



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# “Side by Side with Fighting Nations”: Making the New Culture of Pro-African Solidarity in the Campaigns of the Czechoslovak Committee for Solidarity with African and Asian Peoples\*

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## Abstract

The article analyses the solidarity campaigns organized by the Czechoslovak Committee for Solidarity with African and Asian Peoples between the 1960s and 1980s. It situates the Czechoslovak solidarity towards African countries in the wider framework of the solidarity politics of the Eastern bloc and points out differences as well as similarities. Although the Czechoslovak Solidarity Committee was one of the first such committees to be founded in Eastern Europe, in the 1960s its official as well as public commitment to internationalist principles was modest compared with those of solidarity movements elsewhere in the bloc. However, the solidarity campaigns with African liberation movements intensified in the early 1970s. The campaigns in this period were marked by strong national symbolism, which drew on historical parallels between the African and Czechoslovak struggles for independence. The everyday internationalism in this case filled the public space with images of shared suffering, inferiority, and occupation, through which Czechoslovak citizens made sense of their historical role in the world. The article argues that this “nationalization” of official solidarity campaigns helped to embed the victimization narratives that survived the Velvet Revolution and that, in the 1990s, became a basis for new Czech and Slovak political identification.

In 1963, a Radio Free Europe correspondent reported on the remarkable expansion of Czechoslovak activities in Africa. Besides student scholarships and trade delegations to African countries, the correspondent stressed the efforts made on the cultural level. He reported that the number of books published on African history had been increasing and noted that “[t]he authorities are also endeavouring to publicize, or rather put

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across the image of Africa for home consumption”.<sup>1</sup> For instance, “[o]n 21 February a ‘Colonial Solidarity Day’ was celebrated with some flourish”, during which Radio PRAGUE “sent greetings to students and working youth in countries which have not yet won their freedom. This was followed by recorded statements of ‘freedom fighters’ from Mozambique and South Africa”.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Radio PRAGUE organized a competition for the benefit of its African listeners. According to the correspondent, “[t]he highest prize is invariably an all-inclusive trip to Czechoslovakia at the expense of Czechoslovak government. Lesser prizes include cameras, binoculars, books, etc.”.<sup>3</sup> He concluded that South Africa had recently become a hot topic in Czechoslovak broadcasts and the press. “Parallels with Hitler’s rule [over Czech lands during the Second World War] are usually drawn”, he remarked.<sup>4</sup>

As the above report demonstrates, in the early 1960s, solidarity with African national liberation movements was a central paradigm of Czechoslovak domestic and international propaganda.<sup>5</sup> Although the concept of international solidarity was not new, having its origins in the older motto of proletarian internationalism in the interwar period,<sup>6</sup> it was institutionalized with the appointment of Nikita Khrushchev to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In an attempt to capitalize on the accelerating rate of decolonization, he embraced an “active foreign policy” and encouraged Eastern European leaders to develop relations with newly independent states and liberation movements in Africa and Asia. The socialist countries were quick to offer aid to these movements, not only to gain new allies in their “grand battle against imperialism”, but also to break US trade restrictions and expand into new markets. The leaders of African liberation movements, meanwhile, were enthusiastic about establishing new ties with socialist countries, usually driven by the desire to lessen their economic dependence on former colonial powers.

Eastern European solidarity campaigns with African liberation struggles intensified after the Sharpeville Massacre on 21 March 1960, which suppressed the first mass public protests against apartheid in South Africa. Shortly after the massacre, in November 1960, eighty-one communist parties met in Moscow and adopted the now famous Moscow declaration in which the signatories committed to supporting national liberation struggles worldwide:

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<sup>1</sup>Open Society Archives, 300:30:3:64, Increasing Participation in Communist Drive in Africa, 29 May 1963.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>For an overview, see Paul Betts, James Mark, Idesbald Goddeeris, and Kim Christaens, “Race, Socialism and Anti-Apartheid in Eastern Europe”, in Anna Konieczna and Rob Skinner (eds), *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid: ‘Forward to Freedom’ in South Africa* (Cham, 2019), pp. 151–200; Tom Lodge and Milan Oralek, “Fraternal Friends: South African Communists and Czechoslovakia, 1945–1989”, *Journal of African History*, 61:2 (2020), pp. 219–239; Toni Weis, “The Politics Machine: On the Concept of ‘Solidarity’ in East German Support for SWAPO”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37:2 (2011), pp. 351–367; Ian Taylor, “The Ambiguous Commitment: The People’s Republic of China and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 18:1 (2000), pp. 91–106.

<sup>6</sup>Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 2001), p. 115.

All peoples still languishing in colonial bondage must be given every support in winning their national independence. All forms of colonial oppression must be abolished. [...] This Meeting expresses solidarity with all the peoples of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania who are carrying on a heroic struggle against imperialism.<sup>7</sup>

International solidarity provided a landscape on which to point out the moral righteousness of progressive forces, and it served as a tool for mobilizing public commitment to what were seen as socialist values.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the rich scholarship about the solidarity campaigns of other Eastern European states, we know strikingly little about Czechoslovak involvement. To date, most studies of Czechoslovak–African relations during the Cold War have focused on military assistance and technical cooperation.<sup>9</sup> However, recent studies on student exchanges and scientific relations indicate that the links between Czechoslovakia and Africa were not limited to the arms trade.<sup>10</sup> In response to the “cultural turn” in Cold War studies, many scholars pointed to the centrality of the notion of solidarity in relations between Eastern Europe and the Global South.<sup>11</sup> Much of this literature focused on solidarity with Vietnam and Cuba, while a significant number of studies analysed the development of anti-apartheid solidarity across Eastern Europe during the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> These articles were succeeded by a rich

<sup>7</sup>Statement of 81 Communist and Workers Parties, Meeting in Moscow, USSR, 1960. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/other/1960statement.htm>; last accessed 21 September 2023.

<sup>8</sup>James Mark and Peter Apor, “Socialism Goes Global: Decolonization and the Making of a New Culture of Internationalism in Socialist Hungary, 1956–1989”, *Journal of Modern History*, 87:4 (2015), pp. 852–891, 859–860.

<sup>9</sup>Mikuláš Pešta, “Czechoslovakia, Eastern Bloc and Expert Missions to Africa: An Introduction to the Special Issue”, *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, 1–2 (2021), pp. 7–18; Jan Koura, “A Prominent Spy: Mehdi Ben Berka, Czechoslovak Intelligence, and Eastern Bloc Espionage in the Third World”, *Intelligence and National Security*, 36:2 (2020), pp. 1–22; Daniela Richterová, Mikuláš Pešta, and Natalia Telepneva, “Banking on Military Assistance: Czechoslovakia’s Struggle for Influence and Profit in the Third World 1955–1968”, *The International History Review*, 43:1 (2020), pp. 90–108; Phillip Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva (eds), *Warsaw Pact Interventions in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War* (London, 2018); Jan Záhořík, “Czechoslovakia and Congo/Zaire under Mobutu, 1965–1980”, *Canadian Journal of History*, 52:2 (2017), pp. 290–314.

<sup>10</sup>Marta Edith Holečková, “The University of 17 November in Prague: Students from Third World Countries in Czechoslovakia, 1961–1974”, *Cahiers du monde russe*, 63:3–4 (2022), pp. 647–668; Barbora Buzásová, “Socialist Internationalism in Practice: Shifting Patterns of the Czechoslovak Educational Aid Programmes to Sub-Saharan Africa, 1961–1989” (Ph.D., Comenius University, Bratislava, 2021).

<sup>11</sup>See, for instance, Theodora Dragostinova, “The ‘Natural Ally’ of the ‘Developing World’: Bulgarian Culture in India and Mexico”, *Slavic Review*, 77:3 (2018), pp. 661–684; Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>12</sup>Anne E. Gorsuch, “‘Cuba My Love’: The Romance of Revolutionary Cuba in the Soviet Sixties”, *American Historical Review*, 120 (2015), pp. 462–496; Jennifer Ruth Hosek, *Sun, Sex and Socialism: Cuba in the German Imaginary* (Toronto, 2012). On Vietnam, see James Mark, Peter Apor, Radina Vučetić, and Piotr Oseka, “‘We Are With You Vietnam!’: Transnational Solidarities in Socialist Hungary, Poland and Yuhoslavia”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50:3 (2015), pp. 439–464. On anti-apartheid activism, see Paul Betts, James Mark, Idesbald Goddeeris, and Kim Christiaens, “Race, Socialism and Anti-Apartheid in Eastern Europe”, in Konieczna and Skinner (eds), *A Global History of Anti-Apartheid*,

discussion about the authenticity of solidarity campaigns in the Eastern bloc. One group of historians argues that these campaigns were inauthentic, top-down initiatives imposed on reluctant citizens.<sup>13</sup> A second group, comprising mostly historians involved with the “Socialism Goes Global” project, adopts a different perspective and maintains that campaigns often generated unanticipated domestic activism, which carried unorthodox political meanings and thus posed a challenge to Communist rule.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the recently published volume *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular*, edited by Kristin Roth-Ey, offers a new approach to this discussion and to the complex history of East–South relations during the Cold War in general.<sup>15</sup> The authors of the volume have chosen to turn away from the global and globalizing narratives that are so popular today and focus instead on the deeper exploration of “particular” stories. “Globality”, as Roth-Ey argues in the introduction, was more often than not just a “mediated experience”, which was truly encountered only by the privileged few.<sup>16</sup>

This article further elaborates on the notion of “mediated experience” and explores the means employed by the government to mediate globality in the campaigns of the Czechoslovak Committee for Solidarity with African and Asian Peoples. It shows how official culture responded to the new political “opening” towards African countries and how the authorities translated this official political line for the public using the new vocabulary of solidarity, internationalism, anti-colonialism, and, later, anti-apartheid. Given the nature of archival sources, the popular reactions to these campaigns in Czechoslovakia are difficult to measure, as the opinion polls and statistics on donations could have been orchestrated by mid-level officials to look good in the eyes of their superiors. To avoid speculation, I adopt a top-down approach, exploring how and why the party authorities attempted to socialize the public with internationalist culture. The “particularity” of the Czechoslovak story rests in the fact that, in contrast with other socialist countries, especially Poland and Hungary, public support for the solidarity campaigns was low during the 1960s but intensified in the early 1970s. I argue that, after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the government used solidarity and historical analogies to sway public opinion. The solidarity narrative and accompanying images were increasingly oriented nationally, rather than internationally, bringing back the memories of the historical struggles of the Czechoslovak people.

However, this top-down perspective does not mean that solidarity campaigns with national liberation movements were completely fake, just that they did not necessarily

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pp. 151–200; Ian Taylor, “The Ambiguous Commitment: The People’s Republic of China and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 18:1 (2000), pp. 91–106; Heike Hartmann and Susann Lewerenz, “Campaigning against Apartheid in East and West Germany”, *Radical History Review*, 119 (2014), pp. 191–204.

<sup>13</sup>Toni Weiss, “The Politics Machine: On the Concept of ‘Solidarity’ in East German Support for SWAPO”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37:2 (2011), pp. 351–367.

<sup>14</sup>Péter Apor and James Mark, “Home Front”, in James Mark and Paul Betts (eds), *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization* (Oxford, 2022), pp. 318–357.

<sup>15</sup>Kristin Roth-Ey (ed.), *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War* (London, 2023), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

pursue internationalist goals. After all, for a majority of Czechoslovak citizens, mediated solidarity was lived every day – it was read in the newspapers, heard on the radio, watched in the cinema, and met with during public gatherings. And the level of public involvement, whether expected or unanticipated, had a profound impact on the motives and directions of solidarity campaigns over the years. Rather than proving the authenticity or inauthenticity of these campaigns, I look at them as interactive social practices that furnished the everyday lives of Czechoslovak society and onto which the priorities of international and domestic politics were projected.

Before moving to the main part, a short note on the geographical scope of my analysis is in order. In the Czechoslovak setting, the anti-colonialism and anti-apartheid discourses frequently overlapped. Whereas in the 1960s the aid provided to South African liberation movements was kept secret, in the 1980s the anti-apartheid movement became the main topic of solidarity campaigns. Although I am aware of the essential differences between the struggles for independence in the former European colonies and the fight against the South African apartheid system, my intention is to look at African-oriented solidarity culture as a whole. Therefore, in this article, I adopt a broad definition that does not differentiate between the two.

### **The Beginnings of Institutionalized Solidarity**

In the mid-1950s, when Eastern Europe reopened to the countries of the Global South, Czechoslovakia was fortunate to have favourable political and economic contacts with Africa, established in the interwar period. Czechoslovakia's quick expansion horrified Western observers, who referred to it as “a spearhead of Soviet influence in Africa”. Left-leaning organizations, such as the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU), the African Party for Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), the Peoples' Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), the African National Congress (ANC), and the South West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO), often turned to the nearest Czechoslovak embassy with requests for military equipment and training, financial support, scholarships for their members, medicines, clothing, and food supplies. However, as many of these movements worked illegally, and direct governmental assistance might have discredited Czechoslovakia on the international stage, Czechoslovak mass organizations, such as trade unions, the Czechoslovak Youth Union, the Czechoslovak Women Council, and the Czechoslovak Council of Peace Defenders, were summoned to play an intermediary role in developing cooperation mechanisms and channelling aid from Czechoslovakia to its African partners (Figure 1). With the expansion of socialism across Africa, however, it became necessary to coordinate solidarity actions through specific governmental organizations. Over the course of the 1960s, official committees for solidarity were established in all Eastern European states. The Czechoslovak Committee for Solidarity with African and Asian Peoples (Československý výbor solidarity s národními Ázie a Afriky, CSVS), one of the first such committees in the Eastern bloc, was founded on 20 September 1962. It was preceded by the GDR Committee for Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa and Asia, established in 1960, and followed by the Polish and Hungarian solidarity committees, which were founded in 1965.



**Figure 1.** Czech Union of Students leader Milan Matula together with other student congress delegates, Nigerian student leader Bankole Akpata and Indonesian Gapur Abdulmanap.

Source: Archiv Národního muzea (Archives of the Czech National Museum), fond Novinářský fotoarchiv Práce a Národní politiky - Věcná část, box 17 and box 37.

However, Eastern European governments launched solidarity campaigns at various times, with varying intensities, in pursuit of a variety of political objectives.<sup>17</sup> Taking the CSVS's solidarity campaign as a lens, this article aims to explore the Czechoslovak politics of solidarity in further detail.

To begin with, CSVS brought together representatives from all Czechoslovak mass organizations, important national enterprises, and selected government bodies. When it was founded, the Secretariat of the CSVS included: the director of the international department of the Central Council of Trade Unions; the secretary of the Czechoslovak Youth Union; the secretary of the Czechoslovak Women Council; the Czechoslovak Council of Peace Defenders; a representative of the Czechoslovak Red Cross; the director of the international department of the Czechoslovak Council of Cooperatives; the deputy director of the African department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the director of the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences; the editor-in-chief of *Solidarity*; and a representative of the Chemical Factory of Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship. Among the members was Gusta Fučíková, widow of the famous Czech anti-Nazi journalist and communist Julius Fučík, whose book *Notes from the Gallows* resonated among South African communists.<sup>18</sup> Ladislava Besserová, secretary of the Central Committee of the National Front, was appointed the first president of the CSVS.

<sup>17</sup>For instance, already in the mid-1950s, the GDR and Hungary saw solidarity as an effective tool to overcome their international isolation caused by the Hungarian revolution and the Hallstein doctrine. See Mark and Apor, "Socialism Goes Global", pp. 852–891; Hartmann and Lewerenz, "Campaigning against Apartheid", pp. 191–204.

<sup>18</sup>See, for instance, Paul Joseph's memoir *Slumboy from the Golden City* (London, 2019), p. 91.

The official communiqué to the Czechoslovak press, released right after the establishment of the CSVS in September 1962, stated that its main mission was “to document sympathies and aid of our people to national liberation movements in Africa and Asia in the name of international solidarity and the struggle for world peace” (Figure 2). The committee “will coordinate all solidarity campaigns launched by individual mass organizations to secure their utmost effectiveness”. It also intended to cooperate with the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) in Cairo and national solidarity committees based in other Asian and African states.<sup>19</sup>

CSVS’s aim was thus twofold: firstly, to mobilize pro-African solidarity among the Czechoslovak population; and secondly, to cooperate with similar institutions abroad, which was often connected with showcasing the Czechoslovak tradition of solidarity on an international level. The key tool for the international promotion of CSVS activities became the magazine *Solidarity*, 15,000 copies of which were published monthly in English and French and distributed by the Czechoslovak embassies in Africa to fraternal organizations of the CSVS. The magazine adopted an anti-racist rhetoric from the outset. For example, in 1965, *Solidarity* published an article titled “We and Africa”, which emphasized the “readiness” of Czechoslovakia “to assist the African nations to overcome the legacy of the past”. Moreover, the editor-in-chief, Josef Klánský, reminded the magazine’s African readers that Czechoslovakia supported all measures against Portuguese colonialism, had severed trade relations with “racialist South Africa”, and condemned apartheid and all manifestations of racism.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after the CSVS’s establishment, the members of the Secretariat set up the Solidarity Fund (SF), which sponsored the aid channelled to liberation movements and solidarity organizations. All mass organizations were required to donate to the fund from their budgets or to organize workplace donations. Besides mass organizations, the other major contributors to the fund included various Czechoslovak enterprises and institutions, but occasionally also individual donors – usually the members of brigades of socialist work that were established at every large enterprise. Thus, a responsible solidarity, usually tied to a workplace and coordinated by official collectives, was encouraged and publicized. The resources available to the SF annually usually reached several million Czechoslovak crowns (Kcs). For example, in 1973, the fund amounted to 38,733,397 Kcs, which is the equivalent of 4,687,666 euros today.<sup>21</sup>

To give a few examples of how the SF’s funds were spent, over the course of the 1960s: the SF provided material aid worth 80,000 Kcs to ZAPU; channelled medicines in the amount of 10,000 Kcs to Angolan refugees in Congo; sent office

<sup>19</sup>National Archives of Czech Republic (NA ČR), fo. Central Committee of the National Front (ÚV NF), Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 630, case: ČS. výbor solidarity s národy Afriky a Asie, Praha 1960–1965. Tlačové komuniké, Praha, 1962.

<sup>20</sup>“We and Africa”, *Solidarity: Magazine of the Czechoslovak Committee for Solidarity with African and Asian Peoples*, 4:10 (1965), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>Slovak National Archives (SNA), fo. Central Committee of the National Front of Slovak Socialist Republic (ÚV NF SSR), Materiály a zápisnice zo zasadania predsedníctva ÚV NF SSR, b. 28, 14.2.–13.9. 1973, Informácia o stave Fondu solidarity NF ČSSR k 31.3. 1973 a o pomoci poskytnutej zo spoločenských fondov solidarity, Bratislava, 14 June 1973.



**Figure 2.** Student congress. The picture suggests that the student assembly was summoned against the rearmament of Western Germany. The banner on the picture says “Youth struggles for the peace, against the rearmament of Western Germany”.

Source: *Archiv Národního muzea (Archives of the Czech National Museum), fond Novinářský fotoarchiv Práce a Národní politiky - Věcná část, box 17 and box 37.*

equipment worth 15,000 Kcs to the United National Independence Party in Zambia; transferred material aid, in conjunction with the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education, to a school for orphans in Dar es Salaam; provided aid worth up to 15,000 Kcs, in



conjunction with the Council of Trade Unions, to the Kenyan African National Union in the form of propaganda materials and equipment; and, in conjunction with the Czechoslovak Red Cross, the Ministry of Education, and the Czechoslovak Youth Union, offered a month-long recreational stay in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) to sixty Algerian children from war-torn areas of the country.<sup>22</sup> A significant portion of Czechoslovak aid was allocated to the national liberation movements in Portuguese colonies – FRELIMO, PAIGC, and MPLA – mostly in the form of medical equipment, teaching aids, clothes, and foodstuffs (weapons were transferred through different channels). The CSVS also provided financial assistance for AAPSO activities on several occasions, usually in the form of one-time contributions to its budget.<sup>23</sup> Occasionally, the CSVS also sponsored the work of Czechoslovak teachers in Africa, such as in the case of two teachers dispatched on a two-year contract to the Mozambique Institute in Dar es Salaam.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the lofty speeches of CSVS officials and generous donations from mass organizations, the situation was very different on the public level. The economic crisis in Czechoslovakia between the years 1961 and 1964, accompanied by belt-tightening measures and shortages of consumer goods, resulted in growing public resentment towards Czechoslovak involvement in international aid schemes, and particularly towards the presence of African students in Czechoslovakia (Figure 3), which led to several racially motivated attacks.<sup>25</sup> Many Czechoslovaks believed that the government was investing too many of its precious resources in scholarships and material aid to African liberation movements while overlooking the needs of its own citizens. Non-conforming students at Czechoslovak universities (those not associated with the Czechoslovak Youth Union) expressed their dissatisfaction with the regime by criticizing the internationalist aid granted abroad at their own expense. For instance, during the May Day Parade in Prague in 1962, some radical students carried banners stating, “Cuba yes, meat no” (*Kuba si, maso no*) or “We are stuck in Petřín [gardens in Prague] while the meat is in China” (*My tu tvrdnem ma Petříně a maso je zatím v Číně*).<sup>26</sup> Commitment to official solidarity politics was unacceptable to these students because it was produced by the

<sup>22</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 630, obal: ČS. výbor solidarity s národy Afriky a Asie, Správa predsedníctva ČSVS pre valné zhromaždenie, Praha, 16 April 1963.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 24, Mezinárodní konference na podporu lidu portugalských kolónií. Informace, Praha, 24 June 1970.

<sup>25</sup>Several articles appeared in the contemporary Czechoslovak press monitoring the conflicts between local and African students, which were provoked by the fact that scholarships for foreign students were higher than those for Czechoslovak students since the majority of foreign students could not rely on their families for financial support. One such protest occurred in the boarding house Mlada Garda, in Bratislava, in 1964. See Open Society Archives, fo. Radio Free Europe, Czechoslovak Unit – Old Code Subject Files II (1962–1966), Bratislava students protest, July 1964. Similarly, in 1962, the Czechoslovak daily *Rudé právo* tried to assure its readers that Czechoslovak economic cooperation with Africa was not based on the premise that “we are sending them loads of gifts”, but rather on mutually beneficial trade. See František Vychodil, “O vývozu a spolupráci”, *Rudé právo*, Prague, 31 August 1963, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV KSČ – Antonín Novotný, b. 25, Návrh na potrestanie tých, ktorí sa 1 May 1962 zúčastnili na protištátnej akcii v Prahe.



**Figure 3.** Foreign students in one of the preparatory language centres.

Source: Archiv Národního muzea (Archives of the Czech National Museum), fond Novinářský fotoarchiv Práce a Národní politiky - Věcná část, box 17 and box 37.

Communist leadership, whom they condemned. Similarly, those Czechoslovak students who were inclined towards the radical left and advocated the idea of “permanent” and “world revolution” only rarely used solidarity rhetoric to justify their criticism of Czechoslovak socialism, in contrast to similar movements in the GDR or Hungary.<sup>27</sup> The Movement of Revolutionary Youth was formed in December 1968, in Prague, in response to the defeat of the Prague Spring. The only unorthodox solidarity actions organized by this movement were demonstrations against the expulsion of several radical leftist Burmese students from the GDR in 1969. They issued a proclamation in which they accused the GDR government of violating the principles of proletarian internationalism.<sup>28</sup> However, they did not use similar solidarity rhetoric to criticize the political situation in Czechoslovakia.

The attitude in 1960s Czechoslovakia towards solidarity campaigns thus differed greatly from the situation in other Eastern European countries. Whereas in Hungary and Poland, students accused party elites of displaying an insufficient level of solidarity,<sup>29</sup> in Czechoslovakia the party elites tended to be accused of “giving too much”. I have not found any evidence in the Czechoslovak archives of mass, spontaneous demonstrations similar to the large youth protest that formed on Marx–Engels Square in Belgrade, in February 1961, in response to the execution of Patrice Lumumba.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, when non-conforming solidarity rallies occurred, foreign students were usually responsible for them. For example, the protest that broke out after the US and the Belgians crushed the Simba rebellion in Stanleyville, in 1964, was organized by the Union of Congolese Students in

<sup>27</sup>Mark and Betts, *Socialism Goes Global*, pp. 335–340.

<sup>28</sup>Jaroslav Pažout, *Mocným navzdory. Studentské hnutí v šedesátých letech 20. století* (Prague, 2008), p. 223.

<sup>29</sup>Mark and Betts, *Socialism Goes Global*, pp. 336–337.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 335.

Prague.<sup>31</sup> Officers from the Czechoslovak State Security reported that around 220 foreign students had marched to the American and Belgian embassies in Prague and caused considerable damage to the buildings. Interestingly, according to the officers, “no white student participated in the demonstration”, and Czechoslovak citizens standing nearby even “tried to discourage Africans from performing violent actions”.<sup>32</sup>

The apparent lack of empathy towards African struggles was compounded by the Czechoslovak authorities’ own disillusionment with the existing foreign policy strategy towards the African region, which produced poor results.<sup>33</sup> This resulted in a wave of pragmatism in Czechoslovak–African relations, which culminated during Alexander Dubček’s administration, in spring 1968. However, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, in August 1968, put an end to the government’s pragmatic tendencies (reflected particularly in the curbs to aid schemes) and the new leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) returned to the traditional rhetoric of internationalist solidarity. The subsequent purges of personnel from various political structures had a severe impact on the CSVS – the former Secretariat was dismissed and the Committee was renewed in April 1970.

### Post-1968: Discreet Solidarity and the Marginalization of African Struggles in Official Culture

Between the years 1968 and 1972, all of the CSVS’s activities were virtually suspended. The new Secretariat, elected in 1970 and led by Milošlav Vacík, was highly critical of the former leaders’ lack of genuine enthusiasm and action. In the eyes of the new leadership, their predecessors’ lack of internationalist commitment was the reason they had failed to mobilize the masses for authentic solidarity action. As a Czechoslovak delegate remarked at the meeting of solidarity committees of socialist countries held in Prague, in October 1970:

Our experience from the recent years [...] showed us [...] that the developmental assistance was considered [by the masses] as one of the main factors of the worsening economic situation in Czechoslovakia. The political and theoretical reasons that justified the aid to young African and Asian states were seriously misunderstood, which [...] meant that part of the public had (and still have) hostile attitudes towards the presence of African students in Czechoslovakia. [...] Our propaganda must come to terms with this vestige of the past if we

<sup>31</sup>Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czech Republic, fo. TO-T 10 (1960–1964), Záznam o poradě konané dne 26. listopadu 1964 na MZV vo věci demonstrácie afrických študentov proti belgickému a britskému veľvyslanectvu, Praha, 1964.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>The generous aid and scholarships rarely produced a steady left-leaning orientation among Czechoslovak clients on the African continent. For instance, in 1965, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a report in which they openly declared: “Students are losing the contact with the developments in Africa, they get used to the careless life, lose motivation to study as well as the interest to come back to their homeland.” In Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czech Republic, fo. TO-T 10 (1965–1969), b. 1, case 2, Dosavadní zkušenosti z plnění koncepce čs. zahraniční politiky vůči zemím tropické Afriky a výsledky při rozvíjení našich vztahů s těmito zeměmi. Pro schůzi kolegia MZV, Prague, 25. September 1965.

want to put the public sentiment in tune with our solidarity politics with the Afro-Asian countries.<sup>34</sup>

A massive awareness-raising campaign to mobilize a new wave of solidarity among the Czechoslovak public was set as one of the core tasks of the renewed CSVS.<sup>35</sup> According to the report from the inaugural meeting, the campaign should rely, to a greater extent than previously, on cooperation between the CSVS, scientific institutes, and the mass media, in order to provide the public with “relevant information” and an “adequate explanation of complicated development trends in this region”.<sup>36</sup>

Despite these resolutions, in the early 1970s, the amount of aid provided to African organizations was still modest in comparison with the aid provided to other countries, particularly Vietnam. For example, according to a report on the SF’s spending during the first three months of 1973, the biggest recipient was Vietnam, which received aid amounting to 1,657,493 Kcs. For comparison, the allocation to “other countries” only amounted to 403,000 Kcs, which included aid to AAPSO in the form of airline tickets (51,272 Kcs), cameras for Tanzania (7,000 Kcs), a ninety-day internship for two Namibian workers (11,523 Kcs) and ten Egyptian workers (23,888 Kcs), and a ninety-day course for thirty-two people from Egypt or Sudan (279,000 Kcs). All courses and internships were organized in conjunction with the Czechoslovak Central Committee of Cooperatives, which provided the agricultural training. The rest of the sum was spent in the form of material aid to Spain, Lebanon, Italy, and Mongolia.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, the internal statistical report of solidarity proclamations sent to organizations of the National Front (NF) in the first half of 1972 implies that the situation in Africa was not at the forefront of the Czechoslovak public’s attention. Events that provoked the greatest public outrage included the escalation of the war in Vietnam, conflict in the Middle East, the trial of Angela Davis in the United States, and the international debate about the conference on security and cooperation in Europe (eventually held in July 1973). For example, the NF’s Central Committee received 1,085 proclamations supporting the conference on European security, 995 proclamations against the war in Vietnam, and 225 protest notes against the prosecution of Angela Davis.<sup>38</sup> According to the report, the vast majority of these proclamations were issued by mass organizations (616), followed by national committees (291), cooperatives (268), industrial enterprises (266),

<sup>34</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 24, 14. Konsultativní schůzka výborů solidarity 7 socialistických zemí v Praze, 13–15 October 1970.

<sup>35</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 24, Zahajovací zasedání obnoveného Čs. výboru solidarity, Praha, 15 April 1970.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>SNA, fo. ÚV NF SSR, Materiály a zápisnice zo zasadania predsedníctva ÚV NF SSR, b. 28, 14 February–13 September 1973, Informácia o stave Fondu solidarity NF ČSSR k 31 March 1973 a o pomoci poskytnutej zo spoločenských fondov solidarity, Bratislava, 14 June 1973.

<sup>38</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 119, Výbor solidarity – AKCE, 1972, Informace o počte rezolúcií prichádzajúcich od kolektívov aj od jednotlivcov na ÚV NF ČSSR, národným orgánom NF a federálnym ústredným výborom členských organizácií NF, 30 June 1972.

bodies of the NF (261), and schools (220), while only nine came from civilian committees and five from individuals.<sup>39</sup>

The apparent indifference of Czechoslovaks towards African affairs in the early 1970s is further demonstrated by a report on the celebratory gathering that marked the International Day of Struggle against Racism and Racial Discrimination in 1971. The authors of the report complained that, despite it being of utmost political importance, the event was virtually ignored by the local press and the general public. “We are bewildered by the ignorance of the mass media about such a significant meeting. We recommend organizers to tackle the lack of publicity and propagation because we think that the results of the meeting should reach the public as soon as possible.”<sup>40</sup> Such complaints imply that the post-1968 leadership of the KSC, led by Gustáv Husák, struggled with the task of re-socializing the ideologically demobilized citizens with the restored internationalist goals set by the new leadership. In the early 1970s, Czechoslovak society had hardly recovered from the turbulent years that followed the Warsaw Pact invasion. Moreover, the new leadership was discredited by its servile relation to Leonid Brezhnev’s administration, which used the slogan of socialist internationalism as an excuse to attack Czechoslovak sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that topics related to anti-colonial struggles were mentioned only marginally in the official press as well. Articles about the liberation struggle in Africa and the solidarity campaigns appeared more often in the channels of external propaganda – mainly the magazines *Solidarity* and *Czechoslovak Life* – or in the specialized press tied to concrete mass organizations of the NF, such as the magazine *Mír* (*Peace*, the journal of the Czechoslovak Council of Peace Defenders), than in magazines intended for general readership. The abrupt disappearance of African topics from the public sphere could be seen as an attempt by the Czechoslovak authorities to tame the public mood and not to remind them of the virtuous revolutionary struggles abroad so shortly after the suppression of domestic revolt.

### African Return: Celebrations of the “Week of Solidarity with African Nations” in 1972

The provision of official aid to African liberation movements was resumed in 1972. In that year, the CSVS provided material aid (medical equipment, shoes, and clothing) to FRELIMO, MPLA, and PAIGC in the amount of 1.5 million Kcs (the sum remained stable up to the end of the 1980s) and sponsored vocational training for four SWAPO

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 54, Výbor solidarity – Různé. Praha 1971. Slavností shromáždění k Mezinárodnímu boji proti rasismu. Informace, Praha, 29 March 1971.

<sup>41</sup>Many social scientists have interpreted the concept of socialist internationalism against the background of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in particular. See, for instance, Karen Dawisha and Jonathan C. Valdez, “The New Internationalism in Eastern Europe”, *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 36:4 (1987), pp. 119–131.

members – car mechanics and military technicians – in Czechoslovakia.<sup>42</sup> In the aid plan covered by the SF for the years 1973–1974, the main recipients from the list of national liberation movements remained FRELIMO, MPLA, PAIGC, ANC, SWAPO, and ZAPU; the Secretariat of AAPSO received 300,000 Kcs in financial aid (to publish its brochures in Czechoslovakia and to cover travel fees to important anti-imperialist international meetings); and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), together with the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf, received material aid in the amount of 200,000 Kcs each.<sup>43</sup> The provision of material support in 1972 was accompanied by an extensive awareness-raising campaign that was launched in all parts of the republic.

The Week of Solidarity with African Nations, organized from 24 to 30 May 1972, represented the biggest state-led solidarity campaign organized in Czechoslovakia after 1968. Although the so-called African Days were celebrated every year during the last week of May, the celebrations of 1972 were singular in their scope and level of state commitment. The main impetus to organize the event came from AAPSO's fifth conference, where all delegations from socialist states committed to organize the Week of Solidarity. The CSVS made no secret of the real intentions behind the event. According to the preparatory report, the significance of such a campaign lay in the fact that the "[renewed] Czechoslovak Committee of Solidarity was re-introduced to the Czechoslovak public" and that it "reawakened the interest of the Czechoslovak public in the national liberation struggle in Africa as well as in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, racism, and the apartheid regime".<sup>44</sup>

The main assembly met in the great hall of the University of Agriculture in the Prague-Suchbát, whose Institute of Tropical and Sub-Tropical Agriculture was one of the main centres specializing in the agriculture of developing countries in Czechoslovakia and thus a popular destination for foreign students. Among the key speakers were: Miloslav Vacík, head of the CSVS; the deputy secretary of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education; and a representative of the Senegalese Committee of Solidarity, Amath Dansoko. The organizers apparently worked hard to secure a large audience for the event; invitations were sent to all mass organizations in Czechoslovakia and government bodies, including foreign embassies. The CSVS also publicized the event widely – the Czechoslovak foreign broadcast service conducted an interview with Vacík as well as with the head of the Federation of African Students in Czechoslovakia, Kamal Mirgani. Additionally, an interview with Vacík and the deputy secretary of AAPSO, Morsi Saad El Dinn, aired on Czechoslovak television, and the regular broadcast schedule was periodically interrupted all week by so-called political shorts that informed viewers about the latest events in Africa, mostly the situation in Namibia and Mozambique.

<sup>42</sup>NA CR, fo. Presidium of Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 1971–1976 (KSC-ÚV 1945–1989, Praha – Předsednictvo 1971–1976 02/1), sv. 94, ar.j. 91/8, Poskytnutie materiálnej pomoci národne-oslobodeneckým organizáciám afrických a arabských krajín v rokoch 1973 a 1974, Praha, 5 October 1973.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 119, Výbor solidarity – AKCE, 1972, Dny solidarity s národy Afriky, Praha 24–30 May 1972.

Besides the main meeting in Suchodol, similar solidarity assemblies took place in the majority of university towns in Czechoslovakia. As one of the few solidarity campaigns, the celebrations of 1972 were not limited to the capital. The cultural programme was complemented by lectures and seminars given by Czechoslovak scientists who specialized in research on developing countries. Moreover, specifically on the occasion of the Week of Solidarity, the CSVS published several propaganda brochures, including Jaroslav Pátek's "Boj proti neokolonializmu v Afrike" (Fight against neo-colonialism in Africa) and Jan Vraný's "Neokolonialismus v Afrike" (Neo-colonialism in Africa), which were distributed by the national committees to the broader public (both authors were distinguished members of the Institute of Foreign Relations, the research centre of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Furthermore, at the behest of CSVS, the Czechoslovak State Film company instructed Czech director Bohuslav Musil to make a short documentary called *Afrika dneška* (present-day Africa), which was distributed to Czechoslovak cinemas a week before the Week of Solidarity.

However, despite the above-mentioned activities oriented towards the mobilization of the Czechoslovak public, there were other events that pursued more internationalist goals. As part of the campaign, the CSVS invited two members of the Secretariat of AAPSO, Abdul Sheik Ismail and Hassan Hafez Hassenein, to Czechoslovakia. Besides meetings with workers and students, the delegation visited the modern factories and agricultural cooperatives in eastern Slovakia, including the metalwork company Východoslovenské železiarne (currently, US Steel Košice), an agricultural enterprise in Mokrance, and an industrial automation factory in Prešov.<sup>45</sup> The choice of eastern Slovakia for the visit was not coincidental. According to the preparatory plans, the CSVS leadership considered the post-war industrialization of Slovakia an impressive success story of socialism-building in a "backward" region, and modern factories were seen as evidence of the viability of the socialist development model, which could attain similarly favourable outcomes in regions of Africa. As Andreas Sibanga, a secretary of SWAPO, explained in an interview for Czechoslovak broadcast after his visit to the industrial regions in northern Czechia in 1974: "We saw modern factories, visited agricultural enterprises and we would be very happy if our country once looks the same."<sup>46</sup> As this campaign demonstrates, the intensification of the liberation struggle in Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa in the early 1970s provided a new impulse for the reactivation of official solidarity campaigns in Czechoslovakia.

### The "Nationalization" of Solidarity Culture in the 1970s

The renewed CSVS adopted various discursive strategies to temper the public mood and to mobilize a new wave of solidarity with African liberation movements. The rhetoric of solidarity in the 1970s evoked memories of the Nazi occupation of

<sup>45</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 119, Výbor solidarity – AKCE, 1972, Informácia o pobyte delegácie Afro-Ázijskej solidarity vo východoslovenskom kraji v dňoch 31. máj–4. jún 1972.

<sup>46</sup>Open Society Archives, fo. Radio Free Europe, Czechoslovak Unit, Country files 1, 1967–1975, b. 1, Rádio Hvězda – Poznámka, 25 October 1974.

Czech lands during World War II and of the Slovak national uprising, to stimulate the feeling of shared experience and to create an illusion of genuine kinhood between the Czechoslovak and African peoples. The motif of “shared struggle, shared history” was established to highlight the moral corruption of Western capitalism, which was equated with fascism. The choice of historical motifs was not accidental. By reminding the public of episodes from the country’s own heroic past, the authorities targeted national pride and tried to shift public attention away from turbulent political developments in Czechoslovakia. For state authorities, the increasing use of national symbolism in solidarity campaigns became a means for seeking legitimacy for the new “normalized regime”.<sup>47</sup> The solidarity campaigns thus served as a way to temper the ideological demobilization of the public after 1968.

Historical motifs appeared in almost all official speeches delivered to events commemorating important episodes from African history, such as: the Week of Solidarity with African Nations celebrated during the last week of May; 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; 26 June as the International Day of Solidarity with the People of South Africa against Apartheid; as well as various anniversary events, including the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the ANC and the tenth anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

For instance, at the meeting of solidarity with the Zimbabwean people, held in response to the intensification of the insurgency movement against Ian Smith’s rule in Rhodesia on 2 February 1972, Juraj Mlynárik, a prorector of the University of 17th November (USN), declared:

Our public monitors the situation on the south of the African continent with great concern and is very disturbed by the fact that more than 30 million people live there in the conditions of classic colonialism and racism [...] Czech and Slovak peoples, who struggled for decades for their own independence from foreign hegemony and in the years 1939–1945 against the oppression of Nazi Germany, can understand how much effort, self-sacrifice and courage it takes for the Zimbabwean people to voice their resistance to the British [...].<sup>48</sup>

On a similar note, in June 1972, AAPSO delegates visited the Memorial and Cemetery of the Czechoslovak Army at the Dukla battlefield, a national cultural landmark in eastern Slovakia that commemorates the joint operation of Soviet and Czechoslovak troops in autumn 1944. The following solidarity proclamation was issued on this occasion:

[We] [t]he working people from the historical Dukla, who survived the horrors of the Second World War, are therefore even more determined to support the brave

<sup>47</sup>On the relationship between nationalism and communism, see, for instance, Martin Mevius, “Reappraising Communism and Nationalism”, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 37:4 (2009), pp. 377–400.

<sup>48</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 119, Výbor solidarity – AKCE, 1972, Protestní shromáždění na podporu Zimbabwe, Praha, 7 February 1972.



struggle until the very end and defeat of imperialism. We watch the brave struggle of African peoples against colonialism and racism in Portuguese colonies, in South Africa, Rhodesia, the Middle East, and other countries who fight for their freedom. We resolutely denounce that, in the twentieth century, imperialism still uses the same methods which were used by Hitlerian fascists in the Second World War against the nations of our homeland, the Soviet Union and other countries in Europe and Africa.<sup>49</sup>

At the celebratory assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Struggle against Racism and Racial Discrimination on 21 March 1971, Otakar Taufer, the rector of the USN, proclaimed:

It is not necessary to specially emphasize that our state and our people fiercely denounce any form of racism and racial discrimination. After all, with racism we have, or rather with its variant – German Nazism – our own experience. We know how it feels to be considered an inferior nation, which stands in the way of the chosen race in its march to new areas. We thus can imagine what the South African apartheid is like, what Portuguese colonialism means.<sup>50</sup>

Occasionally, the calls for solidarity touched the moral consciousness of Czechoslovak citizens. For instance, in December 1971, the editorial board of the Slovak weekly *Život* organized a crowdfunding solidarity campaign called “Loď života” (a ship of life). The motto of the campaign became a “Ship of life – a symbol of solidarity, of help to class brothers, of struggle and victory, of proletarian internationalism and mutual love between the peoples”.<sup>51</sup> All Czechoslovak mass organizations participated in the initiative and made public appeals to compel others to contribute. For instance, the local chapter of the Revolutionary Trade Union (ROH) in the Slovak town of Žilina published the following call:

In the time of peace, let us think about the hardship and suffering of those who have to endure the horrors of unjust wars [...] Let us think about the nations of Africa and Asia who suffer from poverty and hunger [...] We appeal to all organizations of ROH in Žilina county to make their stand in the struggle for freedom and peace and provide financial and material aid to struggling nations.<sup>52</sup>

The calls for donations in this case were advertised as a symbol of “love between the peoples” and portrayed as the moral duty of all “progressive forces”. In comparison with the pitiful images of war-torn cities and crying children, the situation in Czechoslovakia did not look that desperate. Perhaps it was the decision to craft the

<sup>49</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 119, Výbor solidarity – AKCE, 1972, Dny solidarity s národy Afriky, Rezolúcia, Svidník, 2 June 1972.

<sup>50</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 54, Výbor solidarity – Různé, Praha 1971. Slavností shromáždění k Mezinárodnímu boji proti rasismu, Praha, 24 March 1971.

<sup>51</sup>*Život*, 22:3 (23 February 1972), p. 22.

<sup>52</sup>*Život*, 22:8 (23 February 1972), p. 22.

campaign as providing help to the “less lucky ones” that led to its surprising success. By the end of the campaign, in May 1972, nearly 2 million Kcs (equivalent to 233,323 euros today) had been collected and donated to the SF.<sup>53</sup>

The historical analogies between African peoples’ struggles for independence and Czechoslovaks’ own struggles against fascism were drawn to overcome the geographical and cultural distance between them. Solidarity was primarily presented as a feeling of empathy between different nations who can genuinely understand each other because of their shared experience of hardship, suffering, and inferiority. However, this attempt to use the images of internationalist solidarity to refresh Czechoslovaks’ own memories of their national past failed to renew the public commitment to socialism. Nevertheless, thanks to their circulation in the public sphere, they helped to embed the victimization narratives that became building blocks of Czech and Slovak national identification in the 1990s.

### A Swan Song: Worn-Out Solidarity Reaching to the Outer World

In this article, I explored some mechanisms of state-led solidarity campaigns launched by the Czechoslovak Committee for Solidarity with African and Asian Peoples from its establishment in 1962 up to the late 1980s. The culture of “mediated solidarity” disseminated by this official channel provided a language and symbolic repertoire through which the Czechoslovak public made sense of a world known only to a privileged few. However, more than expressions of empathy with African liberation struggles, solidarity campaigns often served as a means of reinvigorating public beliefs in the socialist project at home, particularly after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The article has shown that the Czechoslovak state’s “enthusiasm” for solidarity culture was low in the 1960s but that it increased in the early 1970s. The campaigns of internationalist solidarity in this period were “nationalized” as a way to reawaken Czechoslovaks’ memories of their own heroic past and regenerate a domestic project around the idea of “socialist patriotism”, to borrow a phrase from Martin Mevius.<sup>54</sup>

Although this strategy may have salvaged Czechoslovak national pride, it failed to mobilize public sentiment in favour of the African struggle. As a consequence of the growing fear of unregulated public protests, state authorities excluded from solidarity meetings any participants not included on the guest list, thus preventing any spontaneous expressions. The effort to bring solidarity fully under control resulted in the ritualization of speeches and proclamations by the CSVS, which only recycled the discursive phrases dictated from above. During the 1980s, the “genuine” commitment to solidarity culture was therefore declining among the public, as well as at the state level, following a trend also seen in other Eastern European countries. However, the political infrastructure that produced solidarity remained in place and was generously subsidized by official institutions up to the very end of the socialist regime.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>Mevius, “Reappraising Communism and Nationalism”, p. 379.

In the mid-1970s, official solidarity received a new impetus from the national liberation struggle in South Africa, when the attitude of the international community towards apartheid shifted dramatically following the UN arms embargo on South Africa. According to the Czechoslovak government's plan for aid to developing countries for the period 1986–1990, the ANC, SWAPO, and PLO were three priority national liberation organizations that applied to the Czechoslovak system of aid pro bono.<sup>55</sup> The aid budget allocated for this purpose reached 100 million Kcs in convertible currencies, 50 million Kcs in currencies of socialist countries, and another 15 million Kcs to cover travel expenses per annum. The increased prominence of Namibia in Czechoslovak foreign policy is demonstrated by a number of official visits of SWAPO leaders to Czechoslovakia. In October 1983, the leader of SWAPO, Sam Nujoma, paid an official visit to Czechoslovakia on the invitation of the Central Committee of the NF. Nujoma met with two of the most important Czechoslovak politicians of the time, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the KSC and President Gustáv Husák and Central Committee Secretary Vasiľ Biľak. During the visit, Nujoma gave a speech on the meeting of solidarity with the Namibian people organized in the steelworks Bílá Cerkev at Hrádek u Rokycan, in West Bohemia, by the local workers' union.<sup>56</sup> The participants signed a resolution in which they declared full support for and solidarity with the struggle of African people against "the inhuman system of apartheid, racist terror and social injustice" and "endorsed the resolutions of the UN Human Rights Commission which reaffirmed the right of the Namibian people to self-determination".<sup>57</sup>

The solidarity meetings with the African liberation struggle continued in the 1980s, but they withdrew from the capital to much smaller and usually industrial towns. For instance, in 1986, the CSVS staged a rally on the occasion of the Day of Africa, on 21 March, in the testing hall of the national enterprise Let Kunovice, in Uherské Hradiště.<sup>58</sup> The chairman of the South African Students' Union, Aaron Monakoe, was invited to the meeting, and a key part of the programme was an inspection of the local aircraft factory. A similar meeting took place the following year in Sušice factory, in Western Czechia, where SWAPO official Shikwetepo Haindongo was invited to give the main speech.<sup>59</sup> The number and structure of invited participants thus also changed. The attendees consisted primarily of foreign students and members of workers' unions.

The general public seemed indifferent to these official initiatives, which could be explained by their growing weariness with the empty rhetoric of state bodies. Anti-imperialist solidarity did not represent a reference point even for Czechoslovak dissidents. The speakers of Charter 77 rarely drew parallels between the South African liberation struggle and their own struggle for human rights in Czechoslovakia. The only example found during research for this article is a letter

<sup>55</sup>NACR, fo. Predsedníctvo ÚV KSČ, Koncepce československé pomoci rozvojovým zemím a mimoevropským socialistickým zemím na období 1986–1990, Praha, 12 February 1986.

<sup>56</sup>"Support for the Namibian People", *Solidarity*, 1 (1984), pp. 8–9.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup>*Solidarity*, 5 (1986), p. 7.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*

of solidarity sent by Charter 77 to South African bishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and an anti-apartheid activist, in September 1985.<sup>60</sup>

In the 1980s, CSVS's activities were focused largely on "external propaganda", that is, participation in various international anti-apartheid conferences and AAPSO solidarity congresses, rather than on mobilization of the Czechoslovak public. CSVS delegates participated in every international conference dedicated to the support of the South African liberation movement, including the International Conference of Solidarity with the Frontline States held in Lisbon on 25–27 March 1983, the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa held in Geneva in June 1984, and the regular congresses of AAPSO.

The orientation towards an international audience is evident also in the last large action organized by the CSVS, which was the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its own establishment that took place on 16 September 1987, in the Hotel International in Prague. Among the speakers were Miloslav Vacík and a secretary of the Central Committee of the KSC, Jindřich Poledník. The general director of AAPSO, Abdan Núrí Razzák, and a secretary, Nguyen-Trung-Hjúa, were invited to the meeting, as were representatives of the unions of foreign students, who apart from representatives of Czechoslovak institutions formed the majority of guests.

Vacík's opening address seems almost like a swan song for the whole CSVS mission. He reminded the audience that "the upswing of solidarity campaigns among our people" would not be possible without "fresh memories of suffering during the Nazi occupation", without "the open wounds which were left after the victims of the liberation struggle of our nations", and without "the pride in the greatness of our resistance in the Slovak national uprising and in the May uprising of Czech people [...]".<sup>61</sup> In his speech, he appealed to Czechoslovak citizens that they might be "proud, that during all these years they stood firmly by the side of African and Asian peoples", and that they "contributed to this grand and epochal battle for freedom and independence morally, politically, diplomatically and materially".<sup>62</sup> The "mediated internationalism" in Czechoslovakia thus took a "national", Eurocentric form. More than expressing empathy with African struggles for independence, the campaigns served as platforms to enhance feelings of national pride and strengthen the condescending attitudes towards African peoples. More importantly, the continual reminders about "shared suffering", inferiority, and oppression in everyday experience helped to implant the victimization narratives that have survived in Czech and Slovak national stories up to the present.

<sup>60</sup>Blanka Císařovská and Vilém Prečan, *Charta 77: Dokumenty 1977–1989* (Prague, 2007); List biskupovi Desmondovi Tutuovi odsudzující politiku apartheidu v juhoafrické republice, Dokument č. 21/85, p. 732.

<sup>61</sup>NA ČR, fo. ÚV NF, Mezinárodní oddělení – Československý výbor solidarity s národy Asie a Afriky, b. 252, Hlavný prejav Miloslava Vacíka k zhromaždeniu k 25. výročiu ČSVS, September 1987.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*