which cannot mean creation but uncovering. The partial aspect of *ground* bears the meaning of fundamentality. Radical emancipation must operate at the ground of 'the social' and requires complete destruction of the old order. Finally, *rationality* assures the total immanence of reality, which in secular eschatologies (like Marxism) cannot refer to something external (for example to God). For a better notion, cf. the introductory scheme of emancipation (p. 170).

4. As Laclau puts it, empty and floating signifiers are only analytical categories which overlap empirically.

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Martin Štefek:

ZA FASÁDOU JEDNOTY. KSČ A SED PO ROCE 1985.

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There are books we open in the hopes of learning something new. And there are those we open with trepidation. Martin Štefek, the author of *Za Fasádou Jednoty (Behind the Façade of Unity). KSČ a SED po Roce 1985*, a comparative study published last year by Pavel Mervart, surely had this readers' dilemma in mind. As his book's title makes clear, Štefek's main ambition was to lay bare a fiction: that the leaders of the two westernmost Eastern European single-party communist states acted — and reacted to the events of the period leading up to 1989 — monolithically. The book is structured to serve this purpose. It opens with a theoretical section, followed by a section focusing on the KSC, another on SED, and finally, a closing summary.

Nothing wrong so far — little is more irritating than an academic text that lacks ambition and conviction on the part of the author that the book is fresh in its outlook and approach. But a problem arises when we create the image of an 'enemy' out of whole cloth. And this is exactly what Štefek does. The entire book is constructed around fictitious statements – series of straw man arguments – set up to be disproved by primary research. As an illustrative example, on page 99, Štefek disproves the 'stereotype' that the top leadership of the KSC was rigid. He does so by referring to a discussion in the Politburo of the KSC Central Committee that revealed, he says, 'even the most obdurate opponents of perestroika were aware of the need to

change and the impossibility of rejecting the new Soviet policy outright.' But there is no need to disprove a stereotype that never existed in the first place. Few would have charged the top leadership with being unaware of national and international realities. If there was a stereotype that fit, it was that the leadership was incapable of adequate, substantial change, something shown by later events — and even by Štefek himself.

The quotation above reveals another glaring weakness on the part of the author: his unshakable faith in the veracity of the written word. He has set aside any other type of source and devoted himself solely to records and materials from the Politburo. Hence the 'only' reason to reproach the book is for the limited evidence such a methodology provides. Not only does the author accept written sources as literally true, he believes in the power of words. The entire book manages to treat the perestroika process in Czechoslovakia and the GDR without making any reference to actual outcomes. It relies instead on the words of those in power at the time, either as they were present in their thinking about the perestroika process or as they noted them in internal materials and subsequent records. But even if we buy into the sincerity of the words spoken by someone like Jan Fojtík, we learn nothing of the actual outcome — the transformation of those words into action.

Likely unintentionally, the author reveals the overall predetermined limits on any attempt at Czech perestroika when he cites the truly breakthrough appeal of Vasil Biľak in February 1987 for 'free expression by Central Committee members and candidates at the Plenum (page 100).' But mesmerized by his sources, Štefek refuses to look at the reality of the era, instead 'challenging the deep-rooted thesis that no perestroika existed in the CSSR' (page 125), and referring to the complicated schedule for preparing the materials that came out of the 19th All-Union Congress of the CPSU. Or, he claims the number of committees in the KSC Central Committee was expanded in 1988 because of political perestroika (page 126). If so, anything qualifies as perestroika. And this is not the only place in the book where terminology is confounded: the party was said to be interested in the 'democratization of the economy' (page 128) in the Act on State Enterprises. There's not much point in continuing a discussion with someone who believes that the introduction of fictitious institutions like workers' committees will democratize the economy at the same time the party and centralized management are maintained.

Elsewhere, in any event, the author proves that words may not always be trusted. He seizes upon a statement made by Gorbachev in autumn of 1989 about East German political leaders as evidence that statements carry no meaning in and of themselves, but must always be considered in the context of the situation in which they are uttered (page 190). Too bad the author did not employ the same method himself in researching the otherwise impressive collection of material he gathered on the KSC.

There is also mention of the by-now tiresome legend of Lubomír Štrougal, the man who knew how to reform the system to meet the new requirements of the times but struggled with an unlucky set of circumstances and supervisors. Frequently recycled of late, the legend grows out of Štrougal's recently published and cleverly written memoir. Štefek approaches the book as one would a secondary academic source that need not be doubted, instead of as a pure primary source that should be read carefully and with a critical eye. Readers are made to sympathize with this powerless politician of good intentions he is unable to act on because others hold him back. One might almost forget that for almost thirty years, Štrougal was a leading representative of the Czech com-

munist regime (1958–1989 member of the Central Committee of the KSČ, 1959–1988 member of governments, 1961–1965 Minister of Interior, 1968–1988 member of the politburo, 1970–1988 Federal Prime Minister). Thirty years as a party leader, twenty of those in key positions is enough to get done what you want to do.

The extent of Štrougal's determination — the final conflict was dated autumn 1987, when the Politburo was discussing *Proposals Aimed at Activating the National Front and the Associated Organizations and at Increasing Their Participation in the Development, Implementation and Supervision of Political Life*— is aptly illustrated by the concluding sentence: "The issue was, to be specific, to include the NF in preparing party and governmental proposals" (p. 115). Now that would have been real perestroika! This brings to mind a statement about the Prague Spring made in another context by Bohumil Černík, a farmer from the northern Moravian Highlands: 'So in your opinion, Mr. Secretary, this means the communists will continue to execute people and the People's Party will pick the colour of the flowers for their graves…'[1] In his enthusiasm over the reforms prepared but never implemented, Štefek fails to consider the paramount condition: that the leading role of the KSC had not been and was not to be questioned. He does, however, admit this for East Germany, citing Honecker's January 1987 reaction to the perestroika proposals — 'Democratic centralism would not be abolished' (page 172). Though the author provides no written evidence concerning the Czechoslovak Politburo, the actions its members took made clear that this condition was foremost in everyone's mind, even of the most courageous reformers in the Politburo and the Central Committee.

Readers encountering the author's surprised commentary on the Draft *Principles of the KSC Program* dated 11 November 1989, which he describes as indicating the extent of knowledge 'to which the party had attained in its later phase of existence' in contrast to what he claims others have said (page 142), may have the feeling that, unlike everyone else, the author has never heard Jakeš's speech at Červený Hrádek. Certainly he makes no mention of it, probably because it was not in the Politburo records. Had he heard of it, he would understand that Jakeš said nothing not already contained in the Draft Principles prepared scant months before. For this reason, researchers need not be surprised by the Draft, since they know very well how the last group of communist leaders thought of themselves and the society around them. It would be pleasant if such knowledge were based on a primary written source, but even if it were it would do nothing to revise our existing knowledge.

Za Fasádou Jednoty certainly brings a new perspective and greater precision to our knowledge of the final phase of the two communist regimes. But the author's methodology hemmed him in from the outset. Together with his quest to disprove nonexistent clichés, the result is unconvincing at best.

Notes:

1. Černík, B.: *Rudé temno nad Vysočinou*, Česká Rybná, undated, p. 91.

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