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What does it mean, disclosure?

While there are many differences between the Kundera case and those of other eastern European intellectuals revealed as having informed to the secret police, its disclosure has followed the usual pattern. It is important to evaluate each on an individual basis, cautions György Dalos.

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Anyone who read the initial reports that the Czech writer Milan Kundera is alleged to have denounced the western agent Miroslav Dvořáček in 1950 could predict two things with certainty. First, that the events would be analyzed in the media according to the pattern of Stasi disclosure. Second, that commentators would in some form or another make use of the title of Kundera's book, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

Sure enough, headlines like "The unbearable lightness of betrayal" or "The unbearable being" soon appeared and Kundera was indeed referred to as a "Stasi informer", a "stool pigeon", or an "agent of the secret police". The victim, on the other hand, was hailed as an "opponent of the regime" or an "anti-communist activist". At the same time, it is obvious is that the documents found in the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in Prague describe behaviour entirely untypical of informers.

Apparently, the twenty-one year old student Milan Kundera appeared at a normal Prague police station to report that the twenty year-old pilot Miroslav Dvořáček, who had escaped to West Germany and returned illegally to Prague, had left his suitcase in this or that student hall of residence, and would return to pick it up later that day. Also aware of Dvořáček's visit apart from Kundera were Dvořáček's ex-girlfriend Iva Militká and her new boyfriend Miroslav Džal, both fellow students of Kundera at the Charles University.

Although the statement taken down at the police station is blemished by the failure to bear Kundera's signature and only his personal details, it is possible that such a document did indeed come to exist under the circumstances described. At any rate, Dvořáček, who was already on the wanted list, was arrested at the hall of residence that evening and put on trial. Initially sentenced to death, he was later "let off" with a twenty-two year prison sentence, fourteen of which he spent in one of Czechoslovakia's notorious uranium mines. Until the end, he was convinced that it was Militká who had betrayed him.

For years, she reproached herself for having talked to her boyfriend and later husband Dlask about her guest and thus involuntarily leading him into the hands of the authorities. Dlask, on the other hand, may have looked upon the visitor as a competitor for Militka's affections, and moreover as someone who could have caused trouble for both of them. Dlask then supposedly asked Kundera for help.

Today, Dvořáček lives in Stockholm and does not wish to comment directly about the affair. Kundera, for his part, claims not to have known about the incident and views the publication of the Prague Institute as an "assassination attempt". Hence, we learn something about the "what" but not enough about the "how" and "why" in this tragic story.

In Czechoslovakia, the year 1950 stood very much in the shadow of the Great Terror, which was just beginning to gather momentum. Fear of the system was gradually infiltrating the original atmosphere of socialist enthusiasm that had already been widespread in the pre-war democracy. It began to take root in the minds and souls of the founding generation, who began to form a paranoid relationship to their own party. The majority of the communist defendants in the show trials of the period, from the Slovak communist Vladimír "Vlado" Clementis to his colleague Rudolf Slansky, were charged with spying and treason and executed. Almost all were caught up in the cogs of the machinery that they themselves had helped to construct.

Twenty year-olds at that time knew practically nothing about this situation and did not even have to be fanatic to denounce someone they thought they recognized as a class enemy. If a person appeared in their circle who openly admitted having come from "over there", in other words from behind the Iron Curtain, then in their eyes a failure to act was equal to complicity. Moreover, they could assume that the mysterious acquaintance who had so suddenly surfaced was an agent provocateur for the secret police. The absurdity of the situation became clear to them only years later. In probably his best novel, *The Joke*, Kundera himself wrote about the fate of an innocent culprit. It is a story precisely about betrayal, love and ruined relationships — the central motifs of his later work.

Yet as concerns Miroslav, arrested back then in the student halls of residence, there is no reason retrospectively to turn him into a hero. Spying against an unfree country is not automatically a freedom struggle, in the same way that the "reconnaissance" of an eastern European agent in the West was no peace mission. Having said that, the young pilot may well have had noble motives, and to gather intelligence about conditions in his home country for the American Secret Services, during that spring of all times, required a courage that deserves a degree of admiration.

Nevertheless, there is the worry that, in his anti-communist zeal, he was acting just as ignorantly as his contemporaries from the opposite side, and that his idealism was being exploited by his employers in a similar fashion. At that time, to entrust such an obviously naive and ill-prepared young man with such a task almost certainly meant placing him in a life-threatening situation. The draconian punishments and the barbarian conditions in the penal establishments must of course be blamed on the communist system, which in the twentieth century sacrificed hundreds of thousands — including many innocents — on the altar of its ideological insanity.

On one hand, the Kundera case can hardly be compared to the spying activities of other writers and artists. Nevertheless, the manner of its publication creates some degree of likeness with the intellectual culprit–victims exposed after 1990 as having worked for the various state security agencies: the StB,¹ the MfS,² Securitate,³ Department III./III.,⁴ or the Derschawna Sigurnost.⁵ From this list it would not be hard to compile a *crème de la crème* of the eastern European intelligentsia; at the same time, it is extremely important to distinguish between the cases and to check each on an individual basis.

What we are dealing with, namely, is a generation nearing the end of its life, which after the difficult formative years of the communist dictatorship attempted to free itself from the curse of its own past. What is particularly sad about the careers of these protagonists is the fact that time and again they wanted to atone for their human and moral failure without being able to admit it. Clearly, it was easier for them to act honestly than to speak openly.

Some things about the incident require further explanation. Only the court records and the investigation files can confirm how far the carelessly issued police statement actually played a role in the proceedings, or whether, for example, the three young people were summoned to appear before the court and if so, what their statements were. It would also be of interest to find out the names of the officials who made the interrogation, the lawyers and the judge — questions that the authors of the revelations conspicuously fail to raise. It could also prove to be the case that even with serious research, the relevant documents either fail to turn up or take a long time to find.

Until then, we should trust someone who during difficult times followed the principle of "living in the truth", an attitude for which he made heavy sacrifices. Václav Havel warned the young historians to exercise caution when passing judgement on the youthful sins of a communist generation to which he himself never belonged. Havel sees the author of *The Joke* suddenly forced into the Kundera-esque world of his own novels. At the same time, he encourages his fellow writer, to whom he is bound more by argument than by friendship, with the moving words: "Milan, rise above it! There are worse things in life than being defamed by the press!"

¹ Statni bezpecnost, Czechoslovakia

² Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, GDR

³ State security of Romania.

⁴ State security of the People's Republic of Hungary.

⁵ State security of Bulgaria.

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