

CADRE POLICY, CADRE WORK AND SCREENING IN COMMUNIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA: SIMPLE IDEAS, COMPLICATED PRACTICE*

MARIE ČERNÁ

Abstract

Even though cadre policy belonged among the fundamental themes of the communist regime, it has remained outside the main focus of investigation. Therefore, the text attempts to introduce this unknown area to the reader from several different angles. It was a political-ideological project of centralised work force management and it led to the formation of new societal bonds, in which the Communist Party's leading role was to be consistently implemented in practice. It included the checking and comprehensive screening of individual biographies (using a system of assessments and cadre materials) as well as education towards certain values and attitudes. However, contradictions accompanied the ambitious project from the very outset and this fact cannot be ignored. Also, cadre work formed part of common social bonds – where interests other than political were likewise manifested. Therefore, the practical consequences of the implementation of cadre policy for the lives of individuals cannot be depicted using only simple patterns.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, communism, dictatorship, cadre policy, biography

“The Party ensures that according to his qualifications, abilities and political maturity, each socialistically minded and active citizen can be placed in the position where his benefit for the society is greatest.”
From the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia On Cadre Work, Prague, 18 December 1964.¹

* This article was written within the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic grant No. 409/08/1633 “Kádrový posudek si píše každý sám. Kádrování, prověřování a čistky v Československu 1948–1989”. Translated by Tereza Kodičková.

¹ Usnesení ÚV KSČ o kádrové práci, Praha, 18. prosince 1964, Národní archiv ČR, ÚV KSČ, fond [fund – henceforth f.] 02/1, svazek [folder – henceforth sv.] 82, archivní jednotka [archival unit – henceforth a. j.] 93, s. [page – henceforth s.] 2a.

Introduction

The communist state aimed at a rational selection and at a centrally managed distribution of the work force. The criteria of appropriate selection included not only professional, but also political and ideological eligibility. People categorised as “hostile” to the socialist regime – due to class or individual attitudes – or simply “politically unsuitable” were to be denied access to certain jobs and positions. Correspondingly, politically conscious individuals were to be actively educated and distributed in a targeted way. As a result, a complex system of position classification and, above all, employee control, screening and education developed for this purpose.

Obviously, the phenomenon that I shall discuss in the following text relates to a lot of general issues common around the world, such as social control, selection, screening, evaluation, or self-presentation. These issues are of course not tied solely to communism-building societies. However, in an effort to create an entirely new society based on new relationships, communist ideologues and politicians adopted the concept of “cadre” to place it into a new context and to differentiate their work force management from other, especially capitalist, societies. Thus, cadre policy and cadre work (a very important branch of communist ideology and practice) came into existence. In order to preserve this intended specificity and out of fear of semantic reduction, I have decided to use the original term (i.e. cadre) rather than to translate it by a more common English term.

In general, cadre policy refers to societal classification based on professional and ideological criteria – qualifications, class origin, political attitudes, etc.; moreover, it refers to screening and placement of individuals in certain occupational positions and offices based on the above mentioned criteria; it also refers to preventing politically undesirable individuals from holding certain jobs or positions in public life; and last but not least, it likewise refers to education towards the preset ideals of appropriateness.

The introductory quote largely captures cadre policy objectives. Above all, it shows the familiar truth about the Communist party’s leadership in society, strongly present in practical cadre work: from the highest level of drafting guidelines to the involvement of basic and local organisations in making decisions about individual people. It also hints at the political contingency of potential positive selection (“socialist mindedness”). In addition, one cannot leave out the idea of centralised work force distribution – that is “placing” individuals in certain positions. Further, the ideal criterion of appropriate placement was for the society’s benefit. Finally, it rather implicitly suggested the necessity of previous individual screening.

Many principles related to screening were adopted from the practices of the Communist party (cadre questionnaires, assessments, CVs) and were used more or less across the entire Czechoslovak society after 1948.

Remarkably, cadre work has so far remained outside the main focus of historians and social scientists dealing with communism. If at all, attention – mainly among Western scholars – was paid to cadre work and screenings primarily in connection with the Communist party,² mostly in the Stalinist period,³ as an extreme form of promoting the specific social practices the newly built society was supposed to be based on. The way post-war communist regimes got inspired by these communist and party customs, how they embodied them in regulations and cadre measures and how they were reflected in societal and individual lives remain, however, largely unnoticed. The only exception concerns phenomena that are more noticeable and significant from the historical point of view – such as various waves of purges and screenings that involved social exclusion or persecution of larger groups of people.⁴ However, these are usually conceptualised disparately, as separate displays of the communist regime and tend not to be included in a broader context of cadre work, which – outside these exceptional moments – involved also long-term systemisation. In other words, purges and screenings can be seen as a certain extreme case of cadre work. Nevertheless, cadre work had also its less visible everyday form which concerned a large proportion of the population from various social strata. Therefore, its study can be considered as an important

² For example Claude Pennetier and Bernard Pudal, *Autobiographie, autocritiques, aveux dans le monde communiste* (Paris: Belin, 2002); Florian Escudié, “Le fonctionnaire et la machine bureaucratique. Contrôle biographique et la construction des carrières dans l'appareil régional du SED”, *Genèse*, No. 53 (December 2003): 93–112.

³ These include primarily works from the area of the Soviet Union's cultural and social history, focusing on identity and subject shaping in the period after the Bolshevik revolution and Stalinism: Brigitte Studer et al., *Parler de soi sous Staline* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2002); larger part of Oleg Kharkhordin's *The Collective and the Individual in Russia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution of My Mind. Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2006); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks! Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴ Jiří Maňák, *Čistky v komunistické straně Československa 1969–1970* (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 1997); Vladimíra Hradecká, František Koudelka, *Kádrová politika a nomenklatura KSČ 1969–1974* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1998), 37–49; Alena Mišková, Hana Barvíková, Miroslav Šmidák, *Československá akademie věd 1969–1972. Restaurace komunistické moci ve vědě* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1998), 52–76; Petr Blažek, Michal Kubálek, “Politicky motivované vylučování studentů v zakladatelském období komunistického režimu. Černá kapitola z dějin zemědělského a lesnického školství v Praze”, Provozně ekonomická fakulta České zemědělské univerzity v Praze http://wwwold.pef.czu.cz/kolektivizace/documents/vylucovaniStudentu_cz.pdf.

contribution to the more general issues of governance and decision-making, communist regime functioning, and power distribution and its use.

This text does not aim to describe the historical development of the cadre system,⁵ at evaluating criteria transformations or at precisely delineating the positions and competences of the individual participating actors. It rather intends to trace certain more universal traits relevant across time and to introduce the ambitious cadre policy project from several different angles. Even though the concept of cadre work also relates to the so-called employee care, I focus mainly on the selection, evaluation, screening or education – i.e. on the identification and shaping of a comprehensively (professionally, politically, and personally) reliable person. Primarily the ideological and political intent, including various party and cabinet statements, resolutions and opinions, must be taken into account in this respect. Sometimes, they may seem like mere ideological clichés; I nevertheless consider it important to mention them as they set the framework. The rules they promoted and wanted to bring into practice, however, were neither self-evident nor unproblematic. Throughout its implementation, cadre work was accompanied by ideological as well as practical contradictions: its operation was far from the operation of “a well-lubricated machine” in which individual components perform the activity strictly assigned to them and only them. My aim is to introduce the cadre work project in its incongruity and also to outline the way cadre policy was implemented at the individual level.

I assume that the landscape I am entering upon is relatively unfamiliar to the reader. Therefore, I consider it necessary to at least mention some fundamental facts – even though their precise definition would require much broader space than I have at my disposal in this paper.⁶

Actors of cadre work

Objects

The above description suggested what cadre policy was roughly about. The question that follows is whom it actually concerned – i.e. who was exposed to systematic control of professional and political eligibility and to the pressure to create

⁵ About the beginnings of the cadre system establishment see Jaroslav Cuhra, “Kádrovník nikdy nemůže být se svou prací hotov. Kádrování a komunistické vládnutí”, *Dějiny a současnost* 31, No. 11 (November 2009): 30–33.

⁶ I use the experience of former Czechoslovakia. So far, unfortunately, we have not had a chance to compare cadre practice with other countries from the former Eastern Bloc or with other political regimes.

socialistically appropriate personalities. Above all, one important fact that needs to be mentioned is that cadre policy in Czechoslovakia was being formed in a situation when the state was essentially the only employer. Knowing this is crucial as cadre work was always primarily related to employment, or, employment and the preparation for it were always at least at stake. As cadre policy can be understood as centrally managed state employment and work force management, any employee was potentially subject to it. However, this is the right place where a certain differentiation needs to be at least hinted at: the scope and intensity of cadre work and verification, of the required political engagement or “flawlessness” of biography of course differed according to the presumed societal importance of the profession or post held. Nonetheless, clear cut rules cannot be set. A consensus on the concept of cadre, i.e. who was to be the object of cadre policy or cadre work (or who deserved systematic attention), did not exist even in official party documents.⁷

Some authors connect cadre policy solely with the issue of creating communist “elites” – a relatively narrowly defined group of higher functionaries in political, social and economic life.⁸ They focus on the so-called cadre orders – i.e. lists of functions where the appointment was subject to approval by a certain party body level, ranging from the party’s central committee through various regional and district to company and local committees. However, this approach tends to neglect the lower cadre nomenclature levels,⁹ even though company committees (at least in Czechoslovakia) had their own cadre orders including functions the importance of which did not exceed the framework of the given institution. True, all these nomenclature cadres were subject to a special selection, control and screening regime but it would be misleading to reduce the concept of cadre policy or cadre work solely to them. Even the purely formal delineation of functions went even lower

⁷ For instance a 1964 party document mentions “all leading workers”. See Usnesení ÚV KSČ o kádrové práci, Prague, December 18, 1964, NAČR, ÚV KSČ, f. 02/1, sv. 82, a. j. 93, s. 2a. Another, from 1967, uses an even broader and vaguer definition of the concept of cadre: “They are people who lead the organisation, work scientifically or conceive its activities in a creative way, organise work, control its results, fulfil other independent and political and professional tasks...” See Úkoly a organizace dosavadních kádrových a personálních útvarů ve státní správě a v podnicích, Praha, 7. prosince 1967, NAČR, ÚV KSČ, f. 02/4, sv. 23, a. j. 34, s. 7. On this issue, see also Marek Pavka, *Kádry rozhodují vše! Kádrová politika KSČ z hlediska teorie elit* (Brno: Prius, 2003), 27–28.

⁸ E.g. Sandrine Kott, “Les Elites socialistes et le pouvoir. Le cas de la RDA,” in *Le communisme et les élites en Europe Centrale. Destruction, mutation, conversion*, eds. François Bocholier, Nicholas Bocollet (Paris: PUF, 2006), 169–186; Ágnes Horváth and Árpád Szakolczai, *Dissolution of Communist Power: The Case of Hungary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 223, note 1, understand cadre nomenclature as “the top level decision makers of the state and economy”.

⁹ Sandrine Kott mentions 312,169 persons in the GDR subject to cadre orders of the SED central, regional and district committees as of 1970, whereas the total population was 16 million. See Kott, “Les Elites socialiste et le pouvoir”.

along the imaginary social structure – basic organisations (i.e. the most elementary party units present in virtually any working team), which by definition did not create cadre orders) were obliged to design a list of nomenclature functions “to which they g[a]ve opinions within their authority”.¹⁰ This significantly expands the whole concept of cadre – it was related to the performance of a function that was strategic from the viewpoint of the Communist Party and its use of power.

The officially drafted nomenclature lists at various communist body and organisation levels represented a very important lead in determining the objects of cadre policy or cadre work, but they were by far not the only ones. That is why documents sometimes mention “cadres in the narrower sense”, meaning a certain leading “elite” of high functionaries, or in the “broader sense”, meaning essentially any employee at all.

As my intent in this article is not to describe elite selection, education and control but cadre work at the most general level, I therefore use the broader understanding of “cadres”. The so-called cadre materials, accompanying selected people basically throughout their whole professional life, were an important and tangible manifestation of systematic cadre work and screening from the individual’s point of view (as well as a measure of interest the individual enjoyed from the cadre policy point of view).¹¹ It is very difficult to define the group cadre materials were kept for but they essentially did not pertain to manual workers and unskilled technical and administrative staff. We could de facto associate them with the (again problematic) category of the working intelligentsia. Communist party membership would be yet another criterion, as party members were screened separately along the party line. Thus we can see that the question of who was subject to systematic cadre work and control is rather complex and several viewpoints as well as cadre work lines intertwine at this point.

For these people, cadre practice involved regular professional and political evaluations, various *ad hoc* assessments accompanying any movement or change of status (e.g. change of job or position, new degree award, journey abroad, etc.), regular cadre questionnaire completion, and CV writing. Professional as well as personal eligibility the same as political reliability (or the lack thereof in case of negative assessments) of the person in question as well as his family was demonstrated in all the materials concerned. Cadre practice also included commitments for participation in various political events and voluntary jobs, engagement in

¹⁰ See for example: Návrh zásad pro zpracování kádrových pořádků, návrh projednávání kádrových návrhů ve stranických orgánech a návrh prozatímního kádrového pořádku ÚV KSČ, Praha, 6. února 1970, NA ČR, ÚV KSČ, f. 02/1, f. 02/1, sv. 118, a. j. 192, bod [point – henceforth b.] 1, s. 14.

¹¹ I will mention them later in more detail.

public life and the National Front organisations. Engagement was an important and demonstrable expression of reliability of the individual at stake.

Subjects

Subjects and objects of cadre work, i.e. those who performed the work and who were its targets, cannot be entirely separated because the assessors likewise needed to be assessed. As the above mentioned shows, the Communist Party, with its various levels from the central committee to basic organisations, was an important cadre work subject, practically implementing its continuously noted leading role in the society. The party systematically worked not only with nomenclature cadres and party members (by filling their cadre materials and regular evaluations) but it also occasionally assessed “ordinary” non-party members – e.g. in connection with their journeys abroad, changes in work positions, etc. Apart from the Communist Party, workplace management represented another important actor in the spirit of the slogan that “cadre work is part of any management work”. The manager was responsible for the workers’ comprehensive professional and political evaluation; it was up to him to produce various assessments, to watch over the employees’ reliability and engagement or to actively lead them to implement this ideal. The fact that cadre work formed part of common work relations and hierarchies is of course significant for the way it was implemented in practice. I will return to this factor later in the text. The so-called cadre departments, gradually established at workplaces from the early 1950s, represented another institutionally embedded actor. Their functions and competences developed over time but despite the negative connotations linked to them to-date, their role in relation to cadre materials, it can be said, was largely administrative. Cadre materials were gathered and kept here; cadre department heads were responsible for their accuracy and completeness. They handled the related agenda, but apart from certain excerpts, they did not actively participate in creating them. Their agenda was much broader, however, including for example employee education – the organization and booking of various courses and training (professional as well as political) and also to look after employees at certain times (e.g. questions related to flats, health, vacation, etc.). These three main actors (different levels of the Communist party, the KSC, organisations and bodies, management and cadre department) ensured cadre work at the workplace and bore responsibility for it. Occasionally, other actors could be and were involved in the process and provided complementary materials – various assessments and evaluations. These most often included superiors from previous jobs or former teachers, representatives of municipalities, the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (ROH), the Socialist

Youth Union (SSM) or various other organisations or associations one could be a member of. The practice common in the 1950s that virtually anyone acquainted with the person in question (his neighbour, fellow student, colleague, etc.) could be asked for an assessment was gradually abandoned later in the 1960s.

The network of potential assessors was fairly diverse and, importantly, individual components were aware of the relations and commitments they were part of. This undoubtedly influenced their evaluation.

Building the new society

As our knowledge of the so-called communist societies gradually deepens, it becomes more and more problematic to define a certain phenomenon as purely “communist”. Closer examination shows that the seemingly essential differences fall apart and that the necessity to put them into various contexts arises. Therefore, the effort to study communism as the “other” becomes easily challenged. Otherness can also be viewed as a performance – not as something that *was* but what was performed and what was striven for. The communist state, at least in its numerous proclamations, wanted to be different, or new. It was to become new *inter alia* through the consistent implementation of cadre work and policy.

Cadre policy as work force management

The communist project of rational, centralised and planned societal management also included work force management. This involved the planning of jobs and occupational positions necessary for the society in the given period, the corresponding training and distribution of individuals, and also the classification of positions by their importance. This directly relates to (the above mentioned) cadre orders that determined which Communist party level was to decide about which positions. The example of cadre orders shows not only the Communist Party’s declared exclusive position in workforce decision making at almost all levels but also the strategic importance the workforce management enjoyed. The canonised truths created by the communist system ideologues and founders actually postulated this importance; see for instance Stalin’s “Cadres decide everything” or his statements about people representing the most valuable capital in the economy. Throughout socialism, the main contents of cadre work remained to correctly “choose, appreciate and position” people, regardless of how evaluation criteria changed through time.¹²

¹² Human resources management has had its history under communism as well, of course. From the outset, it was strongly connected to the great project of class revolution in society, in which the task

The way the pieces were distributed on the chess board was not to be the result of an uncontrolled selection guided by the individuals' personal interests or the companies' sectional interests, but of a planned, rational and centralised consideration. Such endeavours were materialised for instance in occupational "placement orders" which were introduced in the early 1950s and used until mid-1960s. As criticised in a 1951 document on the situation at the universities for example, university graduates were leaving for different places in an "unrestrained way" and "without regard to the needs of our planned economy".¹³ That was, not surprisingly, inadmissible. Societal rather than individual interests were to serve as the main measure of selection appropriateness. The individual's personal satisfaction with a position was not the goal in itself. It was but a prerequisite for the implementation of the interest of the entire society. According to general proclamations, such as the *Psychology of cadre work* handbook for instance, this was to distinguish socialist cadre work from the human resources management in the West: whereas in capitalist countries the question was "who was the most suitable for the job" in the sense "the best value for money", in socialist countries it was "who was best suited for what, how could they be of best use to the society".¹⁴ The question "who was suited for what" did not thus stand just between the employer and the employee. It needed to be assessed from the outside, objectively, in relation to the interests of the entire society and other people.

The cadre policy and cadre work system were established to ensure this new regime of workforce selection and placement. It was to complete the transformation from "capitalist to socialist social relations".¹⁵

The comprehensiveness of cadre work

Special attention devoted to cadre work by the communist state was also caused by the significance it possessed in Marxist ideology. Theoretical sources of Marxism are referred to where work as such held an exclusive position in individual as well as societal life. According to these sources, work is fundamental in

was to find and train capable workers for managerial positions and thus to create a new man not burdened with the old social order. As problems appeared in practice, this revolutionary ethos lost its momentum. Although class origin naturally continued to be a positively assessed criterion, the ambitious idea of trained workers gradually receded in favour of politically reliable experts.

¹³ Návrh na ustavení kádrových pracovníků při rektorátech vysokých škol, Praha 25. dubna 1951, NAČR, ÚV KSČ, f. 02/4, sv. 36, a. j. 183, s. 3.

¹⁴ Jan Kučera, *Psychologie v kádrové práci* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1954), 10.

¹⁵ Úkoly a organizace dosavadních kádrových a personálních útvarů ve státní správě a v podnicích, Praha, 7. prosince 1967, NAČR, ÚV KSČ, f. 02/4, sv. 23, a. j. 34, s. 7.

shaping human consciousness and psychological life. In itself, it is not separable from other components of the human personality, and, therefore, the worker needs to receive comprehensive attention:

“The worker is not related to the organisation only in his working time, the occupational position influences his entire life. An organisation’s interest in workers therefore needs to pertain also to their non-working time, environment, culture, leisure and personal life.”¹⁶

For this reason, cadre work monitored not only the expertise and qualifications that were directly linked to the occupational performance but also the employee’s political and public life and opinions as well as his character traits, private and social background and his health condition.

More precisely, it was this comprehensive approach that distinguished cadre work from western human resources management. It was the basic axis that should never be diverted from. Whenever the Communist Party leadership got the impression that any of the components were neglected, criticism followed. It was particularly strong for example in the early 1970s. Although the comprehensive approach principles were not fundamentally challenged even during the “liberal” end of the 1960s,¹⁷ the new leadership felt the need to point out the pillars of cadre work again and to distance itself from the previous period based on their alleged violation:

[between 1968 and 1969] “The requirements of political and ideological firmness and character features corresponding to the communist morality principles were neglected and challenged, and the solely professional prerequisites of occupational performance were emphasised, often reduced to school education.”¹⁸

“Professionalism” was a sin countless pointed out in various circumstances. Comprehensiveness applied not only to the different evaluation components and to the interest in the individual, but also to the care that was to be given to the employee. Apart from selection and evaluation, it was supposed to involve active personality shaping as well. “The cadre worker needed to be aware that his task is not only to describe and assess the individual’s personality, but also to create

¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁷ Bureaucracy, unsuitable questionnaires, duplicity of materials, simply excessive paperwork were criticised in the 1960s but cadre work and screening as such remain unquestioned. It just needed to be freed of formalism. The political aspect was never really removed.

¹⁸ Kádrová a personální práce ve stranických orgánech, státní a hospodářské správě, Praha, 17. září 1970, NACR, ÚV KSČ, f. 02/4, sv. 54, a. j. 97, b. 1, s. 8.

and recreate it.”¹⁹ This again refers to the ideological premise of human nature’s malleability and conditionality. Cadre policy was to make labour relations comprehensive and through them, all personality components were to be exposed to assessment as well as active shaping.

Exclusion

So far, social exclusion – an important aspect of cadre work – has not been mentioned. Building a new society and new social relations also entailed the ideological struggle against its enemies or “politically unreliable” individuals. This element was always part of cadre work, making it an ultimately political theme. One of the first cadre work manifestations could be found in the society’s “purification” from “reactionary elements” during the communist takeover and the immediately following spontaneous activities of the National Front’s action committees,²⁰ as well as the somewhat later, already centrally organised, purges at universities, central authorities and in the Communist Party. How to remove certain people from their positions was a practical political problem, somewhat distant from the humanist-socialist slogans about the “nobility of cadre work”.

An early 1950s party document delineating cadre department responsibilities mentions this repressive function of cadre work as well: “Cadre departments are to help remove hostile elements from the state and economic apparatus, mass organisations, etc.”²¹

In this sentence, the content of cadre work is limited more or less to the evaluation of political reliability-unreliability, to the removal or non-admittance of the unreliable. The emphasis on mass “cleansing” was manifested primarily at the turning points of the regime, such as the onset of the communist system or the years following the violent termination of the Prague Spring in 1968. Even though the definition of “unreliability” and the image of the enemy differed in different purge waves, the belief that the society needed to be “cleansed” always prevailed.

Individual exclusion or screening was also an inherent aspect of every day cadre work. The threat of being labelled “politically unreliable” or “insufficiently engaged” was ever-present, even though in “more stable” periods it acquired

¹⁹ Kučera, *Psychologie v kádrové práci*, 73.

²⁰ The activities of action committees were only legalised retrospectively by Act No. 213 “On the regulation of certain circumstances to protect public interests” in July 1948. It mentions “purification” and “protection of the people’s democratic regime”.

²¹ Pokyny pro prověřování pracovníků ve státním aparátě, hospodářských podnicích a jiných institucích, Praha, 14. listopadu 1950, NAČR, f. 02/4, sv. 25, a. j. 157, b. 2, s. 6.

somewhat different, let's say more individualised, dynamics and did not lead to such significant societal changes. In addition, we should not forget cadre work's ambition to shape certain relations and personalities and it is possible to say it was not a mere ideological slogan. In reality, screenings and control manifested in countless questionnaires, interviews, assessments and evaluations, in which reliability (class, social, political) had to be proven. The "educational" emphasis had its specific manifestations as well. Membership in various organisations, attendance at party courses and training, public activism, participation in various political-ideological events, volunteer jobs or party press subscriptions, which people were constantly asked to take up, all that was to contribute to the formation of socialist personalities and socialist social relations. Let us leave aside the impact of this kind of "education", as translated into a range of more or less enforced or at least required activities, on the personality and consciousness of the participants. From the communist state's point of view, cadre policy faced the great task of harmonising both goals – i.e. separating the reliable from the unreliable and preventing the unreliable from accessing important positions on the one hand; and educating the reliable ones and distributing them appropriately on the other.

The premises it was based on kept failing in practice but that could not challenge their proclaimed validity and durability during socialism because the entire ideology of cadre work would have collapsed without them.

The premises of good cadre work

Let us now look at two important premises cadre work was based on. Correct selection, evaluation and the targeting of education was of course primarily based on knowledge, on information. Decisions made about people were based on many aspects – the assessment of class origin, past activities, family suitability, political opinions and engagement – therefore, relevant information had to be found about all the above mentioned. The whole system of questionnaire completion, CV writing, interviews and assessment gathering was actually built to get to know people, as this was to become the alpha and omega of cadre work. "Cadre work has to lean on scientifically precise knowledge of people, therefore, it needs to be alive."²² It was necessary to "get to know the workers consistently, to evaluate their activities in a demanding way."²³ Cadre work was not just any work; it was proclaimed to

²² Stalin as quoted in Kučera, *Psychologie kádrové práce*, 50.

²³ Úkoly a organizace dosavadních kádrových a personálních útvarů ve státní správě a v podnicích, Praha, 7. prosince, NAČR, ÚV KSČ, f. 02/4, sv. 23, a. j. 34, s. 8.

be a highly demanding political and technical job in which phenomena such as “subjectivism” or “spontaneity” could not be allowed.

Cadre work was primarily based on the belief that objective knowledge of the personality as a whole – including his or her inner life (opinions, beliefs, values, etc.) – was possible to achieve. People could of course obscure, hide or distort a lot of things, but that was to be overcome by constant improvement of cadre work methodology. This was to be achieved solely by cleansing the knowledge of the given person from any particular intentions and interests on the side of the evaluators and knowledge gatherers. The entire cadre work history was accompanied by warnings against “familiarism”, collegial or neighbourly “solidarity” and all manifestations of “subjectivism”.

People involved in cadre work as assessors were expected to leave aside ties and commitments that could bond them to the person assessed, to set aside potential personal, group or occupational interests in favour of the centrally defined state interest.

The proposed amendment to the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences Cadre Work Guidelines from 1964 explicitly listed who could not be employed at the Academy. A warning followed: “It is inadmissible to yield in these principles and to influence them by friendly and personal relations.”²⁴

The only officially approved loyalty was that to the state. In this sense, the cadre work project was very ambitious as it attacked the very bases of sociability. At the very same time, this brought it closer to other modernist rationalisation and bureaucratisation projects aimed at eliminating traditional family and group ties from decision making in the public sphere.

Apart from objectivity, state cadre policy also required deep knowledge of people based on the evaluators’ personal acquaintance and their personal approach. Apart from subjectivism, cadre work’s formalism and insufficient knowledge of the assessed was also constantly criticised. Informality was required – stripped of everything that usually accompanies an informal relationship: complicity, trust, mutual commitment. In the party ideologues’ minds, the goal of an informal personal relationship – the relationship itself – was to be a mere prerequisite for impartial and objective knowledge. In a personal relationship prescribed in this way, the person was to be committed to the policy of the state, not to the person concerned.

²⁴ Směrnice presidia ČSAV o zásadách obecné kádrové politiky v Československé akademii věd, Praha, 25. listopadu 1964, Archiv Akademie věd ČR, f. PČSAV, sv. XIX, zasedání P 25. 11 .64, s. 2.

While ideology was capable of dialectically uniting deep knowledge based on a personal relationship with relentless loyalty to objectivised political interests, these two were much more difficult to unite in practice. The declaratory rules hit the velocity of various interests and collegialities, which were never uprooted from the society despite all the appeals. For instance, when in the 1950s the head of the Cadre department at the Academy of Sciences helped to pull research workers out from industrial enterprises, he acted in the interest of “his” institution and against the centrally declared state interest.

Another prerequisite of cadre work is the existence of objective criteria – the idea that people can be grouped into clear cut, pure and stable categories according to their social origin, opinions, activities, etc. Moreover, it is not possible to omit one more prerequisite, i.e. that rules to determine reliability can be stipulated and that individual components of the mechanism (that is how the society was conceived, as a “mechanism”) will implement the rules in practice in a unified and harmonised way.

These ideas also hit reality and, of course, kept failing again and again. Not even the conceptual delineation of “class origin” – a category of fundamental importance for cadre work – was agreed upon. Take the attributes of working class origin for instance – a category that bore certain bonuses, e.g. in admission procedures to a number of educational levels. Did both parents have to be workers or was only one sufficient? Did they have to be workers at the given time? Was it enough to have a worker’s experience for one to become a worker? Quite understandably, the criteria kept changing in practice. In the early 1970s for example, the number of students admitted to universities from workers’ and farmers’ families could significantly increase *inter alia* because the way the origin was defined changed compared to the previous years. While before it had covered only children of parents working as workers or farmers at the time, later, in 1971, it also extended to parents with only past worker or farmer experience.²⁵

Cadre materials

Let us now look at how cadre work manifested itself in the lives of specific individuals. As I have already mentioned above, cadre materials represented an option of approaching the problem at this level. We can see them, therefore, as a certain tangible manifestation of cadre work.

²⁵ Jakub Jareš, “Přijímací řízení na vysoké školy v období normalizace. Příklad Filozofické fakulty UK”, in *Prověřená fakulta. KSC na Filozofické fakultě UK v letech 1969–1989*, ed. Katka Volná, Jakub Jareš, Matěj Spurný and Klára Pinerová (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, v. v. i., 2009), 37–84.

Cadre materials were a personal file that followed people like a shadow throughout their entire working life.²⁶ They consisted of all sorts of information the communist state considered relevant – political, social, moral and occupational qualifications: political attitudes, activities or actions, class origin and family background, engagement in various organisations and public offices, participation in political education, training and various events, professional qualifications, and naturally they also consisted of personal characteristics or health status information. This was done in the format of required and regularly updated cadre questionnaires and CVs that were filled in and written by the individual at stake, as well as various assessments given by other people, regular “comprehensive evaluations”, personal characteristics, screening conclusions, etc. All the materials, whether written by the concerned person himself or by somebody else, were always to contain information and evaluation of all the above mentioned components – i.e. occupational the same as political, social and personal issues. The omnipresent evaluations and screenings²⁷ not only practically confirmed the importance of the assessed facts, but they also regularly questioned the assessee’s position. The question of reliability was opened again and again and could be challenged by new assessments anytime.

This naturally had an impact on the actions and activities of individuals in a very real way. For example, at least formal involvement in various social or political organisations represented a very common response to the incessant question of political engagement. It must be likewise borne in mind one was never screened alone in the materials that were being kept: information on all other family members – children, parents, siblings, spouses, the spouse’s siblings and parents – was also included. People were commonly screened by using their family’s cadre materials and assessments. In addition, cadre materials were classified, and they were accessible only to a strictly defined narrow circle of people holding certain offices. People could never be sure what their cadre materials contained (except for their own personal CVs, cadre questionnaires and comprehensive evaluations). Since cadre materials or their parts represented the individual’s indispensable represen-

²⁶ Marie Černá, “Od školy až do důchodu. V síti kádrových materiálů”, *Dějiny a současnost* 31, No. 11 (November 2009): 37–39.

²⁷ These were primarily the regular comprehensive evaluations which were introduced in the early 1970s as a result of the previous general screenings. They were repeated every two, later every five years. Regular reviews of comprehensive evaluation conclusions implementation need to be included here as well, which could occur also outside the evaluations as such. Moreover, there were *ad hoc* assessments which had to accompany automatically any social or physical movement – changes of jobs, offices, positions, new degrees, journeys abroad, etc. All that required an approval process accompanied by various assessments.

tation, a certain *alter ego*, sent for assessment to various instances, the possibility of controlling one's self-presentation was at the least impaired.

Let us take for example the scientific candidature approval process (a title comparable to today's Ph.D.) undergone by Ms V. in 1960. The degree award had to be approved by the KSC district committee – it was there where background materials were gathered for this purpose, consisting of various assessments and recommendations, as well as a cadre questionnaire, CV, dissertation outline, and a list of publications.

The candidate's evaluation worked out by the workplace manager was there also, the same as three professional dissertation assessments, a basic ROH organisation's assessment and basic KSC organisation's opinions and recommendations on the problem.

Based on these materials, someone at the relevant KSC district committee (i.e. the committee for propaganda, agitation, education, science, arts and public education), who probably did not know the person in concern at all, drafted a Proposal to establish a candidate – a certain meta-assessment, a de facto approval or disapproval of the assessments submitted. This proposal was then submitted to the district committee bureau for approval. Moreover, the workplace cadre department requested cadre assessments for their own use from three other people – two co-workers and one former fellow student – in relation to the candidature.

These are the traces preserved in the cadre materials from which we can reconstruct the process. Possibly, the agenda around the candidature approval could have been even more extensive – e.g. assessments that party bodies requested from the party organisation were not filed in common cadre materials. Similar procedures were usually also accompanied by assessments of the assessors. What is important in the whole matter, however, is the fact that a lot of the steps took place without the candidate even knowing it. Apart from professional assessments related to the thesis itself, she was not to get acquainted with any other evaluation and thus could not have any idea which materials were supposed to represent her.

From this point of view, the large-scale return of cadre materials to their original "owners" after November 1989 could be interpreted as a new chance to retell one's biography in one's own terms.

Practice

So far, I have looked at various procedural questions rather than the content of cadre materials itself – i.e. what specifically was the object of interest, what was

evaluated, what was desirable or, on the contrary, undesirable. Unlike the officially declared slogans, the real content and its meanings defied simple descriptions. This was so, firstly, because the evaluation criteria and the meaning of certain facts, or the image of the enemy, changed over time. For instance the original emphasis on social origin lost power with time and other aspects came to the fore – from 1970, for example, one of the main questions was about activities and declared attitudes to the year 1968. Second, and mainly, it is very problematic to stipulate any general rules at all.

For the image of reliability or unreliability – the purpose of cadre materials – did not derive purely from objective facts where clear criteria could be applied to measure the “pluses” and “minuses”. Of course, there were generally declared ideas and rules enforced in all kinds of ways about what was or was not desirable in the image of reliability, translated also into cadre questionnaire questions, assessment and evaluation guidelines, etc. However, cadre work was not a mere echo and implementation of these rules, but something that co-created them in practice. Thus, the image of the individual was a result of much subtler processes where various actors stood alongside but also against each other, defining what was and what was not a manifestation of reliability or unreliability in different ways. The very “fact” of reliability as well as the meaning of various realities was socially negotiated. Cadre practice left relatively little space to hide certain facts or to completely make up others because the multiple checks and assessments via family made the risk of disclosure very high. However, there was space to interpret certain facts, to bring them into a certain context to add or reduce their significance. The assessee as well as the assessor could use this space. Let us take an example of another Academy of Sciences employee. Mr V. was an openly practising Catholic throughout his long professional life (from the early 1950s until the late 1980s). As an academic employee (moreover often travelling abroad), he used to be evaluated regularly. Few dared to disregard the religious aspect for a certain period of time; however, some assessments trivialised, excused, or strictly separated it from the performance of the scientific profession, while others (isolated but influential) enhanced and emphasised it. The point at stake is not whether the person concerned was a believer or not, there is no contention there, but whether religiosity was or was not in conflict with the performance of the scientific profession, the scientist’s position or promotion in his career. It is interesting to observe the way and the opportunity when a street Communist Party organisation’s assessment suddenly (if only temporarily) disrupted the carefully constructed image of a religious, yet respectable and reliable scientist, who had been approved by various assessors at the workplace (including members and representatives of the facility Communist Party organisa-

tion) for years. Such a sudden turn had real consequences – in this concrete case, it was the interruption of the higher degree award process. What is important here, religiosity as such did not represent a discriminatory handicap in this specific case, but was made into one only through certain actions acknowledged by others (none of the participants stood up against the street organisation's version, even though they undoubtedly could have). Simultaneously, all participants confirmed religiosity as a category worth assessing.

Analogically, the individual assessed components, i.e. what was political, personal or occupational, could not be clearly and objectively delineated either. A quote from cadre materials of a secondary school teacher shows, for example, that the scope of politically relevant activities was fairly broad. In a letter to the headmaster, the Sports Union district committee presidium praised the teacher at stake – its member. It addressed the main evaluator as follows:

“Therefore, we ask you to take this evaluation into account and consideration also in your own evaluation of his activities. Work in a sports movement is socially important, equal to political engagement.”²⁸

Cadre materials included a lot of similar examples demonstrating the endeavour to satisfy the political engagement imperatives in all kinds of ways, or to justify its absence in a politically correct way. If the relations at the workplace were more or less unproblematic, without any fundamental conflicts, the individual and his assessors – mainly his superiors and the basic KSČ or ROH organisation – worked together to negotiate and fine-tune the figure of an orderly and trustworthy worker. In such cases, the tasks and commitments were often tailored with regard to various possibilities and limitations (e.g. women with small children or men building a house were commonly excused from stronger political involvement.) Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that individuals did indeed possess the possibility even under the communist regime to “manipulate their own files”. Additionally, she insists that this individual practice of “self-fashioning” must be “part of the discussion on Soviet identity”.²⁹ This might, of course, be extended also to other communism-building societies but I would emphasize that this practice was not only *individual* but especially *social*. The evaluation and creation of a reliable (or unreliable) figure was embedded in relations and communication, following certain rules just as any other communication, such as decency.

²⁸ Dossiers on a secondary school teacher. Author's personal holdings.

²⁹ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the masks!*, 16–18.

Social life's common and expectable motives were likewise manifested in cadre work – routinisation, collegiality, various sectional interests, their conflicts or harmony. Practical implementation of certain rules and measures was far from clear cut because participation in decision making was dispersed among various institutions and actors and woven into common occupational and personal ties and hierarchies.

Conclusion

From the communist state's point of view, cadre work or policy were not to impact on the individual only. The goals of cadre policy were much more ambitious: not only to discipline and educate the individual, but also to discipline and shape the entire society. It envisioned a certain type of individual, the cultivation of certain characteristics, and also the cultivation or suppression of certain social bonds.

As I have suggested above, however, cadre work was accompanied by a range of internal conflicts throughout the duration of communism. They were caused not only by practical imperfections and omissions – as constantly pointed out by numerous party and government documents calling for “improvement”. Ambiguity dominated also the concepts and principles of cadre work itself.

Cadre work required many highly formalised and routinised processes – filling out questionnaires and evaluations, but it was to be informal at the same time. It was meant to be deeply personal and emphatic, yet simultaneously impartial. It was supposed to explore and shape inner beliefs, values and attitudes, while emphasising formal expressions of loyalty at the same time. Cadre work presupposed clear evaluation criteria, but there was no agreement on even the most basic categories. The way to balance the motives of exclusion or collective guilt (e.g. in the case of people who had been proclaimed class enemies) and of education and self-development was not clearly determined either. This relates to the more general issue of the fatality of certain categories versus the possibility to change certain givens by one's own effort, or, the extent to which an individual was an object or a subject of cadre work. Both principles coexisted alongside each other and could be used for argumentation. Further, the cadre process itself was to be controllable; therefore, powers were spread among several instances with a different degree and nature of involvement. Simultaneously, their unity and harmony were emphasised but this was very hard to achieve precisely due to their enormous diversity.

All this and certainly much more turned the transparent ideological assignment explainable even in only a few simple slogans (see the introductory quote for instance) into a complex and basically unattainable project. If cadre policy spoke

of a “new” socialist human being and “new” social relations, then this system, in place for such a long time, largely failed. The entire cadre process turned out to be much more complex and conflictual than its ideologues were ready to admit in their general statements. All the “unclean” ties and commitments – personal, collegial, occupational – that cadre work was to be free of, could not in fact be circumvented. This was so because screening and education were largely dependent on them as cadre work was based on the immediate knowledge of the given person. Even though the practice of personal assessments was abandoned with time, the main responsibility was transferred to the superiors at work or teachers at school. The representatives of the basic KSC or ROH organisations participating in the assessment often knew the individual in concern personally as well. Only the next assessment instance was taken to a more anonymous level of higher (party) functionaries and bodies, who worked with the submitted documents – assessments and cadre materials. Basic materials were created by people personally and professionally involved with the assessee and this was, of course, reflected in the evaluation.

The fact that cadre work did not function entirely according to ideological proclamations, or that the proclamations themselves often contradicted each other, does not diminish its importance and impact on people’s lives in any way. The related agenda was enormous. The fact that cadre work did persist throughout the communist regime probably represents its most important aspect. During the whole period in question, questionnaires were filled in, and CV, assessments and evaluations were written. People adjusted their lives rhetorically as well as practically to demonstrate their comprehensive “reliability” – even though this reliability was contextually grounded and much less clear cut than it would seem at first glance and than the ideologues of the communist state would admit.