

CHARTER'77 AND THE SOLIDARITY OF PAUL GOMA**Andreea ANDREI¹****ABSTRACT**

THIS PAPER AIMS TO DEVELOP A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF CZECH DISSIDENT-CHARTER'77. THE "CHARTER'77" WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT FORM OF ORGANIZED OPPOSITION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA. THE MOVEMENT WAS FOUNDED IN JANUARY 1977 AND RAN UNTIL NOVEMBER 1989. ONE OF THE MAIN CAUSES THAT LED TO THE BIRTH OF THE CHARTER WAS THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS. THUS, THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE CHARTER INCLUDED: DEFENDING AND RESPECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND FINDING AN ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION FOR THE CZECH PEOPLE BY CREATING A PARALLEL SOCIETY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE PAPER AIMS AT EXAMINING THE SOLIDARITY INITIATIVE OF THE WRITER PAUL GOMA WITH THE "CHARTER'77".

KEY WORDS: CZECHOSLOVAKIA, SOLIDARITY, DISSIDENT, HUMAN RIGHTS, CHARTER

INTRODUCTION

The "Charter 77" was one of the most important dissident civic initiatives of Central and Eastern Europe. The "Charter'77" was an informal civic movement from Czechoslovakia. One of the major causes that led to the "Charter'77" was the violation of human rights and freedom of expression. So, the aim of the charter was to defend the "civil and human rights" of the citizens of Czechoslovakia². According to historians, the history of the "Charter'77" began in 1968, with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union, when many former party members, religious activists, intellectuals, workers and students were involved in opposition movements against the so-called reforms "normalization"³. The document of the charter was published on the 6 January 1977 and ran until November 1989.

The "Charter'77" was established by a group of Czechs citizens who defined themselves as a "free, informal, and open" association of people holding various convictions, beliefs, and professions⁴. So, many chartists were former politicians, clerics, pupils, students, or farmers⁵. But all were united by a common ideal and by the respect and

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²Stefan –Ludwig Hoffmann, *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 192.

³Jeri Laber, Jane Leftwich, Josef Wolf, *A Decade of Dedication. Charter 77, 1977 to 1987* (A Helsinki Watch report, U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, January 1987), 5.

⁴Ludwig Hoffmann, *Human Rights*, 192-193.

⁵Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 7.

protection of human rights ratified by international agreements⁶. Among the founding members of the movement's important figures: Pavel Kohout, Vaclav Havel, Jan Patočka, Jiri Hajek Zdenek Mlynar Vaclav Benda, Martin Palous, Jiri Nemec, Ladislav Hejdanek. Out of which, Jan Patočka, Vaclav Havel and Jiri Hajek were the first spokespersons of the charter. The name of the "Charter'77" was symbolic, chosen by the Czechs because the movement appeared in "the year of the political prisoners"⁷. In terms of status, the "Charter'77" had a double role, it functioned as a civic initiative and as a document. But what was not the "Charta'77"?

The "Charta'77" was not an organization or an opposition movement, but, a free, informal and open community, without a proper social and political program of reform⁸.

According to Vaclav Havel⁹, the "Charter'77" was not a resistance movement, but rather a pressure group. It is also important to note that the initiative of the Czechs had a set of rules by which to operate and no permanent body, its main purpose was to promote general public interest¹⁰.

Regarding the number of the chartists, their number has increased significantly over the years. If in the early years of training, the movement counted 242 people, their number increased, reaching 1300¹¹. Also, in its first year of existence, only two people have withdrawn their signatures; moreover, their number grew from month to month and from year to year¹². So in March 1977, the charter counted 617 signatures, and by the end of 1986, their number was 1,300¹³. One of the main objectives of the "Charter'77" was to create a constructive dialogue with the political authorities of the state, thus drawing the attention on individual cases of human rights violation; it aimed at helping Czechoslovak citizens to live and work free¹⁴. Also, according to Vaclav Havel¹⁵, "Charter'77" was one of those causes that deserve to suffer.

In December 1977, it was prepared the first critical text on the failure of Czechoslovak government to observe even the minimum rights: freedom of expression, religious freedom and freedom of public association¹⁶. And in January, it was presented the second text of the charter. Thus, one of the first roles that the "Charter'77" wanted to assume was to mediate and resolve the cases which could lead to injustice¹⁷. Another goal of the charter was to become and to function like a parallel society¹⁸. What is a "parallel society?"

A "parallel society" is a society that promotes an independent form of culture and information ("samizdat"). Therefore, a "parallel society" is the opposite of a closed society and can be an alternative solution for the citizens. What kind of independent culture this "society" can provide to its citizens? Thus, there were a large number of books published as samizdat, unpublished plays were performed (by actors in their homes), prohibited seminars were organized by teachers, religious services were also, officiated by priests and religious

⁶Vaclav Havel, *The power of the powerless. Citizens against the state in central- eastern Europe*, (Introduction by Steven Lukes, Edited by John Keane, Hutchinson, 1985), 220.

⁷Havel, *Power*, 221.

⁸Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 1.

⁹Havel, *Power*, p. 129.

¹⁰Havel, *Power*, p. 221.

¹¹Laber, *Decade*, 1.

¹²Laber, *Decade*, 7.

¹³Laber, *Decade*, 7.

¹⁴Havel, *Power*, p. 221.

¹⁵Laber, *Decade*, 2.

¹⁶Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 5.

¹⁷ Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 1.

¹⁸Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 9.

leaders who have lost their right to practice¹⁹. Therefore, we see that the charter covered various areas of the society, from culture, religion, environment, etc. It must be said that by the end of 1986, there were published more than 348 documents, including reports on the health system, environmental pollution, economic and religious issues²⁰. The three main achievements of the "Charter'77" were: shocking, awakening Czechoslovak nation, the fight against repression through documentation and investigation, it also made public these abuses, thus helping the development of the type samizdat²¹.

Despite the "Charter'77"'s calls to respect the law and the human rights, international human rights pacts were violated by Czechoslovak authorities and laws were passed to punish the chartists for daring to challenge the regime²². So, the chartists represented a real target for attacks and police abuse²³. Among the repression methods were: attacks, intimidation, threats, arrests, telephones were cut, apartments were lost for "bureaucratic reasons", car licenses were withdrawn or diminished, retirement or disability pensions were withdrawn or diminished, passports were denied²⁴. It is important to mention that not only the activists of the charter, but others associated with them were forced to pay the consequences (children of dissidents, of religious activists)²⁵. Despite all of this, they were not intimidated by the authorities and continued to resist them. Therefore, the repression had always been a constant in the life of the chartists²⁶.

In January 1977, the writer Paul Goma wrote a public letter expressing his solidarity with the "Charter'77" in Czechoslovakia. His letter of solidarity was addressed to "Pavel Kohout and his comrades" ("Către Pavel Kohout și camarazii săi")²⁷. The letter of Paul Goma will mark the beginning of Romanian dissidence. According to his journals, on the 26 of January 1977, Paul Goma prepared two versions of his solidarity letter with the "Charter'77": one that was "personal" and another one, if the writer Nicolae Breban agreed to join his initiative²⁸. Initially, he wanted to create a protest, but will give up this idea. Therefore, he took the decision to draft a declaration of solidarity with the reformist "Charter'77"²⁹. The solidarity letter of Paul Goma was "reformist" in two respects. First, the letter proposed to tempt the leadership of The Communist Party, PCR, to recognize that they didn't obey the laws³⁰. And secondly, the letter intended to be in solidarity with the Czechs, because the Chartists were already more "famous", known in the West, than the Romanians³¹.

The letter of solidarity was planned to be written by a writer who had "prestige and file"³². Among those nominated were big names, such as: Geo Bogza Jebeleanu, Eugen Marin Preda or Nichita Stănescu. But, no one among those proposed will accept to draft the letter. Therefore, Paul Goma is forced to write the letter to Pavel Kohout in its own behalf. It should also be said that this time, Paul Goma was trying to find people to accept and believe in his initiative. The first person contacted by Paul Goma, was Nicolae Breban. Nicolae

¹⁹Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 3.

²⁰Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 15.

²¹Havel, *Power*, 132.

²²Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 23.

²³Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 6.

²⁴Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 25.

²⁵Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 24.

²⁶Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 14.

²⁷Paul Goma, *Culorile curcubeului '77 (Cutremurul oamenilor)*, (Humanitas, București, 1990), 28.

²⁸Goma, *Culorile*, 25.

²⁹Goma, *Culorile*, 17.

³⁰Goma, *Culorile*, 17.

³¹Goma, *Culorile*, 17.

³²Goma, *Culorile*, 17.

Breban wasn't firmly convinced that he wanted to join the initiative of Paul Goma, therefore requested some time to think. More precisely until the 1st of February. But the answer of Breban never arrived to Paul Goma. The second person contacted by the writer was a cultural attaché in Germany, named Lang³³. Because he received so many refuses, Paul Goma believed that the opening organized by Manoliu family was a good opportunity to distribute the word about his letter³⁴. So, from all of the 15 copies of the letter that Paul Goma brought to Manoliu's house, he managed to distribute 9³⁵. It must be said that the writer was aware of the risk to which he is exposed by drafting the letter, but nevertheless, he decided to go ahead and be united with the Czechs. Therefore, the initiative taken by Paul Goma was one strictly individual, his goal being to include Romania on the Eastern Europe opposition map³⁶. Also, the radio Free Europe played a very important role.

Paul Goma begins his letter by declaring his solidarity with the social and political situation of Czechoslovakia: "I declare solidarity with your action. Your situation is my situation; the situation of Czechoslovakia is – with fundamental differences – Romania's situation as well. We live, survive in the same camp, in the same Biafra (Capital: Moscow)³⁷. Paul Goma³⁸ continues his letter by denouncing violation of basic human rights, stating that people are forced to live under the communist regime and endure poverty, insecurity economic chaos, demagoguery and terror. Also, he denounces the "stalinist -socialism"³⁹ from Romania and he is convinced that the lies of the communist system can be defeated. At the end of his letter, Paul Goma stated that many Romanian intellectuals are indeed solidary with this initiative, even if they initially refused to sign his letter.⁴⁰ It must be said that the initiative of solidarity of Goma will not remain without echo in the West.

On February the 9th 1977, Paul Goma's letter of solidarity is sent to the Czech chartists and read at Radio Free Europe⁴¹ Between the 9th and the 16th of February 1977, RFE will send his letter to the Belgrade Conference. According to Paul Goma, this is the moment, the first external signatures were gathered.

CONCLUSION

The history of the "Charter 77" from Czechoslovakia represents a very important part of the history of the communism which should not be forgotten⁴². According to Jan Patočka, "From the Charter, we may expect a new ideological orientation to enter our lives—an orientation toward basic human rights, toward morality in political and in private life. The Charter will not stop reminding us of our debt to these legally- protected rights; will not stop reminding us of people abroad – no matter what risk such activities entail"⁴³. Therefore, the "Charter'77" was a "free, informal, open" and legal civic movement for defending the human rights and the freedom of speech. The aim of the charter was to create an alternative society for all the Czechs citizens. The writer Paul Goma was the first person from Romania that expressed his solidarity (letter) with the initiative of Pavel Khout and his comrades.

³³Goma, *Culorile*, 35.

³⁴Goma, *Culorile*, 35.

³⁵Goma, *Culorile*, 36.

³⁶Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile (editors), *Raportul final al Comisiei Prezidentiale Pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din Romania*, (Humanitas, Bucuresti, 2006), 360.

³⁷Goma, *Culorile*, 28.

³⁸Goma, *Culorile*, 28.

³⁹Goma, *Culorile*, p. 29.

⁴⁰Goma, *Culorile*, 29.

⁴¹Monica Lovinescu, *Seismograme/ Unde scurte II*, (Humanitas, București, 1993), 256.

⁴²Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of dissent. Charter'77, The plastic people of the universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*, (Harvard University Press, 2014), 274.

⁴³Laber, Leftwich and Wolf, *Decade*, 12.

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