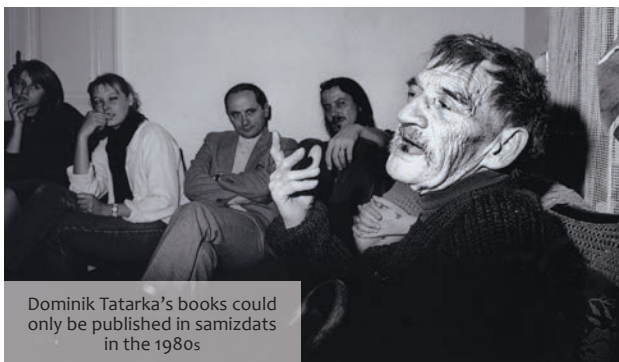




Ivan Polanský was sentenced to long term imprisonment in 1988 for publishing samizdats

“A narrative that no one has ever invented has become witness to the power and courage of Christian souls. It maintained us spiritually when spirits were enslaved by atheistic pressure – when man’s character was broken on the wheel of moral deformation. Each and every page was accompanied by prayers and hard-working hands – as everything was done by hand. Publishing 1000 editions of the 1500-page Bible Dictionary needs no further comment. The Slovak Catholic samizdat is an admirable cultural, religious and deeply humane phenomenon of what lies hidden within the Slovak soul for the whole world to appreciate.”

Jozef Oprala, Christian samizdat publisher in the 1980s



Dominik Tatarka’s books could only be published in samizdats in the 1980s



activities at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s due to anti-state activity. The most draconian judgments were handed down in the 1950s when illegal prints served as an evidence of anti-state activity and were considered to be aggravating circumstances, which led to long prison sentences.

The regime’s persecutions continued well into the 1980s, albeit in a milder form. Known cases of criminal prosecution for publishing samizdats include the conviction of publisher Ivan Polansky from Nová Dubnica. In November 1987 the state security service raided Polanský’s apartment and found numerous illegal samizdats. Sentenced to four years’ imprisonment, he was granted amnesty in October 1988 following international media coverage and a 4000-signature petition. On top of that, all important publishers of samizdats in former Czechoslovakia came to Polanský’s defence. Almost a hundred publishers created the Committee for protection of Ivan Polanský, demanding that the regime either releases Polanský from imprisonment, or imprisons all of them as well.

Many samizdats helped to spread the information about the violation of human rights and religious freedom during period of communism. **Thus, samizdats significantly contributed to disseminating ideas of freedom and democracy during the communist period, and thereby undermined the regime’s ability to control the population.** The publication of samizdats

came to an end with the fall of communism and the establishment of political pluralism and civil liberties, including the freedom to spread and share information.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Recommended websites:
www.upn.gov.sk; www.enrs.eu



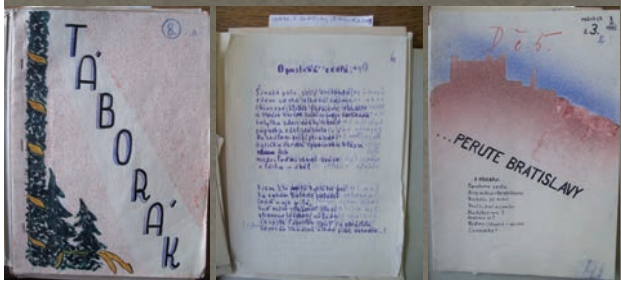
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SAMIZDAT

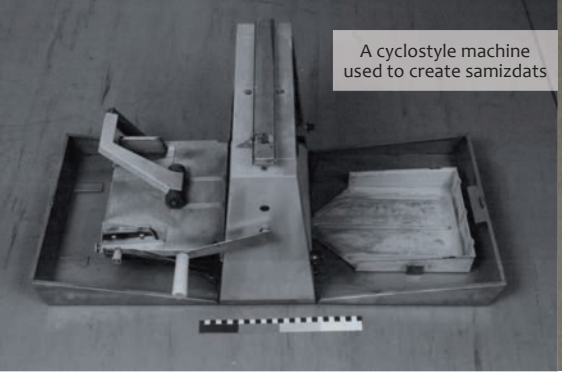
The term “samizdat” refers to the clandestine publishing and dissemination of books and magazines that were forbidden for various reasons – particularly political or ideological – and could not be lawfully published. Under communist totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia, no literature was permitted that in any way deviated from – or contradicted – official state ideology. Hence there was strong demand for objective information. In addition to illegally importing books from abroad, another option was self-copying and rewriting. Although samizdats actually originated mainly as a form of dissent for Christians, they also came to be published and disseminated by civic activists.

1940s and 1950s

Samizdats appeared as soon as 1945



A cyclostyle machine used to create samizdats



1970s

Materials used to create samizdats



Publishers hid samizdats in their homes



1980s

Examples of samizdats published in the 1980s



SAMIZDAT AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE

Samizdats (from the Soviet Russian *sam* (self) + *izdat* (publish)) were viewed with extreme sensitivity by the communist regime, as such publications contravened censorship laws and disseminated information that the regime preferred hidden. Localised versions of samizdats were found in all communist-ruled countries of Central and Eastern Europe. After all, the term samizdat was created in Soviet Russia. Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovskij characterized the samizdat phenomena with the following words: "I write it on my own, edit it on my own, censor it on my own, distribute it on my own, and spend time in jail for it on my own."

In Slovakia, the first samizdats emerged in the 1940s and were associated with the post-war People's Democracy regime in 1945. The illegal publications mainly attacked the Soviet leader Stalin, President Edvard Beneš, and the communists jostling for power. Several samizdats demanded Slovakia's state independence, the establishment of a truly democratic regime, or a Central European Federation of several states. Such samizdats mainly emerged from student environments. Yet the volume of samizdats declined in the 1950s as a result of the imprisonment or emigration of thousands of the regime's opponents.

The heyday of samizdats was in late 1970s and 1980s as a direct result of the Helsinki Accords, which had tackled the issue of human rights and religious freedoms. It was one of the consequences of the Helsinki process of cooperation and security in Europe, during which the question of acknowledging basic human rights and religious freedoms, as well as freedom of information was discussed. In Christian areas, Pope John Paul II's election in 1978 played a key role and led to even more samizdats – mainly religious journals and books, and even periodicals. Between 1973 and 1989 approximately 19 Christian samizdats were published, the highest-profile of which were *Religion and Present*, *Catholic Monthly* and *Family Community*. The best-known authors and publishers included František Mikloško, Martin Lauko, Ján Čarnogurský, and Ivan Polanský. Their samizdats gradually began to also publish secret orders. Besides as magazines, samizdat editions of books were also popular.

In addition to religious samizdats, civil dissenters also published – including the well-known magazines *Contakt*, *Altamira* and *Fragment* by figures such as Ján Budaj, Oleg Pastier, Martin M. Šimečka, and Ján Langoš. Specific kind of samizdat was the guideline how to go on during the hearing by State Security. Forbidden authors including Dominik Tatarka and George Orwell (1984) were also published. The magazines *Voice of Slovakia* and *Bratislava Letters* were produced at the meeting point between Christian and

civic samizdats, while other samizdat tackled environmental issues as well as banned artists.

SAMIZDAT PRODUCTION

Samizdats were mainly typewritten with 10 to 12 readable copies produced at once – although print quality progressively worsened. Such technique was used mostly by the activists of the civic dissent. Another popular approach was the 'cyclostyle' duplication process using a wax coating and producing approximately 1,000 copies each time. The simplest method was modern offset, (which remains the most common printing technique today), which the secret church used from 1984 when it reassembled a smuggled Dutch offset machine in Slovakia: the state security service never uncovered its location in a house cellar in Bratislava's Trnávka suburb. This machine helped to increase samizdat production in late 1980s significantly.

PERSECUTION

Although samizdat producers faced significant risks, the risk that the distributors faced was far greater. Those found in possession of samizdats were mostly accused of illegal business