

## Charter 77 After 30 Years

### Documenting the Landmark Human Rights Declaration

Original Signature Cards, Secret Police Files,  
U.S. Intelligence Reports Published for First Time

Charter's Call for Rule of Law Deemed "Sedition," "Subversion,"  
and "Harmful to National Interests Abroad" by Czechoslovak  
Communist Authorities in 1977

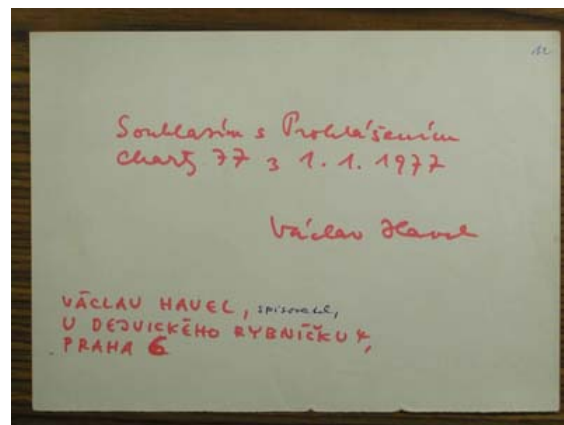
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Signature card of Václav Havel.

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**Washington D.C., January 6, 2007** - The Czechoslovak human rights activists who launched the landmark Charter 77 movement secretly gathered their first 240 signatures on handwritten cards without leaving copies with the signatories, but were arrested 30 years ago today by the secret police on charges of "subversion" and "hostility to the socialist state and social system" before they could deliver the original Charter to the Federal Assembly, according to Charter 77 and Czechoslovak secret police documents published in English for the first time on the National Security Archive Web site ([www.nsarchive.org](http://www.nsarchive.org)).

But the Chartists had already arranged for publication of their manifesto in the Western press, where the Charter was featured in major articles on January 7, 1977 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Corriere della Sera*, *The Times* of London, and *Le Monde*. The latter featured a cartoon of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev holding up a sign labeled "Helsinki," in which a tiny citizen is holding up his own "Helsinki" sign - neatly encapsulating the contrast between the Soviet view of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act as ratifying the boundaries of Europe as imposed by Josef Stalin and World War II, versus the civil society focus on Helsinki's human rights commitments (that even U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had dismissed as empty rhetoric at the time).

Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas subsequently called Charter 77 "the most mature and accomplished program produced by Eastern Europe from the war up to today" (*New York Times*, April 14, 1977).

Charter 77 co-spokesperson Václav Havel, one of those arrested on January 6, 1977 and subsequently president of Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic from 1989 to 2003, told reporters this week that Charter 77 could serve as a model for constructive political culture, because it brought together "people of diverse opinions, but unlike present-day Czech politicians they were not always searching for what they could harm the others with, but they cooperated and pulled all together" (CTK Czech news agency, January 1, 2007). In Havel's reminiscences about Charter 77 (prior to the 1989 "velvet revolution") he prophetically commented that "something had taken shape here that was historically quite new: the embryo of a genuine social tolerance" that "would be impossible to wipe out of the national memory."

"Charter 77 was a bolt from the blue in the otherwise stagnant political atmosphere of Czechoslovakia," remarked Professor Vilém Prečan, one of the editors of today's Web posting and head of the Czechoslovak Documentation Centre in Prague. "Together with movements for human and civil rights in other countries of the Soviet bloc, Charter 77 became a vital factor working from below in the Helsinki process and towards the democratic revolutions of 1989."

The Web posting includes:

- original drafts of the Charter with handwritten edits by Václav Havel and Pavel Kohout (who originally proposed the name "Charter 77");
- typed and handwritten agendas for the conspiratorial meetings of the nascent Chartists in December 1976 and January 1977 to organize the gathering of the first signatures;
- the original signature cards of Václav Havel and other leading Chartists;

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[The Charter 77 Manifesto](#)

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- the January 5, 1977 letter to the Federal Assembly signed by Charter's three spokespersons that was confiscated by the secret police from Havel and his companions January 6 on their way to present the Charter to the authorities;
- the first secret police report from January 6, 1977 calling the Charter a "crude attack" by "hostile elements" who "have been winning over other anti-socialist elements";
- the January 14, 1977 legal opinion by the Czechoslovak Communist authorities finding Charter 77 to be "untrue and grossly slanderous... clearly pursuing the aim of evoking hatred and hostility towards, or at least distrust of, the socialist social and state system of the republic";
- the secret police report from April 1977 recording the decision of the Communist Party Presidium not to prosecute anyone solely on the basis of signing the Charter, but on other grounds;
- contemporary reporting on Charter 77 in previously secret documents by the CIA, the U.S. State Department;
- Professor Prečan's 1978 commentary on the impact of Charter 77;
- contemporary U.S. official statements about Charter 77 from the Congressional Record and presidential documents;
- Václav Havel's own reminiscences about Charter 77, courtesy of Paul Wilson, who translated (from the Czech) Havel's answers to questions from Karel Hvizdala for the 1990 book *Disturbing the Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf).

## Electronic Briefing Book

Note: The following documents are in PDF format.  
You will need to download and install the free [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) to view.

### Section I: Charter 77 – The First Publication

January 6, 1977: "The Charter 77 Declaration" was unsuccessfully presented to the Czechoslovak authorities, and the would-be presenters were detained by the secret police.

January 7, 1977: "The Charter 77 Declaration" (dated 1 January 1977) reached the public in four daily newspapers abroad – the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *The Times*, *Le Monde*, and *Corriere della Sera*. (*Le Monde* had, as usual, already gone to press the afternoon before the date written on the newspaper, but the organizer of the simultaneous publishing of the Declaration, Hans-Peter Riese, a German journalist and friend of Pavel Kohout's, had failed to note this. The oversight turned out, however, to be very useful, keeping publication all on the same day.)



[Click here for larger version](#)

January 8, 1977: *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* published their first stories on Charter 77, focusing on the detention of the Chartists. The *Times* included the quotation from the Communist Party newspaper *Rudé právo* warning dissidents that "those who lie on the rails to stop the train of history" must expect to get their legs cut off.

January 27, 1977: The full text of "The Charter 77 Declaration" was published in *The New York Times* as well as the U.S. Congressional Record.

[Vilém Prečan's introduction to Charter 77](#) from *The Right to Know the Right to Act: Documents of Helsinki Dissent from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. Compiled and edited by the staff of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington, D.C., May 1978.

[Václav Havel's reminiscences about Charter 77](#), reproduced with the kind permission of Paul Wilson, who translated (from the Czech) Havel's answers to questions from Karel Hvizdala for the 1990 book *Disturbing the Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf). This excerpt is from pages 125-145.

### Section II: The Czechoslovak Documents

#### A. The Charter 77 Founding Documents

[Source: [The Czechoslovak Documentation Centre](#), Prague - Note: The originals of most of the Czechoslovak documents published here are deposited in the Security Services Archive (archiv bezpečnostních složek), at the Ministry of the Interior, Prague]

##### [Document 1. "Pavel Kohout Card." Circa December 20, 1976](#) [Translation by Derek Paton]

This notecard typed by Václav Havel summarized the plan for how the organizers would proceed to organize the collection of signatures for the Charter 77 Manifesto. This "Pavel Kohout card" was prepared not later than on December 20 together with the final version of the Charter 77 Declaration. Every collector had an envelope with instructions on how to sign a signature card, and their own signed card as an example. The group of collectors was about ten people, who were

instructed not to leave the statement with anybody until after the publication. After the publication the text of the Charter with all the signatures would be distributed to every person who signed it. Another provision defined how signatures would be checked at the meeting scheduled for December 29, 1976 (the deadline for collecting signatures) at 4 p.m. In the interview/memoirs *Disturbing the Peace*, Havel mentions how surprised he was when Mlynář came in with more than 100 signatures from former Communists.

#### **Document 2. Original drafts of Charter 77 text**

These early drafts of the Charter 77 manifesto include handwritten edits by Havel and Kohout. All the drafts were dated ten days after the actual document date—a decision made by the organizers to mislead the police. For example, the date proposed for the publication was noted as January 17, 1977, whereas it was actually set to be January 7. The draft dated December 27 was actually written on December 17. The handwritten page is by Kohout. The two drafts were discussed at meetings on December 16 and 17, and the final draft was agreed on December 18. The first draft was proposed by Havel. Kohout proposed the name Charter 77, which was adopted on December 18, 1976. Petr Uhl proposed to have three spokespersons instead of one.

#### **Document 3. Draft agenda for January 3, 1977 meeting in Václav Havel's apartment** [[Translation](#) by Derek Paton]

Václav Havel wrote and presented this draft agenda at the January 3, 1977 meeting at his apartment, and the document was later confiscated by the police during the house search on January 6, 1977. Fifteen people participated in the meeting (the room was overcrowded): all three spokespeople (Jan Patočka, Jiří Hájek, Václav Havel), Zdeněk Mlynář, Václav Černý, Ludvík Vaculík, Pavel Landovský, Jaroslav Šabata, Jan Tesař, Jiří Němec, and some other organizers. This was for a very long time the last quiet gathering of the Chartists undisturbed by the police.

#### **Document 4. Original signature cards: Václav Havel, Jiří Hájek, Pavel Kohout, Zdeněk Mlynář, Jan Patočka, Rudolf Slánský, Ludvík Vaculík, and Prokop Drtina**

#### **Document 5. Charter 77 Letter to the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly signed by the three spokespersons (Jan Patočka, Jiří Hájek, Václav Havel), January 5, 1977** [[Translation](#) by Derek Paton]

This letter was meant to transmit the formal Charter 77 Declaration to the authorities, but on the morning of January 6, Czechoslovak State Security forces surrounded the car carrying Havel, Ludvík Vaculík, and Pavel Landovský, who were on their way to present the signed text to the Assembly and to the CTK news agency, as well as mail the Charter to all the signers. The police seized all the documentation, detained and interrogated not only the three but other co-signers, and searched their houses. But the process of releasing the Charter publicly, coordinated by Kohout's friend Hans-Peter Riese with help from Czechoslovak émigrés who visited Prague for Christmas, had already put the text in the hands of journalists in Munich and elsewhere over the holidays, so the January 7 publication target was achieved despite the efforts of the state security forces.

## **B. The Authorities Respond to Charter 77**

#### **Document 6. Department of the National Security Corps, City of Prague. "Decision," January 6, 1977** [[Translation](#) by Derek Paton]

This order from the Czechoslovak Secret Police (StB) began criminal proceedings of Charter 77 activists, accused of the crime of "subversion" (section 98 of the penal code) for their "hostility towards the socialist social and state system of the republic" in sending out "a crude attack" on the system. Remarkably, the document notes that these "hostile elements" actually "have been winning over other anti-socialist elements."

#### **Document 7. Department of Investigation, State Security Forces (StB). "Decision," January 11, 1977** [[Translation](#) by Derek Paton]

This StB order adds yet more charges against the Chartists, now accused of damaging the interests and reputation of Czechoslovakia abroad (section 112 of the penal code) by disseminating abroad "untrue reports on conditions in the republic."

#### **Document 8. Statement on "The Charter 77 Declaration." January 14, 1977** [[Translation](#) by Derek Paton]

This legal opinion by the Prosecutor General and the head of the Supreme Court of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, with their colleagues the Czech Minister of Justice and the chief prosecutor, concludes that the Charter 77 movement not only violates sections 98 and 112 of the penal code, as the StB already alleged, but also section 100 on "sedition." These top legal authorities call Charter 77 "untrue and grossly slanderous... clearly pursuing the aim of evoking hatred and hostility towards, or at least distrust of, the socialist social and state system of the republic."

#### **Document 9. Information on the current results of the investigation into the case of "Charter 77," about April 1, 1977** [[Translation](#) by Derek Paton]

This StB document notes that the criminal proceedings against the Chartists started on January 6, and by April 1, 1977, 251 persons had been interrogated. Most interestingly, the report refers to a decision made by the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee Presidium that nobody should be charged specifically on the grounds of signing the Charter, but only on other grounds. This is the only known documentary reference to that Presidium decision.

## Section III: U.S. Documents

### **Document 1. CIA National Intelligence Daily. January 28, 1977**

[Source: Carter Presidential Library, CIA CREST database]

This CIA summary of current intelligence, circulated daily to top U.S. policymakers, reports speculation that the Czechoslovak regime might try to deport dissidents who signed Charter 77, especially Václav Havel, Pavel Kohout, Jiří Hájek, Jiří Lederer, Ludvík Vaculík. The item notes that out of nearly 300 signatories, 200 were harassed by the police but it is unlikely that they would agree to leave the country voluntarily.

### **Document 2. CIA National Intelligence Daily. February 8, 1977**

[Source: Carter Presidential Library, CIA CREST database]

The daily CIA summary mentions that the Czechoslovak authorities are reluctant to issue indictments against dissidents directly linked to Charter 77, but at the same time are maintaining pressure on the supporters and trying to downplay its significance. The CIA also notes the Charter's potential to create serious problems for the USSR with the approach of the Belgrade Conference.

### **Document 3. CIA Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Memorandum. "Dissident Activity in East Europe: An Overview." April 1, 1977**

[Source: Carter Presidential Library NLC-7-17-5-4-7]

This CIA overview notes the effects of the Soviet détente policy and the Helsinki accords as new factors in Eastern Europe. It emphasizes that "the Czechoslovaks have taken center stage among East European dissident intellectuals by their direct challenge to regime practices regarding civil rights, as outlined in 'Charter 77,'" and the surprisingly large number of the "Chartists."

### **Document 4. CIA National Intelligence Daily. July 14, 1977**

[Source: Carter Presidential Library, CIA CREST database]

The CIA daily notes a new release of Charter 77 documents on cultural and literary censorship in Czechoslovakia, and reports that since the original manifesto was published, many dissidents have been silenced by official harassment, but that Zdeněk Mlynář, who took asylum in Austria, continues to work on behalf of Charter 77 by helping to organize Western pressure on the Czechoslovak authorities.

### **Document 5. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Weekly Highlights of Developments in Human Rights. "Hajek to give up leading Charter 77 role." April 12, 1978**

[Source: FOIA release to National Security Archive]

The State Department's intelligence bureau reports that Jiří Hájek is considering resigning from his post as spokesman for Charter 77 as a result of internal factional disagreements in the movement and because of the growing strength of the more militant wing of the movement.

### **Document 6. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Weekly Highlights of Developments in Human Rights. "Dissidents draft statement." August 16, 1978**

[Source: FOIA release to National Security Archive]

The report mentions the first instance of cooperation between the Czechoslovak and Polish dissidents in issuing a joint statement of Charter 77 and the Polish Workers Defense Committee (KOR) on the anniversary of the Soviet-led military intervention of 1968.

### **Document 7. Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Weekly Highlights of Developments in Human Rights. "Polish-Czechoslovak dissident cooperation." September 13, 1978**

[Source: FOIA release to National Security Archive]

The INR weekly reports another case of cooperation between the Charter 77 and KOR, when Czechoslovak dissidents asked the Polish Committee to publish a statement on the harassment of Chartists by Prague authorities. According to information from the U.S. Embassy in Prague, as many as 50 Chartists might be considering emigrating as a result of constant police surveillance and harassment.

### **Document 8. Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Weekly Highlights of Developments in Human Rights. "Police move to prevent contacts with Polish dissidents." October 12, 1978**

[Source: FOIA release to National Security Archive]

INR reports that Charter 77 spokesman Jaroslav Šabata was arrested in connection with his efforts to organize cooperation between the Czechoslovak and Polish dissidents. The report mentions that the Czechoslovak police might have penetrated the Charter 77 movement and decided to move against the Charter activists to prevent wider contacts between dissidents of the two countries.

### **Document 9. Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research. "The Human Rights Movement in Czechoslovakia." October 11, 1979**

[Source: FOIA release to National Security Archive]

This detailed eight-page report traces the accomplishments of Charter 77 movement and the obstacles it had to face on the eve of its third anniversary. Charter activities are said to have focused Western attention on the repressive character of the Czechoslovak regime. The latter's crackdown on the dissidents has opened a new breach between Communist parties in the East and West, set back the regime's attempts to gain international acceptability, and caused some embarrassment to Moscow in its attempts to pursue détente policy with the West. However, the report describes the Charter's prospects in accomplishing its goals as "bleak," because "the regime has all the necessary levers of power and coercion at its disposal and will not hesitate to use them if threatened," and due to a lack of popular support outside the intelligentsia circles. "Despite these bleak prospects, the movement deserves respect, admiration, and sympathy for its ability to survive thus far and for its willingness to confront the regime in the face of overwhelming odds."

**Document 10. Office of Public Liaison Submission from the Czechoslovak National Council of America. "Czechoslovakia since Belgrade: Compliance with the Provisions of the Helsinki Final Act." April 17, 1980**

[Source: Carter Presidential Library, Office of Public Liaison Files]

The Czechoslovak émigré organization provided the Carter White House with this report documenting recent police harassment of the Charter 77 movement activists and their family members. The report describes the trial of six signatories of the Charter in October 1979 as "only a small sample of the violations by the Czechoslovak authorities of their international obligations and accepted standards of justice." All six were found guilty of the crime of subversion of the republic and were sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to five years. The report also deals with police actions against young people, discrimination in education, and severe limitations on freedom of information.

## **Section IV. U.S. Official Statements on Charter 77**

**Document 1. Department of State Comments on Subject of Human Rights in Czechoslovakia. Department of State Bulletin, January 26, 1977**

In this first official U.S. statement on Charter 77, Fredrick Brown, Director of the Office of Press Relations, reads a statement to the press noting the signing of Charter 77 – "some 300 individuals [in Czechoslovakia] have petitioned the government to guarantee the rights accorded them by the Czechoslovak Constitution, the international covenants on civil and political and on economic, social and cultural rights, and by the Helsinki Final Act." He called on all the signatories of the Final Act to "strongly deplore the violations of such rights and freedoms wherever they occur." The diplomatic cables from the U.S. Embassy in Prague that provided the basis for this statement are the subject of current Freedom of Information Act requests by the National Security Archive but are not yet declassified.

**Document 2. The Helsinki Spark. Remarks by Hon. Dante Fascell, House of Representatives, January 26, 1977**

Congressman Fascell talks about the wave of dissent in the countries of Eastern Europe and calls it "the thirst for liberty." He notes the repressive response of the Communist authorities throughout the region and the resolve of Charter 77 signatories in Czechoslovakia. "In the context of the Helsinki agreements—whose implementation the Congress formed the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe to evaluate—the campaign against freedom and human rights amounts to a breach of a crucial promise." He asks for the full translation of the Charter 77 Manifesto to be reprinted in the Congressional Record.

**Document 3. Czechoslovakia and Charter 77. Remarks by Hon. James Blanchard, House of Representatives, February 2, 1977**

Congressman Blanchard informs the House about his protest to the Czechoslovak ambassador against the harassment of the dissidents by the authorities. A full translation of the Charter 77 Manifesto is included in the remarks.

**Document 4. Statement by the President of the United States Ronald Reagan. Czechoslovak Human Rights Initiative. December 31, 1986. Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, vol. 22, no. 53 p. 1681**

Ronald Reagan gives high praise to the accomplishments of Charter 77 movement on the eve of its tenth anniversary. He emphasizes that "Charter 77, Eastern Europe's longest lasting human rights initiative, served for ten years as a champion of civil and human rights, a repository for national values, and a cultural and publishing network at home and abroad.... By their activities, Charter 77 signers have in countless small and large ways pushed back the gloom over Czechoslovakia's barren political landscape."

**Document 5. The 10th Anniversary of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. Remarks by Hon. Steny Hoyer, House of Representatives, January 7, 1987**

Congressman Hoyer introduced a resolution to commend the Charter 77 human rights organization on the tenth anniversary of its establishment, and emphasized its contribution to the achievements of the Helsinki Act: "Ten years after the birth of Charter 77, the quiet, relentless push for dialog has found partners—in likeminded movements throughout Eastern Europe."

**Document 6. Human Rights and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. Remarks by Hon. Dante Fascell, House of Representatives, January 29, 1987**

Congressman Fascell commends highly the achievements of Charter 77 as "the beacon of hope and light, not just for the people of that unfortunate country, but throughout Eastern Europe." He informs the House that the members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission had nominated Charter 77 as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987.

**Document 7. Helsinki Commission Chairman Nominates Czechoslovak Human Rights Activist for Nobel Peace Prize. Remarks by Hon. Dennis DeConcini, U.S. Senate, February 7, 1989**

Senator DeConcini notes that the whole world is watching Czechoslovakia, where Václav Havel remains in prison. "In spite of relentless harassment by the authorities, including imprisonment, repeated detentions, house searches and confiscations of property, Havel has remained active in the struggle for human rights." Senator DeConcini and Representative Hoyer have nominated Václav Havel for the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize.