

Jindřiška Bláhová, **National, Socialist, Global: The Changing Roles of the Czechoslovak Film Festival, 1946–1956,**

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It took only six weeks in the spring of 1946 to establish a film festival in the Czechoslovak towns of Mariánské Lázně and Karlovy Vary (hereafter Karlovy Vary International Film Festival or KVIFF) and to beat, at least symbolically, to the punch the festival in Cannes that took place in September.<sup>1</sup> The swift execution of this operation reflects the festival's significance of its organizers: the Communist-controlled Ministry of Information and the Czechoslovak Film Monopoly (hereafter Monopoly or CFM), a state-run vertically integrated organization controlling film production, distribution and exhibition in the country. Czechoslovak political and cultural elites deemed the festival important because it promised to play a key role in the development of the country's film industry and to contribute to articulations of national identity that had been afforded additional importance in light of the recent Nazi occupation of the country. Crucially, the festival was envisaged as an institution with an international presence based not only on regional projections of Czech national identity but on its capacity to assist in the Czechoslovak government's desire to see the national film industry become an internationally respected and prolific producer of films. As early as 1947, however, the emphasis of the national dimensions of the festival had been superseded by the transnational and supranational interests of the Soviet Union.

Perhaps because the interests and scope of the KVIFF were amorphous and could not be accommodated by a single concept like the national, perhaps because of insufficient understanding of relations between the USSR and her "satellites", or perhaps because the festival was seen as operating beyond the European festival circuit, it has remained largely peripheral to historical inquiry.<sup>2</sup> The KVIFF problematized a prevailing national approach, which saw scholars who were writing about festivals established in Europe after WWII to emphasize the national dimensions of festivals as well as festivals' relationships to national governmental policies (see Fehrenbach), and challenged the East/West dichotomy shaping histories of Cold War European cinema. However, whereas scholars explored the roles festivals play with respect to national film industries, national film cultures, and cultural diplomacy (see Stone 1998: 100–110; Fehrenbach 1995: 234–253), revisionist historians began fairly recently to reveal the extent to which festivals function cumulatively as transnational networks supporting various economic interests, cultural hierarchies, and aesthetic regimes (see De Valck 2007; Elsaesser 2005) and shape imagined communities (Iordanova and Cheung 2010). As a product of socialist transnational political and ideological frameworks, the KVIFF was unique among film festivals, embodying, as it did, more than any other festival, oft-competing visions of the national and the transnational that characterized intra-East Bloc dynamics as well as serving the Soviet Union's global economic and ideological

agenda. Moreover, although it has been rightly argued that the KVIFF was established to showcase socialistic film production, such accounts simplify somewhat the reasons for the festival's founding while stopping short of offering explanations as to why this was the case. Considering national aspects of the festival alongside relevant transnational and supranational forces permits a deeper understanding of the festival's roles in disseminating communist ideology and building global socialism. This approach also allows new light to be shed on its political and economic relationships to the Czechoslovak film industry, its relationships to other European film festivals and film cultures (even across the Iron Curtain), and relationships between the Soviet and Czechoslovak film industries.<sup>3</sup> This chapter therefore focuses on how the political agents behind the KVIFF conceptualized the festival and sought to convey to the public its changing cultural and political functions, arguing that the festival became a shifting signifier due to being shaped by competing national and supranational forces in the region.

### **The National Film Festival, 1946–1947**

Dances, garden parties, and tennis tournaments accompanied the screenings of nine films that composed the program of the 1946 inaugural KVIFF. Like in Venice or later Cannes, the leisure activities were included in order to infuse the festival with glamour and sense of cosmopolitan vibrancy and to make it attractive to an affluent international crowd. To boost economically the spa towns in which the festival took place was, arguably, one of the main reasons the festival was founded. While economic considerations were important in this respect, issues of national identity were pivotal and cannot be under-estimated. The first festival was envisaged as a vehicle for Czechoslovak Governmental policy and as a public relations platform for the Czechoslovak Film Monopoly.

A key role of the festival was to boost Czechoslovak moral and to cultivate a sense of Czechoslovak national identity befitting what would be proclaimed as a strong, independent, and free nation. The festival – as a noteworthy public event – lent itself ideally to an initiative outlined by the Czechoslovakia government in 1946 in which was detailed a program of political and economical renewal pertaining to foreign policy, the building of a fairer society, and the quest to refashion Czechoslovak national identity. Unlike in the period between the two world wars, when national concerns and nationalism were seen as petty and dangerous, because they eventually led to militaristic conflicts and film festivals emphasized international aspects (De Valck 2007: 24), nationalism was again embraced fully after WWII, particularly in the countries that were occupied by the Nazi Germany and her allies. Envisaged in strictly national and nationalistic terms, the 1946 festival was expected to support the agenda of the state and to promote cinematic output that was considered to express national specificity via articulations of what was deemed national identity (Brousil 1947). The location of the festival was chosen specifically for its capacity to enrich nationalistic sentiment by invoking painful recent memories of the wartime Nazi occupation of the country. Holding the festival close to the

German border, in the heart of the Sudetenland where pro-Nazi sympathy and collaboration were prevalent, was a politically significant act rich in nationalist symbolism (Brož 1946a). Purging the country of a German presence and of any lasting influence that such a presence may have exerted were pivotal aspects of Czechoslovak post-war domestic policy. In metaphoric terms, the festival emblemized the retaking of what was historically the most pro-German region of the country. The anti-German sentiment prominent in promotion for, and commentary on, the festival, was perhaps best encapsulated in an article written by a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Information named Vítězslav Nezval. It read: “We want to return to our beautiful homeland, which until recently has been ruled by our enemies. We want to erect a flag of new beauty – the new spirit of our films and of foreign films” (1946). Echoing domestic policy, the festival’s organizers demanded total de-Germanization and de-Nazification of the region in order that “foreign visitors realize finally that they are entering Czech lands, not a German province” (Ren 1946).

The festival was conceived as an opportunity for Czechoslovak cinema to be measured against overseas films. This notion was expressed in the festival’s motto “To compare Czechoslovak cinema with the cinema of the world” and in the festival’s name that emphasized that the festival was first and foremost Czechoslovak festival (i.e. national) with international aspect due to the participation of overseas films.<sup>4</sup> The content and themes of domestically produced films were envisioned as central to the articulation of the new Czechoslovak national identity. Consequently, Czechoslovak film officials believed that films made within the nation-state would only be recognized internationally as “Czechoslovak national cinema” if they were based on existing cultural products associated with the nation, if they dramatized the nation and national life, and if they were underpinned by and expressed national values. A reoccurring theme at the festival therefore concerned what specific features should characterize Czechoslovak national cinema and thus distinguish it from the cinema of other nations – in short a quest for an “essence” of Czechoslovak national cinema that could only manifest fully and unequivocally when Czechoslovak-made films were contrasted to those produced in other countries. To elevate the conceptual frameworks within which they were working, and upon which they were drawing, the festival organizers drew distinctions between, on the one hand, the national and other organizing principles, and on the other hand, between different forms the national took in terms of off-screen and on-screen manifestations. Compared to the national, found wanting were the blandness of internationalism and cosmopolitanism (both of which were presented as erasing colourful difference) and the insularity and parochiality of the provisional (Brousil 1946). Moreover, whereas German national cinema was criticized for its supposed formal over-elaborateness and an otherwise unspecified “impurity”, American films were lambasted for their excessive violence, excessive production costs, onscreen depictions of lavishness, and for distorting historical and contemporary realities (Kučera 1947). The only way to international recognition of Czechoslovak cinema was to remain strictly national in a sense of topics, depiction of “typical Czechoslovak citizen”, and focus on contemporary social events and people’s activities; the “national” that had been discredited during the

interwar period should be rehabilitated as a symbol of national greatness (Nezval 1946).

In 1946, patriotism was cast primarily in terms of one's responsibility to assist in the building of new Czechoslovak state; filmmakers were expected to participate in this process (Filmoví novináři o československém filmu 1946: 5), particularly by exploring and depicting working class and its involvement in the industry and agriculture (Nezval 1946). Accordingly, rather than handing out awards for individual films, the festival celebrated hard work and the institutional activities conducted by the Monopoly (Brož 1946b). The notion of hard work and building of a new society with the help of cinema connected the festival directly to the Czechoslovak national economy (Brejcha 1947). The festival was envisaged as a part of the system of planned economy being introduced to Czechoslovakia. The long-term state-supervised planning of production of films (two or five years) was expected to generate sustainable economic growth, which would – unlike purely profit-driven private enterprises – take into account the needs of society as a whole. The monopoly's officials anticipated that the output of the Czechoslovak film industry would increase fivefold by 1953, resulting in the production of up to 52 films.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the monopoly would supply sufficient Czechoslovak films to guarantee a solid contribution to the reshaping of the national character and to ensure that the festival itself was seen to be central to that process. However, by 1949 it became apparent that the Czechoslovak film industry was unable to meet its production quota due to economic and organizational crises within the industry, which culminated in when only eight feature films being produced in 1951, even fewer than had been made in 1946 (Havelka 1972: 80).

A second key function of the 1946 festival was to serve as a public relations exercise in which would be celebrate the state-controlled film industry and the principles on which it was based.<sup>6</sup> . The festival was therefore timed to mark the first anniversary of the founding of the CFM. The Monopoly represented a new economic model that was not governed by free-market economics or controlled by profit-oriented private entrepreneurs. Instead, it was heralded as an institution that would respond to the cultural and political needs of the state and the people. Following this line of logic, it would produce films that were of a superior quality – artistically and content-wise – to those produced by private film industries (Kučera 1947). The Monopoly was seen as imperative for building a new, socially just society that was believed to replace the outdated capitalist systems, the failure of which was said to have been demonstrated by the outburst of WWII. As a pioneering model, the Czechoslovak Film Monopoly was seen to offer potential inspiration to other governments, which would dismantle private enterprise in favour of a centralized state-controlled model. This perception of the film industry originated from the prevailing political climate of Czechoslovakia, wherein many political and cultural elites believed that Czechoslovakia was destined to blaze the trail for other countries because of what they saw as its projection of social and political systems which merged selected principles of capitalist democracy with a degree of social justice that capitalism otherwise prevented (Štrych 1947; see Kusák 1998: 150). Because of “the

cultural and political maturity of the Czechoslovak people, their progressive aims and their responsibility for true democracy” Czechoslovakia was, according to one of the leading film journalists, whose position was shared by many other cultural and political elites, poised to become “an important cultural and political centre of the world” (Patera 1947a). Accordingly, central to the festival were a series of lectures and debates in which Czechoslovak journalists, academics, film theoreticians, and filmmakers explored the principles and advantages of the state-controlled film industry, especially its social responsibility, political consciousness, economic frugality and educational value. (Filmoví novináři o československém filmu 1946). Those lectures and debates were intended for the eyes of Czechoslovak and overseas visitors alike, particularly those of foreign journalists who, it was hoped, would propagate the film monopoly overseas, and, in doing so, alleviate the scepticism of Western political and business elites (Zahraniční novináři na festivalu 1947: 1); a scepticism which, it was feared, would endanger the Czechoslovak government’s and the Monopoly’s plans to built a strong and internationally respected national film industry. With Soviet influence in the region growing, as early as 1947, however, the festival began to be used to advocate interests, not only of the CFM, but the collective interests of *all* Eastern European film cinemas/industries.

### **All Slavs Belong Together From National to Slavic Film Festival, 1947**

The 1947 festival represented an evolutionary stage from a “national” to a “socialistic” vision of the film festival. It was shaped by the notion of Slavism, a cornerstone of which was cooperation between the Eastern European Slavic countries of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and, symptomatically for opportunistic policy of the USSR also non-Slavic Hungary. Accordingly, the principal role of the 1947 festival was the advancement of cooperation between Slavic nations and their respective cinemas – under the guidance of the Soviet Union (Brousil 1947). Slavism reflected Moscow’s foreign policy (Kusák 1998: 147–153), wherein Slavic cooperation was seen to cement the Soviet dominance in the region and to propagate Soviet leadership. Placing emphasis on intrinsic and longstanding character of Slavic belonging helped to mask and to naturalize Moscow’s expansionist agenda, which sought to impose upon Eastern European countries a single political, social, and economic model.

As a prominent cultural event in the region, the festival provided an ideal platform upon which to demonstrate Slavic unity in such a way as to resonate regionally and beyond – particularly in Western Europe and the US. In stark contrast to the 1946 festival, Polish, Bulgarian and Yugoslavian films were hailed alongside Czechoslovak films (Patera 1947b: 41; Patera 1947c).<sup>7</sup> The artificial, ideological, and politicised nature of Slavic unity was presented as beneficial for film industries in the countries united under the banner of Slavism. Slavism, it was argued, would make them stronger when competing outside of the region. In doing so, it would facilitate the film industries’ development, both economically and ideologically (Patera 1947a).

The Czechoslovak film industry, which boasted the most advanced infrastructure, was to become a centre for the film industries of other Slavic nations and its Barrandov Film Studios was envisioned as “Slavic Hollywood” (Linhart 1948: 26; Pro slovanskou spolupráci 1947; Barrandov 1947). Together with the Soviet film industry, the Monopoly was seen to be capable of assisting those under-developed film industries in the region by providing them with the opportunity to learn from one another and by pooling capital resources. The importance of forming a coalition of Slavic nations was foregrounded in and by a series of meetings and conferences, held in Prague after the festival, involving film industry officials from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Poland, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia (Porady v Praze 1947).

The valorization of Slavism affected considerably the ways in which both Czechoslovak cinema and the Monopoly have been framed in Czechoslovak history, and how they have been understood as contributing to the development of a new Czechoslovak society and national identity. The concept of Slavism was employed to overshadow the nationalistic dimension of Czechoslovak cinema, which, in rhetorical terms, became a mere derivation of much general and valid concept of “borderless”, “supranational” cinema that united Eastern European countries. In other words, national Czechoslovak cinema was subcategorized into a vision of cinema which conveniently transcended national borders, which erased national specificity, and which represented a culturally, artistically, and politically unique Slavic bloc. Such a concept of cinema was ideally suited to reflect the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union, which were underwritten by trans-regional forces involving East hemisphere countries with Moscow very much serving as a centre of power and influence. This conceptual shift preceded the subsuming of “Czechoslovak national cinema” within the broader category of “socialist” cinema and anticipated the festival’s role in Soviet cultural and foreign economic policies.

Underpinning cooperation between Slavic nations was an implicit conflict between the cinemas of Slavic and non-Slavic nations; a conflict which telegraphed a looming clash between “socialist” and “capitalist” cinema which itself would characterize the KVIFF in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Průzkum mínění 1947). Although Slavism was abandoned in Eastern Europe in 1948 following a dispute between Stalin and the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, the unity it fostered laid a foundation for the new role that the festival played following the Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and the increasing influence of the Soviet Union. From 1948, competition between Slavic and non-Slavic cinemas was radicalized and transformed into a revolutionary confrontation between two political blocs and two systems – socialism and capitalism. The shift towards “Slavic values” of 1947 was thus an early sign of the KVIFF’s transformation into a de facto Soviet film festival in a sense of prioritizing Moscow plans and policies.

**“For a New Man, For Better Humankind”  
On the Road to Socialism and Global Dominance, 1948–1949**

The 1948 Communist Coup in Czechoslovakia ushered in a new era in the history of the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. The festival was recruited to spread socialism through serving primarily the goals of the cultural policy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and through advancing the political and economic interests of the Soviet Union. The goals of Czechoslovak national cinema were jettisoned in favour of the goals of “socialist” cinema as a supranational cinematic form conceived to facilitate Soviet foreign policy and Moscow’s plans for cinematic and economic expansion.

Before focusing on how competition between national industries characterized the 1948 and 1949 festivals, explores is necessary to consider the significance of the formal competition that the festival inaugurated in 1948. Establishing a competition was not simply a cosmetic change. It carried practical, propagandistic, and symbolic meanings for the CFM and the Soviet government. Regarding the Czechoslovak Film Monopoly, symbolically, it marked the end of the process of the Czechoslovak film industry’s transformation from private enterprise to state-controlled institution (now represented by a company called Czechoslovak State Film, CSF). The new era of the Czechoslovak film industry correlated with the era in the festival’s history.

There were also economic incentives for the Monopoly to establish the competition. The Czechoslovak Film Monopoly understood the festival’s importance vis-à-vis distribution circuits and international trade. The competition, which was designed to elevate the KVIFF to the level of Cannes and Venice, was expected to increase the prestige of the festival’s among overseas producers and distributors; it was hoped that the receipt of an award from the festival could be turned into a marketing angle. Increased international trade from the festival was also expected to provide a solution for one of the Film Monopoly’s acute economic problems: the dependency on American films, which were deemed as too expensive. From 1947, Czechoslovak film distribution was undergoing a drastic transformation whereby the monopoly strove to limit its dependency on American distributors by decreasing the number of American films in circulation on its national market (Bláhová 2008). Consequently, the monopoly needed to fill the void left by the removal of American and other imports, with the festival providing an opportunity to develop relationships with new suppliers.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviet Film Monopoly also benefitted from the change in the festival’s status. From 1948, the Soviet government boycotted festivals in Western Europe on the grounds of festival organizers’ alleged anti-Soviet sentiments and due to discrimination said to be practiced against Soviet films. To challenge Cannes, Venice, and those Western film industries that Moscow had concluded were dominating the two festivals, the Soviet Ministry of Culture announced plans to establish a Soviet film festival in Leningrad under the name of The International Festival of Progressive and Democratic Film Art. The festival was scheduled for August 1948.<sup>9</sup> The Leningrad festival was expected, in the words of the Soviet minister of Cinematography Ivan Bolshakov, to bring economic and political advantages to the Soviet film industry by helping to sell Soviet films abroad and, by extension, to disseminate communist ideology overseas.<sup>10</sup> However, the Communist Coup in

Czechoslovakia presented Moscow with a more economically and strategically attractive solution – using the pre-existing and conveniently located KVIFF.

Establishing a competition at the KVIFF was essential for Moscow. It was concluded that, as US-USSR tensions grew, some of the distributors and producers that Moscow was aiming to attract would boycott the festival that took place in the Soviet Union. Attending a festival in Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, was assumed to be less controversial politically on account of Czechoslovakia's democratic past and Prague's comparatively favourable views on contact with Western countries. Moreover, awards given by an international (i.e. non-Soviet) festival would give credit to Soviet films and Soviet cinema thus going some way to substituting for awards from Cannes and Venice, which the Soviet government continued to boycott (Vaněk 1949b). Unsurprisingly, in 1949, the Soviet minister of cinematography Bolshakov referred to the KVIFF as a “new triumph of Soviet cinema” (V Moskvě odevzdány 1949) – he was not merely referring to the generous number of awards given to Soviet films.

Reflecting Moscow's approach to European film festivals as cultural and political battlegrounds, the KVIFF became an arena of multifaceted politicized combat. Already envisaged as a challenge to the prestige of Cannes and Venice, the festival provided a stage upon which competition between socialism and capitalism could take place in the form of two different concepts of cinema – “socialist” (Eastern/Soviet) and “capitalist” (Western/American). This confrontation was conveyed through a number of specific ideological “fights” – a fight for the “new socialist man”; a fight for cinemas of small nations; and a fight against film “kitsch”. In short, by abandoning the profit motive that underwrote cinema in capitalist states, socialist (i.e. state-controlled) cinema was free to serve progressive and educational roles in socialist societies. Moreover, by virtue of its supposed contribution to the development of the human race fostering increased levels of compassion, social responsibility and selflessness, and by its purported promotion of social equality, socialist cinema was deemed to be superior to capitalist cinema, which, by default, was ideologically compromised. The ideological inferiority of capitalist cinema was encapsulated in film the concept of “kitsch”, a category of cultural artefact determined by its perceived low cultural status and its supposed lack of social relevancy. To draw a clear line between socialist and capitalist cinemas, films in competition were selected on a strictly cultural and political bases, both of which were intended to highlight a film's social function (Brousil 1948: 31). Czechoslovak Communists considered Cannes and Venice to be stagnating on account of their organizers evaluating of films solely on their technical and artistic value (what was seen as a bourgeois conception of art which emphasized aesthetics over social value, thus separating the films from everyday life). The KVIFF, however, saw itself as moving forwards because it assessed the films' moral value based on their perceived contribution to the building of a new society and to the development of the of the human race (Brousil 1948: 29) freed from, what Czechoslovak press described as, the “prejudices and superstitions” that exemplified “old” capitalist orders (Kout 1948). This program of politically and socially relevant cinema therefore made the festival



superior to its Western counterparts. The fight against kitsch, particularly an American cinema which, according to the Czechoslovak minister of information and the Czechoslovak Communist Party's main ideologue Václav Kopecký "poisoned audiences" (Ministr Kopecký 1948) because it lacked the kind of educational, progressive, and political qualities typical of cinema in socialist states (Vaněk 1949a). Importantly, the notion of the revolutionary fight served to carve for the IFFKV a distinct niche of alternative film festival model befitting a socialist society. The fight for a new vision of human race, and a new cinema distinguished the festival clearly from Cannes and Venice that were denounced by Czechoslovak journalists as first and foremost markets where films were stripped of their social value and were reduced to profit and venues in which films were used to perpetuate elitism and classism based on the virtue of economic, not social, capital. The way Czechoslovak elites perceived Cannes and Venice is encapsulated in a label used by one journalist to capture their degenerate state, a result of their emphasis on commerce – "film stock exchanges" (Kořán 1948; Proč filmový festival 1948). Importantly, long before the notion of political cinema and political festivals became fashionable in the West during the 1960s and 1970s (De Valck 2007: 27), the KVIFF offered a new model of the festival that saw films as political and that advanced political agendas.

To accelerate the clash between the two opposing forms of cinema and, by extension, two associated opposing political systems, the Kremlin mobilized an issue preoccupying European governments' after WWII – the question of the American film industry's alleged threat to the indigenous film cultures and film industries of Europe (see Elwood and Kroes 1994; Nowell-Smith and Ricci 1998). Those European cultural and political representatives that perceived the presence of American films on European markets in negative terms believed that the economic power of the American film industry was such that it could dictate conditions of film trade to European countries and thus flood European markets *and festivals* with, what were seen as inferior films. Helpless in the face of Hollywood's economic might and the backing it received from the US government, festivals in Western Europe were reduced, in the words of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's official newspaper *Rudé právo*, to "meaningless film fairs where capitalist producers of film trash try to cover up [...] the deep decay and decline of bourgeois film production" (Vaněk 1950). The economic might of the American film industry affected what films were shown at the festivals, which film industries were given preferential treatment and which industries, producers, and distributors were overlooked, discriminated against, or prevented from taking part. Due to local government's being often dependent on US governmental help and indigenous markets on Hollywood import, Hollywood was seen as possessing the power to interfere with festival organizers' decisions which films, for instance include to the competition and which not. Hollywood's dominance excluded films made by less powerful film industries (Pfn 1949). Those statements clearly echoed the complaints of the Soviet ministry of cinematography, which stated that particularly Cannes discriminated against Soviet films because its organizers wanted to keep on good terms with American producers and distributors (mainly with

the Motion Picture Association of America that represented major Hollywood companies).

The KVIFF intended to solve this inequality by providing a safe haven to those film industries that were struggling as a consequence of the American film industry's international reach (bž 1948; Patera 1947c). It announced egalitarian systems of participation and film selection, both of which were intended to encapsulate the supposed classlessness of socialist society. The output of each nation, irrespective of size, would be represented by a single film. Therefore, preferential treatment would not be given to productions from particular countries; nor would films from certain nations be discriminated against, as Czechoslovak and Soviet officials believed had often happened at Cannes and Venice, where they felt American films were given preferential treatment (bž [Brož, Jaroslav]: Československo a filmové festivaly). While film historians showed that from the outset relations between Hollywood and European cinemas shaped film festivals in Western Europe, they argued that festivals fought against Hollywood's dominance but simultaneously helped to maintain that dominance by their being dependent on Hollywood stars and films (De Valck 2007: 15, 24). The case of KVIFF qualifies somewhat the notion of European festivals' capitulation *via-a-vis* Hollywood. By distancing itself from Hollywood, the IFFKV aimed to avoid this dependency and instead become the last retreat for, what it defined as, "cinemas of small nations" and help to prevent the American film industry from becoming a dominant power in Eastern Europe (Výzva k Chaplinovi 1950). Part of this defence strategy was based on the assumption that the festival could serve as a springboard for the Eastern European cinemas' expansion into capitalist markets; an expansion, which it was believed, would undermine Hollywood's position thereon.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, those films would also disseminate communist ideology to the West and the rest of the world via showing "ideals of new life, new democracy, and new socialist order" (Ministr Kopecký 1948). Exploring role of the 1948 (and 1949) festival thus expands our understanding of the history of Hollywood in post-war Europe, of relations between Hollywood and the indigenous film industries of Eastern Europe and, importantly, the role that Hollywood played as a conceptual category in defining the identities of Eastern European national cinemas and of Eastern Bloc film cultures.<sup>12</sup>

Supposed egalitarianism and equality between cinemas notwithstanding, hierarchies still characterized the relative value of the various socialist cinemas. The Soviet cinema was elevated above the cinemas of the other socialist states because it was considered it be the most ideologically advanced cinema based on the USSR being the birthplace of the socialist revolution. Inadvertently, it was Soviet national cinema that was celebrated at the festival as setting an example to the cinemas of other socialist nations including even Czechoslovak. This situation initiated a change from the previously nationalistic rhetoric that had been employed by the CFM in 1946 and, to some extent, in 1947. Czechoslovak national cinema was no longer seen to be the product of historical, cultural, and political developments involving a democratic and independent Czechoslovakia, but was an offshoot of the supposedly pioneering Soviet cinema. Consequently, Czechoslovak cinema was in debt to developments that

had unfolded in the Soviet Union. In this line of thinking, the Czechoslovak State Film was not a consequence institution born out of the decisions taken by Czechoslovak political and cultural elites (Macháček 1949) – it was symbolically denationalized. Accordingly, and in contrast to previous years, it was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soviet Film Monopoly and not the anniversary of the Czechoslovak Film Monopoly that was celebrated at the festival (Bor 1949).

The situation at the festival was symptomatic of the situation as a whole in the Czechoslovak film industry. As Czechoslovak state sovereignty was sacrificed gradually in favour of the interests of the Soviet Union, so too the CFM came more dutifully to serve the needs of its Soviet counterpart, by for example, increasing the number of Soviet films produced at Barrandov film studios or in the international the distribution of Soviet films.<sup>13</sup>

Crucially, an escalation in the rhetorical conflict taking place between Hollywood and some of European cultural and political elites was fuelled by a major transnational economic factor: Moscow attempted to limit the presence on Eastern European markets of Hollywood and its product in order to advance its own global goals of economic, ideological, and cinematic expansion.<sup>14</sup> Established business relations between Eastern European countries and the American film industry had hampered this expansion. To facilitate this operation, the Kremlin aimed to control those Eastern European markets that it considered to be potentially lucrative sources of capital, know-how, and human resources. It was decided that Eastern Europe would serve as a base for the Soviet expansion first to Western Europe and then, in the first half of the 1950s, to Asia, Latin America, and Africa (as the next section shows).<sup>15</sup>

Highlighting the fight against Hollywood distracted, however, from the fact that such a policy did not benefit national film industries as was claimed, but primarily served global the interests of another large film industry – that of the Soviet Union.

### **“Fighting For Peace” International Festival/Global Politics, 1950–1952**

While the 1948–1949 festivals were shaped primarily by the consequences of the Communist Party having seized power in Czechoslovakia, the festivals held in the period 1950–1952 were affected by geopolitical development, in particular Korean War, which had started a month before the 1950 festival. In light of these developments the character and reach of the festival shifted towards the global.<sup>16</sup>

The 1950 festival turned into a pacifistic global institution characterized by the participation of not only Eastern European countries but countries from Asia (the politically hot region) and beyond. China and Korea took part in the festival for the first time; the word “peace” was added to the festival’s motto; and the festival became a venue wherein film workers “fought” for world peace and against, according to the Communist newspaper *Rudé právo*, “the aggression of Wall Street descendants of Hitler’s fascism” in Korea (Vaněk 1950). The festival’s global reach under the banner

of peace was encapsulated neatly in the festival's poster (Fig. 1). As a popular medium, films were seen as an effective tool for fighting for global peace based on their capacity to project to audiences in accessible fashion ideals and political positions. More importantly, however, the festival served as a site from which film culture elites (including filmmakers and journalists) could be recruited for the course of global peace (RP 1950). Delegates from twenty-five countries – including Western nations such as France, Britain, and the US – discussed how to stop the expansive politics of Wall Street (Tichý 1950), condemned the House Committee on Un-American Activities, US foreign policy, and castigated Hollywood cinema for stupefying audiences world-wide and for stimulating the onset of potential WWII by being a part of the US military-industrial complex and by spreading propaganda in the name of its Wall Street financiers (Film v kapitalistických 1950; Slavnostní 1950). As Czechoslovak newspapers reported, film workers supported the working class and defended progress, democracy, and freedom (Tomášek 1950).



Fig. 1. 1950 – Global peace as the main star.

The 1951 festival was, under Soviet tutelage, fashioned as an open political forum in the vein of the 1950 World Peace Congress in Warsaw and the World Peace Council in Berlin.<sup>17</sup> The Czechoslovak government put forward a proposal to build in Prague an institution responsible for coordinating progressive filmmakers across the world.<sup>18</sup> New awards were introduced, including the Fighting for Peace Award and the Friendship among Nations Award.<sup>19</sup> The festival concluded with a mass call for peace, where by the festival was held up as a “humanistic fight for the preservation of peace” (Havelka 1972: 51). Like in 1947 when Slavism had been an organizing principle of the festival, and in 1948–1949 when the notion of socialist cinema had prevailed, the Soviet Union mobilized its “fight for global peace” to advance its own geopolitical agenda. Film workers from around the world were radicalized politically under the flag of “peace” and cooperation.

The festival had fitted in the geopolitical plans of the Soviets by serving as a location in which Moscow could cultivate relations with third world countries in order to increase its economic and political power. New countries were recruited at the festival for the socialist cause and, consequently, ideas and ideals of Communism were disseminated.<sup>20</sup> Symptomatic of the Soviet government’s plans to extend its reach globally, increasing numbers of Asian, Latin American, and Africa, nations boasting developing film industries were invited to the festival so that representatives could learn from their Soviet colleagues the creative and business sides of film (-s 1950). To secure attract representatives of such industries, the export office of the Soviet Film Monopoly – Sovexportfilm – supervised their film exportation practices and served as a middleman between Czechoslovakia and those national film industries looking to participate in the festival.<sup>21</sup> Historians have shown that Communist governments saw film as an ideal medium with which to spread communist ideas. Even more important, in this respect, however, was cinema’s assumed quality of creating unity among the various members of a given film culture. This quality was seen to facilitate and to *naturalize* the global expansion of the Soviet Union – an expansion driven by the festival in Czechoslovakia.

### **Emancipating the Festival International Festival/National Interests**

(With no festivals held in 1953 and 1955), the Czechoslovak government felt in 1954 that the time was right for the transformation of the festival from an ideological arena benefitting the Soviet Union into an economic platform that benefitted the Czechoslovak Film Monopoly. Opportunity presented itself in 1953 when, within a few short months, the Korean War ended, Joseph Stalin and Czechoslovak Communist Party leader Klement Gottwald both died, and the Soviet government began to loosen its control over the festival amid signs that the waning of US–USSR Cold War antagonisms invited alterations to Soviet foreign and cultural policy.

The Czechoslovak government had recognized the festival’s true economic potential and cultural value. In 1953, the Monopoly faced an economic crisis, which

had been caused by the implementation of economic models imposed on the Czechoslovak economy by Moscow, which, because it was poorly suitable to the dynamics of industry in Czechoslovakia, had led to a drastic decline in film production and seen moviegoing plummet. The festival was seen as part of a solution to the Monopoly's problem, wherein it would provide an opportunity to re-establish business relations with foreign producers and distributors and to increase the trade in films<sup>22</sup> needed to energize Czechoslovakia's struggling distribution circuit. To facilitate such a transformation of the festival, the Czechoslovak government increased the festival's budget while festival organizers invited a record number of 45 countries to participate and emphasized the festival's new cosmopolitan character.<sup>23</sup> Even though organizers initially evoked the "evil spirit" of the Western imperialists – accusing imperialists of trying to sabotage the event – the festival's profile was more relaxed in terms of atmosphere and rules, and less overtly politicized than it had been in previous years.<sup>24</sup> Instead of protesting and holding meetings, actors and directors signed autographs, courted attention from by-passers (Hrbas 1954; Bor 1954). The cosmopolitan and international ambitions of the festival were articulated on the pages of film magazines. *Kino*, for instance, declared that, referring to the Iron Curtain, that no curtains should be maintained between Western and Eastern Europe and that, instead, cultural international flow should be cultivated via the festival (Žalman 1954). To emphasize that the festival's organizers that were in favour of a united world not one that was divided politically, ideologically, and economically, the main festival's award was symbolically shared by the Soviet film *Vernyje družja* (1954) and the American film *The Salt of Earth* (1954). Change was also seen in the ways in which the Czechoslovak press referred to the festival and to western festivals. Cannes was no longer deemed a "meaningless film fair" where commerce dictated the rules, but was heralded as an important cultural event in which Czechoslovakia participated proudly and successfully. Czechoslovak films were also submitted to Venice and the positive reception that they received signalled to the Czechoslovak government the (mainly economic) potential of the Czechoslovak film industry's reintegration into Western markets (J. H. 1954). Crucially, the Czechoslovak government encouraged the KVIFF's inclusion into the group of prominent western film festivals, a step catalysed by political developments that unfolded in 1955, particularly those associated with the Geneva Conference.

The Geneva Conference, at which the USA, USSR, France, and Great Britain governments met for the first time since the onset of the Cold War, opened up the possibility for cultural cooperation between East and West (Dulles 1955). The Czechoslovak government responded swiftly. After consulting with Moscow,<sup>25</sup> the CFM applied in October of 1955 to the international association of producers (Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films)<sup>26</sup> for the festival to be included among internationally recognized competitions, so-called "A" festivals, which also included Cannes and Venice. The "A" category stood to increase the prestige of the FFVIV while attracting the participation of capitalist countries and increasing business opportunities generally.<sup>27</sup> Of particular interest (TO WHOM?) was the prospect of renewing relations with the American film industry, which had

been suspended in 1951 (Bláhová 2008). To be included among the prestigious festivals, the KVIFF had to be de-politicized. Accordingly, Social Progress and Work Awards were dropped, and the word “peace” removed from festival’s motto because its implied Cannes and Venice did not support peace.<sup>28.29</sup> As a result of these steps, the Czechoslovak’s government proposal was accepted by the IFFPA and 1956 saw the festival repacked and hot that films from ten socialist countries as well as thirty-three capitalist countries including the American, Palme d’Or winning-drama *Marty* (1955).<sup>30</sup> The KVIFF also adopted rules and procedures its Western counterparts. Filmmakers from capitalist states were invited to attend by the Czechoslovak government.<sup>31</sup> To increase the quality of competition, each country was permitted to submit just one film.<sup>32</sup> An advanced wide-screen cinema was also purpose-built to boost the profile of the event.<sup>33</sup> The success of the 1956 festival demonstrated that the KVIFF had the potential to become an integral part of the festival circuit in Europe – a high profile cultural event and an aspect of the transnational film economy.<sup>34</sup>

The trend towards freeing the festival of Moscow’s influence in favour of serving the needs of Czechoslovak Film Monopoly continued in 1957 and 1958 (Havelka 1975: 49). The ambitions of the CFM and its export branch Filmexport were, however, stifled in 1959. With culture becoming the primary sphere of competition between the US and the USSR (Cull 2008), the Kremlin established a film festival in Moscow to facilitate Soviet foreign and cultural policy. Because the KVIFF represented unwanted competition, Moscow imposed a new rule – only one international film competition could be held annually in Eastern Europe. This ruling resulted in both the KVIFF and the new festival taking place every second year for next three decades. Representatives of the CFM resented Moscow’s decision<sup>35</sup> because they felt it had ruined KVIFF’s chances of become one of the world’s major film festivals on a par with Cannes and Venice.

## Conclusion

In the period 1946–1959, the KVVI underwent a series of radical conceptual transformations – from national film festival, to Slavic, to socialist, to global, and finally back to being a national film festival in a sense that it represented interests of the Czechoslovak film industry. The festival started life after WWII, as a demonstration of the regained political sovereignty of the Czechoslovak state – as a platform upon which could be articulated a newly recalibrated vision of Czechoslovak national identity, and as a showcase for the superiority of the state-controlled film industrial model that reflected the nation’s transition from being a capitalist state to being a socialist democratic state.

With the growing influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, however, the national character of the festival was overwhelmed by the interests of supra-national state formations – first a Slavic bloc based on assumed and politicized shared ethnicity, and then by the Eastern Bloc, which was underpinned by shared ideology. In 1948–1949, the Soviet government used the festival to stage confrontation between the US and USSR, between Hollywood and the Soviet film industry, and, by

extension, between socialism and capitalism. Hence, at the end of the 1940s and in the first half of the 1950s, the festival would serve primarily the global interests – both ideological and economic – of the Soviet Union.

In this respect, exploring the discourses that orbited the IFFKV's regarding the clash between two modes of cinemas and two political and economic systems furthers our understanding of the role Hollywood played as the "Other" after WWII in defining identities of national cinemas/profiles of film industries in Eastern Europe and of socialist cinema as a global concept. It allows us to identify mechanisms that were employed by film representatives in Eastern Europe to protect local film industries and national cinema against "expansion" of Hollywood.<sup>36</sup> By examining manifestations of tensions between national/transnational/global that characterized the IFFKV, this study began to show that when transnational political, cultural, and economic forces are in motion, festivals, as institutions, can only be understood and constantly conceptually in flux, as shifting category that defy a sole prism, be it national, transnational, or global.

Importantly, the study also shed new light on the still largely unexplored dynamics of relations between the Soviet Union and what is understood to be her satellites. Thus, it invites further exploration of the relations between the Czechoslovak and Soviet Film Monopolies that promise to illuminate how precisely the Soviet Union, as a dominating supra-national force, exercised control over its satellites within the cultural sphere. In doing so, the scope, mechanisms, and concrete manifestations of Moscow's global expansions can be detailed and understood. The ways those forces shaped the festival during the decades leading to 1989 collapse of Eastern Bloc and the interaction and competition between IFFKV and Moscow Film Festival offer only two of multiple avenues for further research on transnational history of festivals.



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<sup>1</sup> In 1946, the festival took place in both cities. Between 1948 and 1950 the festival took place only in Mariánské Lázně and from 1951 in Karlovy Vary. Zápis: Pracovní schůze III. mezin. film. fest. 4. 5. 1948, p. 2, National Archive, Prague (hereafter NA), Ministry of Information Files (hereafter MI), box 227 (hereafter k.), inventory number (hereafter IN) 462. Konečná zpráva hospodářského vedoucího Festivalu československého filmu v Mar. Lázních a Karlových Varech od 1.–18. 8. 1946, p. 2. NA, MI, k. 227, IN 462.

<sup>2</sup> One dominant trend in writing about festivals is a focus on one of western festivals as Cannes and Venice, scholars focus heavily on niche festivals (activist, post-colonial, gender identity-related...). K. Corless, *Cannes: Inside the World's Premier Film Festival*. Faber & Faber, 2007; C. Beauchamp and H. Behar, *Hollywood on the Riviera*. William Morrow & Co., 1992; D. Iordanova and R. Cheung (eds), *Film Festival Yearbook 2: Film Festivals and Imagined Communities*, St. Andrews Film Studies, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Only few studies so far applied a supra-national perspective on "national" histories of East European countries. See. J. Bláhová. 2010. *A Tough Job for Donald Duck: Hollywood, Czechoslovakia, and Selling Films Behind the Iron Curtain, 1944–1951*. Ph.D dissertation. Norwich/Prague: FTV UEA/FF UK; L. Karl, 'Zwischen politischem Ritual und kulturellem Dialog. Die Moskauer Internationalen Filmfestspiele im Kalten Krieg 1959–1971', in edd. L. Karl (eds). *Leinwand zwischen Tauwetter und Frost*, Berlin: Metropol, 2007, 277–298.

<sup>4</sup> Konečná zpráva o organizačních a hospodářských výsledcích II. filmového festivalu v Československu s mezinárodní účastí, konaného ve dnech 2.–17. srpna 1947 v Mariánských Lázních, 6. 12. 1947. NA, f. MI, k. 227, IN 462.

<sup>5</sup> Pětiletý plán Československý státní film, 3. 6. 1948, NA, Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee Archive 19/7 (hereafter ÚV KSČ, f. 19/7), archival unit (hereafter AU) 662.

<sup>6</sup> Filmový festival od 1.–15. VIII. 1946 v Mariánských Lázních, 11. 6. 1946. NA, MI, k. 227, IN 462.

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<sup>8</sup> Operations of Motion Picture Export Association in Czechoslovakia. Praha, 28. 12. 1948. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park II, Maryland, USA (hereafter NARA), Department of States Files (hereafter RG59), DF1945–1949, 860F.4061 MP/12-2848.

<sup>9</sup> Moskva 21. 2. 1948, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (hereafter RGASPI), fond 17, opis (hereafter op.) 125, edinica khraneniya (hereafter ed. kch). 639, p. 132.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Hodnocení VIII. Mezinárodního filmového festivalu v Karlových Varech. NA, MI, k. 280, IN 512.

<sup>12</sup> On the discursive role that Hollywood played in rhetoric of the Czechoslovak propaganda see Bláhová, J. 2009. 'No Place for Peace-Mongers: Charlie Chaplin, *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947), and Czechoslovak Communist Propaganda', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 29(3): 271–292.

<sup>13</sup> Rozbor současného stavu práce celého podniku a zjištění současných nedostatků, 8. 11. 1949, NA, A ÚV KSČ, Political Bureau 1951–1954, f. 1261/0/26, File 2, AU 11, p. 30. Uspořádání VII. Mezinárodního filmového festivalu v Karlových Varech, 30. 5. 1952, p. 25. NA, A ÚV KSČ, Political Bureau 1951–1954, f.1261/0/22, File 28, AU 99, point 20g.

<sup>14</sup> Zástupce Sovexportfilmu v ČSR Lebeděv Sakontikovi, Praha, 28. 7. 1949, p. 51–52. Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Ministry of Cinematography Files 2456 (hereafter RGALI, f. 2456), op. 4, ed. kch. 210.

<sup>15</sup> Uspořádání VII. Mezinárodního filmového festivalu v Karlových Varech, v Praze, 27. 5. 1952, NA, A ÚV KSČ, Political Bureau 1951–1954, f. 1261/0/22, File 28, AU 99, point 20g, p. 25.

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- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> VI. Mezinárodní filmový festival Karlovy Vary 1951, p. 3. NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 19/7, AU 673.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Návrh na uspořádání XIII. mezinárodního filmového festivalu v Karlových Varech v roce 1962. NA, A ÚV KSČ, Political Bureau 1954–1962, f. 1261/0/11, File 328, AU 419, point 6.
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- <sup>22</sup> Mezinárodní filmový festival a filmové festivaly pracujících v roce 1953, 6. 1. 1953, s. 2. NA, A ÚV KSČ, Political Bureau 1951–1954, f. 1261/0/22, File 50b, AU 135, point 34.
- <sup>23</sup> Rozpočet VIII. MFF. NA, MK, k. 280, IN 512.
- <sup>24</sup> Hodnocení VIII. Mezinárodního filmového festivalu v Karlových Varech. NA, MK, k. 280, IN 512, Folder MFF KV 1954, 1956.
- <sup>25</sup> Zpráva o konsultaci návrhu na IX. MFF v Karlových Varech s ministerstvem kultury Sovětského svazu. NA, Political Bureau 1954–1962, f. 1261/0/11, File 79, AU 97, point 2, p. 9.
- <sup>26</sup> FIAPF was established in 1949 at the Venice Film Festival to defend its members’ interests on the international markets. Members were: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK and the US. NA, Political Bureau 1954–1962, f. 1261/0/11, File 79, AU 97, point 2, p. 14.
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- <sup>28</sup> Mezinárodní federace sdružení filmových producentů, Řím, 6. 12. 1955, p. 19. NA, A ÚV KSČ, Political Bureau 1954–1962, f. 1261/0/11, File 117, AU 143, point 15.
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- <sup>30</sup> Zpráva o IX. Mezinárodním filmovém festivalu v Karlových Varech a návrh na každoroční uspořádání mezinárodních filmových festivalů v Karlových Varech, počínaje rokem 1957. NA, Political Bureau 1954–1962, f. 1261/0/11, File 117, AU 143, point 15, p. 5.
- <sup>31</sup> Kopecký ústřednímu tajemníkovi KSČ Rudolfu Slánskému, 12. 5. 1951. NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 19/7, AU 673, Folder 6. Mezinárodní filmový festival. Dopis zahraničního oddělení ČSF Rank Organization, 5. 3. 1956. NA, f. MK, k. 280, IN 512, Folder Zahr. film MFF K. Vary 1954, 1956.
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- <sup>34</sup> Zpráva o IX. Mezinárodním filmovém festivalu.
- <sup>35</sup> NARA, RG59, DF1955-59, 25. 2. 1959, 849.452/2-2559.
- <sup>36</sup> J. Bláhová. 2010.