

free communism: a Czech experiment

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free communism: a Czech experiment

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1. historical background

On 21 August 1968 the Soviet Union and four of her allies moved at least 300,000 troops into Czechoslovakia, an act of aggression designed to crush the reform programme of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The aim of this pamphlet is to explain the reasons for the political reforms in Czechoslovakia, reforms which were unprecedented in Communist Europe. If the efforts of the Czech and Slovak reformers are to be understood, it is necessary to trace in some detail the history of Czechoslovakia in the post war period, for the roots of the upheaval lie in the repressive Stalinist dictatorship of Antonin Novotny and his predecessors. One of the driving forces behind the reformers was their determination to correct the injustices suffered by Communists and non-Communists alike under Novotny, for it was only after his fall that the people were free to say what they really thought about the Stalinist dictatorship and its fake trials.

The desire of the Czechs and Slovaks for more freedom under their Communist regime is a product of their long democratic traditions. Now their nationalism has been reborn as a result of the Soviet invasion and occupation of their country.

formation of the Czechoslovak state

The Czechoslovak state was formed as a result of the break up of the Hapsburg Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918. For almost 300 years before, the Czechs had been under the control of the German Austrians, ever since the battle of the White Mountain in 1620. Even before the Thirty Years War the Czechs and Germans were hostile to each other, especially during the Hussite wars. After 1770 an astonishing nationalist and cultural revival took place. The use of the Czech language, which had almost died out, rapidly spread. This revival of the Czech nation, led by writers and intellectuals, accelerated throughout the nineteenth century. The political movement in the pre-1914 period was led by Thomas Masaryk and he was joined during the war years by Edouard Benes.

Both were intellectuals devoted to the ideals and methods of liberal parliamentary democracy and Masaryk became a member of the pre-war Vienna Imperial Parliament. Another leader of the movement was Karel Kramar, who became the first Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic. He was an ardent nationalist and looked towards Russia as the largest Slav nation for support in the struggle against the Hapsburgs.

When the first world war began the liberal democratic and pro-Slav strands of the movement were drawn together in support of the alliance between the Russians and the western parliamentary democracies of Britain and France. As soon as the war broke out Masaryk and Benes began lobbying for support from the three powers. The Czech nationalists were strengthened by President Wilson's fourteen points, which emphasised the rights of nations to self determination.

Masaryk was able to point to the tangible contributions of Czech and Slovak soldiers towards the allied victory in his campaign for recognition by the allies. Although forced to fight on the Hapsburg side, whole regiments of Czechs and Slovaks deserted to the Russians. Czechs and Slovaks also fought for the allies on the Italian front and the Czech legions on Russian soil fought their way to Vladivostock in their attempts to join the fighting on the western front. Moreover, widespread passive resistance and sabotage occurred in Bohemia during the war years.

With the collapse of the Hapsburgs, the Czechoslovak Republic was declared on 28 October 1918 with the full support of the western allies and Masaryk became the first President. The Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia, formerly under Austrian control, and Slovakia, formerly ruled by the Hungarians, were joined together in the new state which, unlike other countries in the area, became a parliamentary democracy. Bohemia and Moravia were industrially advanced and had been responsible for 70 per cent of the production of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Slovakia, however, was largely

rural and economically backward in comparison, and the Slovak national revival had come much later than the Czech. With the formation of the new state, Hungarian teachers and officials were dismissed in Slovakia. The Slovaks did not, however, have enough qualified manpower to take over the new posts and many Czechs came to the country to fill them. This led to tension between the two nationalities and, as early as December 1918, there was formed a Slovak People's Party, headed by the Slovak nationalist Father Hlinka, which had a programme of Slovak particularism. It polled 20 per cent of the votes in Slovakia in the first elections under the first constitution.

Although the new state was blessed with considerable economic resources, it inherited ethnic problems similar to those of the Hapsburg empire, for considerable minorities were present within its borders. The Germans, concentrated in Bohemia, alone accounted for 22 per cent of the total population. There were other minorities present as the 1930 census showed:

nationality	number	%
Czechoslovak	9,688,770	66.97
German	3,231,688	22.32
Hungarian	691,923	4.78
Ruthenian	549,169	3.79
Jewish	186,642	1.29
Polish	81,737	0.57
Gipsy	32,209	0.22
other	17,427	0.12
total	14,479,565	100.00

The most important minority were the Germans, many of whom resented their inclusion in an independent state over which they had ruled for centuries. Moreover, the Czechs and Slovaks were sympathetic to the western powers and their fellow Slavs including the Russians, but this outlook clashed with the pan-German views of many members of the German minority who wanted to be part of a greater Germany which would include Bohemia. As early as 1918 a German National Socialist Workers Party had been formed in Austria and Czecho-

slovakia, which was a successor to the pre-war pan-German movement of Georg Schönerer which had demanded union with the German Reich, a programme later carried out by Hitler with the aid of the Germans in Czechoslovakia. The political parties in the Czechoslovak Republic were split on national lines, e.g. there were separate Czech, Slovak, German and Hungarian Catholic parties. The Communist Party was the only party which drew support from all the nationality groups. The electoral system, based on proportional representation, ensured that large numbers of small parties received parliamentary seats and no single party was strong enough to rule. Governments were, therefore, always coalitions and in 1929 some of the German parties joined the government.

The great depression fatally undermined the fragile co-existence between Czechs and Germans. The latter were dependent for employment on the consumer goods and export industries and were savagely hit by the depression. Although the Germans had full political rights in common with all nationalities, the depression drove them to attack Czechoslovak parliamentary democracy as the cause of the evil under which they suffered. They became strong supporters of Nazism especially after Hitler's take over in Germany, and in 1935 the Sudeten German Party, a Nazi front, gained 60 per cent of the German vote in the general election and secured 44 out of 66 German seats. As the Nazi regime rose to dominate Europe, Czechoslovakia became threatened internally and externally, the Nazis using the German minority as a means to destroy the Republic.

After the Nazi occupation of Austria in March 1938, pressure from Berlin mounted against the Czechs. The crisis reached its peak in September 1938 at the Munich conference where the Czechs were betrayed by their western friends and forced to hand over territory to the Nazis. Hungary and Poland duly annexed their share of Czechoslovak territory and the remainder of the republic became the object of agitation by Slovak separatists willingly aided by the Nazis.

2. the communist takeover and the Stalinist dictatorship

The final blow fell in March 1939 when the Czechoslovak President Hacha was summoned to Berlin, browbeaten by the Nazi leaders, and forced to hand over the remainder of the country to Hitler. The Germans occupied Prague, and Hitler proudly proclaiming that "Czechoslovakia ceased to exist". The Slovak separatists were rewarded with their "independence" and became a puppet government of the Germans.

One of the most important results of the Munich agreement and the occupation was an increase in support for the Communist Party. Formed in 1921 the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had a considerable following and usually gained between ten and twelve per cent of the vote at general elections. The first leader of the party, Bohumir Smeral, accepted the idea of the Czechoslovak state, but in 1924 the party policy was reversed after pressure from the Communist International. The party thereupon recognised "the right of nations for self determination up to separation". This clearly implied the break up of the Czechoslovak state. It remained Communist policy until the 1935 Communist International Congress, which adopted the policy of co-operation with other socialist parties against the rising Fascist menace. The Czechoslovak Communists became defenders of the Republic and supported the government in its fight against Nazi and Anglo-French pressures. In 1935 the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia signed a treaty of alliance under which the republic would be aided by the Russians if the French carried out their obligations to the Czechs.

After Munich Communist support became linked with the historical pro-Russian outlook of many Czechs and Slovaks. Moreover the Soviet Union was the only great power to support President Benes and the Czechoslovak government during the 1938 crisis, and pro-Soviet opinion increased after the Nazi occupation of Prague. In May 1939 George F. Kennan, then attached to the American legation in Prague, noted increasing support for the Communists because of their links with the Soviet Union, the largest

continental military power apart from Germany, for many Czechs and Slovaks looked to Russia as the most probable means of liberation from the Nazi terror.

Although the Czechoslovak Communists supported the Nazi-Soviet pact, their position was strengthened by Hitler's aggression against Russia. After June 1941 they joined the anti-Nazi resistance. Their importance was shown when Benes flew to Moscow for talks with Stalin in 1943. Under the 1943 agreement Benes agreed to the participation of the Communists in the post-war coalition government in return for Stalin's support for the expulsion of the German minority from Czechoslovakia. As a result of the agreement the Czechoslovak government in exile was recognised by both East and West unlike Poland, which had two separate governments in London and Moscow. The Benes-Stalin understanding was popular with the Czechoslovak people, for they recognised that their best hope of liberation from the Nazi terror was the advance of the Red Army, and the Communists naturally profited from this.

The Communists also gained a prominent place in the Slovak resistance movement. In 1943 Gustav Husak and Ladislav Novomesky, the Slovak Communist leaders, concluded the Christmas agreement with the democratic parties in the underground to form a Slovak National Council. Husak and his colleagues succeeded in establishing the Slovak Communists on an equal footing with the democratic parties in the council. It appears that Husak acted independently in concluding the Christmas agreement, for party histories after 1949 ignored the agreement and it was not publicly mentioned again until 1963. Husak and the Slovak Communists also participated in the 1944 Slovak uprising without Moscow's sanction or knowledge.

In 1945 the country was finally liberated from the Nazis, the population of Prague rising against the occupiers in the last days of the war. National committees were set up in liberated territory and the Communists obtained a strong and influential position on them. The other parties

accepted the Communist view that the post-war government should be an alliance of all parties in a National Front. Moreover many traditional Communist and Socialist objectives such as nationalisation of the major industries were widely supported by the population and the main Catholic party. The Communists increased their popularity by leading the demand for the expulsion of the German minority, a policy to which Benes was already committed. The National Front coalition government was formed on 4 April at Kosice and the left wing pro-Communist Social Democrat, Zdenek Fierlinger, became Prime Minister. The Communists controlled the Agricultural Ministry which they used to distribute Sudeten German land to their supporters and non-Communists who were won over to their cause.

from the liberation to the communist seizure of power

At the liberation it has been estimated that there were 37,000 organised Communists in Czechoslovakia (see *Communism in Europe*, vol 2, edited by William E. Griffith, *Czechoslovakia*, by Zdenek Elias and Jaromir Netik, p193), and by December 1945 the party had nearly a million members and was clearly a mass party, unlike the Roumanian Communist Party, which only had 1,000 members in 1914, and which was borne to power by Soviet bayonets.

The Eighth Communist Party Congress took place in March 1946, where a programme was drafted with a wide appeal to the electorate. T. G. Masaryk was described as a "progressive figure" in Czech history. The popularity of the Communists was shown in the 1946 general elections, which were genuine and free. They obtained 38 per cent of the vote (40 per cent in the Czech lands and 30 per cent in Slovakia). The party, as the largest in the new parliament, was rewarded with the premiership and other major cabinet posts including the Ministry of the Interior, which controlled the police. The balance of power in the coalition government was held by the Social Democrats under the leadership of

Zdenek Fierlinger; they had obtained 13 per cent of the vote in the election and both parties had a slight majority in the cabinet—thirteen against twelve from the other parties.

The main aim of the coalition government was to preserve friendship with both the Soviet Union and the West, but there was considerable leaning towards Russia because of the treatment suffered at Munich in 1938. This policy could, however, only be viable if the West and East were prepared to co-exist. As President Benes informed Konni Zilliacus in 1946, "democracy can only survive here on condition that those who were allies in the war remain partners in the peace. But if the rifts already beginning to show widen and the powers fall apart and quarrel, our compromise cannot last and we shall have to choose between Russia and the West. In that case we shall choose Russia", and added that "if France and Britain quarrel with the Soviet Union they will start re-arming Germany and we do not want another Munich".

When the cold war began in earnest in 1947 the Soviet influence on the Czech government grew. This was seen in 1947 when the Czech cabinet, including the Communists, voted unanimously for the participation of Czechoslovakia at the Paris conference on the Marshall plan. After the decision had been taken, Stalin invited the Czechoslovak government to send a delegation to Moscow, which included the Communist leader, Gottwald, and Jan Masaryk, the Foreign Minister. Eugene Loebel, the Communist Deputy Foreign Trade Minister, was also present in Moscow as head of a group of foreign trade experts. Loebel in his memoirs writes that the negotiations took place between Stalin and Gottwald without the knowledge of the rest of the delegation, who were presented with a *fait accompli*. Gottwald at the behest of Stalin had reversed the government decision to take part in the Paris talks and the delegation merely sat in at the final session to ratify the deal. Masaryk later described his experiences to Robert Bruce Lockhart: "I went to Moscow as the Foreign

Minister of an independent sovereign state: I returned as a lackey of the Soviet government”.

Such dictation by a great power weakened the authority of the Communists inside the country. There is also some evidence to suggest that the domestic position of the Communists was weakening. The socialist party, which held the balance of power in the cabinet, showed hostility to the Communists by ousting the pro-Communist Zdenek Fierlinger from the leadership in November 1947. Moreover a food shortage caused by drought occurred in 1947 and the Communists, as the main governing party, became the object of the discontents. The other parties in turn thought that the moment might come when they could win power at the next general elections in 1948 and govern without the Communists as had happened in France and Italy in 1947. The Russians were not prepared to allow the Communists to be replaced by a non-Communist government in Prague and the Czechoslovak Communists took the offensive.

The first act occurred in Slovakia where the Communists began a campaign against the Slovak Democrats, who obtained 60 per cent of the Slovak vote in the 1946 election. The Communist led security forces announced the discovery of an anti-state conspiracy in Slovakia and after street demonstrations the Democrat Party representatives were forced to resign from the Slovak Board of Commissioners.

The Communists followed this up by seizing power over the whole country in February 1948 after a cabinet crisis. This arose because the Communists were packing the police with their supporters. By January 1948 80 per cent of the police was controlled by the Communists, and in the next month eight Communists were appointed to high police positions. The moderates in the cabinet, including some Socialists, outvoted the Communists on the issue of the appointments, but Gottwald ignored the decision. Twelve non-Communists then resigned from the cabinet hoping to force its dissolution.

They played into the hands of the Communists by this action, for they failed to consult Benes and to ensure that the Social Democrats would resign with them. The latter, divided as they were between right and left wings, remained in office. The result was that the Communists were able to continue governing with the remaining thirteen cabinet ministers, but they were not content with this and wanted total control.

The Communists eagerly seized their opportunity by mounting a campaign of pressure against Benes to force him to accept the resignations and so prevent him from calling another election. Mass demonstrations of marching workers filled the streets of Prague and a “plot” by the moderate parties was “discovered” to de-nationalise the factories and break the Soviet alliance. On 24 February Gottwald presented Benes with a new cabinet list and the opposition papers were closed down by strike action. Benes had little choice but to accept the resignations for none of the other parties were prepared to resist the Communists, who continued to fill Prague with monster demonstrations. The presence of Mr. Zorin, a Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, in Prague during the crisis made the Communists more intransigent and was probably a factor in forcing Benes to accept the resignations. The Communists took complete control, the Socialist Party was “united” with them, and fake elections were held.

Although the new government had come to power by a skilful coup, it did enjoy, at least initially, considerable support among the working classes. The hopes of many Communists were, however, to be soured by the immediate growth of a Stalinist dictatorship obediently following the Moscow party line. Free elections became a thing of the past and the workers had no say in the management of the factories, the trade unions merely serving as transmission belts for instructions from the party bosses. In 1949 collectivisation of the land and an anti-Church campaign began. The worst features of dictatorial Stalinism were shown by party control over the judiciary. In-

dustries and services were all nationalised and economic decisions were taken almost entirely at the centre, leaving little opportunity for initiative at local level. The population joined mass organisations controlled by the party and which came together in a National Front, also dominated by the party.

the Stalinist purges

The Czech Stalinists began their rule by arresting political opponents and conducting a series of show trials which involved prominent members of the Communist party leadership. A total of at least 70,000 people, Communists and non-Communists, were persecuted for political reasons, and this left an indelible scar on the victims who, as in Hungary in 1956, were determined to see justice done and have their names cleared from the charges manufactured by the security police and their Soviet "advisers". One of the first prominent Communists to be arrested was Eugene Loebel, Deputy Foreign Trade Minister, and in 1950 Otto Sling, the Brno Communist Party secretary, was detained. In the same year Viliam Siroky, the Slovak Communist Chairman, accused the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Clementis, of "bourgeois nationalism" and Gustav Husak and Ladislav Novomesky of having fallen "under the influence of the nationalistic Slovak bourgeoisie". Husak and Novomesky were dismissed from the Slovak Board of Commissioners.

the Slansky trial

The purge gathered momentum in February 1951 when Clementis was denounced as a traitor and later in the year Rudolf Slansky was dismissed from his post as party Secretary-General, arrested and denounced as an enemy of the people. In December 1952 Slansky and 13 alleged accomplices, including Clementis, Loebel and Sling, were publicly tried. The trial was prepared according to Stalin's blueprint, the accused "confessing" to imaginary crimes. Eugene Loebel recalls that he was questioned by

Russian officers. Elaborate preparations for the show trial were made, the accused being tortured to extort their "confessions". Once they had agreed to confess, rehearsals of the trial admissions were held, each statement by each defendant being cross checked with the others. Otto Sling's widow writes that her husband was first accused of a plot against the party, and Rudolf Slansky, but after the arrest of the latter he was accused of conspiring with Slansky against the party.

The accusations against Loebel also were changed in the course of his three years imprisonment before the trial: originally he was accused of Titoism and then of being a Slovak bourgeois nationalist. After 1950 he became "a cosmopolitan of Jewish bourgeois origins" and a member of Slansky's "treasonable centre of conspirators". The final indictment of the prisoners charged them as "Trotskyite-Titoite, Zionist bourgeois nationalist traitors and enemies of the Czechoslovak people". An unpleasant undercurrent of the proceedings was the anti-semitism, for eleven of the 14 accused were Jews.

During his appearance in court, Slansky "admitted" that Konni Zilliacus, the British left wing Labour MP was a spy and an agent of the Anglo-American services who had acted as the link between himself and the western powers! All the defendants duly "confessed" to their crimes, the defence stressing the guilt of their clients. Eleven were sentenced to death and executed in December 1952, but some of the victims retracted their confessions in their last letters. Eugene Loebel has suggested that one of the main reasons for the confessions was the hope of the prisoners that their absurdity would show the outside world that the trials were a complete sham.

The trials were partly caused by Stalin's insane efforts to find the class enemy everywhere, even in the Communist parties. Similar trials took place in nearly all eastern European states and many were linked with Titoism. The Rajk trial in Hungary, the Kostov trial in Bulgaria, the arrest of Patrascanu in Roumania, and the demotion of Gomulka in Poland

were all part of Stalin's efforts to enforce ideological uniformity and Soviet control over eastern Europe. It would, however, be a mistake to view all the trials in Czechoslovakia as organised by Stalin and his accomplices. The new party leader, Antonin Novotny, continued to try Communists after the deaths of Stalin and Beria, notably Husak and Novomecky, who in 1954, were again accused of "bourgeois nationalism". Husak was imprisoned and was not released until 1960.

denunciation of Stalin

In 1956 Krushchev denounced Stalin at the 20th Soviet Party Congress, the speech becoming one of the triggers setting off disturbances in Poland and revolution in Hungary. In Hungary the Stalinist leader, Rakosi, was demoted and the rehabilitation of Rajk took place. In Czechoslovakia dissent occurred at the April 1956 Congress of the Writers' Union, where several speakers vigorously criticised party controls over cultural life, and in April and May student demonstrations took place demanding access to foreign literature and a revision of the trials. A special party conference was held before the Hungarian revolution where the cult of personality was condemned and a commission set up to examine some of the trials, but the Hungarian events halted further liberalisation. Novotny in his speech to the conference blandly admitted that "it was obviously quite incorrect to compare the actions of Slansky and his associates with the activists of Yugoslavia". Despite this admission he referred to Slansky's "criminal acts" and concluded that "there is no ground for the rehabilitation of Slansky".

In 1960 an amnesty occurred under which thousands were released from prison, including Eugene Loebel, but no legal or political rehabilitations resulted. In October 1961 the 22nd congress of the Soviet Party heard another denunciation of Stalin by Krushchev, who attacked the personality cult. Novotny, in his report to the Czechoslovak Central Com-

mittee in November admitted that the Czech leader Gottwald had also been the object of a personality cult but stated that "the chief introducer and propagator of the degenerate methods used in the Soviet Union by Beria and others was Slansky" who "formed a system of special informers for spying on his comrades . . ." All the blame was placed on Slansky, Novotny claiming that "I myself was not in the innermost leadership of the party at that time". He conveniently ignored the fact that he had taken Slansky's place as a Central Committee Secretary and had staged the fake trials of Slovaks and others in 1954. Moreover, in 1952, Karel Bacilek, Minister for the Police, had specifically praised Novotny's contribution to the "case" against Slansky.

3. liberalisation and the fall of Novotny

From 1963 the Novotny leadership was in a weak position because of a growing economic crisis largely caused by the highly centralised system of management. Moreover pressure for the rehabilitation of the trial victims increased and Novotny was forced to concede that the trials had been miscarriages of justice. Groups of intellectuals and journalists were also demanding economic reform and more freedom of expression.

rehabilitation of the trials victims

The issue of the trials made its appearance at the 12th Party Congress in December 1962 where Novotny announced that 30 people had been unjustly sentenced in the 'fifties. The congress ordered that the investigation of trials should be extended to cover 1953 and 1954. The review was undertaken in 1963, the Supreme Court annulling the charges against Slansky and others in April when the widows of the accused were officially informed that the indictments had been cancelled. Otto Sling's widow was given her husband's last letters to her before his execution. It was only then that she was allowed to see them, a sufficient comment on the brutality of the Novotny regime.

Resignations of leading Stalinists now began because of the growing unease about the trials. In March 1963 Josef Urvalek, President of the Supreme Court and Chief Prosecutor at the Slansky trial, resigned and in May, Karel Bacilek was deprived of his seat on the Party Praesidium and replaced as Slovak Party Secretary by Alexander Dubcek. Novotny, however, refused to condemn the trials and at a speech in Slovakia in June stated that Slansky and others were guilty of "departures from the standards of party life" and responsible for "violations of socialist legality". Husak and Novomesky remained guilty of infringing party unity.

On 22 August the party daily, *Rude Pravo*, published the final results of the trials revision. Only 481 cases had been considered and all but 70 persons were

acquitted or amnestied. The indictments of the Slansky trial were cancelled, but Slansky was still held responsible for "violations of legality" and his expulsion from the party was confirmed. The party leadership had been forced to admit that Communists had been judicially murdered yet the rehabilitation was grudging for it refused to make full amends by restoring party membership to all the victims. Other Communists who were declared innocent of charges against them included Gustav Husak, Ladislav Novomesky and Josef Smrkovsky, who had been labelled a Gestapo agent in the Slansky trial. Although the report had marked a considerable advance towards re-establishing the innocence of many victims, there were thousands and thousands of cases which it did not consider. It was only after the overthrow of Novotny that this could be done, in 1968 and 1969.

criticisms from intellectuals

Party leadership was attacked strongly at three conferences in 1963; these were the congresses of the Slovak Writers' Union, the Slovak Journalists' Union, and the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. The Slovak Writers' conference heard a speech by Novomesky, a leading Slovak Communist who had been imprisoned in 1954. He described his own case as "only an infinitesimal part of something much bigger, much more monstrous, and much more horrible", and challenged the party leaders "to give the people the whole truth . . . without swindles". The Czechoslovak writers revealed their discontent, and many speakers violently attacked the personality cult. Ladislav Mnacko referred to "an eternal stain on the good name of everyone of us, for we all condemned Slansky, Clementis, Novomesky and others".

Perhaps the most daring speech of all took place at the Slovak journalists conference, when Miro Hysko, professor of journalism at Bratislava University, openly denounced Viliam Siroky, the Prime Minister, for his sinister role in the persecution of the Slovak Commun-

ists and others in 1954. He attacked charges of bourgeois nationalism and placed the main blame for past errors on the party leaders. In an obvious reference to Novotny, Hysko said that he was ready to accept his personal share of responsibility for past errors "without commenting that I was not then in this or that leadership". Moreover, the Slovak Communist Party paper *Pravda* insisted on publishing full details of Hysko's speech. Novotny immediately went to Slovakia and attacked the Bratislava *Pravda* for reprinting the speech. He said that Husak and his Slovak colleagues remained guilty of violating the principles of party unity and warned that the party would not agree to the publication of articles that were "an indirect attack on the policy of the party".

Despite Novotny's speech, the removal of Siroky from the Premiership was announced in September 1963. The reasons for his dismissal were "deficiencies in his work, insufficient application of the party line in directing the activities of the government" and "some faults in his political activity in the past".

the economy

In 1963 the economy ran into considerable difficulties and many distinguished economists began to question the suitability of the Soviet model to advanced industrial countries like Czechoslovakia. The economic situation suggested that new policies were required. In 1961 and 1962 the plan targets for production had not been fulfilled, while the rate of industrial growth declined from an average of 11 per cent in the period of 1950-60 to 8.9 per cent in 1961 and 6.2 per cent in 1962. The growth in national income also declined; the average yearly growth in national income in the period 1949-55 was 9.3 per cent, but this declined to 3.5 per cent in the period 1959-64 (*Plan and market under socialism* by Ota Sik). In 1962 national income was 175 thousand million crowns, but by 1964 it had decreased to 169.5 million (*Morning Star*, 4 November 1968). The rise in average wages also showed a decrease. In the

period 1949-53 the annual average monthly wages of workers in the socialist sector of the economy increased by 5.9 per cent, but this percentage was far lower at 1.8 per cent in the period 1959-64 (Sik *op cit*, p77). In 1963 real wages showed a decline rather than an increase: in 1961 they had been 28.5 per cent above the 1955 level, but by 1963 they were only 26.9 per cent above 1955 (*Morning Star*, 4 November 1968).

The real reason for the crisis was the Stalinist economic system of centralised planning which decided everything at the centre and which permitted little local initiative by factory managers. The main objective of the system was to produce as much as possible in terms of quantity without proper regard for costs. The quality of the product inevitably suffered and the result was that Czechoslovak prices were double world prices in 1962. Moreover, production was often not related to the demand for goods. Heavy industry was always given priority over the production of consumer goods. Shortages of the latter occurred and consumer dissatisfaction inevitably grew. As Professor Ota Sik wrote in 1967, "the centralised administrative system of planned management in the spirit of Stalinist theories has really brought the economy to a situation where further development is no longer possible unless a clear cut stop is put to this erroneous system of management".

The Czechoslovak economists argued that production should be more competitive and that the preference given to heavy industry over consumer goods should cease. They used their position in the party to force a change in policy when the Central Committee instructed a group of experts to prepare a plan for reform. A draft was published in *Rude Pravo* on 17 October 1964 and in January 1965 the Central Committee approved the plan.

The Central Committee resolution stated that the central planning bodies were to concentrate on long term planning projects such as balanced regional development, and prices and wages policies. The

actual management of production was to be left as far as possible to basic economic units which would be individual enterprises or groups of enterprises. These would work on the basis of profit out of which would come payment for raw materials, bank loans, interest payments, contributions to the state budget, and wages. Basic wages would be paid in accordance with the overall wages policy of the government and anything left in the enterprise budget would be distributed to managers and workers. The plan called for an end to excessive levelling in the payment of basic wages. Skills were to be rewarded and part of the workers' income would depend on performance and the economic achievement of the enterprise.

The central planning machinery was to lay down overall investment policies on large development programmes, but enterprises were permitted to invest some of their own funds or borrow money from banks. The Central Committee resolution also recommended changes in the fixed price system and under the new plan this was replaced by fixed, limited, and free prices. Fixed prices applied to raw materials and basic products such as coal, electricity or steel. Some goods were to be subject to limited prices which would fluctuate within a prescribed range, while some consumer goods prices would be completely free and operate strictly according to the laws of supply and demand.

In 1966 the 13th Party Congress ordered the plan's implementation and its operation began in 1967 although it did not cover the whole economy. It sanctioned the import of consumer goods. In March 1967 the Prime Minister, Mr Lenart, stated that competition had to be accepted in Czechoslovak business and then announced the end of the monopoly of foreign trade organisations so permitting individual enterprises to do their own exporting. Novotny, in an interview published in *The Times* on 2 June 1967, explained that the new economic plan expected the various enterprises to pay their way. **The state would continue to build new factories, but these would operate**

on their own and provide for future equipment from their own budgets.

Although the party leadership had accepted the need for economic change, the plan, by downgrading the role of central planning, was undermining the position of the party bureaucracy which had administered the old system. The bureaucracy naturally attempted to sabotage the reform proposals and Novotny, the arch-bureaucrat, watered down the plan. This contributed towards the dissatisfaction of the economists led by Ota Sik, who played an important role in the final fall of Novotny in January 1968.

politics: discontent and Novotny's removal

New ideas in economics were paralleled by fresh thinking about the political system. This did not mean that the party was about to abandon its leading political role in the state, but prominent party members and legal theorists began to publish theories recognising the political realities of interest groups in society. Zdenek Mlynar, Secretary of the party Central Committee Law Commission, argued at the end of 1965 that group interests should be permitted to express themselves politically. Significantly he added that it was necessary to transform the party dominated mass organisations from being transmission belts from the party to the masses; influence had to flow the other way from the people to the state and party.

Similar arguments were put forward by Pavel Auersperg, head of the Central Committee Ideological Department, in the party theoretical journal. He admitted that "various, often different and contradictory interests" existed in Czechoslovak society and affirmed that "such differences must make themselves felt in the process of the preparation of various decisions made by state and other agencies". Under the Stalinist dictatorship in the 'fifties, it was not expected that people or groups would express their own opinions. It was therefore significant that Mlynar and Auersperg should support the emergence of interest groups.

Despite the real advances made between 1963 and 1967, many grievances still remained. One of the most difficult problems (as in most countries) was the distribution of income. Czechoslovakia was the Communist country that had progressed the farthest towards equality of incomes, but the professions and intellectuals resented this. The writers were discontented while censorship still remained. The party leadership had made considerable concessions, but these merely whetted appetites for more and raised greater expectations which the Novotny regime was unable to satisfy.

cultural freedom and the writers' revolt

The party leadership showed more moderate ideas towards culture and the arts. The film industry began to blossom and many works of lasting value were produced. At the end of January 1967 *The Times* eastern European correspondent thought that "Czechoslovakia's cultural scene retains its distinction of being the liveliest in eastern Europe". Corrections in the Stalinist version of history were made and sociology was recognised as a legitimate science.

Throughout 1967 the writers continued to criticise the party leadership, which made the mistake of trying to repress them. The 1967 Writers' Congress was used as a vehicle for criticism of the party. Pavel Kohout and others criticised the government's Middle East policy and Ludvík Vaculík said that "no one could feel secure in a Czechoslovakia where there was no clear distinction between party, government, and police affairs". He added that "over 20 years no solution had been found in this country for any of the human problems, such as housing, schools and economic prosperity . . ."

A few days after the Congress a writers' show trial began in Prague, where Jan Benes, the main defendant, was charged with "subversive activities against the Republic, speculation with foreign currencies and attempted fraud". Two of the three accused were imprisoned, Benes for five years. Another of Novotny's victims

was the author Ladislav Mňacko, who had offended the party leader by opposing the government's support for the Arabs in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Mňacko went to Israel to express his sympathies and attacked the Novotny regime saying that "I have recently read in our press exactly the same mischief about Zionism and cosmopolitanism as I read at the time of the Slansky trial . . . the system in Czechoslovakia must be changed if we want to survive as a socialist, humanitarian and healthy land". Novotny replied by depriving Mňacko of his Czechoslovak citizenship.

Then the offensive against the writers was renewed in early September when strict censorship of all publications, films, television and radio programmes was enforced. Novotny charged the rebellious writers with "pacifism, recklessness and frivolity" and stated that it was not possible in a socialist state to allow "the propagation of opinions and ideology harmful and alien to the Communist Party". Several prominent writers, including Vaculík, Jan Procházka, Ivan Klíma and Antonín Liehm were expelled from the party. In October, the editorial board of the Writers' Union magazine *Literární Noviny* was dismissed and a new weekly introduced supervised by the Ministry of Culture and Information. The response to this high handed action was protest and boycott of the new magazine.

the students and the Slovak communists

As soon as the writers had been temporarily repressed, Novotny faced new challenges from the students and the Slovak Communists.

On 30 October students demonstrated in the streets of Prague against continual electrical power cuts in their colleges. The demonstrating students inevitably clashed with the police who were wielding truncheons and manhandling the demonstrators. A dispute broke out between the students and the authorities, the latter maintaining that the students had used the power cuts as an excuse for a

political demonstration. The students demanded an enquiry into the conduct of the police and the punishment of the worst offenders, and others in the philosophy faculty passed a resolution demanding academic freedom. In December the government climbed down by conceding that the students had been roughly treated by the police, but it rejected demands for the punishment of individual policemen. It admitted that "there were cases of excessive harshness towards individual students" but the latter had "grossly abused" and even attacked the police (*Guardian*, 16 December 1967). Officials responsible for the conditions leading to the demonstration were dismissed. This action showed that there were people in the party leadership opposed to indiscriminate repression of grievances.

Novotny's fate was sealed when he aroused the antagonism of many Slovak Communists because of his economic policy. Several Slovaks combined with the Czech economic reformers to outvote Novotny. In September Alexander Dubcek, the Slovak party Secretary, made a speech at the September Czechoslovak Central Committee meeting in which he presented a list of Slovak economic demands. He complained that Slovakia was not getting her fair share of investment and proposed a central investment reservoir to be used for regional investment. He followed this up in November and December by publishing articles in the Bratislava *Pravda* critical of Novotny's nationality policy. Dubcek again attacked Novotny at the October Central Committee meeting, accusing him of "behaving like a dictator" and criticising him for his incompetent interference in Slovak affairs. Novotny replied that Slovakia was dependent on the Czech lands for economic aid and suggested that the two economies be divided if the Slovaks did not like the existing system.

Throughout the autumn hostility towards Novotny increased within the party. The Prague correspondent of the Yugoslav paper *Borba* wrote in November that "the Czechoslovak party is at the crossroads. It has started a serious analysis of its

own function" (*Observer*, 26 November 1967). The party Central Committee met again in December when the economic reformers won a significant victory, the committee decreeing that less resources should go to heavy industry. Novotny again came under fire and a report from Prague published in *The Times* indicated that only four out of eleven district secretaries supported him. The Praesidium finally took a vote on the party leadership, but it split evenly with five votes for Novotny and five votes against him. The issue was then taken to the Central Committee which, after a long debate, eventually decided "to separate the functions of the President of the Republic and the first Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party". On 5 January 1968 Novotny was replaced as party secretary by Dubcek but retained his position as President.

4. the Czechoslovak reforms

The reforms introduced by the Dubcek regime were a unique experiment in the Communist world to make the party and government more democratic and responsive to the needs of the people. The Communist Party proceeded to direct a programme of careful reform permitting freedom of speech, freedom of the press and assembly.

During his first month in office Dubcek made few public statements in support of reform, for the supporters of Novotny were strongly entrenched in the secret police and the party bureaucracy. Novotny himself remained President of the Republic and Dubcek knew that Novotnyites in the army had attempted to prevent the January leadership changes. Josef Smrkovsky was one of the first leaders to put forward a programme of democratic communism in an article published in the trade union daily *Prace*, on 21 January. He wrote: "Conflicting opinions about the solutions of problems must be settled in a democratic manner, as is stipulated in the party statutes. They must not be settled by means of an authoritative pronouncement".

Dubcek ended his own silence at the beginning of February in his address to the Seventh Congress of Agricultural Co-operatives in Prague. Rather than just hand out directives, he appealed for genuine support from the farmers and said that the policy of the party would be to help agriculture "achieve full and equal rights". After his speech a genuine and free debate took place, the farmers voicing their criticisms and grievances. The final resolution adopted at the congress demanded the creation of a national farmers organisation which would express the economic and other interests of the farmers, and called for full democracy on the collective farms, and the extension to agricultural workers of the same insurance and other benefits enjoyed by industrial workers. Dubcek's next major speech was at the meeting to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the 1948 coup. Mr. Brezhnev and other Communist leaders were present when Dubcek appealed for support from the

whole population and specifically praised the intellectual community, saying that "we shall have to remove everything that strangles artistic and scientific creation". The party daily, *Rude Pravo*, wrote in February that "a normal and sound situation must be marked by a lively exchange of views, by debates and polemic from which a joint platform is born. There is a need for more candid information".

In February the Writers' Union paper was returned to the union which published the first issue under the name of *Literarni Listy*; it appeared on 29 February and 120,000 copies were sold by 7 am. The Journalists' Union expressed dissatisfaction with their Secretary General, Adolf Hradecky, and pressed for a reorganisation of its executive. On 22 March Hradecky and four others resigned. The union also condemned censorship which began to be lifted at the beginning of March when literary and scientific publications were freed. Television coverage of the news became much freer and open as Richard Davy reported from Prague in *The Times* on 12 March: "Almost all newspapers are sold out as soon as they appear and practically every night some hapless party official or minister or army officer is being mercilessly grilled on television".

the resignation of President Novotny

The conservative supporters of Novotny were not idle in February and March, and they were still strong in factories and throughout the party organisation. His hopes of a return to the party leadership were dealt a fatal blow, however, by revelations in the press that army units had been mobilised to prevent his removal from office as party secretary. The main culprit, General Sejna, defected to the United States in February and the press revealed considerable corruption in high places with Sejna and Novotny's son being engaged in dubious business deals. An enquiry was set up to investigate the plot by the military in January and a key witness, General Janko, shot himself before his appearance at the inquiry. In

March General Prchlik, head of the Central Committee Security Department confirmed that mobilisation had taken place and that he was able to warn the party liberals of the plot against them. Officers of the Czechoslovak General Staff demanded Novotny's resignation because of his alleged responsibility for Sejna's defection. Their letter published in the trade union daily *Prace* insisted that "those who knew something about General Sejna's faults, or who were silent and indulgent partners and protectors of the general, should carry full responsibility for his activities. This concerns directly the President of the Republic". The Sejna scandals strengthened the liberals in their campaign against Novotny and his supporters. On 13 March 2,000 students signed a petition demanding his removal. On the same day 92 law professors at Prague university sent a strong letter to the Attorney General concluding that he had "neither the moral right nor the necessary authority" to carry out his duties, and on 15 March the Attorney General resigned.

The anger against Novotny continued to rise. Although the President had attempted to curry favour with the workers after January, they too began to turn against him; workers from the two largest industrial plants in Prague demanded that all those who opposed reforms should resign and named Novotny. Floods of resignations occurred in March including newspaper editors and party officials throughout the country. On 19 March the leading article in *Rude Pravo* urged Novotny to go, and three days later Prague Radio announced his resignation. His place on the Praesidium was taken by Josef Smrkovsky, who had been imprisoned for four years in the 'fifties, and General Svoboda became the new President.

While the country was shaken by the political changes in the Communist Party, a revival of interest in the Masaryks took place. Tributes were paid to them in March and a popular demonstration occurred at the family grave at Lany. At the end of the month a significant political event occurred with the formation

of the 231 Club, an association of former political prisoners, which was set up to obtain rehabilitations and compensation for those unjustly imprisoned during the 'fifties. Another club, independent of the Communist Party, was the Kan Club, which was a discussion group for non-party members. Both these organisations were an embryo from which an opposition might have developed.

attitudes of the new Czechoslovak leaders

Both Dubcek and Smrkovsky gave interviews to foreign newspapers in which they discussed the political reforms. The former in an interview with the Italian Communist daily, *L'Unita*, stated that "full development of Socialist democracy and the rights of all citizens to express themselves on all important problems in the management of public affairs are indispensable for a sane national policy". The new President of the National Assembly, Mr. Smrkovsky, gave an interview which was published in *The Times* on 19 April 1968. He insisted that every one should have a legally guaranteed right to criticise and propose alternatives. "We must see to it that there is freedom of speech in all communications media and in Parliament, so that people will have the right to say things that will not always accord with the official view".

the April plenum

At the beginning of April the party Central Committee met to consider the action programme of the party. On 1 April Dubcek reported to the committee and introduced the action programme. He began by describing developments after January as "creative and spontaneous activity of the people led by Communists", and criticised past "haughty and administrative methods in party work which paralysed the activities of members". A revival of "certain non-socialist moods" had, however, occurred and Dubcek stated that the party would oppose any attempts to "weaken progressive socialist tendencies". He announced that the government would cease exces-

sive control over culture and the economy and recommended the creation of a federal system to solve the nationality problems between Czechs and Slovaks. Dubcek praised the mass social organisations especially the trade unions for asserting themselves "as independent autonomous parts of the political system" and summed up the aims of the political reforms as increasing "the real independence of social and group interest organisations, to make the representative bodies of the state, up to the National Assembly, into bodies where political decisions of the state are actually made".

Concessions to the writers were made by Dubcek, who announced in his speech the cancellation of the expulsions from the party of Klima, Liehm and Vaculik. The Central Committee set up a twelve man commission to deal with the rehabilitation of the victims of the Stalinist era; but the most important decision taken by the committee was the adoption of the Communist Party Action Programme.

the action programme

The programme, approved by the Central Committee on 5 April and published four days later, was the centrepiece of the reform movement. The first section analysed the development of the party during the 'fifties and attacked the deformations of the political system. During this period "methods of revolutionary dictatorship deteriorated into bureaucracy and became an impediment to progress in all spheres of life in Czechoslovakia".

The national economy was dominated by "directives from the centre". The programme attacked the slow growth in wages, the "catastrophic state" of housing, the "precarious state" of the transport system, and the poor quality of goods and services.

The statement also discussed the role of the Communist Party and rejected its past totalitarian attitudes stating that "it enjoys the voluntary support of the people; it does not practice its leading

role by ruling the society, but by devotedly serving its free progressive socialist development . . . it cannot force its line through directives but by the work of its members . . . the party policy must not lead to non-communists getting the impression that their rights and freedom are limited by the role of the party. On the contrary they must see in the activity of the party a guarantee of their rights". Moreover "each member of the party . . . has not only the right, but the duty to act according to his conscience" even if this meant opposing party officials.

The programme outlined a new model socialist political system which had "to provide firm guarantees against a return to the old methods of . . . high handedness from a position of power". Significantly it gave greater freedom to the mass social organisations which were to become independent of the party, and insisted that they should become genuinely voluntary and have the right to choose their own officials. This did not mean that Communists were to be pushed out from the leadership of these organisations, but they were to earn their positions by arguing the party policy instead of being mere appointees.

The programme also attacked the "unconvincing unanimity" of past debates in the National Assembly and proposed that deputies should make genuine political decisions on the laws before it and should no merely approve party or government directives. Freedoms of assembly and association were to be guaranteed by law so that interest groups would represent the real needs and aspirations of their members without bureaucratic interference from outside. Moreover the party press could no longer be a mere mouthpiece of the state, but had to reflect arguments and differences of opinion among Communists. Perhaps the most important proposal was the attempt to prevent too much power residing in one body and the programme singled out the Interior Ministry for criticism, stating that the security police could not be used to "solve internal political questions and controversies in socialist society".

The party statement went far to guarantee the individual his legal rights. Citizens were given the constitutional right to go abroad and their property was to be protected against arbitrary state decisions. The Communists also opposed the old economic system under which inefficient enterprises had been subsidised at the expense of the consumer. A market for goods was needed to "put pressure on production to become more effective and to introduce healthy structural changes". Enterprises were to be given greater autonomy, and economic competition rather than central directives was to be "the basic stimulus for improving production and reducing costs".

The programme sanctioned the creation of works councils to act as a democratic influence on management, but these would in no way reduce "the indivisible authority and responsibility of the leading executives in managing the enterprise". The role of the trade unions was "to defend with increasing emphasis employment and working conditions of the workers . . ." for, "even a socialist economy places working people into a position in which it is necessary to defend human, social and other interests in an organised way". Individual enterprises were also given the right to form voluntary associations. This was extended to cover co-operative farmers whose farms would become independent economic and social organisations. The party conceded that the democratisation could be abused by the enemies of socialism, but stated that the people could be won to communism by genuine debate instead of dictation from above.

action by the party leadership

The party leaders acted on their desire to consult public opinion, and on 13 May a questionnaire was published in *Rude Pravo* which readers were asked to complete anonymously. They were asked whether communism was compatible with democracy, whether the internal democratisation of a Communist Party was a sufficient guarantee of democracy, and whether a democratic opposition could

develop within the National Front from the non-Communist parties.

On 14 May the Prime Minister, Mr. Cernik, and Ota Sik, deputy Prime Minister, held a press conference. Cernik argued that the main principles of government policy were to stress "the democratic rights and freedom of citizens" and announced economic measures by which free enterprise would be permitted for the provision of personal services like cafes and restaurants. State protection for unproductive enterprises would be gradually removed and Professor Sik added that the government was prepared to accept western capital in joint ventures with state capital (*The Times*, 16 May 1968).

At the end of May the party Central Committee met to consider the course of events since the publication of the action programme. Dubcek, in his report to the meeting on 29 May, commented that "anti-communist tendencies have intensified" and stated that these forces represented "the main threat to the further development of the process of democratisation". He also attacked the conservative representatives of the old Novotny regime who were still present in the party and warned that any attempt to "revive dogmatism . . . in the name of fighting anti-communism would greatly damage the party and its policy". He recommended that the party should disassociate itself from "the crimes of the 'fifties" and announced proposals to convene a full party congress in September 1968, whose task would be to approve new statutes and elect a new central committee.

The Committee finally adopted a long resolution which stated that the main task of the party was to ensure that its political programme would not be endangered by "anti-communist tendencies" or "conservative forces which would welcome a return to pre-January 1968 conditions . . ." It supported the convening of a September congress which would discuss the rehabilitation of "unjustly victimised comrades" and assess the responsibility of the old leadership

for past crimes. It went on to argue that "anti-communist forces, as such, are numerically weak in Czechoslovakia". They could only gain political influence through the exploitation of discontents and could best be fought by the party if it overcame dictatorial methods and gave non-Communists "the opportunity to participate with full rights in the government and management of the society". The implication of the resolution was that the leading role of the Communist Party could only be viable if it received the genuine support of the people.

The party Central Committee also suspended several notorious Stalinists from the party, including Novotny, Bacilek and Siroky, and on 3 June Dubcek publicly accused Novotny of being responsible for the trials and terror of the 'fifties.

the 2000 words manifesto

On 26 June the Czechoslovak National Assembly passed the law abolishing preliminary censorship, but a minority of 30 deputies voted against it. On the next day four newspapers published a document entitled "2,000 words" which was written by Ludvik Vaculik and signed by 69 people, including intellectuals, Olympic sportsmen, and workers. The manifesto analysed the 20 years of Communism and concluded that the party had degenerated into a "power organisation which became very attractive to egotists avid for rule, calculating cowards and people with bad consciences". It stated that during the Stalinist period "no organisation actually belonged to its members, not even the Communist organisation", and that the party and state apparatus had taken "the place of the overthrown class and themselves became the new authority". It argued that "the initiative and efforts of the democratic Communists, therefore, are only an instalment in the repayment of the debt owed by the party to the people outside the party, whom it kept in a position of inequality. Therefore no gratitude is due to the Communist Party, although it should probably be acknowledged that

it is honestly striving to use the last opportunity to save its own and the nation's honour". It denied, however, that it was possible to "conduct some sort of democratic revival without the Communists, or possibly against them. This would be both unjust and unreasonable".

The manifesto stated that it was necessary to choose delegates to the September party congress who would reflect the needs of the people and urged people to agitate for change. "Let us demand the resignation of people who have mis-used their power, who have harmed public property, or who have acted dishonestly or brutally. We must find ways to induce them to resign, for instance, through public criticism, resolutions . . . strikes and boycotts of their doors". It concluded that "we can assure the government that we will give it our backing, if necessary, even with weapons, as long as the government does what we gave it the mandate to do: and we can assure our allies that we will observe our treaties of friendship, alliance and trade."

Radio Prague and the press reported a huge volume of support for the manifesto, but Dubcek reacted by saying that the Praesidium took a grave view of the manifesto; a resolution from the party Praesidium admitted the honourable intentions of the signatories, but said that any attempts to by-pass the institutions of party and National Front would be repressed by all available means. The resolution added that the publication of 2,000 Words was "an act which might in its objective consequences considerably impede, even jeopardise, the further development of the action programme of the Communist Party and the policy of the National Front and the Government". This proved to be an accurate observation as the Russians were able to use the manifesto in their propaganda against the Czechoslovak reformers.

5. the Russian response to events in Czechoslovakia

The Soviet Union had been happy to see Novotny in power in Czechoslovakia and did not interfere with the limited liberalisation from 1963 and 1967. In 1965 President Podgorny returned from a visit to Czechoslovakia and warmly welcomed the economic reforms. By the end of 1967 the internal crisis within the Czechoslovak party was reaching its climax. Mr Brezhnev paid a fleeting visit to Prague in December, but did not attempt to prevent Novotny's removal from the leadership. Mr Smrkovsky referred to Brezhnev's visit at a public meeting in March 1968: "Comrade Brezhnev was here; he was asked before Christmas, and when he was told what was going on here he said, 'That is, comrades, your Czechoslovak affair and the Soviet Party and the Soviet Union will not interfere in your internal affairs'."

The Russians only became anxious about Czechoslovakia when the Dubcek leadership began to implement its reform programme. Censorship of the press began to be lifted in February. Indications of Soviet concern came with the summoning of Dubcek to an emergency meeting of the Warsaw Pact leaders at Dresden in March. The *Pravda* editorial of 22 August justifying the Soviet invasion made it clear that the main item on the agenda at Dresden was Czechoslovakia. The communique expressed confidence that Czechoslovakia would ensure the development of socialism, although the Czech leaders had assured their allies that this was their policy. Moreover the new leaders had from the outset stressed their determination to stand by the Warsaw Pact.

The East Germans, however, continued to voice fierce criticisms of the Czech leaders, and on 26 March Professor Kurt Hager, Secretary of the East German Central Committee, attacked Mr Smrkovsky alleging that he was encouraging the West German regime. The Czech Foreign Minister, Mr David, registered a strong protest at Hager's remarks by summoning the East German ambassador.

In April fresh revelations about the Stalinist trials were printed in the press.

The Soviet role in these purges became known and this cannot have pleased the Russians. A writer in the Defence Ministry weekly newspaper said that the Soviet police chief Beria had controlled the trials. The most damning evidence came from the former National Security Minister, Karel Bacilek, who admitted that the Slansky trial had been ordered by Stalin and that Mikoyan had come to Prague to deliver the instructions for the trial. The mysterious death of Jan Masaryk in 1948 was also discussed in the press, some papers hinting that he was murdered by Beria's agents.

talks in Moscow

On 3 May Dubcek and four colleagues flew to Moscow for further talks with the Soviet leaders. *Pravda* published an interview with Dubcek in which he was quoted as saying that "the Soviet comrades expressed anxiety over the possibility of our democratisation process being exploited against socialism". On 9 May President Svoboda said that "we shall never allow anything to disrupt the friendship and alliance between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union", but the next day the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* warned against any dilution of the power of the Communist Party, as any weakening in the leading role of the party would be the first step towards bourgeois liberalism.

The first signs of military pressure on the Czechs came on 10 May, when a spokesman in Prague referred to troop movements in Poland, saying that they were part of a regular exercise by Warsaw Pact forces. In the light of later events it is possible that these exercises were a broad hint to the Czech leaders not to ignore the opinions of their allies.

Soviet press campaign against the Czechs

The Soviet press increased its hostile tone against the Czechs and Slovaks. *Sovietskaya Russia* denounced T. G. Masaryk as an "anti-Soviet criminal" and alleged that he had been a party to

an assassination plot against Lenin. On 15 May the *Moscow Literary Gazette* attacked the playwright Vaclav Havel, by accusing him of repeating slogans "formulated by the enemies of Communism". *Rude Pravo* in reply argued that the Czechoslovak Republic under Masaryk did have some positive features, but the Czechs and Slovaks were determined to make their country better.

On 18 May Mr. Kosygin and Marshal Grechko arrived in Prague on separate flights. A communique issued in Prague on 21 May stated that the Marshal had visited the country to meet new Czech army commanders and to discuss "mutual problems". The Czechoslovak Defence Minister denied reports originating in West Germany that the Soviet Union wanted troops to be stationed in Czechoslovakia; despite this denial, Charles Douglas Home reported from Prague in *The Times* that the request to station troops had been confirmed from unofficial sources. It was soon announced that Warsaw Pact staff manoeuvres would take place in Poland and Czechoslovakia in June.

military manoeuvres

At the end of May Dubcek again reiterated Czechoslovakia's "firm friendship with the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries", and in June the first Soviet/Warsaw Pact troops began to arrive for their exercises. Tad Szulc reported in *The Times* on 7 June that Soviet tanks had entered the country but Vadim Ardatovsky, political commentator of the Novosti press agency, denied that the Soviet Union was intimidating the Czechs by the military exercises and claimed that such staff exercises occurred regularly (*The Times*, 10 June 1968). The Soviet press attacks intensified on 14 June when *Pravda* denounced Mr Cestmir Cisar, a prominent Communist reformer, as a revisionist wishing to abandon some of Lenin's teachings: it stressed the need for the leading role of the party and said that Cisar regarded Leninism as a purely Russian doctrine not applicable to other socialist countries.

The crisis continued to grow and, at the beginning of July letters were received in Prague from the Central Committees of the Soviet, East German, Polish, Bulgarian and Hungarian Communist Parties (the Warsaw Five). These letters expressed concern at developments in Czechoslovakia and requested the Czech leaders to come to a conference at Warsaw. The letters condemned the freedom of the press on the grounds that counter revolutionaries were using it for their own ends. The Czechoslovak Praesidium replied expressing the willingness of the Czech leaders to confer with their allies on a bilateral basis, but rejecting the idea of a joint meeting at which they would be the defendants.

On 10 July the *Moscow Literary Gazette* asserted that opponents of Communism were laying plans for a "hot summer" of subversion: the article referred to the 2,000 words manifesto saying that the use of strikes and boycotts in a socialist country was a wild idea. On the next day *Pravda* strongly attacked the manifesto by accusing its authors of using "the same tactics employed by the Hungarian counter revolutionaries" and of undermining "the foundations of Socialism in Czechoslovakia by more refined and treacherous methods". *Pravda* declared that the manifesto was not an isolated incident and was "evidence of the growing activities of right wing and counter revolutionary forces in Czechoslovakia, evidently linked with imperialist reaction".

troop withdrawals and the Warsaw letter

The military exercises were finally completed on 30 June and in July a Czech government spokesman announced that the Warsaw Pact forces would begin "a gradual withdrawal" on 13 July, but later the Czech Defence Ministry commented that more troops had come in after the completion of the exercises to repair damaged equipment (*The Times*, 13 July 1968). The troops were gradually withdrawn, but the slow speed of the withdrawal caused anxiety among the population.

On 14 July the Warsaw Five met in Warsaw without the participation of the Czechs; at this moment General Prchlik, head of the Communist Party Defence Department, called for a revision of the command system in the Warsaw Pact and argued that there was nothing in the pact that could justify the stationing of foreign troops on the territory of a member state which did not want them. The Warsaw Five sent a joint letter to the Czechoslovak leaders on 15 July which strongly attacked the reform programme of the Czech Communist Party and revealed to the world the deep differences between the two sides. The letter stated that the five countries were "deeply concerned by the course of events in your country" and that the interests of the entire socialist system were threatened. The letter confirmed that the Soviet Union and her allies had been worried about the Czech reforms from the beginning: "We expressed our misgivings at the meeting in Dresden, during a number of bilateral meetings, and also in letters which our parties have recently addressed to the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia".

The letter stressed that the signatories were not intending to interfere in the internal affairs of the country and conceded that "infringements of socialist legality" had taken place in the past. It expressed grave concern at the weakening of the party's leading role which would result in "the liquidation of socialist democracy and the socialist system". The signatories complained that "political organisations and clubs formed recently outside the framework of the National Front have in fact become headquarters of the forces of reaction" and "anti-socialist and revisionist forces" had gained control of the press to attack the Communist Party. The 2,000 Words Manifesto was denounced as "an organisational political platform of counter revolution"; the letter claimed that the manifesto had received support from sections of the party leadership and that the party had not rejected it. The Warsaw Five demanded that all political organisations opposing socialism should be

suppressed and that the party should re-establish full control over the press and mass media. Revisionist forces were defaming the Communist Party and this was a situation "absolutely unacceptable to a socialist country".

The Czechoslovak party Praesidium replied to the Warsaw letter defending their political programme. They said that they would use all possible means to defend the socialist system if it was menaced by internal developments. They emphasised that the basic principle of their foreign policy was "the alliance and co-operation with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries" and that their actions accorded with these principles. They reminded the Warsaw Five that the Czech government was the last member of the alliance to take definite steps towards increasing relations and trade with West Germany and their commitment to the Warsaw Pact had been shown by their willingness to admit troops for exercises in Czechoslovakia. The doubts about the exercises had only arisen among the public "after the repeated changes of the time of the departure of the allied armies from the territory of Czechoslovakia at the end of the exercises".

The Czech leaders supported the leading role of the Communist Party, but added that the party "depends on the voluntary support of the people. It is not implementing its leading role by ruling over the society, but by faithfully serving its free, progressive socialist development". The Czechs conceded that there were groups wishing to discredit the party, but they were not sufficiently numerous to be a threat to it. The reply attacked the Novotny regime for deepening conflicts between Czechs and Slovaks and between workers and intellectuals. Any return to the old methods, said the letter, would result in the "resistance of the overwhelming majority of party members, the resistance of the working class, co-operative farmers, and intelligentsia".

The Czechoslovaks emphasised that the party, government and National Front had rejected the 2,000 Words Manifesto

and that it did not threaten political institutions. The reply concluded that they had been prepared to discuss differences on a bilateral basis and commented that "the common cause of socialism is not advanced by the holding of conferences at which the policy and activity of one of the fraternal parties is judged without the presence of their representatives".

The Warsaw letter was an attempt to coerce the Czechs while foreign troops were on their territory, but the Dubcek leadership, supported by the people, refused to make concessions. On 18 July Dubcek made a television broadcast in which he appealed to the people to support the party. A day later *Pravda* returned to the attack by referring to an alleged top secret American plan for subversion and aggression against Czechoslovakia and said that US arms caches had been found near the West German border for use by "Sudeten revanchists".

The Czechoslovak Central Committee unanimously approved the reply to the Warsaw letter on 19 July and Dubcek said that "we cannot and will not return to the conditions as they were before January". Mr Smrkovsky commented in *Rude Pravo* on 22 July that the Warsaw letter was based on "entirely one sided information" which led to "unacceptable conclusions and recommendations".

more manoeuvres

Pressure was intensified on the Czechs by the Russians, who sent a note to Prague demanding the right to station troops on the Czech border with West Germany and protesting against West German influence in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet newsagency, however, announced that the Soviet Praesidium was willing to travel to Czechoslovakia to meet the Czech Praesidium. The Russians, although agreeing to talks, announced that reservists were being called up for manoeuvres along the entire western border of the Soviet Union, but on 24 July the Czech Central Committee reaffirmed its liberal policies. A committee spokesman denied the need for Soviet

troops on the West German border and added that there was "no room for any change in our political line".

The Czechoslovaks left Prague for the talks with the Soviet leaders at Cierna on 28 July: thousands of people in the capital signed a petition supporting their leaders. Richard Davy reported from Prague that Dubcek had received bundles of the petitions and that "there can scarcely be another political leader in the world who enjoys such wide support and affection from all generations and all quarters" (*The Times*, 29 July 1968).

On the first day of the talks *Pravda* chose to remind the Czechs of their economic dependence on the Soviet Union. A day later the Russians blatantly attempted to influence the outcome of the conference by announcing that the military manoeuvres would be extended outside Russia to Poland and East Germany. General Norkov, second in command of the manoeuvres, told a Soviet journalist that "in scope, this is one of the biggest exercises ever conducted by the Soviet Army" (*Guardian*, 31 July 1968). It was announced in Moscow on 31 July that East German and Polish reservists were taking part in the exercises.

Cierna and Bratislava meetings

The Cierna talks ended on 1 August, the communique stating that "a broad comradesly exchange of opinion on questions interesting both sides was held at the meeting". It added that a further meeting would take place at Bratislava on 3 August which the rest of the Warsaw Five would attend. President Svoboda assured the Czechoslovak people that the party and government were committed "to carry on the policy adopted inside the country". Despite these assurances correspondents in Prague reported that a sense of betrayal appeared to grip people after the tensions caused by Cierna; student demonstrations occurred after Svoboda's speech and Smrkovsky appeared at a balcony to calm the people telling them that the Cierna talks had been "fully successful" from the Czech

point of view and adding that "we will forget the Warsaw meetings". Dubcek broadcast to the nation on 2 August saying that he had carried out his promise to stand by the post-January policy. He said that Czech forces would guard their western border with Germany and that the sovereignty of the country was not threatened, but warned against rashness and anti-Soviet speeches. According to correspondents in Prague it appeared that the Czechs had agreed to: (i) Strict adherence to the Warsaw Pact and Comecon commitments; (ii) Restraint of the Czechoslovak press to prevent papers attacking the USSR or discussing foreign policy too freely, provided that other socialist countries did the same.

The Bratislava meeting was held on 3 August and on the same day Soviet troops finally completed their withdrawal from Czechoslovakia. At the end of the talks the delegations signed a declaration confirming the territorial integrity of socialist countries. "The participants have expressed their firm endeavour to do everything in their power for the deepening of multilateral co-operation of their countries on the basis of the principles of equal rights, sovereignty and national independence, territorial inviolability, mutual fraternal aid and solidarity". The declaration added that "every fraternal party can creatively solve the problems of its further socialist development taking into account national characteristics and conditions". It was also agreed to strengthen the leading role of the Communist Party and to struggle against "bourgeois ideology and anti-socialist forces". On 4 August Dubcek broadcast to the nation on television saying that there were no secret agreements made at Bratislava and that there was no need to fear any limitations on Czechoslovak sovereignty, although the country's position in the world had to be based on co-operation with the other communist countries.

The Czechoslovak leaders did not dilute their reform programme after the Bratislava meeting. On 10 August 1968 the new party statutes for the 14th Congress in September were published. These gave

considerable freedom for minority opinion in the party. Decisions at meetings were to be taken by majority vote, but the minority could request that its views be minuted and ask for further examination of the decision if new circumstances warranted it. All officers were to be elected by secret ballot and leading party and state offices were no longer to be vested in one person.

The Czechoslovak party had gained a respite from the pressures of the Russians and their allies, but events were to show that this was very temporary. Although the press campaign against the Czechs slackened considerably, military manoeuvres continued to take place. On 8 August *Izvestia* commented that Polish and East German troops had joined Soviet forces for the final stages of the exercises and stated that the operations had taken on a wide scope in the last four days. On the same day, the *New York Times* Warsaw correspondent reported that fresh Soviet forces were still arriving in Poland despite the Bratislava summit, his sources indicating that Russian tanks were operationally deployed towards Czechoslovakia.

The Czech leaders were morally supported by visits to Prague of President Tito and President Ceausescu of Rumania, neither of whom had attended the Warsaw meeting or those at Cierna and Bratislava. Both leaders had publicly supported the Czechs, Tito arguing against any outside interference in the internal affairs of socialist countries, and both received enthusiastic receptions from the people in Prague. A shadow was cast, however, by the visit in August of Herr Ulbricht to Karlovy Vary for further talks with Dubcek.

The Russians could not have been happy about the September Congress because of the strong probability that many Czech conservatives would be voted off the party Central Committee. Moreover the Congress was due to consider the trials and crimes of the 'fifties and the Soviet role in these crimes could not have been hidden. The Soviet Union and its supporters in Czechoslovakia there-

fore had little time left. *Pravda* renewed its campaign against the Czechs and Slovaks on 16 August, when it wrote that anti-socialist forces were still active in the country. "Several Prague publications, acting against the spirit of the Bratislava meeting, are coming out these days with violent, slanderous attacks against fraternal parties and are even opening fire on the Bratislava declaration which bears the signature of the Czechoslovak Communist Party". Further Soviet pressure was confirmed when an announcement was made in Budapest that Soviet and Hungarian forces were to have joint military exercises in Hungary. Dubcek recognised that Czechoslovakia was still in danger when he warned against too much freedom for his people and said that the country needed order so that the reform programme could continue. On the 15 and 16 August Soviet military leaders visited East Germany and Poland and on 19 August Mr. Brezhnev sent a letter to Dubcek accusing him of failing to act in accordance with the Cierna and Bratislava agreements, but failing to mention military intervention.

the Warsaw five invade

The evidence available shows that a plot was made between the Russians and the Czech conservatives to oust the Dubcek leadership. The first stage of the plan was to remove Dubcek at the 20 August meeting of the party Praesidium. If this failed, an appeal for help was to be sent to the Russians via the Ceteka newsagency. The *Czech Black Book* (edited by Littell) first published by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, printed an eye witness account of the meeting. The main business was the preparation for the September congress, but in the late evening Indra, one of the conservatives, presented a paper for adoption by the meeting which recommended the acceptance of the demands of the July Warsaw letter. The Chairman of the National Front, Dr Kriegel, attacked the Indra paper, and the Prime Minister, Mr Cernik, denounced the attitudes of Indra and his supporter Drahomir Kolder as treason, but the latter were supported

by Vasil Bilak. The news of the invasion came to the meeting at 11.40 and the eye witness noted that Bilak, Kolder and Indra "did not seem to be surprised". Far from accepting the news Dubcek prepared a statement denouncing the invasion but four voted against, namely Svestka, Bilak, Rigo and Kolder.

The plotters in league with the Soviet invaders now attempted first to prevent the broadcast of the Praesidium's condemnation and secondly to send an appeal for help to the Soviet Union. The Director of Communications, Karel Hoffman, was able temporarily to delay the broadcast but Prague Radio was soon able to broadcast it in full. The call for help was anonymous and Miroslav Sulek, head of the Ceteka newsagency, delivered the statement for release by the agency, but he was foiled by the staff who refused to co-operate. The proclamation attacked the liberal leadership accusing it of compromising with right wing forces and violating the Bratislava commitments. It appealed to the Soviet Union and other "fraternal socialist countries" for assistance. Despite the failure to issue the appeal, the Soviet newsagency *Tass* claimed that "party and government leaders of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic have asked the Soviet Union and the other allied states to render the fraternal Czechoslovak people urgent assistance, including assistance with armed force".

The Czechoslovak Praesidium appealed to the population for calm and attacked the invasion: "This took place without the knowledge of the President of the Republic, the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, or the First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Central Committee". The occupation was "contrary not only to the fundamental principles of relations between socialist states but also a violation of the principles of international law".

President Svoboda denounced the invasion and the High Command of the Czechoslovak Army said that it would only obey the legal President. The National Assembly convened a session that

lasted throughout the first seven days of the occupation. It fully endorsed the party Praesidium's view, demanded the immediate withdrawal of the invading troops and called upon the people not to resist the troops by violence. The *Rude Pravo* editorial board supported the stand by the party leadership and after the military occupation of its offices the paper promised to "fight for the sovereignty of our state and for the right of our Communist Party to seek its own road for building socialism in its own country". Other organisations protested against the occupation, including the National Assembly Defence and Security Council. The police remained loyal to the legal authorities although there were a few in state security willing to co-operate with the Soviet Union.

The Russians had made a great political blunder which they made worse by their arrest of the Czech party leaders, including Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Kriegel and Spacek. They had invaded in the belief that the Czech plotters would ensure that everything would go smoothly in Prague. Instead they had met every obstacle and the Soviet Union was made to look ridiculous with its allegation of appeals for help from Czech party leaders. A political stalemate existed in Prague during the first two days of the invasion, the vast majority of the people and party members supporting the legal government, but a few collaborators were willing to do business with the Russians. On 21 August Kolder, Indra and Bilak accompanied by Soviet officers, attended a meeting of about 30 members of the Central Committee in the Praha Hotel, which supported the Praesidium call for calm and adopted the action programme as the basis for future party activity. It accepted the political reality of the occupation, despite the open resistance of the population to the Russians, and asked for contact with the commanders of the occupation forces. According to the Czech newspaper *Mlada Fronta*, directives were also sent from the meeting calling in effect for co-operation with the invaders. It appears that the Praha Hotel gathering was the possible basis for a collaborationist government.

The efforts of the conservatives were dramatically countered by the convening of an emergency party congress in Prague on 22 August, which was held secretly at the CKD works. It was attended by 1,192 of the 1,543 elected delegates, but most of the Slovaks could not get there in time. The congress condemned the invasion and demanded the release of all detained officials. A resolution stated that "Czechoslovakia's sovereignty, the bonds of alliance, the Warsaw Pact, and the agreements of Cierna and Bratislava were trampled underfoot". A new Central Committee and Praesidium were elected from which the pro-Soviet conservatives were excluded.

While the congress was expressing full solidarity with the arrested leadership, President Svoboda was under pressure from the Russians and the Czechoslovak collaborators to form a new government amenable to Soviet wishes and excluding Dubcek and other progressive leaders. Svoboda, however, refused to play the role of a 1968 Hacha and on 22 August demanded direct talks with the Soviet leaders and refused to agree to the formation of a new government. The political stalemate and the popular support for the legal government convinced the Russians that new tactics were necessary. They therefore agreed to high level talks and Svoboda flew to Moscow on 23 August.

The Russians had clearly abandoned their aim to establish a quisling government because it would have lacked any legitimacy as every important political body had denounced the invasion. The only alternative was ruthless military rule, but the Russians could not afford to find themselves directing a bloodbath of repression at a time when full details of the occupation were being received by the world's television screens. Dubcek and the other leaders, having been disgracefully treated by the Russians (it is probable that Kriegel, a Jew, was even tortured), were released from detention and permitted to join the Moscow talks.

It was above all the heroic mass resistance of the Czech and Slovak people that

gave strength to the party leaders and the legal government and which forced the Russians to change their plans. Within hours of the invasion "the fraternal Czechoslovak people" began their non-violent resistance. Clandestine television and radio stations were set up spontaneously throughout the country, their broadcasts boosting the morale of the people and directing the opposition to the occupation. They ordered the removal of street signs to confuse the invaders and appealed to railwaymen to delay a Soviet train carrying radio jamming equipment to such good effect that the Russians were forced to transport it by helicopter. The authorities aided the popular response in other ways; police cars were sometimes used to distribute newspapers and the Czechoslovak Army provided transmitters and transport for the free radio and television services.

The non-violent nature of the resistance was remarkable. Very few examples of fighting took place with the exception of a struggle outside Prague Radio on the first day of the occupation. Soviet tanks in the cities were surrounded by the population who argued with the soldiers. Obvious parallels with the Nazi German aggression in March 1939 were drawn in posters and cartoons, and swastika symbols were daubed on Soviet tanks. So effective was the non-violent opposition that the Soviet forces had to stage their own shooting incidents to provide their cameramen with an opportunity to film the counter revolution at work.

The resistance had prevented the installation of a quisling regime and this was no mean achievement. The real decisions were being made or rather dictated in Moscow in the negotiations between the Czech and Soviet leaders. The Russians negotiated from strength and were able to force the Czechoslovaks into compromise, the first of many which Dubcek and his colleagues had to make in the following eight months. The Czechoslovak party leadership returned from Moscow on 27 August. The communiqué referred to a "free comradely discussion" both sides agreeing to carry out the Cierna and Bratislava agreements. It

stated that the occupation troops would not interfere with the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia and that their presence was "temporary". The Czechs agreed to the censorship of the press on all those subjects concerning relations between Czechoslovakia and her allies. The communiqué added insult to injury by confirming the desire of the Soviet Union for "the broadest sincere co-operation on the basis of mutual respect, equality, territorial integrity, independence and socialist solidarity".

All four leaders broadcast to the nation on their return from Moscow. Svoboda said that the leadership wanted to stand by the action programme. Dubcek announced that the occupation troops would be withdrawn immediately from towns and cities to special reserved areas. He called for order and discipline and spoke of the need for "temporary, exceptional measures restricting the degree of democracy and freedom of expression that we have achieved", but stated that people could not give up their "original endeavours to give fuller expression to humanistic socialist principles". Mr. Cernik said that the government had approved measures to assert the government's influence on the radio, television and the Czechoslovak newsagency" but concluded that "the idea and the cause of socialism and its humane image will emerge victorious from these difficult days in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic". Perhaps the most remarkable speech was that of Smrkovsky, who spoke frankly of the dilemmas facing the leadership in Moscow. He recognised the "stern reality" of the occupation and the fact that the country could expect no help from outside. It was therefore necessary to compromise. He said that the Czechoslovaks "did not keep silent" during the negotiations and clashed "sharply and repeatedly" with the Soviet side and among themselves. He concluded that the country had "no other real guarantee and hope other than its own good sense and above all its unity". He spoke of the invasion as the second time in the twentieth century that an enormous military power had suddenly occupied the Republic.

6. the Soviet case and world reaction

The Russian case for the invasion was provided in a long article in *Pravda* on 22 August, which argued that counter revolutionaries had been active in the country and that the Czech leaders had not opposed these attempts to destroy the party. Instead they had "continued to lead events towards turning the Czechoslovak Communist Party into an amorphous ineffectual organisation, a debating society . . ." Basic Leninist norms "began to be . . . violated in the Czechoslovak Communist Party". *Pravda* attacked the freedom of the press stating that "many of Czechoslovakia's newspapers and radio and television stations were actually at the disposal of certain groupings pursuing clearly anti-socialist aims" and accused some Czech leaders of stirring up nationalist passions in order to secure support from "right wingers and enemies of socialism". Attempts had even been made to weaken the Warsaw Treaty. The article said that the western frontiers of the country were open to the secret smuggling of arms by "imperialist agents". It argued that political clubs like the 231 Club had been permitted to operate and that "things were heading for an open counter revolutionary coup attempt" and claimed that the anti-socialist activities had been increased after the Bratislava agreement. During the Cierna and Bratislava meetings "a minority of the Praesidium members" headed by A. Dubcek, had spoken "from openly right wing opportunist positions". This minority, although pretending to defend socialism were "encouraging counter revolution" and their actions were "wicked" and "treacherous". The article concluded by saying that the Soviet leaders had "decided to meet the request of Czechoslovak party leaders and statesmen to render urgent assistance to the fraternal Czechoslovak people . . ."

The Soviet press later attempted to "prove" that 40,000 counter revolutionaries were active in Czechoslovakia and that they were armed with automatic weapons. The *Soviet White Book* claimed that considerable supplies of arms were supplied by the west especially West Germany. The fact that there were so few examples of armed resistance to the

invasion showed this excuse to be mere propaganda, without a shred of evidence. The Russians were obliged to photograph Czech arms in their attempts to produce spurious excuses for their action. It is noteworthy that the pictures of arms supposedly used by counter revolutionaries were omitted from the Czech edition of the *White Book*. The book pretended to justify the invasion by alleging "the existence of an organised counter revolutionary underground". Evidence for this was the functioning of "a dozen underground radio stations" which "had been built up over a long period of time, and long before 21 August. This ignored the fact that the radio stations were organised by the legal broadcasting authorities and that they had only arisen because of the Soviet invasion. The *White Book* failed to acknowledge that there were few Communists willing to co-operate with the invaders, and made the ludicrous claim that the official Communist Party daily, *Rude Pravo*, was controlled by "reactionary elements".

World opinion strongly condemned the Soviet action. The west predictably denounced the invasion and the British Government recalled both Houses of Parliament, all parties expressing their abhorrence of the invasion, although this gesture was to some extent nullified by past failures of the Labour government to condemn United States military intervention in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere. Mass demonstrations took place in world capitals including London, to express people's aversion to the aggression of the Soviet government.

The most significant dissension came from Communist governments and Communist parties. President Tito of Yugoslavia and the Roumanian leader, President Ceausescu, both sharply condemned the Soviet Union and huge protest demonstrations were held in Belgrade and Bucharest. Moreover the two great Communist parties of the west in France and Italy refused to support the Russian action. The British Communist party described the invasion as "completely unjustified" and called for an immediate withdrawal of troops.

7. Czechoslovakia after the invasion

Although the invasion was mishandled politically by the Russians, they and their Czech and Slovak allies have since been able to gain their ends after a long courageous struggle against the occupation by the Communist progressives backed by the Czech and Slovak peoples. Eight months after the invasion Dubcek was replaced as party leader by Gustav Husak, a moderate conservative, and the popular Josef Smrkovsky was dropped from the party Praesidium. Since the April leadership changes, the conservative hardliners have gained the upper hand and have forced the resignations of progressive Communists in many key areas. Real censorship of the press has also been restored. Despite this ending to the Czechoslovak experiment it is worth recording the struggle of the progressives to retain the reform programme against heavy pressure from the Russians.

The popular reaction to the results of the Moscow talks was hostile. The Prague University Communist Party called on the party leadership to demand "an immediate, unconditional, and total withdrawal" of occupation troops. The Czechoslovak Youth League stated that it could not accept the Moscow agreement and demanded a plebiscite on it. Meetings of workers throughout the country passed resolutions opposing the agreement and the Central Trade Union Council continued "to insist on the withdrawal of foreign troops, and we cannot agree that their departure should be delayed".

Central Committee plenum and restrictions on the press

The party Central Committee met on 31 August 1968 to consider the post invasion political situation. The decisions of the emergency party congress were annulled and the Minister of the Interior, General Pavel, resigned. Mr Dubcek in his address to the meeting paid tribute to President Svoboda for his work in safeguarding the constitutional political machinery of the country. He admitted that the leadership had underestimated Soviet fears about the weakening of the Warsaw Pact alliance and declared that

Czechoslovakia had to fulfil the Moscow agreement. The defence and security organs would be strengthened and censorship would be introduced temporarily on items concerning foreign affairs, defence and state security. A debate then took place in which all factions in the party put forward their points of view.

The communiqué issued after the meeting summarised the discussion which "confirmed the determination of the Communists not to permit a return to the pre-January 1968 situation . . . isolated statements made in the debate doubting the very foundations of the party's post January policy and its implementation were generally rejected . . ." Some speakers attacked the Moscow agreement, but this view was also rejected by the Committee. The party leadership was determined to pursue a middle course between the pro-Russians and the radical reformers. The Central Committee condemned criticisms of Bilak, Kolder and others, who were widely believed to be collaborators with the Russians; they declared that they had never "committed anything *vis a vis* our people or party which was at variance with the honour of a Communist and a citizen of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic" and added that on some occasions "they had to conduct private negotiations which led to unsubstantiated calumnies concerning the nature of these negotiations" (*The Times*, 2 September 1968).

A new Praesidium was elected by the committee; three reformers, Kriegel, Cisar and Mlynar, lost their jobs, but their removal was balanced by the omission of Svestka and Kolder, two conservatives. The progressives still had a majority on the Central Committee, but a minority of conservatives were strongly entrenched. On 3 September Professor Ota Sik, the economic planner, disliked by the Russians, resigned from his post of deputy Premier.

A clampdown followed on certain newspapers. Two progressive weeklies, *Literarni Listy* and *Student*, ceased publication, although the former came out later

in the year under the title of *Listy*. The Interior Ministry struck at the 231 Club and the Kan Club, a political club outside the existing political parties, by rejecting their draft statutes. On 13 September the National Assembly passed legislation curbing press freedom and banning new political organisations.

Despite these measures, a proclamation was broadcast signed by President Svoboda, Dubcek, Husak and Smrkovsky, promising to "continue on the path we took in January to build socialism with a democratic and humanistic character". They guaranteed the personal safety of all citizens and concluded that "we will not permit deformations of socialist legality as has happened in the past years. We guarantee complete freedom for all scientists, engineers and technicians and all artists".

Considerable freedom of speech still remained in Czechoslovakia. On 17 September Jaroslav Seifert, a poet, appeared on television to read a statement of the Writers' Union attacking the Warsaw Pact governments for "grossly distorted and unsubstantiated attacks from abroad aimed at the ranks of the Czechoslovak writers". Four days later Dubcek, in a speech to party officials in Ostrava, said that it was "important to create an atmosphere in which people will not fear to speak their opinions in public". On 27 September the Journalists' Union commented that it had observed the Moscow agreement, but "some foreign news media, especially in East Germany infringe it by publishing inaccurate and false information".

The Russians continued to justify their invasion of a socialist ally. An article in *Pravda* on 26 September 1968 said that a Communist country was free to determine its own path, but this could not mean freedom to depart from communism. Communist countries also had an unconditional right to self determination provided their actions did not threaten other communist countries. It concluded that "the weakening of any link in the world socialist system directly affects all socialist countries, which cannot remain

indifferent to it". The Russians also remained anxious about the continued freedom of expression in Czechoslovakia when the Soviet newsagency *Tass* complained in September that some newspapers and broadcasts "have still not stopped anti-socialist propaganda and are even trying to increase it".

Dubcek visits Moscow

On 3 October Dubcek, accompanied by Cernik and Husak, arrived in Moscow for further talks with the Soviet leaders, who pressed their demands. As a result of the talks the Czechoslovaks promised to "step up efforts to raise the leading role of the Communist Party" and, more ominously, to reinforce "the party and state organs with men firmly adhering to positions of Marxism-Leninism", they also agreed to sign a treaty legalising "the temporary stationing of allied troops in Czechoslovakia".

On their return Dubcek made a speech in which he argued that the press freedoms of the spring had been misused by "anti-socialist" forces. He reaffirmed that there could not be a return to the methods of the Novotny era and assured people that their personal security would be protected.

the Brezhnev doctrine

Brezhnev, the Soviet Party Secretary, publicly justified the invasion when in Warsaw for the Polish party congress in November, saying that it was "dictated by necessity". He set clear limits on the independence of Communist states, for if any attempts were made to restore capitalism in socialist countries, "this is no longer a matter only for the people of the country in question, but a common problem which is a matter of concern to all socialist countries". "Military aid" to a fraternal country would only be caused "by the direct actions of the enemies of socialism inside the country and beyond its boundaries". Such a loosely defined policy ignored the fact that there was no danger of capitalism

in Czechoslovakia and appeared to mean that the Soviet leaders would be the main judge on whether attempts to restore capitalism in communist countries were likely.

the November Central Committee resolution

It was announced early in November that the Czechoslovak Central Committee would meet in the middle of the month. Factory party meetings sent a stream of resolutions urging the leaders to stand by the reform programme. The Metal Workers' Union sent a statement attacking the "distorted and unobjective information about Czechoslovakia spread by the information media of the five countries of the Warsaw Treaty" and expressed strong concern at the removal from office of people who had led the reform movement earlier in the year. Other workers' resolutions demanded the reaffirmation of the action programme and the implementation of the economic reform. On 8 November a meeting was held between newspaper editors and the Interior Minister to discuss new restrictions on the press. The weekly *Reporter*, which had attacked Soviet propaganda, was suspended for a month and a few days later tighter controls over travel were announced and journalists were warned against passing information to foreign correspondents.

When the Central Committee met, Dubcek issued a warning against public demonstrations that "could have tragic consequences" and pledged the continuation of the reform programme. He attacked "opposing extremist forces" in the party and condemned the anti-Soviet demonstrations that took place in Prague on the 51st anniversary of the Russian Revolution. A long resolution was finally agreed by the committee which showed the party leadership attempting to satisfy the Russians and the radical reformers. It attacked the Stalinist regime under which "democratic centralism" had been replaced by "bureaucratic centralism" culminating in "too great a concentration of power in the hands of Antonin Novotny". The resolution showed self

criticism by admitting that the "influence of negative activity by the mass media was not analysed and was underestimated . . . the mass information media gradually turned into an uncontrolled force". The resolution refused to endorse Soviet charges of counter revolution and stated that "the party kept its decisive influence on the political situation. The overwhelming majority of the people stood and stand for socialism".

The position of the conservatives in the party apparatus was strengthened by the formation of an eight man inner cabinet of the Praesidium. One of its members was Lubomir Strougal, a former Minister of the Interior under Novotny, and it also included Husak, Cernik and Smrkovsky. Strougal was also appointed Chairman of a bureau for Communists in Bohemia and Moravia.

increasing discontent

In the last weeks of the year students and workers showed considerable discontent. On 17 November a student sit-in by philosophy students began in Charles University in Prague and was followed the next day by 60,000 students throughout Bohemia and Moravia. Their demands included full implementation of the April action programme, restoration of the right of assembly, the continuation of self managing workers' councils, and guarantees for free scientific research and literary expression. A meeting of 1,000 Prague journalists supported the student demands.

On 20 November, the Party Praesidium, supported by the Trade Union Council, gave a warning to the striking students and accused "irresponsible people" of trying to "draw factories into the strike and thus split the working class and the unity of the working people". Prague railway workers supported the students by threatening to strike if the government took action against them. Apprentices at the Prague CKD works also came out in support, but the sit-in ended peacefully on 21 November. After the conclusion of the student protest, em-

ployees of the Czechoslovak television complained that the Central Committee had assessed the mass media "in a negative, incomplete and one sided way". On 25 November a delegation of writers, journalists, scientists and artists met Dubcek, who promised that no television or radio director would be appointed without consultation with the staff (*Guardian*, 27 November 1968). He assured the delegation that there would be no political trials and agreed to review the suspension of *Politika* and *Reporter*.

At the end of November the Praesidium of the National Assembly instructed the government to protest to the Russians against the distribution of the Soviet occupation propaganda sheet *Zpravy*. The Chairman of the Press and Information Office, Mr. Colotka, said in a television interview that the government hoped to gain the banning of *Zpravy* through diplomatic channels.

the campaign for Smrkovsky

One of the reforms which the Russians permitted was the plan to create a federal system under which the National Assembly would be replaced by a Federal Assembly. Controversy immediately arose over the chairmanship of the new body. The Chairman of the old body was the progressive leader, Josef Smrkovsky, and the trade unions wanted him to remain at his post. Also Prague factory workers threatening to strike in his support. Mr. Husak, however, argued that the post should go to a Slovak, which would have excluded Smrkovsky, a Czech. The latter received support from the 180,000 strong railway workers' union, 100,000 Ostrava coal miners and the 900,000 strong Czech metal workers' union, which also called for the continued implementation of the action programme. The party Central Committee called for an end to the campaign for Smrkovsky who supported the demands of the Slovaks that the post should go to a Slovak and appealed to workers not to strike in his favour. Eventually the party leadership approved the proposal that the Federal chairmanship should go to a Slovak,

Mr Colotka, and Smrkovsky became Vice-Chairman. The whole episode showed support for the progressive Communists from the workers and the trade unions, even though they were not able to get their way.

In the first week of the new year the party leader, Mr. Dubcek, stated that the leadership had done nothing against the reform programme in negotiations with the Russians. He said that people were "discontented about certain problems and criticise them with reason. I think, however, that we have succeeded in doing more than one would have thought possible after August . . ." He recognised that recent developments had caused an interruption of communication between leaders and people and that this was "a fault to be avoided in the future" but warned against "ill considered campaigns" which brought conflict by dramatising issues.

the suicide of Jan Palach

The most dramatic protest against the Soviet occupation occurred on 1 January 1969 when a 21 year old student, Jan Palach, set himself on fire in Prague's Wenceslas Square. A note found beside him demanded an immediate end to censorship and a ban on the distribution of the Soviet propaganda sheet, *Zpravy*. A testament given to a friend a day before his death called for the resignation of Strougal, Bilak, Indra and other conservative politicians. On 19 January the Ministry of Health announced Palach's death and 1,000 students marched to Wenceslas Square. Palach was linked with the Czech Protestant martyr, Jan Hus, who was burnt at the stake in the 15th century. The Czechoslovak leaders sent a telegram to Palach's mother expressing their sympathies, saying that "he was led to this by his genuine and ardent love of his country and its happy future". President Svoboda, in an address on television, showed the anxiety of the government when he warned against anarchy and chaos "that would lead to someone else taking over the government from us". Palach's body lay in state in the

university before the funeral and many wreaths were sent, including one from Mr Smrkovsky. On 24 January a five minute strike was held in Palach's honour and the funeral took place the next day. An estimated 500,000 people filled the streets of Prague during the funeral but there were no incidents or disturbances.

The struggle between the conservatives and the progressives continued throughout February and March. At the end of January the Federal Prime Minister, Mr Cernik, introduced the government's legislative programme saying that it was necessary to strengthen civil liberties and that "no one will be punished for his political views if he has committed no illegal act". The reformers showed no signs of giving up their struggle, but the conservatives were not slow to move. Clandestine leaflets were produced critical of Smrkovsky and President Svoboda and persistent rumours grew that the Interior Ministry was associated with the leaflets. At the end of February Professor Miroslav Kusy, head of the Slovak party ideological department wrote in *Prace* that conservative forces in Slovakia were organising themselves.

The trade unions provided a useful if only temporary corrective to the activities of the Communist conservatives. They held their conference in March, which showed strong support for the reformers. At a press conference the union leaders firmly insisted on the rights of workers to strike and the Chairman, Karel Polacek, told the congress that the unions would continue to support the Communist Party, but this would not mean automatic endorsement of the party line as had happened in the past. The Chairman of the printers' union informed the congress that his members would not tolerate clandestine leaflets attacking party reformers and the metal workers' leader, Mr Toman, stated that civil rights and the freedom of the press could not be sacrificed.

The uneasy balance between progressives and conservatives in the party was decisively tilted in favour of the latter

in April. The pretext was the popular celebrations of the two victories of the Czechoslovak ice hockey team over the Russians in the world championships. The mass gatherings in Prague and other centres naturally turned into anti-Russian demonstrations. The Prague offices of the Soviet airline, Aeroflot, were wrecked as a result of the demonstrations. Although the Czech press condemned the acts of vandalism, *Pravda* on 31 March chose to blame "right wing anti-Soviet forces for the "provocations". It accused the Czech press, radio, and television of "stirring up public passions" and stated that the Czechoslovak government had failed to take adequate measures to prevent the disturbances. It also accused Mr Smrkovsky of taking part in the demonstrations.

the Conservative offensive

The *Pravda* criticisms were backed by the visit of Marshal Grechko to Prague on 31 March. He arrived uninvited by the Czechoslovak government and accompanied by a Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr Semyonov. They presented a Soviet note to Dubcek and Svoboda stating that the demonstrations were organised by counter revolutionaries. It promised that the Soviet Army would intervene unilaterally against future demonstrations unless the Czechoslovak government took action.

The eight man inner cabinet of the Czechoslovak party Praesidium met on 1 April and a statement was issued the following day apologising to the Russians for the damage caused by the ice hockey disturbances and Smrkovsky was criticised for speeches made in violation of the November Central Committee resolution. It accused *Listy*, the writers' union weekly and *Reporter*, the organ of the journalists' union, of "gravely deviating from the line of the party and the action programme". The Press Minister also announced the reintroduction of newspaper pre-censorship and suspended the party weekly *Politika*. Despite the protest of the journalists' union against the pre-censorship, further measures

against the press were taken by the party Praesidium on 8 April. A resolution attacked "anti-Soviet and anti-socialist forces" as the major cause of political tension and promised that journalists who had recently published material against party policy would be "called to account". A government decision to suspend *Listy* was applied on 8 April. The trade union daily *Prace* continued to show signs of independence by publishing on 12 April a survey of opinion among factory workers on the new measures. The workers objected to restriction on the freedom of expression in the trade union press, demanded new elections to parliament and blamed the anti-Soviet disturbances on provocateurs wishing to discredit the reform programme.

the April Central Committee and the fall of Dubcek

On the eve of the April Central Committee meeting Mr Smrkovsky admitted political errors in an interview given earlier in the year to the Slovak youth paper. The pressure of the conservatives increased with the publication on 10 April of a statement by the Praesidium inner cabinet "rehabilitating" the traitors of August, including Bilak, Indra, Kolder and Svestka. On the same day the Trade Union Council defiantly attacked the new restrictions as an unjustified limitation of peoples' rights and blamed the March disorders on "irresponsible individuals".

The April committee meeting ended in victory for the Russians and their Czechoslovak allies. Dubcek was replaced as party leader by Dr Gustav Husak, the Slovak party Secretary. A new Praesidium of eleven replaced the former one, and Smrkovsky and other leading progressives were dropped. The new body included the conservative Lubomir Strougal and Vasil Bilak. An attempt was made to placate the workers by appointing the trade union leader Karel Polocek to the Praesidium. Husak in a television broadcast attacked the weakness of the Dubcek regime, but gave an assurance that there would be no return to the police methods of the 'fifties.

The conservatives were not content with the removal of Dubcek. The progressive editor of *Rude Pravo* was dismissed and replaced by a conservative. On 21 April the paper wrote that the Dubcek leadership had shown "excessive tolerance" towards anti-Soviet and anti-socialist forces. Two days later *Rude Pravo* blamed the March incidents on the "dark nationalistic instincts of the petty bourgeoisie". The campaign against a free press was carried farther on 15 May when the weeklies of the writers' union and the journalists' union were banned outright. The trade union newspaper *Prace* wrote that "doors are closing slowly but surely before journalists". On 26 May Prague Radio made a public apology to a number of conservative politicians and the Ministry of the Interior for "unfounded accusations of treason and collaboration" during the August invasion.

the May Central Committee

The first Central Committee meeting under the Husak leadership took place at the end of May. In his speech Husak emphasised the need to restore the leading role of the party in society, mass organisations, state bodies, the economy, and culture. He criticised the Novotny regime and said that the January leadership changes were necessary. The main fault in 1968 was that the party had allowed anti-socialist forces to develop and had failed to control the situation. "The criticism of the faults of the 'fifties and the Novotny regime was overdone to such an extent that all the activity of the Communist Party and of Communists was denigrated and slandered . . ." Negative trends in the trade union movement were criticised and Husak warned intellectuals that interference in politics would no longer be tolerated.

Leading reformers were dropped from the committee including Professor Ota Sik and Dr Kriegel. The latter was expelled from the party for his speech to the Central Committee, which was a fierce attack on the Russian occupation.

He said that he had refused to sign the August 1968 Moscow agreement because it had been concluded "against the feelings of the people of this country". He had voted against the treaty legalising the presence of Russian troops because it violated "the principles of international co-existence and the provisions of the Warsaw Pact". The agreement "was not written with a pen but with the barrels of cannons and sub-machine guns". Dr Kriegel also attacked members of the Committee who had been responsible for crimes and errors in the Novotny era.

immediate outlook

The purge gathered momentum after the May Central Committee meeting. At the beginning of June the entire Praesidium of the Prague City Communist Party Committee resigned and on 3 June the appointment of Lubomir Strougal as deputy party leader was announced. More than 2,000 local commissions have been set up throughout the country in factories and towns. On 12 June 1969 Mr Milos Jakes, Chairman of the Party Control and Auditing Commission explained that the task of the committee was to expel "all right-wing opportunist forces" and "wage a decisive struggle for the implementation of party policy". He also warned journalists about their "unhealthy professional solidarity". In July the Praesidium of the North Bohemia Regional Communist Committee resigned after a visit by Mr Strougal.

Although the conservatives have tightened their grip on the party apparatus, other organisations have refused to endorse the post-April party line. The newly formed Czech Writers' Union (the Czechoslovak Writers' Organisation has now been replaced by separate Czech and Slovak unions) held its congress in Prague on 10 June and appealed to the Federal and Czech governments to investigate the legality of measures taken against the press. It protested against the restoration of censorship and the banning of *Listy*. The 30 man central committee elected by the congress included Ludvik Vaculik, author of the 2,000

Words manifesto, Professor Goldstücker, Ivan Klima, and Jan Prochazka, all of whom played a prominent part in the 1967-68 reform movement.

Workers too have shown signs of dissatisfaction. In June 1969 the works committees of 20 large industrial plants in Prague issued a statement announcing their intention to withhold their dues to central trade union organs in protest against the leaders' failure to stand firm against reversals in the reform programme. They also attacked censorship of the press. Dr. Husak showed concern at the unrest by telling union leaders to purge "hostile elements" from their ranks and stated that there was no room in the unions for those who "speculate on how to strike, how to carry out unfriendly actions . . ." (*Guardian*, 16 July 1969).

Students have opposed the Husak-Strougal leadership. On 20 June the Union of University Students in Bohemia and Moravia was dissolved by the Interior Ministry on the grounds that it had violated a law of September 1968. One of the offences of the student leaders was the publication of articles in the western press which were, in the view of the government, against party policy. A probable reason for the ban was the refusal of the students to join the Communist dominated National Front. The union's Praesidium declared that "the activity of the students organisation cannot be annulled by an official act nor obstructed by any repression". The student parliament, meeting on 2 July, endorsed the union's stand. A resolution called on students to boycott the rival official leadership sponsored by the authorities and rejected the May Central Committee party line, stating that it negated "the national process of democratisation and humanisation of our society started after January 1968 . . ." It attacked censorship, party purges, violations of civil rights, restrictions on the right of assembly and the postponement of elections.

The Husak leadership has drawn closer to the Russians and has come near to justifying the Soviet invasion. Dr. Husak

himself has not yet officially endorsed the invasion, but he did make a pro-Soviet speech at the June International Communist Conference in Moscow in which he criticised the 1968 political developments, adding that "the leaders of the Communist parties of the neighbouring allied countries gradually lost confidence that the leadership of our party was able to stop this critical development. The well known events of August took place".

The party daily, *Rude Pravo* has been more direct. On 24 June it argued that the Soviet troops "did not endanger sovereignty or interfere in the internal affairs of our country". On 16 July 1969 it wrote that the Soviet troops came in August to help the country. They "did not come to throttle Socialism and deprive us of our freedom, but on the contrary to help us protect freedom and socialism".

8. politics and economic reform in eastern Europe

In the worst cold war years, the East European Communist governments, with the exception of Yugoslavia, became mere instruments of Stalin's political control over the region. The Communist rulers all imitated Soviet political, military, and economic institutions in defiance of their own countries' national traditions. Rigid totalitarian control was maintained with the use of Soviet police "advisers" and the populations were enrolled into party dominated mass social organisations whose main purpose was to echo the current political line. The management of the economy was strictly centralised with factory managers receiving and implementing orders from above. The "transmission belts" from party and government to the people were intended to be strictly one way, with little or no tolerance of opposition.

Yet despite this monopolistic control, the system presented a curious paradox. The party was not content with dictatorial direction of government, but insisted on making the people join social organisations and associations, which have on occasions been used as a platform against the leadership. This was shown by the Writers' Union in Czechoslovakia from 1963 onwards and in Hungary in 1956. Although totalitarian regimes attempt to erase traditional social classes and groups, these still remain and can successfully resist the ruling elite. The church, peasantry, workers and intellectuals have all shown themselves to be political forces which the Communist regimes have had to recognise. In Poland in 1956, the party had to abandon collectivisation of the land because of the peasantry's opposition and over 90 per cent of the land is now privately owned. The Polish party has also been forced to come to terms with the power of the Roman Catholic Church, so that there are now two rival centres of authority in the country.

The ruling elite in Communist countries is also divided into distinct groups with their own interests which jostle for power and influence in the state, such as the party, the security police and the army. The Communist Party has some-

times been forced to curb the security police because the latter has threatened to become the real ruler in the country. Examples include the dismissal and execution of the Soviet police chief Beria in 1953 and the dismissal of Rancovic in Yugoslavia in 1966. In Czechoslovakia, the Novotny leadership realising that the party was turning against it, made an unsuccessful attempt to use the army to remain in power. Moreover it is likely that other pressure groups will become more important in the future because of increasing technological change in the economy.

Under the Stalinist prescription, economic growth was achieved at the cost of efficiency. This policy cannot continue indefinitely because economic crises will occur as happened in Czechoslovakia in 1962-63. The increasing sophistication of industrial development makes the centralised system of management anachronistic for the efficient operation of the economy will need experts who are appointed to their positions on grounds of expertise rather than party loyalty. These technocrats will have vested interests of their own, which will not necessarily coincide with those of the party bureaucracy. Their views are increasingly finding expression within the party and a more pluralistic society is emerging in most of the Communist states.

Economic reform came in Czechoslovakia because a group of economists led by Professor Ota Sik used their positions in the party Central Committee and the State Planning Commission to convince the leadership that reform was essential if the crisis was to be solved. This problem was not unique to Czechoslovakia for the Hungarians too have been experimenting with economic reform since the beginning of 1968. If the party allows economists and other intellectuals to express their own opinions, it undermines its claim to be the sole decision taker in the state, and other interest groups may press their demands. It may, for example, become necessary to allow the workers more political and economic expression through their trade unions and the latter may become more representative.

The strike weapon may, in addition, be used in support of worker demands as in Yugoslavia, where strikes occur regularly. (In 1964 there were more than 230 strikes in Yugoslavia and in 1965 there were 270.) Before the removal of Dubcek, the Czechoslovak trade union leaders insisted on the right to strike, and in Hungary strikes have occasionally occurred because the economic reform has permitted greater freedom at plant level. The workers do not confine their demands to mere economic issues and want more industrial democracy, where they take a genuine part in decision making. The larger political objectives become more important in cases where the Soviet Union attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of Communist States by suppressing reform movements. It is no accident that workers councils have grown up in Yugoslavia and also grew up in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Since 1963 other groups in Czechoslovakia have become more vocal in support of their interests, notably the writers, students and Slovaks. Once reform has begun in the economic field, the functions of political institutions may be questioned. In Hungary in October 1968 a Communist Party paper wrote that "the new conception of economic management demands similar conceptions in the social superstructure as well".

The Czechoslovak action programme proposed reform of the National Assembly which had previously rubber stamped party and government decisions. It called for more real debates and a genuine participation of deputies in parliamentary work. Party spokesmen in Hungary have also suggested an increase in the political importance of the National Assembly; in January 1967 one of the Central Committee secretaries said that it was necessary "to increase the role of the parliament and to give greater prerogatives to the deputies". The Yugoslav regime has given parliamentary assemblies more power and influence; in 1966 the Slovene State government was defeated by the State Parliament by 44 votes to 11 and the government resigned.

At the end of the second world war the Russians were determined to ensure that Germany would never be permitted to wage another aggressive war against them. One of Stalin's methods of achieving this objective was a ruthless co-ordination of the eastern European states to provide a security zone for the Soviet Union. The relationship between Stalin and his accomplices who ruled these states was essentially colonial, for Soviet advisers were present in the police and security forces, and the administration. Most of the states had Soviet troops stationed on their territory and any widespread popular unrest was suppressed by Soviet tanks as in East Berlin in 1953 when the workers rose in revolt against the Ulbricht regime.

the Soviet response after Stalin

After the death of Stalin, several overt colonial relationships were discontinued. Many police advisers were withdrawn and the joint bilateral Soviet, East European industrial companies were dissolved and in 1958 all Soviet troops were withdrawn from Roumania. There were, however, limits to the Soviet relaxation of controls. The Krushchev speech in 1956 attacking Stalin acted as a detonator in Poland and Hungary; the Russians suppressed the Hungarian workers by a brutal armed invasion. There was a plausible reason for Soviet intervention because of the possibility of Hungary leaving the Warsaw Pact, but the Russians were clearly worried about Communist reformers who were permitting freedom of speech and other reforms.

The next major challenge to the Russians came from the Chinese and the dispute had an effect in eastern Europe where the Communist states became freer to make their own economic and political experiments. The Roumanians in particular challenged the Soviet Union over its plans to form a Communist Common Market under which all the national economies would become integrated. They insisted on industrialising their country and embarked on increased trade with the west to help finance their

ambitious plans. Significantly the Soviet Union allowed the Roumanians to get away with their deviation, but there was no attempt by the Roumanian Communists to grant freedom of the press and other fundamental political reforms as the Czechs and Slovaks were to do in 1968.

the Soviet response in Czechoslovakia

The Soviet Union also did not interfere with the Czechoslovak liberalisation that gathered pace after 1963 because the reforms supervised by Novotny were not a decisive break with the past. The Russians became worried about Czechoslovakia when the Czechs and Slovaks pressed ahead with their plans to free the press and democratise the country. As the months passed the Dubcek leadership became genuinely and widely popular, partly as a result of Soviet external pressure against Czechoslovakia. The Russians finally resorted to military intervention to crush the Czechoslovak Communist Party's programme. There are several possible reasons for this.

(i) The Brezhnev leadership was faced with considerable intellectual unrest within the Soviet Union. It resorted to repression by holding a series of writers' trials, notably those of Sinyavsky and Daniel. These took place at a time when writers in Czechoslovakia were getting greater freedom. The contrast between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union was vividly shown in 1967 by the Writers' Union Conferences held in both countries. The Soviet Writers' Congress in May suppressed a letter from the Soviet author, Solzhenitsyn, which denounced censorship, and which complained that no books of lasting value had been produced in Russia for 35 years. In strong contrast many speakers at the Czechoslovak Writers' Congress attacked the Novotny regime and Pavel Kohout read out the suppressed Solzhenitsyn letter.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the Kremlin regarded the Czechoslovak reforms with alarm, particularly when it

was cracking down on its own intellectuals. The Soviet leaders recognised that the reforms could become contagious and lead to demands for similar concessions in Russia and so accentuate their own domestic political difficulties. Other Communist countries also took fright; in March 1968 the East German regime banned the import of a Czechoslovak German language publication because it feared the impact of a free press on its own population, and in the same month student demonstrations broke out in Poland demanding more freedom.

The conservative forces in the Soviet Union asserted themselves on 10 April, a day after the publication of the Czechoslovak action programme. The Soviet Central Committee warned that the imperialists were now concentrating on the support of "nationalist and revisionist elements" to disrupt the unity of socialist countries and that a counter offensive against bourgeois ideology was necessary. The Russians' dislike of genuine debate within a Communist Party was shown by the *Pravda* editorial on 22 August, which argued that some Czechoslovak leaders attempted to transform the party "into an amorphous emaciated organisation, a kind of debating club".

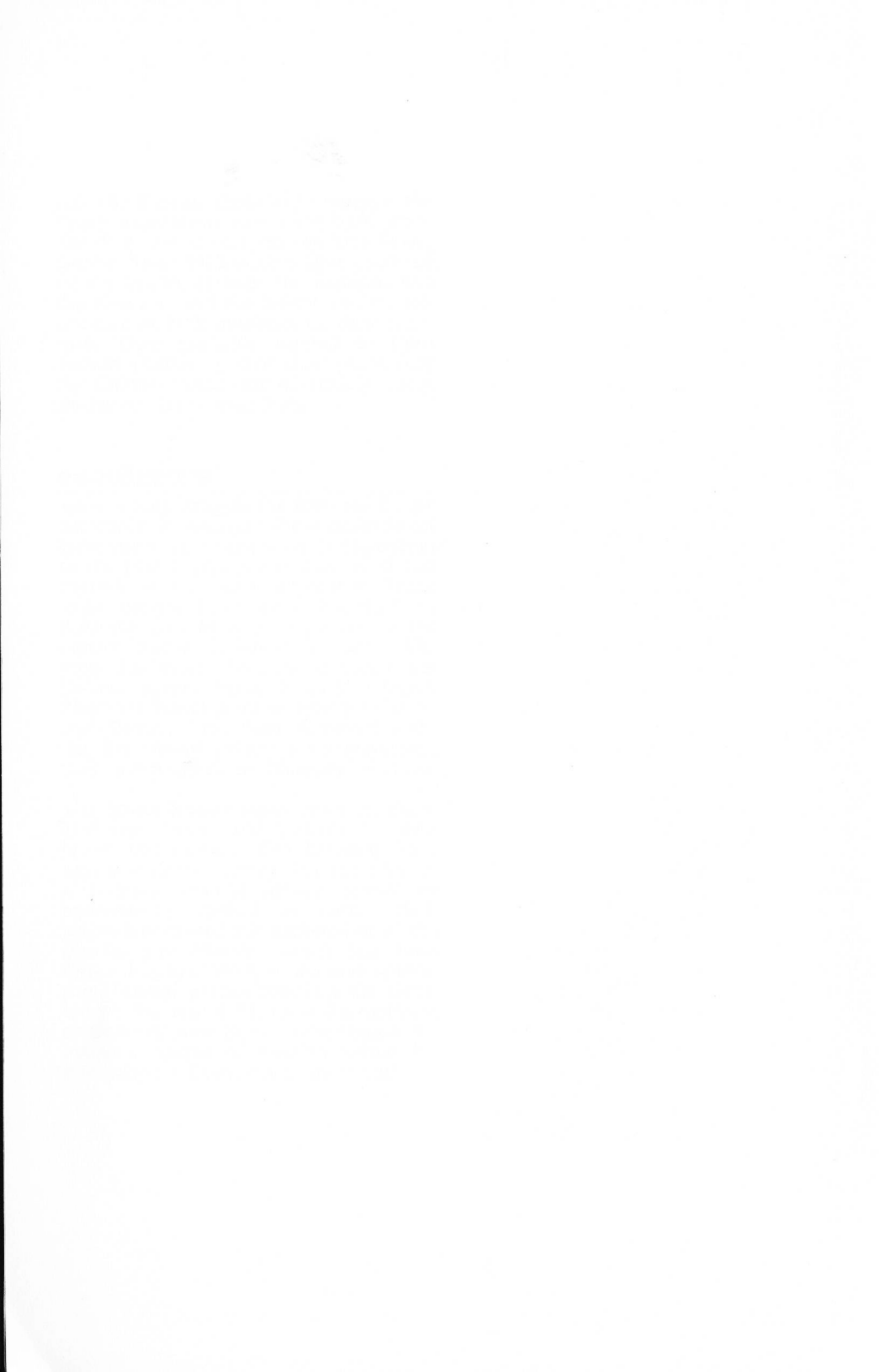
(ii) Another important factor influencing the Russian decision was the possibility that the 14th Congress of the Czechoslovak Party would bring to light more material about the sinister Soviet role in the Stalinist purges. Already in the spring of 1968, much evidence had been accumulated to show that the Russians had been responsible for the Slansky trial. The Czech reformers had made clear their determination to break with secret police dictatorship and this inevitably meant the replacement of many State Security officers who had been willing servants of the Russians. In May 1968 a purge of the secret police occurred and the Russians did attempt to prevent some of the dismissals, through their Chief Adviser to the Czech Security Service (*Czech Black Book*, edited by Littell, p69). A vital Soviet interest was therefore at stake by the threat of more revelations to come in September 1968.

(iii) The Russian decision to suppress the Czech experiment may have been influenced by the tension on the Sino-Soviet border. Since 1962 clashes have occurred on the border between the Russians and the Chinese, and the Soviet leaders felt insecure at both extremes of their territory. They probably wanted to calm eastern Europe so that they could face the Chinese threat free of anxiety about challenges from elsewhere.

conclusions

After a long struggle the Russians finally succeeded in crushing the Czechoslovak experiment. Although there is opposition to the Husak group, the latter is in full control of the party apparatus. Large scale purges have been launched in Bohemia and Moravia, directed by the deputy leader, Lubomir Strougal. The press has been effectively muzzled, the boldest papers being banned outright. From the Soviet point of view the Czechs and Slovaks have been repressed without the violent upheaval accompanying their intervention in Hungary in 1956.

The Soviet leaders have, however, alienated the Czechs and Slovaks by their brutal intervention. The Russians have won a military victory, but the idea of a humane socialist society cannot be permanently crushed by tanks. Their action has fanned the nationalism of the Czechs and Slovaks which has been directed against them as the new oppressors. Several parties criticised the invasion at the recent Moscow international conference, and Soviet intervention remains a source of division within the international Communist movement.



young fabian group

The Young Fabian Group exists to give socialists not over 30 years of age an opportunity to carry out research, discussion and propaganda. It aims to help its members publish the results of their research, and so make a more effective contribution to the work of the Labour movement. It therefore welcomes all those who have a thoughtful and radical approach to political matters.

The group is autonomous, electing its own committee. It co-operates closely with the Fabian Society which gives financial and clerical help. But the group is responsible for its own policy and activity, subject to the constitutional rule that it can have no declared political policy beyond that implied by its commitment to democratic socialism.

The group publishes pamphlets written by its members, arranges fortnightly meetings in London, and holds day and weekend schools.

Enquiries about membership should be sent to the Secretary, Young Fabian Group, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1; telephone 01-903 3077.

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