DUBCEK’S BALANCING ACT:
THE STRUGGLE TO PRESERVE REFORM AND REVOLUTION
IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1968-1969

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Submitted to Professors Linda Gerstein and Alex Kitroeff
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of
History 400b: Senior Thesis Seminar

April 19, 2012
Abstract

When Alexander Dubček took over the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1968, he embarked on an ambitious reform program meant to create a better relationship between the Party and the people of Czechoslovakia. The reform program guaranteed liberties and freedoms that had been denied by the previous Communist regimes, the country embraced Dubček and his reforms as a symbol of hope. The Soviet Union leadership, drawing upon their previous experience with Hungary in 1956, felt threatened by the reforms in what they considered a “satellite state”, as non-Communist parties formed and the press used their new freedoms to criticize the Soviet Union. The Soviets sought to ensure that the Communist Party would retain its leading role in governing the state, and demanded that the Soviet Union retain its influence with the Czechoslovakian Communist Party. The conflict between Dubček’s reforms and Soviet pressure resulted in the August 21st Invasion of Czechoslovakia by its Warsaw Pact allies, in order to prevent what they saw as counter-revolution from going any further. The invasion failed to depose the reformist leadership due to the outpouring of popular support they received from the nation. The Soviet leadership then opted to instead slowly erode Dubček’s political position, so that months after the Invasion Dubček was the only reformer left among the Party leadership. Dubček struggled against the Soviet pressure to “normalize” the situation and abandon the reform program, by using his personal authority among the people to maintain calm and order without restricting their freedoms. Eight months after the Invasion though, in April 1969, it became apparent that Dubček would be unable to hold his political position against the more opportunistic members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Dubček resigned and his successor, Gustav Husák, immediately reduced the reforms to a distant dream, not to be realized for two more decades.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people who have helped me throughout this project: Professor Gerstein, for introducing me to the magic of the Prague Spring three years ago, and for her tireless editing and advice; Professor Smith and Professor Kitroeff, for their counsel over this past year; Tom Donnelly and the Goats, for demanding excellence in all endeavors; Julie and all of my friends, for their love and support; Annie Boggess, for her wonderful editing; and my parents, sister, and grandparents, for filling me with a love of history and underdogs, and for their encouragement in all aspects of my life. I am beyond grateful.
INTRODUCTION

When the Soviet Union led the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia in order to effectively end the so-called Prague Spring, it began the process of “normalizing” conditions within Czechoslovakia. At the time of the Invasion, Alexander Dubcek, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, was massively popular with the Czechoslovakian people due to their embrace of the social and political freedoms he had implemented. These reforms had been the driving force of the Prague Spring.

Dubcek was determined to win the trust and respect of the people (both members and non-members of the Party), in marked contrast to the previous regime’s dictatorial position. Dubcek’s support came most strongly from the local levels of the Party rank and file, where the reforms had the greatest impact. The eight months following the Soviet Invasion saw Dubcek struggle to preserve the reforms he had implemented, but in that process he lost the political power he had gained in the first half of 1968. Despite all this, Dubcek remained popular with the entire people of Czechoslovakia, to the point that it was only his personal appeal for calm and order that allowed Gustav Husak to take power smoothly from him in April 1969. Why, then, despite his own best efforts and with the backing of the masses, was Dubcek unable to retain power and preserve his reforms?

Dubcek himself identified the answer shortly after the Invasion, when he noted that only through “unity” would the Czechoslovakian nation be able to adequately stand up to the Soviets.\(^1\) This unity included both unity among the political elite, and between the political elite and the country as a whole, but it only lasted as long as such harmony

was politically expedient. Constant Soviet meddling and the threat of violence against
the people played a role in the downfall of the reforms and of Dubcek himself. Some
Czechoslovakian Party leaders exacerbated these factors by their willingness to become
tools of the Soviets in their quest to reach the top of the Party hierarchy. As the political
landscape shifted back towards favoring the centrists who pushed the pragmatism of
compromising with the Soviets, Dubcek ran out of political capital and was left with no
choice but to step down from office and away from political life.

This thesis examines the relationship among the popularity of Dubcek’s reforms,
the lack of unity within the Party political elite, and the willingness of the Soviet Union
to push Dubcek to use his authority to preserve the Party’s leading role in the government
of Czechoslovakia. The mere chance that Czechoslovakia might escape from their orbit
frightened the Soviets, and they were not afraid to use force to protect their interests, as
they had demonstrated in Hungary in 1956, and again in August 1968. Even as Dubcek
fought to preserve the reforms during the normalization process, the constant Soviet
pressure caused Dubcek to lose all his political capital and forced his subsequent
resignation. This patient approach allowed the Soviets to install a more malleable figure
at the head of the CPCS, and ensured Czechoslovakia’s restoration as an obedient
satellite state of the USSR.

**Historical Background**

The state of Czechoslovakia came into being in 1919- two years before Dubcek
was born in a small Slovakian village- due to the relentless campaigning by Tomas
Masaryk during the negotiation of the Treaty of Versailles. Masaryk served as the
President of his state until 1935, when he passed the office over to Edvard Benes. Benes
came to power shortly before Hitler occupied the Czech regions of Bohemia and Moravia and created a puppet government under Father Tiso in Slovakia. The Communist Party was an increasingly influential presence in the country during the occupation, in contrast to the Benes government, which had fled to London during the war. Prague was freed only after the fall of the Nazi regime in Germany, while the Red Army liberated Slovakia throughout the fall of 1944. Communists were at the forefront of the guerrilla resistance against the Nazis that occurred in both the Czech-lands and in Slovakia, but it was not until the Soviets entered the region in 1944 that they made progress towards liberation. The three years following World War II saw the re-formation of the state of Czechoslovakia under President Benes, as the Communist Parties of Czechoslovakia and Slovakia used their newly earned influence to become “vital partners” with other democratic parties in the post-War government, winning a plurality of votes in the 1946 elections.  

On February 20, 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) successfully launched a coup against the Coalition of democratic parties governing the country. The Party then quickly expanded its membership base, and began exerting its influence throughout the country. By the early 1950s, however, as Czechoslovakia joined the Warsaw Pact, divisions arose between some of the more influential members of the party over the treatment of Slovakia by the Prague-based Party. Following Stalin’s example, these divisions were settled by “purging” various members out of the Party. These purges cemented the CPCS’s position of following behind the Soviet model, as Stalinists would rule the country until Dubcek took over the Party. The Party was not

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wildly popular at any point during Stalinist rule. In 1953, more than half of the villages in the country remained outside the socialist sector, even as the Party claimed to have vastly improved production rates throughout the country. This disconnect between Party and people seems to have existed throughout the Stalinists’ time in power, and it was this lack of trust and understanding that Dubcek most to remedy wanted.

By the mid 1960s, various groups and individuals had begun to take action against the Stalinist leadership of Antonin Novotny. Ota Sik, the head of the Party’s Economic Institute, proposed in 1966 a series of sweeping economic reforms that would reduce the bureaucratization and centralization that so greatly hindered the country’s economy. Sik recognized that these policies would only be effective if they were accompanied by parallel political reforms. Novotny made a token effort at instituting Sik’s measures, but ignored the necessary structural changes of decentralization that would have given them a chance to be effective. The Writer’s Union Congress in June 1967 provided another avenue for momentum to gather behind a dissenting position. A series of writers, including Milan Kundera and Ludvik Vaculik, spoke out against the “censorship, against the suppression of individual liberties, against bureaucracy, and the arbitrary actions of the police,” which then characterized the country as it was run by Novotny. This indictment of Party policy served as a rallying cry for potential reformers, especially including the media and students.

Alexander Dubcek found himself in position to become the key figure of the reform movement at this point, having worked in opposition to Novotny’s regime for

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3 Shawcross, Dubcek, 48; Shawcross, Dubcek, 51.
4 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 136.
5 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 33.
6 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 65.
several years. Dubcek proposed a resolution at the October 1967 Central Committee meeting meant to “put an end to the Party’s bureaucratic meddling in government business,” providing the political reform necessary to allow any potential economic reforms have a chance to be effective. This proposal opened a Pandora’s box for Czechoslovakian politicians, and the resulting two-month long skirmish for power ended with Dubcek becoming the General Secretary of the Party, thus able to separate the State government and the CPCS, which had been consolidated under Novotny. The Stalinists had insisted on the Party’s micro-managing of the government, thus rendering any state government ineffectual its influence. Dubcek had vast experience with the inefficiencies created by this over-centralization and bureaucratization, and one of the his most visible reforms was to empower the state government to act without the oversight of the Communist Party bureaucracy. Out of all the Warsaw Pact nations, Czechoslovakia had been the least affected by the 20th Soviet Congress in 1956, where Khrushchev made his secret speech denouncing the excesses of authoritarianism. Unlike Hungary and Poland, where the governments moved (or at least attempted to move) towards more democratic methods, Czechoslovakia had witnessed no release of any kind of power that had been held by the Party.

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7 Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last*, 115.
8 As Timothy Garton Ashe writes: “...one of the recurrent problems in describing Communist systems (or should I say, formerly Communist systems) is precisely to find an appropriate collective noun for the people and institutions who actually wield power. To say, ‘the government,’ for example, would be wrong, since in such systems the government did not really govern: the Party did, or some mixture of the Party, the police, the army and the Soviet Union.” Timothy Garton Ashe, *The Magic Lantern*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 92.
9 Shawcross, *Dubcek*, 146.
One of Dubcek’s most important tasks upon taking over the CPCS was to move away from the Stalinist policies of repression that had characterized the organization for the past 20 years. In order to place the Party on a firm democratic foundation he allowed, and even encouraged, a thorough denunciation of the early 1950s CPCS repressions against the “bourgeois nationalism” of which the Slovak Party leaders had been accused. This unifying measure was meant to “remove the heavy stone” under which the “whole country groans,” and set the stage for further nationalization of the socialist process\(^\text{10}\).

Early in the reform process, the Soviets publically gave their approval, as Brezhnev had spoken to Dubcek several times in the months before January 1968 and expressed confidence in him. As the reform course developed, though, the Soviets were able to communicate to the Czechoslovakian leaders just how close an eye they were keeping on the actions of Dubcek and his reformists. The first development against which the Soviets felt compelled to act was the collapse of censorship in early March 1968, which allowed magazines such as “Literarni Listy” to be published without any oversight. The initial months of Dubcek’s Party leadership included cautious steps towards reform, but also hinted at more ambitious plans. The Soviets, sensing the potential for a rapid acceleration of reforms that would threaten the leading role of the Party, consistently spoke out against the pace of the reforms, especially at the Dresden Meeting on March 23. Dubcek began to tack back towards the political center just a week later, acknowledging the truth in the Soviet concerns.\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last*, 135.

This shift can be illustrated through the change in the Action Program as Dubcek proposed it in January, and as the Central Committee approved it on April 10. The program Dubcek originally envisioned would curtail the Party’s ability to dictate, and create “new guidelines for democratizing our Party and our society,” by instituting free multi-party elections for government positions.\(^\text{12}\) As events turned out, however, the more conservative members of the Central Committee were able to add language qualifying the guarantees called for in the document. For instance, the final draft states that “only by law,” may restrictions of various freedoms be imposed, but this does allow for those restrictions to be imposed. Another example of this tactic is the call for freedom of travel, unless it’s restriction is necessary to protect the interests of the state.\(^\text{13}\) These compromises in language removed the shine from the document, as they made it possible for the government to act against the freedoms the people believed they were being given, even as the governing body was being established as the state, and not the Party.

By this time, however, the abolition of censorship, combined with Dubcek’s idea that “we cannot change the people, so we will change the Party,” had caught the imagination of the nation.\(^\text{14}\) This sentiment also threatened the Soviet conception of the role of the Party in governing the state. Prague protestors went so far as to march in the May Day parade with placards calling for free elections to various government posts. The rest of the summer featured a tug-of-war between the Soviets’ efforts to slow down or limit reform and the Czechoslovak demands for further freedoms and liberties. On

\(^\text{12}\) Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 130.
\(^\text{13}\) Navratil, The Prague Spring ’68, 93.
\(^\text{14}\) Radio Prague, July 18, 1968, as quoted in Shawcross, Dubcek, 239.
May 4, a group of Czechoslovakian leaders went to Moscow to discuss the developments within their country with the Soviet Politburo. Brezhnev objected to the loss of Party “control over mass communications,” and also the potential for economic reforms to “lead to a restoration of capitalism.” Dubcek responded that the Party had more support than ever before, and that the media was no longer “the government’s responsibility, since [they] had abolished censorship.” This did little to reassure the Soviets that the Party was fully in control, and in mid-July, they and the remaining four members of the Warsaw Pact sent a formal letter criticizing the reforms. Specifically, they warned of the work of “counterrevolutionary forces” necessitating the suppression of “antisocialist organizations” and of the freedoms recently given to the press. The Soviets were afraid that reforms in Czechoslovakia would follow a similar path to those attempted by the Hungarian CP under Nagy in 1956, resulting in a violent uprising against the regime, which was only put down by intervening Soviet troops. Dubcek received unanimous support from the CPCS hierarchy in rejecting the Warsaw letter, including from those who would later collaborate with the Soviets following the Invasion. At this point, public opinion was decisively on the side of the reforms, as a poll conducted by the Prague evening newspaper, Večerní Praha, demonstrated that 87% of the people agreed with the reforms, and only 7% were against them. This sentiment was illustrated throughout the “Spring” by peaceful student marches and Vaculík’s “2,000 Words” leaflet, calling for the embrace of grass-roots reform.

15 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 159.
16 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 163.
17 Shawcross, Dubcek, 165.
The Soviets, however, were willing to counter such popular support by threatening military intervention, invoking the precedent set twelve years prior in Hungary. In April 1968, the Soviets proposed to move up a planned “large, multinational war game scheduled to be held [in Czechoslovakia]” from September to June. Dubcek objected to such an overt display of force, and a “limited staff exercise” was agreed to instead. However, the Soviets then proceeded to ship in 27,000 men, well beyond the agreed-to amount, and only very gradually removed them once the maneuvers were over. In addition to this display of brute force, several delegations of high military officials made visits to the country to make their presence known. Dubcek was caught squarely in the middle, trapped by the momentum of his reforms against the position of a superpower with troops surrounding, and at various points within, his country.

Warsaw Pact troops had been in close proximity to Czechoslovakia for the past twenty years, but it was only at the moment that Dubcek’s policies threatened the Warsaw Pact’s leaders that these troops posed a real threat to the country. The two contrasting influences—Soviet threats versus the will of the Czechoslovak nation—grew in strength over the course of the summer. In the first week of August, the Party leaderships of the Soviets and the Czechoslovaks met in the Slovakian border town Cierna nad Tisou, where the pattern of misunderstanding really began. Dubcek left the conference believing that the two sides had merely agreed that the “allies” would retreat from the condemnations of the Prague Spring reforms presented in the Warsaw letter, while the Soviets proclaimed that the Czechs had agreed to check those very reforms. The follow-up conference in Bratislava resulted in a “declaration of unity,” but while the

10 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 158.
19 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 193.
Czechs insisted on their right to pursue their own socialism, the other Warsaw Pact nations held to their right to intervene in the socialism of others. The Czechoslovakian people took it upon themselves to support their government, culminating in one million people signing a petition encouraging the government to stick to the reform course. Such tensions set the stage for the Warsaw Treaty Organization invasion of Czechoslovakia just a few weeks later, beginning on the night of August 20.

The invasion failed to create an immediate change among the Czechoslovakian leadership, but in the long run, it had a profound effect on the course of intra-Warsaw Pact relations, eventually leading to Dubček’s ouster and Gustav Husak’s rise to power. Although Warsaw Pact forces thoroughly occupied the entire country, the Czechoslovak passive resistance won a moral victory over the course of the next week, as the country was flooded with leaflets and petitions denouncing the invasion, conclusively demonstrating that the occupying troops were unwanted and unneeded. During this period, Dubček and his colleagues had been abducted and flown to Moscow, and used that opportunity to “negotiate” once more with the Soviets. Each side agreed that normalization must occur, but it was left nebulous whether it would come because the troops had left, or whether the WTO troops would leave once normalization had occurred. By August 27, the Czechoslovak leadership had returned to the country and begun implementing what they understood to be the agreement reached with the Soviets in Moscow. The Communiqué echoed much that the Soviets believed they had already agreed upon in Čierna nad Tisou and Bratislava less than a month earlier. The immediate effect was the removal of several key reformers, and the re-installment of many of the pro-Soviet collaborators.
Although Dubcek had massive popular support for his reforms, the threat of physical violence, as well as the political undermining from within by other Party leaders, contributed to the downfall of his program. Even as early as November, power in the CPCS Central Committee had shifted away from the reformists and towards a centrist, compromise-driven position, leaving only Dubcek and Josef Smrkovsky from among the original reformers. Eventually, Smrkovsky, too, was removed, and Dubcek was left to hang on for four months as the conservatives and opportunists replaced his reforms with increasingly repressive policies. The Czech people supported Dubcek as best they could, with student-sit-ins and the spectacular self-immolation of Jan Palach in New Town Square on January 23, 1969. The Soviets kept a constant and steady pressure on Dubcek, and by April 1969, Gustav Husak had curried sufficient favor with the Soviets to be able to call for a new government, focused on restoring calm and order. Despite Dubcek's mass popularity, he resigned on April 17, 1969, and did his successor the favor of appealing for calm amidst the transition.

Literature Review

A divide exists in the literature regarding the Prague Spring and "normalization" between works that had access to Soviet-era archives and works written during the existence of the Iron Curtain. The latter works, such as the Czech Black Book, a collection of Czechoslovak primary sources from the week between the Soviet Invasion and the Moscow Communiqué, found it easy to glorify the Prague Spring due to its premature demise. The Czech Black Book condemns the conservative collaborationists

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for betraying their country, while depicting a populace enamored with Dubcek and his Action Program. For example, each resolution submitted by various organizations to Dubcek regarding the Moscow Communiqué denounces the capitulation of the Czechoslovakian leaders. The collection does not include one piece that makes an argument for accepting the terms of the Soviets.

The notion of Dubcek as a unifying figure, against whom only a few villains would dare operate, does not mesh with the evidence now available to us. Although many of the contemporary sources glorify Dubcek and the reformers, it would be naïve to forget the limitations inherent in using such a contemporary perspective. Such contemporary accounts may accurately represent the feelings and perceptions towards an event, but they are not guaranteed to present events with detached objectivity. For example, Dubcek’s political position was not as strong as he would have liked the Czechoslovakian people to believe. The “domestic villains” of the affair- Kolder, Indra, and Bilak- actually held a slim majority in the Central Committee up until the most vital moment. Even President Svoboda was only lukewarm towards Dubcek’s administration, until the Soviets invaded. The primary source material provides insight that may otherwise have been lost over time, but access to accurate archived material can illuminate inaccuracies in the stories portrayed by that primary material. One example of this is the treatment of a letter sent by Brezhnev to Dubcek in the days preceding the

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21 In addition to the limited viewpoint contemporary sources are able to provide, they are also constrained by the agenda which inspired their production. The Czech Black Book, for instance, was compiled specifically to counter the narrative of the Invasion depicted by the Soviet-propaganda “White Book.”

Soviet Invasion. “Journalist M,” writing in the weeks following the Invasion, describes the condemnatory letter as being delivered in the same moment that the Invasion was announced. In Kieran Williams’ account several decades later, it is clear that Dubcek had received the letter several days previously, and had chosen to ignore its ominous portents. Access to the actual discussions at the highest levels of government “allow [for a] more nuanced and comprehensive” analysis to develop.23

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, many works have been published that engage archived material previously inaccessible which help shed light on Dubcek’s role in the normalization. Maude Bracke’s “The 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis: Reconsidering Its History and Politics,” analyzes four such pieces published around the year 2000, and concludes that the archived material illustrates that little was actually as black and white as it might have seemed to anyone outside of the decision-making circles. Bracke’s discussion of Williams’ The Prague Spring and its Aftermath touches on what options the Czechs might have had other than the course they had taken. Williams’ piece, however, was not a theoretical discussion, but a historical presentation of what Williams could determine had actually taken place in his period. Williams’ argument that Dubcek and his moderate-reformists were able to keep power only by unintentionally “facilitating the restoration of authoritarian rule,” thus taking power away from the popularly elected bodies promoted by the reforms, demonstrates the complexity of Dubcek’s position as he attempted to preserve the prospects of “socialism with a human face.”24

Sources

I will draw upon a variety of sources in order to thoroughly examine the causes of Dubcek's normalization. Williams' *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath* has been the backbone of my understanding of the normalization process. William Shawcross' biography, *Dubcek*, details Dubcek's life up until his replacement by Husak in 1969. Much of the information about Dubcek's background as a Communist comes from this work. Several layers of primary sources exist on top of those accounts, beginning with Dubcek's memoir *Hope Dies Last*. This work serves as an excellent starting point for delving into the mindset of the CPCS leader during the peak of his political career. The memoir, written during his time at the head of the Federal Parliament of Czechoslovakia, and completed shortly before his death (with the help of his collaborator Jiri Hochman), begins by discussing his parents' lives, and continues until the end of his own. The bulk of the text, however, deals with Dubcek's political career, centering on the Prague Spring and its demise. One potential problem with using such a memoir is the temporal distance between the events and their recording, creating room for creative memory, intentional or otherwise.

In order to address the problems stemming from utilizing memoirs as primary evidence, the *New York Times* collection has proven invaluable. The newspaper had a series of special correspondents assigned to Prague at the time, and published articles about each development relating to the reforms, the Invasion, and the normalization. Among these correspondents were Tad Szulc and Henry Kamm, both Polish-born immigrants to America. Their articles ranged in topic from "Dubcek Fan Clubs Spring Up Across Czechoslovakia," to "The Soviet Occupation-Subtle Like a Tank," and
maintained a pro-Dubcek and pro-reform bias. In addition to the Times’ reports, the CIA has a series of their declassified internal reports available under the Freedom of Information Act, and these reports paint a complete picture of the very complex situation with which Dubcek had to confront. Dubcek’s political maneuverings show up in various speeches and documents produced during the period, which are collected in Navratil’s National Security Archive Documents Reader. An additional account of the events as they happened is given by an “idealistic Romantic Communist” in the Czechoslovak journalism business, under the pseudonym “Journalist M”. His A Year is Eight Months provides an in-depth and insightful depiction of the events leading up to the Prague Spring, and the long-term movement towards reform in Czechoslovakia. This description is confirmed by official public polling data taken throughout the period Dubcek was in office. It is tempting to dismiss the public polling of a Communist country as naïve, and in the first few months the surveys were considered to be useless due to the high number of “non-responses” to the questions. By April 1968, however, the surveys became increasingly statistically significant as Dubcek’s reforms gained the trust of the nation, and the respondents began to answer openly and honestly. Through this integration of primary and secondary sources, I will be able to examine the exact course of Dubcek’s role in normalization.

25 “Czechoslovak Leadership Faces Uncertain Future,” CIA Intelligence Information Cable, October 11, 1968.
Sections

This work is divided into four main sections, each detailing a cause of the normalization process in the eight months following the Soviet Invasion. The first section discusses Dubcek’s background and shows how his rise to being the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was dependent upon his two (at times, competing) motivations: to be a good Slovak, and to be a good Communist. As Dubcek rose in the Party ranks, he increasingly sought to combine those two (separate) spheres, but ran into trouble when it became apparent that it would not be possible to both promote the Party and prevent any bloodshed among his countrymen. The second section provides the relevant background to the events in Hungary, 1956, where student protests turned violent and drew a full-scale military intervention by the Red Army. Both Dubcek and his Soviet opponents allowed their knowledge of these events to influence their decisions in the months before and after the Invasion in 1968. Dubcek, as a good Czechoslovak, wanted to prevent the bloodshed that had accompanied the Soviet troops into Budapest, while the Soviets wanted to ensure that the Czechoslovaks would not approach the radical policies that had occurred in Hungary twelve years previously.

The third section argues that the various forms of support the public gave to Dubcek and his reforms strengthened Dubcek’s position with regards to the Soviet leadership. The actions taken by the Czechoslovakian public in supporting the freedoms made it clear that they thoroughly rejected the idea of returning to the “pre-January” conditions, i.e. life under Novotny and his ilk. Throughout the “Spring” and the “normalization,” the public made use of their newfound freedoms in order to express their approval of the reforms, and to demand the further democratization of their socialist
society. The support for the reforms evolved into support for Dubček as the symbol of hope for the reforms, which gave Dubček the capital he needed to hold out against Soviet pressures for eight months. The final section demonstrates the lengths that the Soviet leadership was willing to go to in order to avoid another threat to the Soviet position comparable to the one posed by Hungary in 1956. Brezhnev thought nothing of meddling in CPCS internal-personnel decisions, and a series of formal agreements between the two nations gave the Soviets the power to do so. The Soviets welcomed the attempts by opportunists among the CPCS leadership to lessen Dubček’s authority, figuring that it was a matter of time before he ran out of either political or public capital.

ALEXANDER DUBČEK

Alexander Dubček’s role in the Prague Spring and the subsequent normalization of Czechoslovakia is best understood by examining his principles and the path he took to become the head of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on January 6, 1968. Dubček’s past provides insight into the manner in which Dubček negotiated the pressures of the popular embrace of his reforms against the pressures of the Soviet threats to Czechoslovakian freedoms.28 Dubček was imbued with a unique blend of Slovakian nationalism and admiration for the Soviet system of Communism throughout the course of his childhood, and these distinct influences motivated Dubček to act in the best interests of both the nation and the Party, as best as he could combine the two.

Dubček was born in his father’s native village of Uhrovec, Slovakia, on November 27, 1921. Coincidentally, the house he was born in was the same house in which Ludovít Stur, the “founding father of modern Slovak consciousness,” had been

28 Littell, Czech Black Book, 80-81.
born more than a century previously. This connection to Slovak nationalism is balanced by Dubcek’s father’s fervent belief in Communism. The Dubcek family spent the majority of Alexander’s childhood living and working on a commune in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 30s. Dubcek developed his excellent Russian skills early enough that he received no special treatment in the Soviet schools, and his Russian abilities later proved key to his advancement in the Communist Party apparatus. Dubcek grew up during the height of the terror of Stalin’s purges, and he consequently bought into the propaganda of the CPSU, which blamed the massive campaign of violence and terror on Nikolai Yehzov, the Soviet Chief of Police. Dubcek returned to his native Slovakia in 1938, shortly before Hitler occupied all of Czechoslovakia, and the religio-fascist Dr. Tiso took charge of Slovakia with Hitler’s support. Dubcek found what work he could over the next few years while working with the underground Communist Party of Slovakia, which had developed in opposition to the fascists in power. Dubcek formally joined in 1939, demonstrating the admiration he had developed for his father’s beloved group. When the Slovakian Revolt broke out in 1944 in anticipation of the imminent liberation by the Red Army forces, Dubcek and his brother both joined guerrilla groups.

29 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 3. Stur was in the vanguard of the Slovak National Uprising against Magyar rule in 1848-49. Stur gained influence throughout Slovakia as the editor of a “national” newspaper, and in the year preceding the Uprising proposed a revolutionary program calling for freedom of religion and language, among other aspects. The 1848 Uprising was not the first of its kind in the region however, as the Thirty Years War spilled over into Bohemia and Slovakia, leading to a series of local rebellions against Hapsburg rule, ending with the Hapsburg victory at White Mountain in 1620. Slovakia’s long history of rebellion against foreign rule therefore extends several centuries before the concept of the nation of Slovakia came into being. Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, A History of Slovakia: The Struggle for Survival, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 75.
30 Shawcross, Dubcek, 22.
31 Shawcross, Dubcek, 21.
During the revolt his older brother, Julius Dubcek, was killed by the occupying German forces, and Alexander was shot twice in the leg. While recovering in secrecy, he was tended to by Anna Ondrisova, whom he married the subsequent summer. Before Dubcek had developed a profession, or even a family, he had already demonstrated his commitment to both Communism and Slovak nationalism.

Following the war years Dubcek took up work in a yeast factory in Trencin, Slovakia, and quickly rose to a supervisory position. In his free time, however, he worked for the CPCS, acting as the secretary for the Party cell in his factory. Although Dubcek was uninvolved in the Communist coup of February 1948, Dubcek recognized this moment as a “great milestone in our development.” In 1949, he was formally hired by the Party to work at nationalizing small local businesses.\(^{32}\) This nationalization process was carried out despite the fact that the Party had spent the past three years “professing the highest regard for individual private enterprise,” foreshadowing the later failure of the Party under Stalinist rule to develop any level of trust with the people.\(^{33}\) Dubcek, “though humane,” was considered to be quite uncompromising in collectivizing the small businesses of Trencin. Dubcek’s commitment to his Party duties caused him to create difficulties for his countrymen, demonstrating the difficulty of balancing his two distinct motivations.

For the next ten years, Dubcek’s Party responsibilities steadily increased, following his election to the state Legislative Assembly in 1951, and promotion to the apparatus of the Central Committee in Bratislava. This, however, did not always correspond with increased power and insight into the highest centralized authorities.

\(^{32}\) Shawcross, *Dubcek*, 44.

\(^{33}\) Shawcross, *Dubcek*, 40.
During his rise through the Party hierarchy, Dubcek became well aware that the over-centralization and bureaucratization characteristic of Communist Party regimes led directly to inefficiency and poor economic decisions. Due to this very centralization, he was unable to do anything about it until he reached the highest Party positions. In 1954, for instance, Slovakian Party officials arranged for a new cement factory in the town he was responsible for. The factory was built far away from the local limestone deposits, so that transportation costs were unnecessarily increased, and also the factory was situated such that the town nearby was continually covered in “fine and unpleasant” dust, a byproduct from the plant. When Dubcek had pointed out these flaws during the planning stage, and proposed a location that would alleviate such shortcomings, he was accused of being a “narrow-minded bourgeois.”

Dubcek’s rise through the Party hierarchy demonstrated that his superiors looked on him favorably, but with this experience Dubcek learned that all real power resided in the hands of the Central Committees in Bratislava and Prague. Dubcek also learned that the power held by the Stalinists was being used only for the good of the Party, and not necessarily for the country as a whole.

Dubcek was essentially helpless, a non-entity, with regards to the purges carried out by President Gottwald and his allies during the early 1950s. There was little Dubcek could do as Slovakian Communists such as Gustav Husak, foreign minister Vlado Clementis, and Karol Smidke were arrested or killed. He accepted “unquestioningly the validity of Slansky’s cooked up trial,” and in several speeches at the time acknowledged the existence of the Slovakian “bourgeois nationalism” of which those men stood

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34 Shawcross, Dubcek, 49.
accused.\textsuperscript{35} Dubcek stayed mostly under the radar during this fearful period, and it was in part due to his clean hands that he was able to climb up the Party hierarchy in later years.\textsuperscript{36} That is not to say that Dubcek was not aware of the injustice behind these purges, as he “courageously” gave the eulogy at Smidke’s funeral in late December 1952. After he finished praising the man accused of “bourgeois nationalism,” Dubcek scanned the crowd, expecting to be taken into custody, but nothing ever came of it.\textsuperscript{37} This incident demonstrates Dubcek’s ability even early in his \textit{apparatchik} career to balance the demands of the Party with respect for the guardians of the Slovak nation.

Dubcek spent three years, from 1956 to 1959, at the Higher Political School in Moscow, in order to further advance his knowledge of Communist ideology.\textsuperscript{38} During his time there, Dubcek was exposed to the de-Stalinization process that followed Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” to the 20\textsuperscript{th} Soviet Party Congress. De-Stalinization affected Dubcek on a personal level, as the textbooks at the HPS had to be wildly revised in order to account for such a drastic change in Party policy. On the whole, however, he was happy that the Party had found a way to “reduce distrust” at the more local levels.\textsuperscript{39} When the Soviet Party leaders decided that it was necessary to intervene in Hungary in the fall of 1956, Dubcek agreed that it had to be done, but also believed that something was fundamentally wrong if Communism needed to be imposed upon a nation in such a

\textsuperscript{35} Shawcross, \textit{Dubcek}, 56-57. To be clear, this is Shawcross’ description of the process, not Dubcek’s.
\textsuperscript{36} Shawcross, \textit{Dubcek}, 60.
\textsuperscript{37} Shawcross, \textit{Dubcek}, 62.
\textsuperscript{38} Shawcross, \textit{Dubcek}, 65. Alternatively, Shawcross raises the possibility that Communist Parties used their slots at the school as an ideological exile, although he does not say for certain that this was the case with Dubcek’s enrollment.
\textsuperscript{39} Shawcross, \textit{Dubcek}, 66-67.
way.⁴⁰ Dubcek retained a strong affinity for all things Soviet Russian, and this in part allowed him to accept the restoration of Hungary to its place as a satellite state, especially when the Soviet Party leaders described the Invasion as a fight against a revival of “rightist, fascist tendencies.” This may be due in part to his experience living under and fighting against the fascist regime governing Slovakia during World War II.⁴¹ Knowledge of the Soviet engagement with Hungary would prove key to his later attitude once in the Czechoslovakian leadership, especially regarding Czechoslovakia’s place as a satellite orbiting the USSR. Dubcek recognized even then that once a country entered the orbit of the USSR, it would be dangerous to even attempt to leave that orbit. This tension between being a good Communist, (at least as far as the Soviet Union was concerned) and acting for the good of the nation would be at the forefront for Dubcek in the months before and after the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Following his return to Czechoslovakia from Moscow in 1959, Dubcek was named Regional Secretary of Bratislava, and also was elected to the Central Committees of both the Slovakian and Czechoslovakian Communist Parties. This combination of positions meant that Dubcek served as both a legislator and an administrator, that he had risen in both the Party and the Regional and State governments (although these bodies were by no means distinct entities under Novotny).⁴² In particular, as the Industrial Secretary, Dubcek was uniquely placed with regard to the economic problems looming over Czechoslovakia, as he saw how the reality of the situation meshed (or did not) with

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⁴⁰ Shawcross, Dubcek, 67.
⁴¹ Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 97. An additional factor in Dubcek’s acquiescence to the Soviet justification of the invasion may have the memory that the 1848 Slovak revolt was directed against the Hungarian Empire, who had ruled in Slovakia for several centuries leading up to that point.
⁴² Shawcross, Dubcek, 69.
the actions taken by the Party apparatus in response. In 1963, he achieved his penultimate promotion, taking on the role of First Secretary of Slovakia. Dubcek held this post for the next five years, until he was named the First Secretary of the CPCS on January 6, 1968.

Dubcek’s selection as the First Secretary capped five years he had spent steadily working against the Stalinist tendencies of Antonín Novotný, the long-time First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) and also the President of Czechoslovakia. Novotný had both of those positions for over a decade at that point, and insisted on acting as autocratically as the Soviets would allow. Dubcek believed that not only were the Stalinists ruining the country by causing economic woe, but such lacking leadership put the Party in a bad light. Dubcek had confronted the Stalinists (as Novotný and his colleagues were categorized) in the past, especially regarding the excesses of power taken on by the Stalinist regime. In particular, Dubcek had been waging battle for years over purges enacted by Novotný and his cronies in the early 1950s. Although Dubcek had somewhat successfully helped rehabilitate many of the political victims, Novotný had just as successfully avoided taking any responsibility for the misdeeds, instead allowing others (such as Dubcek’s nemesis Siroky, and also Bacílek, the Slovakian First Secretary whose demotion cleared the path for Dubcek to take over the CPS), to take the fall for him. Tensions over this matter had steadily risen.

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43 The title of the heads of the various Communist Parties was changed from General Secretary to First Secretary upon Stalin’s death, in order to prevent such an accumulation of power as Stalin had experienced. This nominal change had little effect, as evidenced by Novotný’s extended reign.

44 Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last*, 85. One example of this is a report Dubcek submitted in April 1963 to the CPCS Central Committee, stating that each senior member of the Party during the purges shared some collective responsibility for them.
since Dubcek had served on the Kolder Commission in 1963, which had formed in order to investigate the purges of the previous decade. Even after Dubcek took office in 1968 the two sides clashed with each other in the official media. In fact, the media served as a point of further contention between Dubcek and Novotny. When the official paper of the CPS published an article criticizing the “lagging rehabilitations,” Novotny was outraged, and publicly questioned how Dubcek could have condoned the printing of such an article. Dubcek, foreshadowing his later strategy of compromising when possible, publicly agreed that the article should not have been published, but instead cited the method of publication as the problem, leaving the (critical) content untouched.

One other issue that drove a deep divide between Novotny and Dubcek was the continual disrespect and maltreatment of Slovakia by the Novotny regime. Throughout the period of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, the Slovak region was ignored and considered to be backward. In 1960, Novotny went so far as to curtail all of the “autonomous rights” of the various Slovakian governing bodies, including taking away Bratislava’s status as the regional capital, and reducing the newspaper of the CPS to a translated copy of the Prague-published Rude Pravo. When, in 1967, Novotny succeeded in insulting the Slovakian national consciousness through a series of blunders, Dubcek secured the backing of the region as the one politician who cared about Slovakia. Husak later made use of Slovakia’s conservative tendencies, but, as Dubcek took power, he was considered to be a defender of the nation of Slovakia. Dubcek’s nationalist consciousness left him vulnerable to the same accusations of “bourgeois nationalism.”

45 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 89.
46 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 25. Instead of one “regional capital,” Slovakia was given ten regional centers, each of which was subordinated to Prague.
47 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 83.
that had ruined Slovakia’s Slansky and Smidke fifteen years earlier. The tensions Dubcek experienced between doing what was best for one’s country, and performing one’s duty to the Party served as a rehearsal for Dubcek’s most difficult decisions, when he had to negotiate between his own interest, the will of the nation, and the threat posed by the Soviets.

The tensions which arose from Dubcek’s desire to be both a good Slovak and a good Communist played a key role in influencing his actions during the Prague Spring, the Soviet Invasion, and especially during the normalization process. Dubcek emphasized the potential his reforms had to make Communism better, both for the nation and in and of itself. Czechoslovakia had everything to gain from implementing “socialism with a human face,” and Communism could only benefit from being placed on a firm, democratic foundation by winning the trust of the people. So long as there was little tension between what was best for the Party and what was best for the nation, Dubcek successfully implemented his programs of freedom and socialist democracy.48

That Dubcek was at least temporarily successful is in little doubt. The apex of this success may well have been the May Day parade in Prague, when, without any prior planning (unlike previous parades), crowds “surged along the main boulevards” of Prague in order to welcome the newly elected representatives of both the Party and the state.49 In addition to this political success, Dubcek notes in his memoirs that this occasion was especially momentous for him as the “first Slovak in the office of

48 It is not surprising that Dubcek had to weigh two distinct sets of interests as the First Secretary, given that, under Novotny and all Stalinist regimes, the Party was the government, in function if not in name, as discussed in my Introduction. For an indictment of this system, see: Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 43.
49 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 142.
Czechoslovak First Secretary," and also to be a Slovak “reviewing a Czech May Day parade.” So long as Dubcek was able to combine his interests as a Communist and a patriot he was able to successfully lead the Party and the nation, because he viewed the two bodies as interdependent on one another. He believed the Communist Party was the best vehicle to carry Czechoslovakia towards prosperity and happiness, and that the people of Czechoslovakia were ready to create their own, improved brand of Communism.

Following the Soviet invasion and then throughout the normalization process, Dubcek found it increasingly difficult to blend the interests of both the Party and the state. Attempting to do so anyway left him at ends with the Soviet leadership, who cared entirely about the Party, and about the state only so much as it served its duty as a guard against West German “revanchist” machinations. When Dubcek learned of the Soviet-led invasion, his reaction was one of man who had failed his nation: “that they have done this to me, after I have dedicated my whole life to cooperation with the Soviet Union, is the great tragedy of my life.” Because of his more personal connections with, even admiration, of the Soviet Union, the Soviet betrayal of their Warsaw Pact alliance on August 20, 1968, cut Dubcek especially deeply. His first response was not to engage in political manipulations, however, but to prevent bloodshed to the best of his capability, working as a good countryman to preserve Czechoslovak lives. Within hours of the first troops crossing into the country, Dubcek was heard on the radio repeatedly calling for

50 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 150. This sentiment is particularly poignant when he was writing his autobiography, considering that the country was on the verge of finally fracturing into two separate states.
51 Shawcross, Dubcek, v.
calm and dignity, so as to prevent any kind of catastrophe. This obligation to prevent bloodshed continued throughout the normalization period, and seemed to be Dubcek’s main motivation for calling for calm and order again following his resignation. Although he had failed to elevate the Party to his sought-after heights, Dubcek acted as best he could to prevent the country from sharing in his hardship.

When the Slovak, Husak, replaced Dubcek in April 1969, Dubcek entered a form of purgatory, where, still officially a Party member of high standing, he was kept from speaking, and, when possible, appearing in public. Husak intentionally prevented him from quelling the unrest which sprang up on the August 1969 anniversary of the Warsaw Pact Invasion, and then was able to blame him for the thousands of protesters cheering “At Zije Dubcek,” or “Long Live Dubcek!” Despite his protests, Dubcek was kept from preventing both the provocation and the crackdown on the protestors. This incident harmed the image of Communism in the country, and also harmed many of Dubcek’s countrymen. This period was resolved when Dubcek was sent off to be the Ambassador to Turkey. Even there, however, he was kept on a tight leash by the security officers who prevented him from talking to any foreigners. On March 23, 1970, Dubcek was suspended from the Party, and more or less removed from public life for the next two decades. Aside from brief appearances in various Western newspapers, Dubcek labored in the Forestry Administration and remained under constant police surveillance. During the Velvet Revolution in 1989, however, Dubcek emerged once again into the public eye, and served as a figurehead of the movement that ended Stalinist rule in Czechoslovakia.

54 Shawcross, *Dubcek*, 233.
Timothy Garton Ashe’s account of the Velvet Revolution, *The Magic Lantern*, describes the first public appearance Dubcek made in front of the crowd in Wenceslas Square: “the crowd gave a roar such as I had never heard. ‘Dubcek! Dubcek!’ echoes...” Ashe describes the crowd’s reception of Dubcek as one befitting a “legendary hero,” and that Dubcek “must believe that he will wake up in a moment and find out that he is dreaming.” Dubcek was elected to head the Federal Assembly, which went from a “rubber stamp... to an active, independent legislature,” the democratization he had been on the verge of twenty-one years earlier. He was in the middle of a re-election campaign when he was in a severe car crash on September 1, 1992, and died 9 weeks later. Dubcek’s lifespan coincided almost exactly with the existence of the state of Czechoslovakia, and he spent his entire adult life working through the Communist Party in order to create better conditions for the country as a whole. When this motivation came into conflict was his Party duties, however, Dubcek was forced to negotiate between those two interests. Dubcek’s knack for pursuing compromise stemmed directly from his desire to create a symbiotic relationship between Communism and Czechoslovakia.

**HUNGARY, 1956**

The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 serves as a useful comparison to the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Both the Soviet leadership and the Dubcek regime were aware of the specter of Hungary haunting Communism. Parsing through these events therefore gives some indication of potential motives for the actions taken (and not taken) by each side in 1968. As in Czechoslovakia years later, Soviet

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troops entered Hungary after the "leading role" of the Party was threatened, and the Soviets installed a more conservative leadership. Unlike in Czechoslovakia, however, Soviet troops faced a violent popular uprising of Hungarian nationalism in addition to the more passive student protests and demonstrations, and the Soviets successfully manipulated the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party in order to preserve their relationship with it. Another key difference was that, while the Prague invasion had followed a surge of support for the Party, the events of October and November 1956 occurred while Hungarian support for the Party was at its lowest.

In order to examine the effect of the Soviet Invasion and interference in Hungary in 1956 on the 1968 invasion and normalization of Czechoslovakia, it is necessary to establish an adequate background in the facts of the situation in 1956. Post-World War II Hungary followed much the same course as Czechoslovakia as it turned into a satellite Soviet state. Liberated by the Red Army in 1945, and then taken over by the Communist Party under Matyas Rakosi in 1948, Hungary to this point paralleled Czechoslovakia’s path very closely, which allows direct comparisons with regards to each country’s relationship with the Soviet Union. Again similarly to Czechoslovakia, and everywhere in the Eastern bloc, the first few years of Communist rule saw a mimicking of the Terror induced by Stalin beginning in the 1950s, as various figures were denounced, including the Foreign Minister, Laszlo Rajk, and eventually the Prime Minister, Imre Nagy. Rajk was executed in 1949, but Nagy was not expelled from the Party until 1955, following his 1954 attempt to implement a moderate reform course; he was accused of "right
deviationism.” Nagy had received support for his reforms at the lower levels of the apparatus, but by the spring of 1955 the Kremlin came to regard him as “nationalistic”, and the same Stalinists he had criticized expelled him from the Party. Nagy’s readmission to the Party in mid-October 1956, days before protests and demonstrations broke out against the Communist regime, proved to be too little to assure the protestors of the Communists’ good intentions.

The months leading up to the first Soviet intervention in October 1956 saw a major political reshuffling that only encouraged the Hungarian opposition movement to struggle against Communist rule, in contrast to the Prague Spring’s role in generating support for the CPCS. In his account of the tumultuous weeks of the Hungarian Revolution, Paul Lendvai references Tocqueville’s thought that “the most perilous time for a bad government is when it tries to mend its ways.” In the several years leading up to the Hungarian Revolution, the Hungarian government, in the form of both Nagy’s reforms and his later expulsion, put itself in exactly the situation of which Tocqueville warned.

The unrest in Hungary had several spark points, but the key impetus for the uprising was the hint of democratization in Poland. The moderate Gomulka had been elected to be the First Secretary of the Polish CP in October, 1956, and the Poznan workers’ revolt of June, 1956, resulted in improved working conditions. This proved that a Communist government could be manipulated by its constituents, as the workers of Poznan had real, valid complaints, and they were addressed and worked with by the

59 Lendvai, *One Day that Shook the Communist World*, 41.
60 Lendvai, *One Day that Shook the Communist World*, 43.
Polish government, rather than being ignored or castigated. In Budapest on October 23rd, a spontaneous student-led rally took place in solidarity with the reform movement in Poland, but it quickly turned to embrace the issue of Hungarian freedom and autonomy from foreign rule. Various Hungarian student groups then quickly began publishing and publicizing various points of demand, which invariably included the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops then positioned in the country, the election of a new set of Party leaders through free elections, the complete de-Stalinization of the government, and guarantees of a free media. These ambitious demands threatened not only the status of the Party's leading role in governing the country, but also the country's status as an obedient satellite of the Soviet Union.

Over the course of the day, the students were increasingly joined by young workers as they sang the Hungarian national anthem and chanted various anti-Soviet slogans. The protestors, resplendent with Hungarian flags with the Communist coat of arms torn out, proceeded to turn violent, attacking various symbols of dictatorship and foreign rule, including the massive Stalin monument. This act was the most visible of the anti-Soviet protests, but in addition many Red Stars were removed from the government buildings, and books and pictures about and by Marx, Lenin and Stalin were burned in the streets of Budapest. Even as Nagy tried to reassert control over the situation, both in terms of the protests and in terms of implementing his reforms, Soviet troops were en...
route to Budapest. The involvement of these foreign troops turned the demonstrations against dictatorship into a guerrilla war for independence, completing the image of a satellite state gone awry.

The ensuing days saw a full-fledged war in the streets of Budapest and throughout the country between various militant groups and the occupying Soviet troops. Nagy himself announced the enactment of militia law, and initially condemned the protestors as counterrevolutionaries. In doing so, Nagy lessened the enthusiasm for his own popular support generated by those very counterrevolutionaries the day before, and further militarized the situation. Budapest workers responded by launching a massive general strike, bringing the city to a standstill as groups of armed citizens took on the Red Army. The following day, October 25, Soviet troops and tanks massacred hundreds of unarmed protestors. The Hungarian Politburo then agreed to one of the protestors’ demands by removing Gero and promoting Janos Kadar to the head of the Party, with the Soviets’ support. After several days of conflict, most notably around the Corvin theater district, the Nagy government declared the uprising a “national-democratic” revolution, and a Soviet troop withdrawal was promised. The Soviets encouraged this view, even launching detailed negotiations regarding the specifics of an imminent withdrawal.

Despite these encouraging signs, a full-scale occupation occurred began on November 4, as Soviet troops based both in Hungary and in several neighboring countries moved in and launched a “brutal and indiscriminate” attack against the various pockets where armed resistance had been given most strongly in the previous weeks. The end

64 Lendvai, One Day that Shook the Communist World, 56.
65 Lendvai, One Day that Shook the Communist World, 60; 251.
66 Lendvai, One Day that Shook the Communist World, 149.
result of this second intervention was the installment of a Moscow-friendly government in Hungary, as well as 3,000 dead and tens of thousands of wounded people.\(^{67}\) This invasion came hand-in-hand with the blatant disregard for the political autonomy of Hungary by the Soviets. In the week between the cease-fire and the Soviet re-occupation, Nagy had undertaken a series of bold steps that later would serve as a warning to Dubcek about the limit his actions could reach. Initially, Nagy’s reforms were related to internal issues, such as the structuring of the Security apparatus, and then Nagy expanded his policies to include the formal establishment of a multi-party state. Both of these programs came directly from the protesting masses, and for a moment it appeared that the Revolution would end as a more aggressive Poznan.\(^{68}\) The hint of Hungarian intentions to declare neutrality and withdraw from the Warsaw Pact alarmed the Soviets, however, and they arranged for the obedient Kadar to replace Nagy, thus ending the threat to the Soviet empire.

On November 1, Kadar was flown to Moscow in order to discuss his role in a post-Nagy government. It was clear to him that his choices were either to work as an outright collaborator, or be lumped in with Nagy and removed from any position of power.\(^{69}\) Although he argued against the second Soviet invasion, he did agree to head the new government, which was at first entirely dependent on Soviet soldiers and policemen for its safety and authority.\(^{70}\) Kadar’s position was limited almost immediately; he had very little room to work with. Although he made lots of promises about “clean, honest elections,” his government was rendered impotent by the Hungarian Workers Councils,
who led a series of nationwide general strikes in response to continued violence by the Soviet troops against the nation; it was only in February 1957 that Kadar was able to disband the Workers Councils. It became apparent that the government would not be able to keep its promises regarding the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the creation of a multi-party political system. Instead, under Kadar the Hungarian state smoothly reverted to its status as a stalwart Soviet satellite.

The seeming-parallels with the events in Czechoslovakia makes the violence and lack of effective leadership in Hungary all the more striking. A moderate reform course came about in opposition to years of political turmoil, especially involving high level purges of the Party. These reforms gained the support of the population at large, including the workers on whose behalf the Communist Party claimed to be acting. As the situation escalated, however, the Hungarian Party leadership proved malleable to the will of the Soviets, as opposed to the struggle against Soviet wishes which Dubcek undertook twelve years later. Nagy was unable to gather the people behind him before he capitulated to the Soviets, unlike Dubcek, whose abduction served to unite the country behind him regardless of his actions. Even though Nagy vacillated between various positions with regards to the insurgents, calling them “fascists,” “counterrevolutionaries,” and then finally “national-democratic revolutionaries,” his hesitation to support the people of Hungary against the Soviet troops counted against him, and made it easy for the Soviets to replace him with Kadar. Kadar’s abduction to Moscow directly parallels the Soviet treatment of Dubcek and his colleagues. Another potential comparison, the threat of which Dubcek must surely have been aware, was the treatment of Nagy following his replacement in November 1956. He and his family and close followers were abducted
and sent to Romania, after being denied sanctuary in various embassies, most notably Yugoslavia. Nagy was held in a villa by Hungarian Security Services, until his arrest and subsequent extradition and execution in 1958. Dubcek therefore knew he had to be cautious with his reforms, so as not to upset the Soviets. During the first days of Dubcek’s abduction, he had no way of knowing if the Soviets planned on treating him like Nagy. The knowledge that the Soviets believed that they held his life in their hands caused Dubcek to be much more willing to seek out a compromise agreeable to the Soviets, even if it meant abandoning the reforms entirely.

The nature of the two uprisings also differ in several ways. In Hungary, a violent outbreak preceded a violent response, as both sides escalated attacks against each other. This culminated in the shelling of various Budapest city blocks as punishment for aiding the insurgent fighters. In Prague, on the other hand, the invasion took place only due to political activity, the protests and demonstrations came as a response to the invasion, and for the most part peace was maintained during the occupation. In a similar vein, the Hungarian protestors saw only Russian soldiers, whereas the occupation of Czechoslovakia was performed all five of the other Warsaw Pact nations. This diversity may have been meant to symbolize the unity of the Warsaw Pact against the liberties taken during the Prague Spring, whereas in 1956 the Soviets needed to act decisively in order to preserve Hungary’s status as a satellite state, as an example to the other satellite states.

The roles of Nagy and Kadar do not correspond neatly to Dubcek and Husak twelve years later. Dubcek encompasses both Nagy’s reforms, and Kadar’s normalization through compromise and broken promises. Lendvai believes that the
Soviets were never going to allow fundamental changes to take place in Hungary, so that once Kadar realized this, he had little choice but to normalize Hungary’s status as an obedient satellite state. Dubcek, encouraged by the popular support for the reforms, believed that he had a chance to both preserve the reform program and placate the Soviet fears of Czechoslovakian independence. It was only after the reform program dwindled to nothing, and the Soviets still insisted on interfering following another wave of protests in late March, 1969, that Dubcek realized he could not accomplish both of those tasks.

**POPULAR SUPPORT FOR DUBCEK’S REFORMS**

Over the course of 1968, Dubcek developed massive popular support as enthusiasm for his reform program grew. This support blossomed especially following the Soviet invasion, as the Czechoslovakian people rejected the blow against the autonomy of their nation, and gave Dubcek the strength he needed to fend off Soviet influence after they had occupied the country. Even as Dubcek gradually backed down from his reform program, the nation as a whole supported the symbol of hope and freedom that they believed he stood for. Dubcek received much of the same support that Nagy had received twelve years earlier in Hungary, as his strongest backers included the press and the students, who were outspoken in their embrace of the new freedoms, and in rejecting foreign influence on their country. During the Soviet invasion, Dubcek’s supporters earned a moral victory that forced the Soviets to allow Dubcek to stay in power, at least for another eight months, and in the process won the occupied country the sympathy of the world. Although Dubcek did end up paving the way for Czechoslovakia to be returned to its status as a satellite state of the USSR, his popular support made this

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71 Lendvai, *One Day that Shook the Communist World*, 120.
process much less painful for the country as it occurred.

**The Prague Spring**

The first eight months of Dubcek’s rule saw him gather vast popular support, which culminated in the outburst following his abduction during the Soviet Invasion. During the May Day Parade in Prague in 1968, groups marched carrying (unapproved) placards that stated their support for Dubcek and his reforms, and also various organizations that stood to benefit from Dubcek’s loosening of strict Party control over the government.  

Dubcek claimed to be overwhelmed by the “spontaneous expressions of sympathy and support from the crowd,” especially as this was a “voluntary happening,” in stark contrast with the arranged and propagandistic demonstrations of the past. Journalist M, a pseudonym used by a “true-believer Communist” in the “newspaper fraternity,” also sought to illustrate the importance of that moment, especially relative to the old, staged demonstrations. He describes the celebration as a “genuine public festival,” where “close friendly contact” was made between the people and their newly elected “representatives of Party and state.” Dubcek recognized how important it was to get the “support of a very significant part of the population.” Dubcek strove to create a better relationship between the Party and the people by directing the Party so that it would serve the people, and he certainly succeeded, at least briefly.

Following two decades of Stalinist rule in Czechoslovakia, it is unsurprising that the people would rally to support the changes Dubcek implemented. The various reforms, including shutting down censorship offices, and removing the Party from its

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72 Williams, *The Prague Spring*, 76.
73 Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last*, 150.
74 Journalist M, *A Year is Eight Months*, 142.
position as the *de facto* governing body, improved life in the country as a whole. While still maintaining socialism as the basis for governing in the nation. Dubcek’s new model of socialist democracy aimed to persuade the people of its efficacy by demonstrating its abilities every day, so as to mobilize the working classes, and not have to coerce their support. Opponents to Dubcek’s reforms claimed that the reforms were counter-revolutionary, and were aimed at leading the country back towards capitalism. Public opinion polling data from the period demonstrates that the people did not believe that these threats were realistic. Nearly 90% of those polled throughout the country in June and July 1968 preferred “the continuation of socialist development,” in opposition to any shift towards capitalism. In fact, the main dangers to the nation as identified by this survey were potential economic problems, and failures by the Party leadership.

Throughout the months between the announcement of Dubcek’s Action Program and the Soviet Intervention, over 90% of Czechoslovaks polled believed that “post-January changes” would lead to improvements in both their political and everyday life. This evidence demonstrates that the Party, and Dubcek, had succeeded in their plan to earn the support of the people, and also illustrates that the people of Czechoslovakia viewed the Party as a vehicle towards a democratic, socialist future.

Student demonstrations in favor of the reform course went on throughout the spring and summer. The series of student demonstrations was backed by a large-scale

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75 Journalist M, *A Year is Eight Months*, 93.
petition campaign put on by Literarni Listy, the national literary magazine. This petition, launched in conjunction with the Cierna nad Tisou talks in early August 1968, called for the government to stick with the reform course, and gathered upwards of one million signatures. Ludvik Vaculik, a young writer who had been expelled from the Party and its Writer’s Union the previous summer, and reinstated under Dubcek, penned the petition. From its resolution came the phrase “we are with you, be with us,” a call for unity by the populace to the political elite, embraced especially during the tumult which followed just weeks later.

The Soviet Invasion

Following the August 1968 invasion, Dubcek’s popularity increased greatly. The Soviets, fearing his influence, attempted to abduct Dubcek and several of his colleagues, and install a pro-Soviet, conservative (which is to say, anti-reform), government. The parallels between this plan and the treatment of Nagy twelve years earlier suggests that, at least for a brief while, the Soviet plan included the permanent removal of Dubcek, Smrkovsky, Cernik and Kriegel from the country. The potential execution of this plan raised great alarm in Czechoslovakia, and the initial response of the vast majority of the people of Czechoslovakia was to support Dubcek, both as a person and as the symbol of the reforms.

This personal popularity was especially evident as the people of Prague persistently and passively resisted the Warsaw Pact occupiers. Even on the first day of the invasion, Dubcek’s support was considered newsworthy. The newspapers reported

80 Williams, The Prague Spring, 100.
81 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 185. Vaculik’s most famous piece, “2,000 Words” is discussed later in the Chapter about Soviet Interference.
82 Shawcross, Dubcek, 183.
crowds cheering for Dubcek by chanting, “we stand behind Dubcek, Dubcek behind socialism,” and also published resolutions to the same effect.  

The widely circulated Party newspaper *Rude Pravo*, for instance, announced their commitment to Dubcek and the plans of “socialism with a human face.” They were joined in their support by 5.5 million Czech trade unionists, Party members who signed a petition condemning the invasion and proclaiming their support for Dubcek and his policies. It is notable that just days into the invasion, the workers were nearly unanimous in rejecting the actions of their supposed saviors, the occupying armies.

This initial response to the occupation of Prague by both the crowds and the leading publications set the tone for the rest of the week, up until the Moscow Protocol was issued and the Czechoslovakian leaders returned from Moscow. Resolutions in support of Dubcek continued to stream in from all corners, including from a group representing the Communists in the armed forces of Czechoslovakia. This communiqué assured the nation that the army had not been compromised by the Soviets, despite their inaction during the initial stages of the invasion. More active measures of protest also took shape, as an hour-long lunchtime strike was called for just one day into the invasion. Dubcek received substantial political support from the Extraordinary 14th Communist Party Congress, which had been convoked and conducted clandestinely from a Prague warehouse. This Congress proved to be a point of contention with the Soviets, who insisted that it be declared illegal and annulled. The Congress’ first order of

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83 Littell, *Czech Black Book*, 34; 37.
86 Littell, *Czech Black Book*, 78.
business at the time, however, was to elect Dubcek as its head, even as Soviet forces were abducting him. They explicitly recognized Dubcek’s name as “the symbol of [their] sovereignty,” and demanded that the Warsaw Pact troops depart without delay. August 25th was proclaimed to be “Dubcek’s Sunday,” as the workers showed up on their day off in order to make up for the production lost during the general strikes in support of Dubcek.

Normalization

This enthusiastic support for Dubcek (and specifically for the promise of reform which Dubcek had begun to enact) culminated in the outright rejection of any capitulation by the government towards the Soviets, even as that capitulation took the form of the Moscow protocol. Despite this capitulation, Dubcek was able to maintain his high level of popular support over the course of the “normalization” of affairs both within Czechoslovakia and between Czechoslovakia and her ostensible allies. In fact, the negotiations set the tone for the course of the rest of the normalization process, as each side took the agreement to mean what they wanted it to mean. Dubcek was only able to accept the final form of the Communiqué because the “vague and pretentious language at least afforded more than one interpretation.” This intentional misunderstanding became a pattern over the ensuing months, as Dubcek endeavored to say one thing and maintain his legitimacy when he did just the opposite of what he had said. Dubcek did recognize the duplicity involved, and also acknowledged later that, “this double-talk bought us very

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little, but... it looked less hopeless,” to be duplicitous than to acknowledge defeat straightaway.91

Despite this room for interpretation, the Communique was soundly rejected at the local Party level, where Dubcek’s reforms had been most strongly embraced, and the workers recognized the threat the Communique posed to the reform course.92 According to a poll conducted between September 14 and September 16, 94% of Czechs and Slovaks supported continued attempts to implement the Action Program.93 The Communique resolved that the occupying troops would not interfere in internal affairs, and that the troops would withdraw following adequate normalization. The document also specified that Dubcek would reinstitute the censorship apparatus, a direct blow to one of the pillars of his reforms. The Czech government, however, had trouble finding censors, because no one wanted to commit the “suicide” required to help the Soviets enact their slow repeal of Dubcek’s program.94 Additionally, the Soviets made little headway in their efforts to compromise Dubcek’s popularity by making him “contradict and compromise himself,” a fact that also shows that the Soviets were threatened by Dubcek’s popular backing.95 The Soviets were not comfortable with a satellite state following a leader who was free of their influence, which explains the measures they took to bring Dubcek back into the fold even as they worked to undermine him.

Dubcek’s backers across the country took measures to formalize their support for him over the ensuing months. During October, as the Czechoslovakian leaders

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92 Williams, *The Prague Spring*, 146.
94 Williams, *The Prague Spring*, 162.
95 Williams, *The Prague Spring*, 165.
negotiated a formal treaty with Moscow regarding the legality of the occupying troops, “Dubcek Fan Clubs” were started all over the country.⁹⁶ One Prague club had 200 members, and received more applications each day, in return for Dubcek buttons and transcripts of his speeches. These clubs were a reaction against the rumor that Dubcek’s life might be threatened, as the shadow of Nagy loomed over the negotiations. Although the clubs were monitored by the Soviet troops, no measures were taken against them. The “yet” in the situation was loud and clear, albeit unspoken, another indicator that Moscow feared the power inherent in Dubcek’s popularity.

The Moscow Treaty, signed on October 15, 1968, formally legalized the presence of the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia, without including any mechanism to begin their withdrawal. The official document continued to invoke “normalization” as the measuring stick against which to judge the situation, especially regarding the necessity of maintaining Soviet troops in the country.⁹⁷ Prague students gathered en masse in order to protest the Treaty, only to be confronted by police officers employing violent crowd control tactics.⁹⁸ Additionally, resolutions supporting Dubcek and the reforms continued to be published in all corners of the country, including various regional Party cells, and also from the students of Prague.⁹⁹ Pro-Dubcek sit-ins occurred in high schools throughout the country in the weeks leading up to a key meeting of the soon-to-be divided Central Committee of the CPCS. Even as the Moscow Treaty formalized the aid

⁹⁷ The details of the Treaty are further discussed on page 48.
⁹⁹ Williams, *The Prague Spring*, 179; 180.
to be given to the occupying troops, neither the government nor the citizens gave any more material aid to the troops than they were (now legally) required to.

Dubcek was able to use his popular support to ease out the reforms he had so grandly instituted. As the Soviets slowly squeezed down on the liberties allowed to Czechoslovakian society, it was left to Dubcek to use the good will felt for him by the people in order to minimize the difficulties in "normalizing" the country. Following the newly moderate Central Committee's November proposal to curb some creative freedoms, a group of leading intellectual, artistic and scientific organizations planned to publish a resolution in protest. Dubcek successfully used his own personal authority to halt the proposed protest by means of a simple appeal to the groups. He also agreed to meet with the groups and discuss their concerns, which served as an implicit acknowledgment that they ought to be concerned about possible infringements on the "frontier of freedom." This maneuvering did not even cause a blip in the support for Dubcek, as just a week later the New York Times carried a Tad Szulc article titled: "A Spirit of Defiance Reviving in Prague Despite Occupation." This article reported on the series of protests against the illegal, occupation-published Zpravy newspaper, which at that point was the single most visible issue between Dubcek and the occupiers. Additionally, new restrictions on travel and the press had met challenges even within the government, and Rude Pravo continued to slight the Soviets, by publishing over-the-top

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congratulations to Yugoslavia on the 25th anniversary of their Communist Revolution.\footnote{Such a celebration of Yugoslavia's national path towards socialism ignores their role in refusing sanctuary to Nagy in the aftermath of the 1956 Soviet Invasion.}

Given the rocky relationship the Yugoslavs had had with the Soviets over those 25 years, this was overtly disrespectful on the part of the Party newspaper. The general sentiment among Prague citizens was that “we shall overcome, sooner or later.” Even as Dubcek was forced to slowly erode his own reforms, the people continued to support and believe in him, demonstrating that their allegiance had been transferred from Dubcek’s reforms to Dubcek himself. Once it became apparent that the reforms would be impossible to continue, the Czech people chose to support the man most closely associated with the reforms, the next best thing to the actual reform program.

Even as the Czechoslovakian government instituted unpopular measures, Pravda was led to complain about the continued moral and political resistance in the country. There were very few potential collaborators whom the Soviets could trust fully, as it became difficult to distinguish political opportunists from true believers. Throughout the eight months of Dubcek’s normalization, Moscow retained the option to simply re-invoke.\footnote{"The Prague Phoenix," \textit{New York Times}, December 5, 1968.} Their reluctance to resort to such brute force created some maneuvering room for Dubcek to utilize, but eventually Dubcek began to forsake the millions of supporters he had. Following the mid-December 1968 publication of a resolution containing nearly one million signatures rejecting the erosion of the Spring’s reforms, Dubcek warned that “defiance” would lead to “undemocratic measures.”\footnote{Alvin Shuster, “Dubcek Warns Czechoslovaks to Stop Defiance,” \textit{New York Times}, December 22, 1968.} Dubcek presented the November Central Committee resolution as the path to be followed forward, but the media’s
continued subtle criticisms of the USSR and the CPCS put pressure on Dubcek to act authoritatively. By the end of 1968, journalists had become particularly concerned about the extent to which controls were being tightened, in reaction to their persistent criticism of the Party.

As the Czechoslovakian people began to lose hope in the possibility of preserving the reforms, they increasingly turned towards violence and destruction in order to express their disappointment, similarly to the protests in Hungary in October 1956. While Dubcek maintained his personal authority over the country, he was able to maintain “calm and dignity.” Once it became apparent that Dubcek had lost his political capital, however, the people began to lose the restraint he had imposed upon them. Although this violence was directed against the actions taken by the Czechoslovakian government, of which Dubcek was still the head, it can also be considered as support of Dubcek the reformer, before he began to compromise with the Russians and the Czechoslovak opportunists within the CPCS. The most well-known act of protest, Jan Palach’s self-immolation on January 16, 1969, was an action taken in support of the ideas of truth and freedom of expression, and was not explicitly political. Such a shocking display, however, did illuminate the disconnect which had formed between the compromising government and the groups which had supported the reforms during the initial occupation. This disconnect makes sense, as Dubcek and Smrkovsky were the only original reformers left in the Central Committee, and they were completely isolated there by pragmatic, opportunistic, compromising centrists, such as Cernik and Husak.

The popular frustration with the abandonment of the reforms boiled over following an international ice hockey victory by the Czechoslovakian national team over
the Soviets. On March 30, 1969, the Czechs beat the Russians 4-3 at the World Ice Hockey Championship tournament. This result was followed by a "spontaneous and jubilant" mass celebration in the streets of Prague, which quickly led to the ransacking of the Soviet Aeroflot offices, and other buildings associated with Soviet militarism. This event demonstrates that the Czechoslovakian people remained "bitterly un-reconciled" to the reality of their occupation. The victory was particularly fraught with meaning, as it paralleled a similar ice hockey victory in February 1968, which many then took to portend well for Dubcek’s new “era of genuine change.” As the nation descended further and further towards the example set by Hungary twelve years previously, it became dangerous for Dubcek to remain in power, as he was the symbol, willing or otherwise, of what the violence sought to achieve. On April 17, 1969, Dubcek resigned from his post as the First Secretary, and urged the country to support his successor, Gustav Husak. Again exercising his ability to personally appeal to the nation, Dubcek called for calm and order, and thus demobilized the millions of supporters who had joined him in repudiating the tyrannical policies of the Novotny regime and the Soviet attempts to interfere with Czechoslovakian government, especially the August Invasion, thus facilitating normalization. Although Dubcek was dragged along by the more ambitious reformers and proponents of grass-roots radicalism, during the normalization process he was able to regain control of the nation, even as that meant dismantling the freedoms on which Dubcek had made his name as the hero of the nation.

SOVIET PRESSURE AGAINST REFORMS

The Soviets applied steady pressure against Dubcek and his reforms throughout the spring and summer of 1968, in order ensure that Dubcek did not remove the Party from its “leading role.” This pressure peaked with the August invasion, but continued in a more discrete, and effective, form throughout the subsequent normalization process. Soviet pressure against the reforms began as soon as Czechoslovakian censorship began to slacken, as the Soviets protested against the publication of liberal journals such as Literarni Listy, and also the publication of “extreme, ill-considered, half-baked opinion” pieces that appeared in the daily newspapers.106 In the Warsaw Pact meeting in Dresden on March 23, 1968, the Soviets told Dubcek to slow down the pace of the reform movement, drawing parallels between Dubcek’s reforms and the results of Nagy’s moderate reform course in 1954.107 This concern about the “pace” of reform was only heightened by the publication of Vaculik’s “2,000 Words”, which called for the embrace of grass-roots reform. Vaculik’s proposal, published in several national journals on June 27, 1968, was much “more” reform than Dubcek was prepared to implement. The Presidium of the CPCS condemned the document, focusing on the calls to act independently of the Party and government.108 The fact that such a statement was published at all, even with the follow-up condemnation, demonstrated to the Soviets that the situation was slipping from the grasp of the ruling Party. Despite Dubcek’s hesitations to support the radical course proposed, the mere publication of such a document raised

106 Journalist M, A Year is Eight Months, 70.
107 Williams, The Prague Spring, 71.
the Soviets' ire, and also raised the stakes of the political negotiations between the Czechs and their “allies.”

Following the Cierna nad Tisou and Bratislava talks, which ostensibly reduced tensions between the Czechoslovaks and their allies, Brezhnev kept up the pressure on Dubcek to act according to the agreements they had made. Instead, Dubcek continued to ask for patience from the Soviets, and this seeming disavowal of their agreements caused the Soviets to finally add the military dimension to the conflict. The two sides left Cierna nad Tisou and the later multi-party talks in Bratislava claiming to be in agreement, but in reality each side left, “convinced that it had persuaded the other of the correctness of its viewpoint, from which neither wished to retreat.”

When, in the ensuing weeks, few changes were forthcoming from Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev had had enough discussion. The Soviet invasion at 11 p.m. on August 20 was launched in complete secrecy, and allowed the Soviets and their allies to occupy Prague and all of Czechoslovakia’s important facilities within hours. Prague and the nation went into a state of shock, but also showed up to work each day at the behest of the trusted leaders of the country, and maintained a strong passive resistance campaign throughout the ensuing week. Although their trusted leaders were kidnapped and removed to Moscow in order to clear the way for a collaborationist government, the Czech people rejected any kind of takeover, and were vocal in their support for their “legal” government. The supposed collaborators, with the guidance of Russian Ambassador Stepan Chervonenko, tried to form a “workers and peasants government,” but were rebuffed by many of the people they had asked to

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join their government. Instead, the collaborators were left holed up in the Russian Embassy, hoping to be protected by the Kremlin in its *diktat* to the legal Czechoslovakian government.

The Moscow Communique announced on August 27, 1968 set the tone for the normalization process, and contained several explicit channels through which the Soviets could directly influence Czechoslovakian affairs to ensure that events proceeded in the directions the Soviets desired. The most overt of these was the non-withdrawal of the Warsaw Pact troops already stationed in Czechoslovakia. Although the agreement recognized that the troops would not be allowed to interfere in the “internal affairs” of Dubcek’s nation, their very presence served as a permanent reminder of the Soviets’ ability to resort to brute force as a means to carry out their wishes. Although the Communique did not explicitly spell out specific changes that must be made regarding the personnel of the CPCS, specific personnel issues were discussed extensively during the negotiation process. The Soviets demanded the removal of Kriegel and the reinstatement of Bilak, who had been punished by the “illegal” 14th Party Congress for his role as a collaborator with the Invasion. Additionally, the Communique formally demanded the return of a strict censorship apparatus on the part of the CPCS, which was especially important regarding intra-Warsaw Pact relations.

Not satisfied with the terms of the Moscow Communique, the CPSU brought the leadership of the CPCS back to Moscow in early October (with their permission, this time). The resulting treaty continued the theme of capitulation by the Central Committee

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110 Journalist M, *A Year is Eight Months*, 220.


members of the CPCS, as it both legalized the presence of the occupying troops in
Czechoslovakia, and also signaled the Soviets' ability to threaten any attempts by Dubcek
to re-implement reforms. There is no justification in the Treaty for the presence of the
Soviet troops, only an article stating that "the temporary deployment of Soviet troops on
the territory of [Czechoslovakia] does not violate the country's sovereignty."\textsuperscript{113} The only
"positives" for the Czech side were the articles that specified that the USSR would be
responsible for provisioning the troops, and that Soviet soldiers would be held
responsible for criminal activity. One other article announced that only Soviet troops
would remain in the country, reducing tensions with the remainder of the "allies," with
the goal of "consolidating defenses against growing revanchist efforts" stemming from
West Germany.\textsuperscript{114} Husak had suggested that only the Soviet troops might remain during
negotiations, and cited "difficulties with the Hungarian troops" due to disputes rising
between them and Hungarian citizens of Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{115} By making such a
suggestion, Husak also began to situate himself as a "moderate" in order to gain the favor
of the Soviets. The Soviets exercised revisionism in legitimizing the occupation, as they
stated that the Czechs had been failing to protect their western frontier (bordering West
Germany) adequately.\textsuperscript{116} The Soviets were concerned as much with West German
influence on cultural and political aspects as they were by the threat of an actual

\textsuperscript{113} Navratil, \textit{The Prague Spring '68}, 534.
\textsuperscript{114} Navratil, \textit{The Prague Spring '68}, 534.
\textsuperscript{115} Navratil, \textit{The Prague Spring '68}, 527.
\textsuperscript{116} Henry Kamm, "Czech Leadership Yields to Soviets, Will End Reforms," \textit{New York
Times}, October 5, 1968.
military conflict. Czechoslovakia's inclusion in the Warsaw Pact was predicated on their defense against "revanchist West Germany," so any weakening of that defense may have given the upper-hand to NATO strategically, a result which would have justified the occupation by Czechoslovakia's concerned "allies."

In addition to the military component, the Treaty also touched on the various political issues that had led to the invasion in the first place. The Soviets viewed the one-sided treaty as necessary following "Czechoslovakia's circumvention of her earlier capitulations through reluctant compliance and skillful use of loopholes," and the Soviets wanted to make this capitulation more enduring. The Treaty thus aimed to "dismantle" the remaining reform policies, and further give strength to the Brezhnev Doctrine and the original Communiqué, indicating that the conflict was merely a continuation of their previous miscommunications over what each side was agreeing to. Dubcek later characterized the Treaty as being signed "basically at gunpoint." Although he had no choice but to agree with the diktat, in his autobiography he claims not to have meant to legitimize the occupation ex post facto. He also noted the formation of a detachment between the people and the country's leadership, which became increasingly pronounced over the remainder of normalization. Dubcek was distressed that many citizens believed that the government (and the country as a whole) was free to do as they pleased, that they retained complete sovereignty over their actions. The Moscow Treaty made it clear to

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117 One pillar of Dubcek's argument for being allowed to proceed with reform was that Czechoslovakia did not maintain relations with capitalist European countries, unlike other members of the Warsaw Pact, such as Romania.
118 Kamm, "Czech Leadership."
119 Dubcek, Hope Dies Last, 228.
Dubček that this was not the case, as the legalization of the constant presence of Soviet troops made evident.

Soviet interference in various forms was a constant for the remainder of Dubček’s time in office. The promise of this threat, on top of the sense of despair following the Moscow Treaty, caused the situation in Prague in the fall of 1968 to remain tense. Even if Dubček was not actively taking steps to re-implement his reform course, the Soviet pressure served as a counterweight to the pressure put on Dubček by the public to do just that. A CIA Intelligence Information Cable from that time indicates that the Soviets in fact stood to benefit from the equivocating language used between the two Parties. By continually “postponing and obscuring any common understanding” of “normalization,” the Soviets successfully created discord amongst the CPCS leadership, as was seen by Husak’s early maneuvering during the Treaty negotiations.12° This lack of unity is exactly what Dubček had warned against following the invasion as threatening the reform course, and the remainder of his time in office saw increasing numbers of “centrists” chip away at that very program. In so doing, these opportunists destroyed the “unity of our course...our deeds,” through which Dubček believed they could assure the “success of our future policy.”121

One option Dubček considered in responses to the sustained Soviet pressure was to resign. This would not be an offensive move, but rather a reaction to having “no possibility to execute the program they believe ‘morally right and fully supported by the

120 “Comments on the Growth of Disunity within Czech Leadership and Other Aspects of the Current Status of the Soviet Occupation of Czechoslovakia,” CIA Intelligence Information Cable, found in Navratil, The Prague Spring ’68, 530-533.
121 Littell, Czech Black Book, 252.
people.”  

There was also the possibility that the people would force out the leadership, or that the leadership itself would turn on the reform movement, as ended up happening. As the fall turned towards winter, the Soviet influence became increasingly pronounced. The government violently suppressed protests on the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, a decision that further “alienates more of the patriotic forces whose heroic, non-violent resistance” saved Dubcek in August. The Soviets were well aware of the difficult situation they had put Dubcek in, and continued to search out potential acceptable replacements for him, including Husak and other “opportunists.” During the critical November Central Committee meeting of the CPCS, Brezhnev called Dubcek “in real time,” in order to object to potential Committee appointments. Dubcek even went to the length of flying to Moscow following that meeting in order to get Brezhnev’s approval on the agreement reached by the Committee. As the CPCS leadership instituted increasingly tighter controls on the press, they hewed to Brezhnev’s belief that the media should serve as a mere conductor of information, rather than as an intermediary between the leadership and the nation (to say nothing of criticizing the leadership of a nation). Although Dubcek was at points seriously considering resigning, this would have let down both the Party and the nation as far as he was concerned. His continued presence as the First Secretary meant that the reforms were not completely buried, and served to buoy the nation’s hope so as to prevent a descent towards violence, a la Hungary. Even as Brezhnev’s increasing meddling allowed to him to search for a Kadar

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122 “Comments on the Growth of Disunity.”  
125 Dubcek, *Hope Dies Last*, 231.  
126 Williams, *The Prague Spring*, 177.
to take over the situation, Dubcek held his ground as best he could, for the good of both the Party and the state.

Despite all of this external pressure against the implementation of the reform program, at the beginning of December the Russian newspaper *Pravda* found cause to complain that Czechoslovakian moral and political resistance, to the occupation and normalization, continued “unabated”. 127 This continued resistance illustrates the depth of the support Dubcek had won for the reform program, and especially for the government as Dubcek stood up against the Soviets. Even after the implementation of unpopular measures by the CPCS leadership, few “traitors” had emerged whom the Soviets could trust completely. The Soviets worked around the early winter renewed support for Dubcek by taking their pressure off the front pages of newspapers and making it much more covert. In December 1968, a pair of Soviet high officials, Konstantin Katuschev and Vasili Kuznetsov, spent several weeks in Prague, ostensibly on vacation. It just so happened that their visit coincided with a fierce battle in the CPCS over the position of Smrkovsky, the last “uncompromising symbol of the democratization movement.” 128 Due to massive support from the students and workers of Czechoslovakia, a compromise was reached in early January 1969, leaving Smrkovsky in power, while in turn rebuffing the vast support network that had gathered around him. Immediately following the demobilization of his mass support, Smrkovsky was in fact demoted from the chairmanship of the new Federal Assembly. To make matters worse, the government also announced that publications would be banned unless they contained “positive

resolutions.” This clear attack against the reform program occurred during the very weeks Katuschev and Kuznetsov were vacationing. They returned home shortly thereafter Smrkovsky was successfully removed by the opportunists and conservatives in the CPCS Central Committee.

The final example of Soviet pressure against Dubcek’s position in power came following the so-called Hockey Riots on March 30, 1969. The Soviets explicitly threatened violence if Soviet interests were going to continue to be threatened.\footnote{Williams, \textit{The Prague Spring}, 200.} This was a clear step towards the situation in Budapest twelve years previously, and both the Soviets and Dubcek recognized it as such. Dubcek acted to prevent such a reoccurrence of violence, by speaking out against such riots. Although even years later the victory remained as a symbol of hope against Soviet control, Dubcek warned the nation that they all faced “tragic consequences if they engage in anti-Soviet violence.”\footnote{Linda Gerstein, personal interview, January 27, 2012; Alvin Shuster, “Dubcek Cautions Riots May Bring New Soviet Move,” \textit{New York Times}, April 3, 1969.} This warning followed a renewed institution of censorship and disciplinary (read: Stalinist) measures, and yet Dubcek promised to try to gradually re-implement the reforms of just twelve months prior. Dubcek would only be able to do this, however, if public acts of violence ceased. As matters stood the Party leadership would now have to “pay a high political price” to the Soviets for the violence which had already occurred.\footnote{Shuster, “Dubcek Cautions Riots.”} This meant that the Soviets would not hesitate to use the military presence they had established to find and install a Kadar, regardless of Czechoslovak protest. Again, Dubcek was able to deploy his personal connection with the nation in order to make his political life easier. Though citizens continued to adopt various resolutions against Soviet-influenced policies, violent
and public protests came to a halt. Once Dubcek de-mobilized his political support, he was unable to further serve the Party or the country, and he threw his support behind Husak in the name of calm and order.

**CPCS Opportunism**

The driving force behind the implementation of “normalization” was the political disunity which spread from the original “pro-Soviet” conservatives, to the “centrists” out to gain favor with the Soviets, until only Dubcek was left from the original reformers, completely out-numbered. The Soviets were able to utilize these opportunists to influence the actions of the CPCS, especially through Husak, during the entire process of “normalization.” This disunity was apparent even at the height of the reform movement, as the CPCS Central Committee that endorsed the Action Program was clearly divisible into the reformers, the centrists (including Dubcek, always the compromiser), and the conservative faction.132 The fissure in the CPCS at the time of the Soviet invasion was made implicit in the Moscow Communiqué, where the Soviets proclaimed “additionally personnel changes in the Party” should be made in order to “secure consolidation.”133 Dubcek had no choice but to allow this to happen, as there was no room to equivocate on these specific demands. Even as Bilak was reinstated, though, other collaborationists-Kolder, Kapek, and Svestka- surrendered their positions, having completely lost the trust of the nation.134 Despite this initial backlash by the nation and the majority of the Party against potential collaborators, slowly but surely more conservative Party members came to prominence, and some reformers, such as Cernik, shifted to a “centrist” stance.

Twelve months after being abducted by the Soviets for his part in the reform program, Cernik would lead the working-group responsible for violently putting-down the various protests staged on the anniversary of the invasion. The balance of power did not shift all at once, but the most pivotal moment proved to be a meeting of the Central Committee of the CPCS in the middle of November 1968.

As the meeting approached, the country was in a perilous state, as the leadership struggled to negotiate the various pressures it faced. Following the Treaty in October, it was feared that leadership of the nation was in danger of “restoring confidence in [its] allies in such a way that they would lose the confidence of the people.” Although the country was united in their support of Dubcek and President Svoboda, it was recognized that the students and workers were “more advanced than...the leaders in practicing defiance” of the Soviets. This November meeting was so important precisely because the gap between the cautious leaders and the defiant public opinion was widening. The Central Committee meeting would chart the course for the rest of the normalization process, as it pit the will of the populace against the threats posed by the Kremlin.

Dubcek’s plan for the meeting, as always, was to propose a plan that was a compromise between both the desire to preserve the implementation of “Socialism with a Human Face,” and the “harsh realities of the Soviet Occupation.” He proposed to was to guarantee fundamental civil rights and freedoms, while also emphasizing the strength of their alliance with the USSR, and discouraging any anti-USSR sentiment. The other

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135 Williams, The Prague Spring, 237.
aspect of this proposal, though, was to insist that the Soviets discontinue their practice of meddling with the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia, and to also cease to publish the unapproved newspaper *Zpravy*. Although this set of proposals may have been balanced, it was rejected by the Committee, due to the influence of reformers-turned-"centrists" such as Husak and Strougal, both of who were angling for Dubcek’s job in the near future. These opportunists were willing to break off from the will of the people in order to give themselves a better name with the Soviets.

The final resolution produced by the Committee profoundly altered the course of normalization, loading the Party leadership with conservative members and chipping away at the very basis of the reforms. Lubomir Strougal, considered now to be a staunch pro-Soviet supporter, replaced Mlynar, a die-hard reformer, on the Central Committee. This move left only Dubcek and Smrkovsky of the original reformers, and they were now faced with opposition “at every turn.”\(^\text{138}\) Husak took the meeting as an opportunity to position himself as the main rival to Dubcek, by opposing the “adventurist and non-realistic proposals,” of the present leadership, and making note of the “deficiencies” of the original reform policies. Strougal, too, harped on Dubcek’s policies, as being in an “entirely unrealistic” direction. Tad Szulc noted that “no drastic changes were expected from the Soviets and their [Czech] supporters.” Instead, the Soviets would use constant pressure over a long enough period of time.\(^\text{139}\) This assessment is confirmation of the prediction made in the CIA Intelligence Cable two months earlier, that the Soviets would spread disunity through consistent psychological pressure against the reform programs.


\(^{139}\) Szulc, "Czech Party Reorganized."
By altering the status quo so strongly against Dubcek and the reform movement, the Soviets made it just a matter of time before Dubcek’s authority, either popular or political, would be chipped away beyond repair.

By the next Central Committee meeting, the divide between the actual leadership—no longer the reformers—and the will of the people had reached its widest point during the conflict. This divide extended to the rank and file of the CPCS as well, which placed the Party in its “greatest disarray” since it took power in February 1948.\footnote{Tad Szulc, “Disunity Grows in Czech Party Over Compromise on Reforms,” \textit{New York Times}, December 15, 1968.} The December 1968 Central Committee meeting was focused on this “deep split,” which was especially troublesome due to the “defiant and rebellious attitude” of Communist Party workers, for whom the Soviet Intervention had ostensibly been launched. This divide had begun as early as Vaculik’s “2,000 Words,” when Party workers protested against a Presidium statement declaring the document “counter-revolutionary.”\footnote{Journalist M, \textit{A Year is Eight Months}, 154.} This conflict between the will of the workers opposed to the actions of the Party elite especially came to the forefront during the workers’ support of Smrkovsky, whose position of power was threatened by the conservatives in power. The Communist Party factory workers threatened to mobilize a massive strike should his position be threatened. Through Cernik and other centrists, Strougal and others were able to join the leadership as momentum turned against the reformers. Strougal took this opportunity to suggest purging the Party of reformers, a strategy Husak would adopt following his accession.\footnote{Dubcek, \textit{Hope Dies Last}, 223.} The disconnect between the leadership of the nation and the nation as a whole created a “Paradox in Prague” in early 1969. This tension played into the hands of the Soviets, who were
threatened by any perception that the CPCS was losing its grip on the people, allowing the situation to devolve into the violence they encountered in Hungary. On the surface, conditions appeared to be normal, as Czechoslovakian delegates streamed to Moscow and other Warsaw Pact capitals in shows of friendship. The leadership had even gone so far as to threaten force to prevent any anti-Soviet displays, months before the crisis that stemmed from the Hockey Riots. The public, however, had not resigned themselves to "permanent servitude," which created a continually fervent simmering under the surface, boiling over in the cases of Smrkoovsky and Jan Palach. Dubcek, although he maintained his rapport with the people, had no trust with Moscow, who supported various “opportunists” in opposition to him.\footnote{143 "Paradox in Prague."} As the interests of the Party nomenklatura veered away from those of the nation at large, Dubcek found his position growing weaker and weaker, until he had lost his political authority entirely.

CONCLUSION

A series of factors contributed to Dubcek’s struggles to preserve the reforms after the Soviet Invasion. The non-violent Czechoslovakian resistance to the Soviet invasion allowed Dubcek to stand up to the Soviets, even as the Soviets continued to interfere in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring and the “normalization” which followed the Invasion. The people of Czechoslovakia were eager to embrace the new set of freedoms they had been given, and were willing to give the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia their trust if the Party was willing to earn it each and every day. The nation was especially interested in the reforms relating to the relationship between the Party and the government. Public opinion was strongly in favor of democratizing the
government, and replacing the cumbersome Party interference in the minutia of daily affairs with an efficient and authoritative government. When the potential for this new, attractive system of government was threatened by the Soviets, the people of nation, and especially the Party workers, rallied to defend their interests. Vaculik capitalized on this zeal in his call for grass-roots reforms, and throughout the conflict with the Soviets there were various forms of popular support for the reforms, and for Dubcek as their symbol. This resistance occurred in a variety of ways: from sit-ins and petitions, to Jan Palach's spectacular self-immolation, and then finally in the Hockey Riots. The popular support for Dubcek and the reforms gave him the strength to withstand the initial interference by the Soviets, including the actual Invasion. As normalization proceeded, however, Dubcek was forced to step away from the policies of his reforms, alienating his supporters and leaving himself more vulnerable to further Soviet demands.

The increasingly violent Czechoslovakian popular resistance reminded the Soviets of the military resistance they had faced in Hungary in 1956, in addition to the other parallels between the two situations. Beginning with the abolition of censorship in March 1968, the Soviet Party leaders began to fear the possibility of a counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia, especially as the press took more and more liberties writing potentially sensitive or damaging articles. The flash point in Hungary, the point at which military intervention became necessary, was when Nagy began to seriously consider declaring neutrality, and withdrawing from the Warsaw Pact, in the last few days of October. This move threatened both the Soviet sense of empire, and also their security against NATO forces. Similar fears motivated the Kremlin to ensure that Czechoslovakia did not stray far from the Soviet orbit. When it appeared that Dubcek was not acting in the manner
that they had agreed upon, following seemingly explicit negotiations at Cierna nad Tisou, there was no choice for the Soviets but to send in troops. Brezhnev feared that, if Dubcek could go back on his word so easily after seeming so convincing at Cierna nad Tisou, the only remaining deceit could be a Czechoslovak declaration of neutrality. The potential for this step was especially worrisome given that Czechoslovakia’s participation in the Warsaw Pact was a matter of great importance to the Soviets. Their common border with “revanchist” West Germany, and the October Treaty legalizing the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia ensured that the Soviets would be able to protect their interests through military force. When Dubcek began to lose control over popular expressions of outrage against Soviet interference, he lost his usefulness to the Soviets, and they demanded that he resign or be responsible for a second wave of military engagement.

Dubcek’s background had a strong influence on his decisions to implement and then back away from the reforms outlined in the Action Program of the April CPCS Central Committee meeting. As a loyal Communist, who had been raised to be enamored with the Soviet Union, he only ever wanted what was best for the socialist movement. In his reform Program, Dubcek believed that he had created a model of socialism that would not have to be imposed upon the people, but would instead by hoisted up by the people themselves. Dubcek’s time in the Party, from his role in forcibly nationalizing local businesses to his exposure to the brutal inefficiencies created by over-centralization, made it clear that if the Party were to remain a viable partner with the government, political reforms would have to accompany the economic reforms he (and Sik, among others) envisioned. These political reforms, as part of the general decentralization and democratization process, threatened the incumbent conservatives in the Party leadership,
and caused them to oppose Dubcek in every arena they could get away with. Dubcek balanced his desire to better the Party with his patriotic wish to do what was best for Slovakia and all of Masaryk’s creation as well. When Dubcek was acting in opposition to Novotny, this meant defending Slovakia against Prague hegemony. As the First Secretary of the national Party Dubcek put this practice to good use, defending Czechoslovakia against Moscow’s hegemonic practices. Dubcek, having seen the violence and destruction enacted against Hungary, was unwilling to allow such actions to be taken against his own citizens, his fellow countrymen, even if it meant abandoning his ambitions for improving the Party. It was due to these conflicting motivations, to better the Party and to preserve tranquility in his country, that Dubcek had such a difficult time balancing the Soviet demands against the reforms supported by the nation.

Czechoslovakia was an important satellite state for the Soviet Union, and Dubcek was allowed to implement reforms so long as they did not threaten the Soviet Union’s interests. Once it became apparent that Dubcek was allowing open dissent against CPC S and CPSU policies to appear in the press, the Soviet Union viewed the reforms as weakening their empire. This suggests that, so long as the Soviet Union maintained their Central European satellites, there were strict limits to the freedoms those governments were to be allowed to implement. Dubcek’s attempts to democratize the country inherently meant that the Party would lose the “leading role” in governing the state, even if it maintained a “leading role.” This distinction seemed dangerous to the CPSU leadership, who were not prepared to negotiate the possibility of losing influence in any of their satellite states. Khrushchev’s precedent of using force to restore Hungary to obedience proved crucial, as Brezhnev formalized his own doctrine that allowed the
Soviet Union to interfere in other socialist states when socialism itself was threatened. Dubcek’s attempts to improve socialism appeared threatening to the Soviets, especially when the formerly obedient country refused to give in to the Soviet demands. After the Invasion failed, the Soviets were left with no choice but to slowly compromise Dubcek, counting on the apparatchiks to realize that opportunism was the shortest path to the top of the Party hierarchy.

This explanation for why “normalization” was carried out in such a protracted and gradual manner suggests that, had any of these motivations been altered, events would surely have unfolded differently. Without the warning of Hungary, the Soviets would not have begun interfering as early as they did, and may not have been alarmed by a national brand of socialism distinct from the USSR’s. This is especially notable following the Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia in the early 1960s, after a decade of icy relations due to Tito’s nationalist brand of socialism. Dubcek, too, may have allowed radicals even more rein had he not seen what happened when a satellite veered too far off from the Soviet orbit. Were Dubcek’s sole motive preserving the superficial tranquility of the nation, he may never have begun the reform course at all. Conversely, if Dubcek was concerned only with perfecting socialism, regardless of the potential harm inflicted by dissenting Communist Parties, he may have gone ahead more enthusiastically against the Soviet wishes. “Normalization” occurred in the manner it did due to the fact that it followed a previous, bloody “normalization” in Hungary, and that it benefitted both the Soviets and Dubcek to maintain Dubcek in power so long as he could ensure that popular resistance would not turn violent.
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