The Prague Spring and its aftermath

Czechoslovak politics 1968–1970

Kieran Williams

The Prague Spring of 1968 was amongst the most important episodes in post-war European politics. In this book Kieran Williams analyses the attempt at reform socialism under Alexander Dubček using materials and sources which have become available in the wake of the 1989 revolution. Drawing on declassified documents from party archives, the author readdresses important questions surrounding the Prague Spring: why did liberalization occur? What was it intended to achieve? Why did the Soviet Union intervene with force? What was the political outcome of the invasion? What part did the reformers play in ending the experiment in reform socialism? What was the role of the security police under Dubček? The book will provide new information for specialists as well as introductory analysis and narrative for students of East European politics and history and Soviet foreign policy.

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Preface

The events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, usually referred to as the Prague Spring, remain among the most important in the political history of post-war Eastern Europe, and of Europe as a whole. Not surprisingly, a sizeable literature has arisen dealing with those events, and another study might not immediately appear needed. There are several interrelated reasons, however, to warrant it. The first is the change of perspective made possible by the passage of three decades, the revolution in Czechoslovakia after November 1989, the end of Soviet hegemony in Central Europe, and the discrediting of the idea of reform communism with the failure of perestroika.

Secondly, many of the existing studies of 1968, though of high quality and enduring value, date from the mid-1970s and are coloured by the prevailing concerns of that period, and many have been long out of print.

A third reason is that events in the former Soviet bloc have allowed the release of thousands of previously classified documents, which gives us a new opportunity to go beyond speculation based on limited public sources or partial memoir material when analysing élite strategies and interaction.

Finally, there is a new, post-1989 generation of students and lay readers who have become interested in the history of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet bloc, and who require a reasonably concise introduction to a period that shaped the entire second half of the communist era in Czechoslovakia and still generates controversy in the successor states.

The analysis that follows of the events of 1968–70 draws on the many strengths of earlier scholarship but concentrates mostly on the new sources that have become available since 1989. These materials include newly released files from the Czechoslovak and Slovak Communist Parties, the government and interior ministry of the former Czechoslovakia, and from Hungarian, Polish, German, and Russian archives. Most of these documents were collected by the Czechoslovak Federal Government's Commission for Analysis of the Events of 1967–70 and its Slovak counterpart; the federal files are now housed at

the Institute for Contemporary History in Prague and the Slovak materials at the Political Science Department of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. All translations from archival sources are my own, as are all other translations unless they are taken from Radio Free Europe (RFE) reports or the BBC's Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB).

Using these materials, I shall concentrate on the most basic, but also the most challenging, questions that arise from these events:

Why was reform initiated under the communist leadership of Alexander Dubček? What was it intended to achieve? What were the underlying assumptions about power and the character of Czechoslovak society? Were the reforms internally consistent?

Why did relations between the Czechoslovak and Soviet leaderships deteriorate to the point that the latter resorted to a massive military intervention? And why in August 1968?

How was reform reversed and authoritarian rule reinstated in a society that had demonstrated that it preferred reform? How was this authoritarian restoration accomplished without recourse to mass terror? Who actively assisted and resisted the restoration? What role did leading reformers themselves play in the death of reform? What role did the security police perform?

In trying to answer these questions I hope to provide enough new material to interest specialists while providing newcomers with the background and narrative they need to become familiar with the events and personalities. These may be irreconcilable constituencies, and some readers will object to my emphasis on élite behaviour at the expense of broader treatment of social action. Those wishing to discover more about the intellectual and social ferment of the period, and of the preceding years, are still strongly recommended to turn to works from the early 1970s by Skilling, Golan, Kusin, and Krejčí (see n. 3 in chapter 1 for a list of these).

Part I of this book will introduce the three problematics that define the Dubček period: liberalization, foreign intervention, and normalization. The three issues are linked through the problem of assembling and managing an élite coalition pursuing limited but meaningful change. Chapter 1 will explain why liberalization occurred, what new political and economic architecture was envisioned, and the problems associated with grand reform. Chapter 2 will consider earlier attempts to explain the Soviet decision to intervene, and propose an alternative looking primarily at Soviet–Czechoslovak strategic interaction and the power of cognitive and normative frameworks. Chapter 3 will introduce an approach to the

restoration of authoritarian rule after a crisis in a Soviet-type system, a process known euphemistically as normalization.

Part II of the book proceeds to analyse the deterioration of relations between Prague and Moscow in 1968 (chapter 4), the preparation and botched execution of the August 1968 invasion (chapter 5), the Dubček leadership's attempted normalization after August 1968 (chapter 6), and his downfall in April 1969 (chapter 7). Chapter 8 is devoted to the role of the security police during this period, while chapter 9 concludes the book with an overview of the culmination of normalization under Gustáv Husák. Unfortunately, space constraints prohibit me from devoting to Slovakia the special attention it deserves. Some of the material in chapters 2 and 4 has appeared in two earlier articles: 'Political Love's Labours Lost: Negotiations Between Prague and Moscow in 1968', *Slovo* 7 (1994), pp. 72–87; and 'New Sources on Soviet Decision Making During the 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis', *Europe–Asia Studies* 48 (1996), pp. 455–68.

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Abbreviations

In most cases I have derived abbreviations from the English translation of the title of the organization; Czech abbreviations are retained in a few special instances.

ARCHIVES AND PERIODICALS

A FMV	Archive of the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Czechoslovakia)
A FMZV	Archive of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Czechoslovakia)
A FS	Archive of the Federal Assembly (Czechoslovakia)
A KV ČSFR	Archive of the CSFR Government Commission for Analysis of the Events of 1967–1970
A KV SR	Archive of the Slovak Government Commission for Analysis of the Historic Events of 1967–1970
A MNO	Archive of the Ministry of National Defence (Czechoslovakia)
A MV ČSR	Archive of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Socialist Republic
A PV ČSSR	Archive of the Presidium of the Government (Czechoslovakia)
ATsK KPSS	Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
A ÚV KSČ	Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
A ÚV KSS	Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia
AVP SSSR	Archive of the External Policy of the Soviet Union
RFE	Radio Free Europe
SÚA	State Central Archive (Prague)
SWB	Summary of World Broadcasts (issued by the BBC)

ORGANIZATIONS

CCAC	Central Control and Auditing Commission
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CNC	Czech National Council
CPCL	Communist Party of the Czech Lands
CPCS	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
CPP	Czechoslovak People's Party
CPS	Communist Party of Slovakia
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSP	Czechoslovak Socialist Party
CSPA	Czechoslovak People's Army
DSC	Defence and Security Committee
ExCom	Executive Committee
HSWP	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party
KAN	Club of Non-Party Engagés (Klub angažovaných nestraníků)
KOVO	Czech metalworkers' union
NF	National Front
OPI	Office for the Press and Information
PM	People's Militia
RTUM	Revolutionary Trade Union Movement
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SNC	Slovak National Council
StB	State Security (Státní bezpečnost)
UUS	Union of University Students of Bohemia and Moravia
VB	Public Security (Veřejná bezpečnost)
WTO	Warsaw Treaty Organization

Part I

Liberalization, intervention, and normalization

1 Liberalization

For all their many virtues, the reforms of 1968, in intention and execution, amounted to only the liberalization of a Leninist regime, the gradual widening by the ruling élite of 'the non-prohibited zone, the sphere of things permitted, the space where people can feel themselves more or less free'.[1] Dubček repeatedly spoke only of expanding *priestor*, which can be roughly translated as 'space' or 'scope', to allow wider participation.[2] Liberalizers were certainly not without ambitions; like revolutionaries, they understood the need to overcome societal disequilibrium and achieve a new integration of institutions, values, and expectations. Given, however, its aim of preserving and improving, not destroying, existing institutions, liberalization should not be studied in the same terms as revolution.

The analysis of the 1968 changes that follows is inspired by one of the few frameworks available for analysis of great reform, produced by Oksenberg and Dickson.[3] It will consider first the origins of liberalization with reference to reformers' cognitive and normative frameworks and contingent strategic choices. Then it will show how the reforms intended to change the relationship between the party-state and society through a

[1] Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 55. See also Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 57–8.

[2] See *Rudé právo*, 9 March 1968, for one reader's complaints about the ambiguity and implications of the term (*prostor* in Czech).

[3] Michel Oksenberg and Bruce Dickson, 'The Origins, Processes, and Outcomes of Great Political Reform: A Framework of Analysis', in Dankwart A. Rustow and Kenneth Paul Erickson (eds.), *Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991). I am also drawing on the classic studies of 1968, the most noteworthy of which are: H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1976); Galia Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: Communism in Crisis, 1962–1968* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), and *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubček Era, 1968–1969* (Cambridge University Press, 1973); Vladimir Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia, 1956–1967* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), and *Political Groupings in the Czechoslovak Reform Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Jaroslav Krejčí, *Social Change and Stratification in Post-War Czechoslovakia* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

new distribution of power among and within institutions, and a new concept of economic rationality. It will conclude with a critique of the reforms' eclecticism and the problems of coalition management and breakdown, to be explored in chapters 2 and 3.

Origins of liberalization

The advent of liberalization should not be explained solely as a response to economic malaise or dismissed as the machinations of a calculating (ir)rational actor using 'collective projects for an alternative future'[4] merely to help win the power-struggle game. As Oksenberg and Dickson note, a coalition of liberalizers is united and motivated by perception of a threat to cherished institutions, even if they underestimate the depth of the crisis and overestimate their corrective abilities.[5] An account of liberalization therefore has to take into consideration the coalition's cognitive and normative frameworks, what was understood to be the past and present condition of society, and what was believed would be a better future.[6] While we lack the texts necessary to pinpoint changes in the inner thoughts of outwardly conservative, unremarkable apparatchiki in the years before they became liberalizers, we can speculate why they arrived at their new view of society and its problems.

The social condition

The power struggle that erupted in late 1967 resulted from the decision of an important faction of party and state officials to trust the population. Trust, which Anthony Giddens defines as 'confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events' and 'faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles (technical knowledge)', is essential for the health of a modern society involving increasingly esoteric expertise and ever more intricate division of labour.[7] Czechoslovak rulers had to accept that they could not know or understand everything, and had to allow experts to make decisions.

That a growing number of politicians were ready to trust was in turn possible because of the deep social change that had taken place since the 1950s. The revolution that followed the communist seizure of power had demolished the urban and rural middle classes, as indicated by the

[4] Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, pp. 54–5.
[5] Oksenberg and Dickson, 'The Origins, Processes, and Outcomes of Great Political Reform', pp. 240–1.
[6] Herbert Kitschelt, 'Comparative Historical Research and Rational Choice Theory: The Case of Transitions to Democracy', *Theory and Society* 22 (1993), pp. 413–27.
[7] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 34.

decline in the number of privately owned shops and craftsmen's studios from almost 250,000 in 1948 to 6,553 by 1958.[8] In theory, there was no reason to fear that an anti-communist outlook might find a social basis for political mobilization. By 1967, around 60 per cent of the working population was aged between fifteen and thirty-seven, had been shaped almost exclusively by wartime and the communist era, and had at most only a fuzzy memory of the pre-war republic.[9] The intelligentsia that was starting to challenge the existing order was, by and large, a new one, consisting largely of people of working-class origin who had moved up in the world thanks to class war, education, and the patronage of party godfathers. Many of the writers, scholars, and journalists who in the mid-1960s began aggressively denouncing the crimes of political terror and the constraints of censorship had, fifteen years earlier, written odes to Stalin, hounded thousands of 'bourgeois' professors and students out of universities, and dutifully tamed the media.[10] They were the backbone of the policy communities in orbit around Central Committee departments, speaking a language that was still identifiably socialist and communicating through established channels. Their critique often infuriated the party élite, but it was an immanent critique none the less.

The new character of the intelligentsia was an indicator that leaders could now, if they chose to, look on society as one big feuding family. The friend–enemy dichotomy of Stalinism could be abandoned, as the salient cleavages were now those of education, nationality, and (non-)membership in the party.[11] The social revolution, however, posed its own problems. The cleavages that did persist in an otherwise homogenized society amplified resentment in the approximately 45 per cent of the population that had been fifteen years old or younger in February 1948 when the party took power, and thus had been too young to have benefited from the élite turnover of the late 1940s and early 1950s. At that time, at least 300,000 people were removed from public life for class reasons, and in their places 250,000 people aged between twenty-five and thirty and largely of working-class background were hastily trained and promoted to become the basis of the new ruling clan, the nomenklatura. These chosen men and women, who included figures such as Dubček, represented the party's 'middle generation', in their mid- to late forties in the second half

[8] Jindřich Pecka, Josef Belda, and Jiří Hoppe (eds.), *Občanská společnost, 1967–1970. Emancipační hnutí uvnitř Národní fronty, 1967–1970* (Brno: Doplněk, 1995), p. 8.

[9] Pavel Machonin, *Sociální struktura Československa v předvečer Pražského jara, 1968* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1992), p. 22.

[10] Peter Hruby, *Fools and Heroes: The Changing Role of Communist Intellectuals in Czechoslovakia* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980).

[11] Krejči, *Social Change and Stratification in Post-War Czechoslovakia.*

of the 1960s, entering their prime and dominating the power structure, though few of them had any right to such prominence: nearly half a million people occupied decision-making positions, especially in enterprise management, for which they were unqualified.[12]

By comparison, citizens under forty were better educated and rather more middle class in values, yet had to endure lower wages and lower status, and were essentially disenfranchised.[13] In the decade after 1956, the numbers of trained lawyers, doctors, technicians, and engineers multiplied dramatically, but one in six of these new graduates had to take jobs below the level for which he or she was qualified.[14] Young manual workers were being trained in the use of new technologies, but had few opportunities to ply their skills. This younger cohort's points of reference were not the full employment and improvements in social services that the authoritarian welfare state could offer compared to the hardships of the 1930s, but rather the unfulfilled promises found in the official ideology, the advances in living standards being made in neighbouring capitalist states, and the lack of opportunities for personal development. In short, half the population had no experience of the capitalist system but had not profited from the socialist one.

Sympathetic seniors had little reason as yet to fear a legitimation crisis, and it is hard to determine just how well informed they were of the social condition; Dubček mentions only that in early 1967 'we learned from reports of the district party committees that the public mood in both Slovakia and the Czech lands was increasingly impatient and in favor of change'.[15] At the very least, leaders had some inkling of the alienation among the children of the revolution, who had known only the communist order. For prospective reformers, the disenchantment of the young was the most poignant indicator of the new society's failure to provide a more meaningful, liberated existence.

Normative shifts

Explanation of liberalization must also factor in the role of ideas, in particular the attraction of the very idea of a principled redesign of the

[12] Jacques Rupnik, 'The Roots of Czech Stalinism', in Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman-Jones (eds.), *Culture, Ideology, and Politics: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 312.

[13] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P70/68, č.j. P4174; Machonin, *Sociální struktura Československa v předvečer Pražského jara, 1968*, p. 22.

[14] Karel Kaplan, *Sociální souvislosti krizí komunistického režimu v letech 1953–1957 a 1968–1975* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1993), pp. 43–4.

[15] Alexander Dubček, with Jiří Hochman, *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubček* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 112.

system. This holds true especially for the middle generation of party functionaries, those who became communists after 1938 or 1945, had vigorously served the post-war construction of a new society on the Soviet model, and who began to have second thoughts once they saw the fruits of their labour.[16] Although the Stalinist model had lost its allure, the idea of engineering, of the scientific construction of a better society, had not. The country's policy style, while hesitantly shifting during the 1960s away from imposition of decisions towards more consensual policy-making with the help of outside consultants, remained formally committed to rationality, planning, and anticipation of problems in keeping with the purported scientific character of Marxist method. This shift towards greater consultation is exemplified by the provenance of so many reform ideas in various research teams commissioned by the party leadership in the mid-1960s and protected by enlightened Central Committee secretaries.[17]

Having stifled calls for a systematic undoing of Stalinism in 1956 because of their own complicity in its crimes, the ruling clique around Antonín Novotný, the Communist Party's first secretary since 1953 and president of the republic since 1957, first allowed a substantive normative change in 1960. That year a new constitution was adopted that, reflecting the social revolution, declared the power structure an 'all-people's state'. This line held that internal class war had ended, with exploiters vanquished and the workers triumphant. Consequently, as all remaining differences between social groups were now deemed non-antagonistic, there was no further need to foster an atmosphere of vigilance and hatred. The development and interests of each member of society were now considered congruent with the development and interests of society as a whole. As if to symbolize the new unity, the constitution was timed to take effect shortly before the second *spartakiáda*, the festival of mass gymnastic displays performed by thousands of athletes in near-synchronicity.[18]

At first this new idea of the state was mere triumphalism, another device to discourage resistance and convince the masses of the party's unassailable hold on power. Novotný privately feared that domestic enemies still lurked and gladly used the bipolar division of Europe as an

[16] See Zdeněk Mlynář and Michail Gorbačov, *Reformátoři nebývají šťastni. Dialog o 'perestrojce', Pražském jaru, a socialismu* (Prague: Victoria Publishing, 1995), pp. 47, 88.

[17] Mlynář, in his memoirs, named Jiří Hendrych and Vladimír Koucký as the two primary godfathers of these exploratory research commissions. See *Mráz přichází z Kremlu* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1990), p. 84.

[18] Zdeněk Jičínský, *Právní myšlení v 60. létech a za normalizace* (Prague: Prospektrum, 1992), pp. 14, 29.

excuse to maintain dictatorship.[19] Younger and often more optimistic party functionaries, however, took the line on the 'all-people's state' more seriously and concluded that it demanded a matching change in how the country was governed.

This rethinking of the role of the state was accompanied by the general revival of legal thought.[20] During the years of official class war, law did not play its true role as an alternative to the rule of force, but was used to lend a veneer of legitimacy to political murder and persecution. After the Twentieth Party Congress in the Soviet Union in 1956 denounced some of Stalin's atrocities, a new concern was expressed for 'socialist legality' to prevent another wholesale violation of human rights. In Czechoslovakia, Novotný was able to hinder the rehabilitation of victims of Stalinism until 1962, whereupon the exploration of the potential benefits of law and constitutionalism gathered pace. Jurists were emboldened by the thesis of the 'all-people's state', arguing that a society no longer racked by antagonisms could allow itself to be regulated by socialist legal norms.

Some of the legal reforms enacted in the first half of the 1960s, such as the new penal code in 1961 and new civil code in 1964, were in fact considerable deviations from Czechoslovakia's Roman-law tradition, as they glossed over the complexities of ownership rights and took a rather naïve view of relations between citizens of a socialist state. By relaxing some of the stringencies of Stalinism, however, they contributed to the feeling that new times called for new approaches to citizenship, a concept usually held in contempt by Marxists as a bourgeois fraud. The conviction that a socialist state should be guided and limited by law was growing most quickly among lawyers working in the justice ministry, the procuracy, the party apparatus, university law faculties, and the Academy of Sciences' Institute for State and Law. These institutions were still run by a proletarian cohort that had been rushed through crash-courses in 1949 and took a rather cavalier attitude towards the law itself, but below them younger jurists sought to revive their profession. To disseminate their views they published as actively as possible, and conducted numerous seminars for party and state functionaries. In this latter audience were sympathizers who had sat on commissions investigating the show trials of the 1950s, or had at least learned of their findings, and who agreed that there was a place for the rule of law in a socialist state.

[19] For a telling example of Novotný's insecurity, see Karel Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní* (Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1989), p. 92.

[20] Details are from Jičínsky, *Právní myšlení v 60. létech a za normalizace*, especially pp. 11–33, 48–56, and 69–109, and from Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring*, pp. 28–35.

Prospective liberalizers were also equipped with a legitimizing ideology supplied by Marxist philosophers, working within the establishment but slowly rethinking many first principles.[21] The revision began with a rebellion against the crude functional determinism of Marxism in its Engelsian–Stalinist simplification, which portrayed humans as puppets of historical forces and reduced contemplation of reality to a blind faith in the party's vanguard role. Czech thinkers such as Karel Kosík (a devout Stalinist in his youth) and Ivan Sviták, influenced by phenomenologists and various East European revisionists, especially György Lukács and Leszek Kołakowski, challenged philosophy to explore and question the world. Favouring an anthropocentric rather than Hegelian or Aristotelian cosmocentric perspective, they drew on ambiguities in the young Marx's rediscovered writings that seemed to give priority to man's projective consciousness.[22] The result was a Marxist humanism turning on the idea of praxis, of creative activity. Through praxis, especially art and philosophy, people were to transcend the false reality of the surface world and probe the reality beneath, which, upon discovery, they would try to change, thereby overcoming alienation, a concept derived as much from the rediscovered Franz Kafka as from Marx. Though firmly committed to a Marxist outlook (and prose style), these thinkers broke down orthodoxies and validated the revolutionary notion that human beings must be free to enquire and act.

These otherwise immanent revisions started to transcend limits with the importation (again via a committee sponsored by the party élite in 1965) of modernization theories about a post-industrial historical stage, that of the 'scientific-technological revolution'.[23] In the mid-1960s academics began pointing out that, as was apparent to those visiting Austria and West Germany, capitalist economies were making great

[21] Details are from Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring*, pp. 36–68, 92–3; Hruby, *Fools and Heroes*, pp. 186–211; Benjamin Page, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement, 1963–1968: A Study in the Theory of Socialism* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner B. V., 1973), pp. 35–61; James Satterwhite, 'Marxist Critique and Czechoslovak Reform', in Raymond Taras (ed.), *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Postcommunism in Eastern Europe* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1992); J. M. Bocheński, 'The Great Split', *Studies in Soviet Thought* 8 (1968), pp. 1–15; Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 94–8; and Emanuel Mandler, 'Intelektuálové na cestě k nepolitické politice', *Soudobé dějiny* 2 (1995), pp. 65–92.

[22] On this aspect of Marx's concept of human nature, see John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 22–37.

[23] Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia*, pp. 52–3; Page, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement*, pp. 35–43; Hruby, *Fools and Heroes*, pp. 97–100. The committee was headed by Radovan Richta; it was tasked with investigating 'The Social and Human Implications of the Scientific and Technological Revolution', and published its findings as Richta (ed.), *Civilization at the Crossroads* (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1969).

advances thanks to intellectual breakthroughs. The wealth of nations now depended less on physical labour and more on technological change, which required mental talents, rigorous education systems, opportunities to train and retrain, and free communication of information. Czechoslovak revisionists drew on ambiguities in Marx's writings on the role of technology and technological advance to depict intellectual efforts as forces of production rather than as part of the superstructure, and technocrats as members of the progressive working class. One consequence, however, which impugned the Marxist nature of their theorizing, was the replacement of the proletarian as the revolutionary actor by the scientist, engineer, and computer programmer. In all likelihood, it was argued, the liberated, unalienated free agent of history now wore a white collar.

Liberalizing party functionaries did not understand or subscribe to all of these new ideas, and theorists of change were by no means united in their outlook. Literary writers tended to portray society in a stark dichotomy between a tiny, corrupt, alien ruling élite and a heroic, countervailing nation of European culture and values; the philosophers emphasized the general possibility of human agency and the need to live in the present; the sociologists dwelled on structural trends, urging political changes that would acknowledge and facilitate the shift that was already happening towards a differentiated, sophisticated yet fair and open, industrial society. They all agreed, however, that reform was overdue.

Constraints on choice

Liberalization began because it was a strategic choice consciously taken by a faction of the incumbent political élite. At the same time, of course, constraints existed on the range of choices open to them in deciding what this liberalization should entail. In 1968 the division of Europe automatically ruled out the restoration of large-scale private enterprise or unfettered liberal democracy in a Soviet satellite. Yet Soviet hegemony was not feared or resented by liberalizers, for four reasons. First, the Dubček leadership launched its reforms in the belief that they enjoyed the tacit approval of Moscow, as the entire Soviet commonwealth would benefit from a revitalized Czechoslovakia. Second, Czechoslovak liberalizers were still under the impression that the changes wrought by Nikita Khrushchev, despite his downfall, had made the USSR a more tolerant hegemon; Leonid Brezhnev was regarded as a transitional, and transitory, figure. Third, since no Soviet units were based within their borders, Czechoslovak reformers suffered from a delusion of sovereignty; as

Dubček recalled later, 'I thought that we were much freer than we were.'[24] Finally, membership in the Soviet sphere of influence would allow a state to pursue unconventional political and economic arrangements that in the West would be quickly overwhelmed. Thus, it seemed entirely plausible that Czechoslovakia, shielded in the Soviet greenhouse from the harsh elements of Western democracy and markets, could cross-breed a delicate hybrid.

Additional constraints commonplace in great reforms were the lack of a single guiding model and the need to borrow instead from foreign inputs and indigenous traditions. Nascent Italian Eurocommunism and the Yugoslav experiment that had begun five years earlier had a profound influence, as acknowledged by the primary architect of political reform, Zdeněk Mlynář.[25] Czechoslovakia's own political traditions were also significant parameters, but the nature of these traditions, especially of the First Republic, must be clarified and their impact qualified.

First of all, the political system was infused by the philosophy of Tomáš G. Masaryk, president from 1918 to 1935, which itself derived from his sociology of synergism.[26] Like most sociologists of his day, he was particularly concerned for the integration (through politics) of individuals and groups. Masaryk was well aware that profound differences can exist between individuals and, along with the modern division of labour and decline of religion, can diminish feelings of association and belonging. At the same time, Masaryk believed that social organizations and individuals can lock together into a functional unity, and that if this unity does not arise spontaneously, then the state must effect it. Masaryk was an élitist, and though he rejected Hegelian idealization of the state, he also felt that the Anglo-American liberal tradition underestimated the good work that a limited state under enlightened, ethical leadership can perform. He espoused democracy as the natural form of government after theocratic monarchy, but argued that, for the sake of social peace, actual participation in politics had to remain limited to a talented minority: 'As aristocratic monarchy was in practice always an oligarchy, so also is democracy in practice an oligarchy – the problem is to make sure that democratic oligarchy does not degenerate into aristocratic hierarchy.'[27]

[24] *Lidové noviny*, 18 November 1992. See also A KV ČSFR, R151 [KV ČSFR interview with Mlynář, 9 August 1990].

[25] Mlynář and Gorbačov, *Reformátoři nebývají šťastni*, pp. 26–7.

[26] On Masaryk's socio-political philosophy, see Miloslav Trapl, *Vědecké základy Masarykovy politiky. Pokus o soustavný výklad Masarykovy politické theorie* (Brno: Zář, 1947), esp. pp. 31–50, 71–147, and Roman Szporluk, *The Political Thought of Thomas G. Masaryk* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1981), pp. 101–68.

[27] Koloman Gajon (ed.), *T. G. Masaryk o demokracii. Výbor ze spisů a projevů* (Prague: Melantrich, 1991), pp. 49–50.

Accordingly, the conduct of politics in the First Republic, though shaped by liberal constitutionalism and the French parliamentary model, did contain a powerful oligarchic element in the convention of consultation, compromise, and coordination by committees of the leaders of five political parties (the *pětka*) and by a variety of broad coalition cabinets.[28] Balanced on the fulcrum of the agrarian party, these committees and coalition governments managed to include parties representing all or most of the major social groups. Czechoslovakia had four general elections between 1918 and 1938, but eighteen governments, none of which was brought down by a vote of no confidence or failure to get a bill passed. At a time when the splintered political scene was dominated by what one scholar calls 'a tendency towards carping, unconstructive criticism and a penchant for obstructionism',[29] not to mention periodic unrest among workers and non-Czech nationalities, these imperfect arrangements preserved democracy. So, if the Prague Spring were to draw on the pre-war Czechoslovak tradition, either in theory or practice, it would be a tradition of trying to reconcile pluralism with corporatism, liberalism with collectivism, of seeking a third way between the individual and the community.

Thirdly, although the Prague Spring was in many ways consistent with what scholars would identify as the Czech or Czechoslovak political culture, there is little to indicate that the Dubček coalition was directly inspired by the Masaryk tradition. It is true that the First Republic had been rehabilitated among the intellectuals and public who had dismissed it contemptuously in the 1940s as a failure. It is not so evident, however, that the political class, though widely assuming Czechs and Slovaks to be democrats by instinct, had undergone a comparable reconversion to the inter-war tradition. There is, for example, almost no reference to Masaryk and the First Republic, let alone a positive one, in the memoirs of such leading reformers as Dubček, Mlynář, or Ota Šik.

Some looked instead to the 1945–8 period, when communists could win elections (at least in Bohemia) without fraud or coercion and when the political-economic system was still very distinct from the Soviet one.[30] There was a plurality of parties, united through the National Front

[28] Details are from Eva Broklová, *Československá demokracie. Politický systém ČSR, 1918–1938* (Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství, 1992); Václav Beneš, 'Czechoslovak Democracy and Its Problems, 1918–1920', and Victor S. Mamatey, 'The Development of Czechoslovak Democracy, 1920–1938', in Mamatey and Radomír Luža (eds.), *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918–1948* (Princeton University Press, 1973); Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*, 4 vols. (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1991), vol. IV, especially pp. 1385–95.

[29] Mamatey, 'The Development of Czechoslovak Democracy, 1920–1938', p. 108.

[30] Mlynář and Gorbačov, *Reformátoři nebývají šťastni*, p. 94.

coalition, in which the communists were dominant but not omnipotent, and which, like some of the pre-1938 coalitions, faced no opposition in parliament. It also reflected President Edvard Beneš's scheme for a new, 'regulated' democracy, pluralist but without the debilitating messiness of party politics in the First Republic.[31] After 1964, official historians like Karel Kaplan and Michal Reiman used their scholarship to promote this period as the path to which the country should return,[32] while others were motivated by vaguer, somewhat mythologized impressions. As Prime Minister Černík reminded the Soviets in March 1968, many Czechs and Slovaks remembered being taught in school that Klement Gottwald often spoke in 1945–6 of a unique Czechoslovak path, one that would be pro-Soviet but not imitating the Soviet model, that would take into account the country's traditions, history, psyche, and 'concrete situation'.[33]

Liberalizers in the 1960s had similar wishes, to repatriate the political and economic system while at the same time remaining a faithful member of the Soviet realm. Much suggests, however, that even the 1945–8 interlude was not their model. As Dubček declared on many occasions, 'we will not allow a return to the period before 1945, or even before 1948'.[34] The National Front, which in 1968 contained the communists, four minor parties, fifteen social organizations (such as the trade unions), and nine issue groups, announced in June that the new system would allow extensive participation but prevent 'attempts to revive old party conflicts for power in the state'.[35] The impression given from newly available material confirms Skilling's conclusion that 1968 was not a confrontation with the past, but an attempt at a marriage of democracy and socialism 'not only new to Czechoslovak history but unduplicated elsewhere in the world'.[36] Liberalizers were admitting that communist rule had failed to solve many of society's problems, and had created new ones in the process; their proposed solution, however, was not to revive familiar institutions of the country's past or of the West, but to construct through eclectic borrowing a new and purportedly more humane order.

[31] Karel Kaplan, *Nekrvavá revoluce* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1993), p. 21.

[32] A KV ČSFR, R131 [KV ČSFR interview with Karel Kaplan, 1 March 1991]. See also Martin Schulze Wessel, 'Vom Tabu zum Mythos? Der "Spezifische Weg zum Sozialismus" in der Tschechoslowakei', in Eva Schmidt-Hartmann (ed.), *Kommunismus und Osteuropa. Konzepte, Perspektiven, und Interpretationen in Wandel* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1994), pp. 243–55.

[33] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 61, 'Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung von sechs Bruderparteien in Dresden am Sonnabend, dem 23. März 1968'.

[34] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 2 [Russian stenographic account of the 4–5 May 1968 summit in Moscow of Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders].

[35] Pecka, Belda, and Hoppe, *Občanská společnost, 1967–1970*, p. 51.

[36] Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 849–50.

Rethinking and redistributing power

The point of departure for liberalization was the realization that power had become too concentrated not just in the hands of the approximately 8,500 employees of the national party apparatus, or even of the 750 who ran the party at the very centre, but above all in the supreme party organ, the Presidium. This small, isolated group was groaning under the weight of long, cluttered agendas with mountains of paperwork supplied by departments of the party's Central Committee, government ministries, or research teams. On average, a Presidium member would receive more than 500 pages in background materials for each Tuesday meeting. This impossible reading load had the consequence (unintended or not) of deterring debate, as Presidium members feared that, unable to read up on each point, they lacked the knowledge to speak out. At the conclusion of each item of the agenda, the first secretary would verbally propose a compromise decree (*usnesení*) that would try to accommodate every speaker's point of view; no vote would be taken to approve it and the final written version, drafted later by the first secretary and his staff, might bear no resemblance to what had been agreed.[37]

Thus, while society had become levelled to a point of near-equality in wages and benefits, status and power had become the preserve of a privileged élite.[38] Most of the approximately 300,000 members of various party committees from the local level upwards had at best limited authority, usually concerning only local supply and delivery problems. The rank and file of the party had fallen into deep apathy and passivity, and the young were refusing to join. Citizens outside the party had no political role whatsoever. So, like perestroika, the Czechoslovak reforms began with a realization of the need to diffuse power.

As the reforms progressed, the very idea of power was radically reconceptualized. For twenty years, power had been understood as command and coercion, part of a zero-sum game in which one side's gain translated into another side's loss. Now power would be understood in functionalist terms as capacity generated from social agreement: power was the energy released when social groups, granted the necessary freedom

[37] A KV ČSFR, R131 [KV ČSFR interview with Karel Kaplan, 1 March 1991]; Karel Kaplan, *The Communist Party in Power: A Profile of Party Politics in Czechoslovakia*, trans. Fred Eidlin (London: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 54–101. Kaplan points out that, whereas in 1948 the agenda of the average Presidium meeting consisted of four or five points, by 1967 it contained twenty-one. Over a three-month period in 1967, the Presidium had to take 471 decisions.

[38] Jaroslav Krejčí, 'The Prague Spring Revisited: A Sociological Reappraisal', *Czechoslovak and Central European Journal* 8 (1989), p. 27. See also Pavel Machonin, et al., *Československá společnost. Sociologická analýza sociální stratifikace* (Bratislava: Epocha, 1969).

to express their interests and their ideas, cooperate. It was hoped that out of such a combination of powers and liberties, to which John Hall ascribes the dynamic rise of the West,[39] economic and social revival would ensue.

We can see a rethinking of power in one of the earliest available arguments for reform at the élite level, a plea for decentralization made by Martin Vaculík, the leader of the municipal party organization in Prague, in the Presidium on 5 September 1967. He proposed to free the state from party domination and restrict the role of central CPCS bodies to synthesizing information and expounding basic ideology and policy, while leaving quotidian decisions to the district-level party organs.[40] Dubček, at that time leader of the party in Slovakia, supported Vaculík's proposal, arguing that it would deepen and strengthen the party's hold on power. He also believed that changes had to go beyond the timid reform agenda approved at the party congress in 1966, so on 24 October 1967 he proposed in the Presidium that an 'action programme' be enacted to address thorny questions such as culture, the economy, and the position of Slovakia.

Novotný rejected the 'illusion' that the party was in a position to present a programme 'that all of society [would] dance to', declaring instead that emphasis should fall on personal responsibility, discipline, and economic recovery.[41] With his ouster in January 1968, the Dubček coalition opted to develop a reform programme rapidly, indeed more rapidly than is often assumed. Within days of Dubček's ascent the Presidium commissioned the action programme in the hope that its formal adoption at the end of February could coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the communist seizure of power. A team of 200 party functionaries, lawyers, social scientists, and intellectuals produced a modest draft by mid-February, less than a month after its official commissioning. The programme built on the original assumption that power had to be redistributed throughout the system, and constrained by constitutionalism to allow the renewal of civil freedoms. The party's leading role in society, hitherto a euphemism for domination, was reformulated: the party would no longer demand to be the sole director and decision-maker (in 1960 Czechoslovakia had become the first state to codify the party's supremacy in the constitution), but would strive to earn this prominent position through example, persuasion, and compromise. The party, as an instrument of cognition rather than coercion, would attract the best and the brightest to analyse and address society's needs.

[39] John Hall, *Powers and Liberties: The Causes and Consequences of the Rise of the West* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 22–3.
[40] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, 44, schůze PÚV (5-09-1967).
[41] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1 [uncatalogued].

The draft was approved handily by the Presidium on 19 February, but actual submission of a final variant to the Central Committee and subsequent publication were delayed until April, apparently because of disputes between two of the members of the steering commission, the moderate reformer Drahomír Kolder and the conservative ideologue Pavel Auersperg. When the latter suffered a heart attack, work came to a full stop.[42] The final version, though very ambiguous, did acknowledge a crucial link between, on the one hand, the need for decentralization to facilitate the solution of pressing problems and, on the other, the need to recognize the existence of group interests within society. Such interests could be granted freedom of expression because, it was argued, socialism had been achieved, as the 1960 constitution declared, and if *ipso facto* any differences of opinion were non-antagonistic, then there was no threat of conflicts endangering the regime.[43]

The gist of the new system was summed up by its chief architect, Mlynář, as ensuring 'that various societal interests acquired the possibility to express themselves and to try to influence the creation of political decisions by means of freely expressed public opinion, including freedom of the press and via newly formed interest organizations (from trade unions to organizations expressing altogether specific, particular interests)'.[44] Liberalizers had accepted the mischiefs of faction and were ready to modify the rules accordingly. A key starting point was the party's own decision-making procedures, to be set out in a new statute. The revised guideline would not have abandoned the Leninist tenet of democratic centralism, but pledged to restore the democratic element of it, with democracy understood as a highly disciplined and regulated participatory system. Dissenting opinions would be given the right to be noted in minutes of meetings, though they could not be published, nor could permanent factions organize.[45]

In addition, a new constitution was promised that would guarantee the liberties necessary for group organization, because the 1960 constitution had actually reduced the significance of civil and political rights in favour

[42] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 14.–17. listopadu 1968. Stenografický zápis* (Prague: n.p., 1968), part II, pp. 39–44 [remarks by Ludmila Jankovcová, Auersperg, and Josef Špaček]. Auersperg reportedly suffered his heart attack after seeing himself denounced on television by the writer Pavel Kohout. See A KV ČSFR, Z/S 140.

[43] See the translation of the Action Programme available in Robin Alison Remington (ed.), *Winter in Prague: Documents on Czechoslovak Communism in Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969), pp. 94–7. See also pp. 43–7 for a translation of Zdeněk Mlynář's article on this subject, 'Naše politická soustava a dělba moci', *Rudé právo*, 13 February 1968.

[44] Zdeněk Mlynář, *Problémy politického systému. Texty o roce 1968, normalizaci, a současné reformě v SSSR* (Cologne: Index, n.d.), p. 16.

[45] Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 353–4.

of positive social rights, and the laws governing rights of association were essentially still those enacted in 1951, in the depths of Stalinism.[46] In response to years of pressure from within the Slovak party apparatus, the state would be federalized into two equal republics, as, it was argued, Pragocentrism was hindering the economic development of Slovakia and there was no need to fear Slovak nationalism in the 'all-people's state'.

The usual implication of a theory of group competition and functionalist concept of power is a political system characterized by pluralism. Such a system is generally held to contain an unlimited number of voluntary, competitive, self-organizing, and self-financing organizations, without monopolies on group representation or state interference in leadership selection.[47] Marxists, however, have traditionally denounced pluralism as a bourgeois deceit to weaken the united front of progressive forces, and Czechoslovak revisionists, unable to resist the symbolic power of ideas of unity, united action, and discipline that have haunted socialism since Fourier,[48] dialectically included a corollary to the thesis of the end of class antagonism, that of the *rapprochement* of social groups. Though it was acknowledged that groups have their own interests and should be allowed to pursue them, at the same time it was insisted that the logic of socialist development would lead to an eventual merging of all groups into a common force. The Action Programme is riddled with pledges to consolidate the unity of all working people, to harmonize their efforts, to maintain social order and discipline. Bound to such goals, and infused with a socialist idea of the good, the state would hardly remain the neutral, impartial force that pluralist theory demands.

Frederick Barnard, interpreting the idea of pluralism in an almost medieval sense of intermediary associations and estates, argues that Czechoslovak reformers were striving for 'civic pluralism', a socialist republicanism that would reconcile particular loyalties and allow distinctness of opinions within the framework of one shared world-view. Such a description is valid if we accept that distinct opinions and endeavours can still result in a consensual unity.[49] In the extraordinary conditions of

[46] Jičinsky, *Právní myšlení v 60. létech a za normalizace*, p. 31.

[47] This is the standard definition of pluralism from Philippe Schmitter, as quoted in Peter Williamson, *Corporatism in Perspective: An Introductory Guide to Corporatist Theory* (London: Sage, 1989), p. 11. See also Patrick Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy, and Public Choice: Economic Explanations in Political Science* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 14–27.

[48] Michael Waller, *The Language of Communism: A Commentary* (London: Bodley Head, 1972), pp. 43–55.

[49] F. M. Barnard, *Pluralism, Socialism, and Political Legitimacy: Reflections on 'Opening-Up' Communism* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also Richard Vernon, 'Moral Pluralism and the Liberal Mind', in J. M. Porter and Richard Vernon (eds.), *Unity, Plurality, and Politics: Essays in Honour of F. M. Barnard* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

1968, perhaps such a unity could have been upheld if the public had understood the constraints imposed by Soviet hegemony. Opinion polling before the August invasion indeed found that the overwhelming majority of respondents accepted, for the time being, a strictly socialist framework for political discourse. What reformers could not count on, however, was that public self-restraint would persist indefinitely. Some procedural limits, as Barnard admits, would have to be imposed on the scope of contestation.[50]

These limits, Barnard suggests, could have been imposed by a constitutional court, but the architects of the new political system had in mind a much stronger, corporatist system, as emerged after the Action Programme's publication. In corporatism, representation and state intervention are fused, so that the expression of group interests is merged with channels of implementation of policy. Certain groups are guaranteed a say in policy-making, and then help the state to carry out whatever is agreed.[51] This arrangement can be seen in the plans for a reformed Czechoslovak parliament. The rediscovery of the idea of separation of powers as protection against tyranny had already led theorists to favour an enhanced role for the legislature, and federalization required the creation of a second chamber to guarantee Slovak veto power. An unconventional proposal, however, was to establish three more chambers to represent the basic sectors of the workforce: industry, agriculture, and services. According to Mlynář, these three chambers would collectively function as the socialist equivalent of the British House of Lords, based on economic interest but for an economy resting on social ownership rather than private capital.[52] These chambers would have to be consulted on any matters concerning a sector of the workforce, and would be able to return bills for further debate. Representatives would be elected according to workplace and without party affiliation. This mechanism was intended to allow key groups undiluted access to the decision-making process, to prevent the concentration of power in one political body, and to reconcile democracy to expertise without new forms of bureaucracy.

The corporatist accommodation of groups in parliament would be mirrored (or duplicated) by a similar arrangement within the National Front. Dubčekites did not want, or felt that it would be premature, to permit political free play, and as early as 21 March 1968 the Presidium unani-

[50] Barnard, *Pluralism, Socialism, and Political Legitimacy*, p. 136.

[51] Alan Cawson, *Corporatism and Political Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 24–7. See also Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy, and Public Choice*, pp. 27–30.

[52] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968 [stenogram of the meeting of leading secretaries of the district and regional party committees on 12–13 May 1968].

mously agreed that opposition parties would not be permitted.[53] The political report to the party congress planned for September 1968 stated bluntly that the new political system could not be an open one; otherwise it would certainly lead to 'a conflict over political power aimed against the hegemony of the Communist Party'. For at least ten to fifteen more years, it was argued, participation would have to be restricted to the National Front, operating 'on the basis of the common socialist [Marxist-Leninist] conception of . . . policy'. The Front and its constituent members would enjoy 'independent rights', but (and here the Action Programme is at its most ambiguous and self-defeating) the CPCS would still exert the 'leading role'. Membership in the National Front would be regulated by a statute and a constitutional amendment stipulating certain prerequisites, such as a commitment to socialism. Failure to meet these prerequisites and subsequent denial of membership in the Front would be tantamount to a ban.

Moreover, although the Action Programme promised that laws on association would be amended to permit the formation of new interest organizations 'without bureaucratic limitations and without monopoly rights', in practice everything was done to ensure monopoly representation. Where monopolies had broken down, Mlynář wanted reamalgamation so that there would be just one peak association for each group, such as a federation for all the youth groups that had resulted from the dissolution of the old Komsomol-style union in spring 1968. Mlynář even wanted to create new monopolies, such as for all white-collar professions, which had previously been represented along branch lines. His aim was to lump together the truculent artists, writers, and journalists with professionals such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and scientists, who, he hoped, would exert a moderating influence.[54] All trade unions would remain federated under the central committee of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (RTUM). In theory these groups were to be free to select their own leaders and parliamentary candidates, but this principle conflicts with the determination of the Communist Party to exert its unifying 'leading role', which, even if no longer performed through coercion, would probably still involve attempts to place party members in leading positions.

One mechanism to ensure communist supremacy would have been the new electoral system, which was still in the planning stage at the time of the invasion. It appears that the new arrangement would have tried to

[53] Václav Kural (ed.), *Československo roku 1968. 1. díl: Obrodný proces* (Prague: Parta, 1993), pp. 41, 63.

[54] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968 [stenogram of the meeting of leading secretaries of the district and regional party committees on 12–13 May 1968].

combine proportional representation with a percentage of seats (perhaps a quarter) to be filled by individual candidates. The existing system of single-mandate constituencies would probably have been replaced by larger, multi-member constituencies. Voters would have been given a National Front ballot for their constituency, with each candidate's affiliation noted, be it a party or social organization. The citizen would have had two votes: one for a Front organization, the second for an individual candidate. The seats set aside for individual candidates would have been allocated to those receiving a simple majority, while most seats would have been filled proportionately per organization. Such a system was designed to benefit organizations with popular personalities, so that the party could still carry a constituency in which it was unpopular if it could field a few charismatic candidates.[55] Mlynář reassured nervous local party secretaries in May 1968 that communist domination from the district level up would be maintained: 'Some comrades are very naïve and believe that on the one hand political parties and the freedoms of political parliamentarism are being established, and on the other hand some sort of direct, unambiguous, simple electoral laws. It won't be like that.'[56]

Economic reform: mixing plan and market

Just as the political reforms of the Czechoslovak experiment sprang from the heads of lawyers, sociologists, and political scientists, so too economists were given *carte blanche* to try to remake an economy in the image of their abstract theories and models.[57] Such licence was granted because of

[55] Jiří Pelikán (ed.), *The Secret Vysočany Congress: Proceedings and Documents of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 22 August 1968* (London, Allen Lane, 1971), pp. 236–7.

[56] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968 [stenogram of the meeting of leading secretaries of the district and regional party committees on 12–13 May 1968].

[57] Details of the reforms are taken from Jan Adam, *Economic Reforms in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe Since the 1960s* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Adam, *Planning and Market in Soviet and East European Thought, 1960s–1992* (London: Macmillan, 1993); Judy Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe: A Comparison of the Czechoslovak and Hungarian Experiences* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Jiří Kosta, *Abriß der sozialökonomischen Entwicklung der Tschechoslowakei, 1945–1977* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), especially section 3, and also his contributions to the 1971 Reading symposium in Vladimir Kusin, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement, 1968* (London: International Research Documents, 1973), pp. 179–204, and (with Jiří Sláma) to the émigré collection *Systémové změny* (Cologne: Index, 1972); Andrzej Korbonski, 'Bureaucracy and Interest Groups in Communist Societies: The Case of Czechoslovakia', *Studies in Comparative Communism* 4 (1971), pp. 57–79; Martin Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy, 1948–1988: The Battle for Economic Reform* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Karel Pulpán, *Nástin Českých a Československých hospodářských dějin do roku 1990*, 2 vols. (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1993); three works by Ota Šik, *Plan and Market Under Socialism* (Prague: Academia, 1967), his contribution to *Systémové změny*, and his memoir *Jarní probuzení – iluze a skutečnost* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1990).

the near collapse of the once-robust industrialized economy at the beginning of the third five-year plan (1961–5). The crisis was triggered by a confluence of exogenous factors (the loss of trade with China, and the Berlin and Cuban missile crises), chronic irrationality in investment policy, half-hearted reforms in 1958 (which had actually increased monopolization and bureaucracy), and a series of poor harvests. This conjuncture punished an economy ruthlessly exploited by Comecon partners and dependent on exports to pay for raw materials, fuel, and foodstuffs. To make matters worse, Czechoslovak exports were declining in competitiveness; even though most of the capital stock in use was actually quite new (two-thirds was less than ten years old), it was not of the highest quality, and was often mismanaged.[58] The grand result was a decline in GNP of more than 2 per cent in 1963. By then, the five-year plan had already been scrapped and replaced by one-year, improvised guidelines. Growth, essential for the promised transition to communism, had stopped and a way had to be found to revive it.

The failure of the plan provided an opportunity to pursue ideas that had been percolating in research institutes since the mid-1950s, *before* crisis began. The theoreticians involved had no desire to imitate any form of capitalism; as their leader, Ota Šik, recalled, many of them had negative personal experiences of the First Republic's liberal economy.[59] Still young, at most on the cusp of middle age, and aware that their education and career advancement had been the rewards of loyalty to the communist cause, these economists began a long march in search of a third way between capitalism and centrally planned socialism.

A few preliminary remarks can be made about their approach. They strove to distinguish between Stalinism and the actual writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, in the hope that in the latter they would find ideas to support whatever project they devised. They opened a debate on pressing issues of modern development for which nineteenth-century theories had no answer. They shared the view of political scientists, that there existed in society a multiplicity, not identity, of interests, and that enterprises even within a planned economy needed incentives. They accepted that there might exist universal economic laws, regardless of mode of production, that dictate that consumer demand must be met, and that commodification (including of labour) might still be needed under socialism. Following from this principle, the economists took the plunge of rehabilitating the idea of the market.

[58] Karel Kaplan, *Sociální souvislosti krizí komunistického režimu v letech 1953–1957 a 1968–1975*, p. 31. By 1968 only 15 per cent of capital stock dated from before 1948, which reflects the radical shift in production away from light manufacturing to heavy industry after the German occupation. [59] Šik, *Jarní probuzení*, p. 78.

As a profession, economists were far from united on the extent to which the market should be unleashed. Older economists argued that market relations between state-owned enterprises was a fantasy, while the younger, more radical ones favoured the market as the basis of the entire economy. In the middle, the moderates (who included Šik and who had the greatest influence at the time) advocated introduction of a highly regulated market, so that only its 'positive' features were to be enlisted. Enterprises were to become more responsive to consumer needs, and to be given incentives to maximize efficiency, but profit was not to be an end in itself as under capitalism; a plan would continue to be used to ensure (by means never adequately described by reformers) that the market worked for the benefit of society. Planning, in a new guise of non-binding targets, would direct investments according to forecasts of long-term trends in demand, consumption, optimal growth rates, demographics, technological innovation, levels of education, regional development, and external influences. If serious disequilibrium arose, the state would impose binding targets. Thus, there would still be a process of economic coordination, just as political coordination would be effected through a multicameral parliament and the National Front.[60] The growth that, it was hoped, would be spurred would not be the old 'extensive' sort, based on heavy industry and ravenous use of resources, but 'intensive', generated by consumer-oriented light industries.

A key regulator in the socialist market would be prices. Under central planning, prices had remained fixed for political reasons (to prevent unpopular inflation) and for ideological reasons. During the 1960s Marx was reinterpreted to allow a system of pricing that would be calculated from production cost and profit margin. A massive recalculation of wholesale prices took place in early 1967 to bring them closer to market-clearing levels, as a first step towards making them subject to forces of demand as well as production costs and ultimately to bring prices more into line with world levels. The disastrous unintended consequences of the price revisions almost killed off reform altogether,[61] so for a transitional period prices were put (as in Yugoslavia) into three categories: free, limited, or fixed, depending on the sensitivity of the good.[62] Eventually, it

[60] Some recent theorists of market socialism explicitly argue that neo-corporatist institutions would be essential to arrange social pacts and maintain price stability in conditions of full employment. See Domenico Mario Nuti, 'Market Socialism: The Model That Might Have Been – But Never Was', in Anders Åslund (ed.), *Market Socialism or the Restoration of Capitalism?* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 26.

[61] See Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe*, pp. 190–1, and Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy, 1948–1988*, pp. 143–6.

[62] Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe*, p. 187. By 1968, 23 per cent of retail prices and 6 per cent of wholesale prices had been freed. See Adam, *Economic Reforms in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe Since the 1960s*, p. 60.

was hoped, prices would be determined between enterprises during transactions, under the state's watchful eye.

Changes in planning and prices required an overall change in the role of the state. According to Šik and his confederates, the state was to rely more on banking tools, such as credit and interest rates, to spur enterprises to meet non-binding targets. To gauge the proximity of output to the plan's goals, the government needed a basic indicator of performance other than gross output, which had been used by central planners and did not reflect satisfaction of demand. The government decided, as in Yugoslavia, to use gross enterprise income (the total value contributed to national income) instead of profit as the main success indicator. This choice revealed reformers' faith in management, as there was a risk that enterprises, no longer forcibly grouped into branch associations, might form conglomerates and cartels to generate income without necessarily satisfying demand.

To control inflation in the short term, base wages were to be centrally set, and a uniform tax on gross income would be levied; if profitable enterprises tried to shower workers with pay increases, extra taxes would be imposed. For a brief period, therefore, Czechoslovakia became the first Comecon country to control wages by taxation, but the failed price reform soon made the practice untenable.[63]

As these points suggest, economists wanted to grant enterprises a new degree of autonomy, especially in deciding product line and choice of suppliers. Ideally, they would become self-financing, and bonus payouts from the wage funds would be negotiated between management and trade unions. It was hoped that eventually about two-thirds of a worker's wage would derive from the fixed component (down from three-quarters in 1966), with the remaining third depending on enterprise results and the worker's own performance.[64] Heavy industry would be encouraged to lay off excess workforce, resulting in a small blurt of unemployment, which theorists planned to absorb through retraining and placement in areas of consumer-oriented production.

The problem remained, however, of encouraging entrepreneurial spirit in businesses that would continue in public ownership. Reformers explicitly ruled out the creation of joint stock companies. The Action Programme allowed for consideration of small-scale private enterprise (by late June 1968 more than 20,000 people had applied for permission), but this would not be extended to larger units.[65] So who would perform

[63] Adam, *Planning and Market in Soviet and East European Thought, 1960s–1992*, pp. 57–63, and *Economic Reforms in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe Since the 1960s*, pp. 58–63; Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe*, pp. 185–90.

[64] According to Kosta in Kusin, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement, 1968*, pp. 186–7, 203.

[65] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 41, 116.

the role of *de facto* entrepreneur? Some theorists favoured the creation of state holding companies, on whose behalf managers would operate enterprises, but the winning proposal came from a team of economists at the State Commission for Management and Organization, who suggested self-managing collectives of elected representative employees – enterprise or workers' councils.[66] Reformers like Šik and Prime Minister Černík originally feared that workers' representation would lead to inflationary wage increases and irrational investments and would complicate labour mobility. Most reformers were managerial-technocratic, and wanted the better-educated, white-collar sectors to reap the benefits of change. The workers were seen (unfairly) as conservative, attached to guaranteed incomes regardless of performance and envious of others' advancement. But during 1968 workers' councils came to be accepted as a way of ensuring enterprise independence, of incorporating workers into the reform process, and of putting pressure on intransigent bureaucrats. The Action Programme introduced the councils as a way of pushing economic reform one step beyond the initial project approved in 1965, from decentralization to 'democratization' of the economy.

Strict limits were imposed on these councils. Besides electing enterprise directors, they would play primarily an advisory role in issues such as production choices and distribution of funds. Management would have exclusive right of decision in day-to-day issues. Plans varied as to the actual composition of the councils: original proposals allocated workers' elected representatives only one-third of the seats, with technocrats and state representatives appointed to fill the other two-thirds, but ensuing debates in the summer of 1968, and Šik's own change of heart, radicalized designs to give workers the majority share. One of the last great debates of the Prague Spring was the dispute during the first half of 1969 over the share of worker representation on the councils and their powers over management.[67]

This summary of economic reform cannot do justice to its intricacies, since there were many variants and theorists were constantly revising proposals as events unfolded. Politicians sympathetic to economic reform, such as Černík and, initially, Drahomír Kolder, themselves wavered constantly before 1968 and at times almost suffocated change out of concern for stability. The economy suddenly surged out of recession in 1966 as a result of extravagant, 'extensive' methods of stimulation, which called into question the need for reform. Tax policies were changed frantically

[66] Karel Kovanda, *Zkušenosti demokratické samosprávy v čsl. podnicích roku 1968*, Zkušenosti Pražského jara 1968 XI (n.p.: n.p., 1980), pp. 10–11.

[67] For documents from this debate, see Vladimír Fišera (ed.), *Workers' Councils in Czechoslovakia, 1968–1969* (London: Allison and Busby, 1978).

throughout 1967–8 in a desperate bid to control wage growth, with the undesired effect of undermining gross income as an incentive. Moreover, during 1968 itself there was disarray and confusion throughout economic policy-making circles by the time of the invasion. Relations between central government and enterprises were unclear, the workers were unsettled by prospects of unemployment and de-levelled wages, productivity growth was trailing far behind wage rises, and short strikes were erupting to prevent closure of obsolete mines and steelworks.[68]

There were positive features: national income in 1966–9 grew by 7 per cent, and real wages in 1968 alone rose by 6.9 per cent, but this only fuelled a consumer appetite that could not be satisfied. A further price reform was badly needed but would be politically risky, so retail prices remained suppressed, shortages of goods grew more acute as wage increases put more money into consumers' hands, and the state still lacked the indirect regulatory tools to force producers to meet demand. Šik, now deputy prime minister, was setting out a clear potential policy route, but he was marginalized by dinosaurs in the cabinet. By December 1968 Černík and top planners were admitting to the Central Committee that the government had no strategy for further reform, and that if current trends continued inflation could spiral out of control within three years.[69]

The limits of eclectic reform

The reform package resulted from the collaboration of a wide group of people who, while mostly considering themselves socialists, had markedly different priorities. Lumped uneasily into one kitchen sink were liberal ideas of individual rights and constitutionally limited government, a functionalist, corporatist system of bargaining and decision-making, a managerial technocracy of semi-autonomous state enterprises, and a radical experiment in workplace democracy and humanized market. This eclecticism riddled the reforms with contradictions. The new political system was intended to mobilize individual initiative, but genius could not transgress the vague frontiers of party policy. Party members were to find local solutions to local problems, yet were expected always to defer to central decrees. Other political parties were to enjoy independence and equality within the National Front, but the communists would remain supreme and brook no opposition. A new model of socialism was to emerge that would offer far greater freedom and opportunity than capitalism could, and would thus contribute to the anti-imperialist struggle by luring

[68] Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy, 1948–1988*, pp. 161–77.
[69] *Zasedání ústředniho výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 12.–13. prosince 1968. Stenografický zápis* (Prague: n.p., 1968), pp. 20–7.

Western states, yet, at the same time, the model was presented as suited to Czechoslovakia's unique national conditions and not intended for replication in other Soviet-bloc states.[70] Censorship would yield to a new openness, but no one was to articulate an ideology hostile to communism. Market forces would replace rigid central planning, but there was to be no large-scale private ownership or decollectivization of agriculture. Groups would be allowed to pursue their interests and influence policy-making, but a powerful state would uphold higher communal goals.

Beneath these fundamental problems, however, was an even deeper contradiction stemming from the philosophical base of Marxism. As Charles Taylor has pointed out, Marxism tries to combine the rationalist, Enlightenment concern for the unhindered development of the autonomous individual with the Romantic yearning for the discovery of meaning in communion with all humanity, nature, and the cosmos.[71] Thus, even putting aside the constraints of the Cold War, Czechoslovak reformers eventually would have had to confront a dilemma of Marxian principle and choose their priority: was their aim the promotion and protection of individual liberty and development, or the attainment and maintenance of a harmonious, united, non-exploitative society? Was politics to remain teleological, or leave it to citizens to determine their own ideas of the good?

Given that these questions still cannot be answered after thirty years, it must also be asked whether the overall project can be considered democratic. It certainly should not be disqualified for its corporatist overtones. Although Noel O'Sullivan warns that a corporatist state's emphasis on collective goals can shove constitutionalism and the rule of law into lesser positions of importance, and could put them at risk altogether,[72] Austria served in the 1960s and 1970s as a prime example of the potential successes of a corporatist democracy in a small but developed Central European state. Moreover, many of the limitations on reform can be seen as rational self-binding devices necessary to facilitate an eventual transition to democracy: by keeping the pace and scope of change under limits, the party would have had time to slough off its Stalinist hide and would have been spared the authoritarian temptation to suppress a reform

[70] Dubček articulated this contradiction almost in one breath during a speech to a meeting of district and regional party functionaries on 12 May 1968. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968.

[71] Charles Taylor, 'Socialism and Weltanschauung', in Leszek Kołakowski and Stuart Hampshire (eds.), *The Socialist Idea: A Reappraisal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp. 49–51.

[72] Noel O'Sullivan, 'The Political Theory of Neo-Corporatism', in Andrew Cox and Noel O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Corporate State: Corporatism and the State Tradition in Western Europe* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1988).

course that was spiralling out of control. It was assumed that the party would be ready to contest free elections by the late 1970s.[73]

As envisaged, however, the new system would have failed Przeworski's test of institutionalized uncertainty as a defining feature of democracy. A democratic election's outcome cannot be predicted with 100 per cent conviction, because there is no earthly power that will determine the results. Under an authoritarian regime, by contrast, such a power does exist that could prevent an undesirable outcome or alter it *ex post facto*.[74] The new Czechoslovak system would have introduced some degree of uncertainty, but would have built in ultimate victory for a particular contestant. It would have attempted, as other communist states tried on occasion, to bridge the gap between choice and non-choice systems, falling into a grey zone of a 'semi-free', 'partly democratic' system, an electocracy or *democradura*,[75] like the 'compartmentalized' election of June 1989 in Poland.[76]

As that case showed, however, such efforts can have spectacular unintended consequences and unanticipated outcomes. Although the CPCS enjoyed real popularity in 1968, and probably could have won a free election, if economic reforms inflicted hardships (as was widely feared), then eventually party leaders might have had to contend with a strong showing by independent opposition candidates, or a resurgence by conservatives using elections to return to power, or both. A cautionary tale comes from Yugoslavia, the inspiration of many details of the new institutional arrangement proposed in 1968. From 1963 to 1974, Yugoslavia conducted its own semi-corporatist experiment in response to profound social change and the recognition of group interests.[77] Yugoslav liberalizers, however, quickly discovered that their scheme for semi-free elections and group representation had many unintended consequences, such as ethnic tension and the victory in several districts of hardline candidates.

[73] Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, pp. 93–7.

[74] Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, pp. 10–50. See also Przeworski, 'Democracy as a Contingent Outcome of Conflicts', in Jon Elster and Rune Slagstad (eds.), *Constitutionalism and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 62–3.

[75] The term 'electocratic' comes from Terry Lynn Karl, 'Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America', *Comparative Politics* 23 (1990), p. 15. *Democradura* refers to a regime that severely restricts popular participation but allows a modicum of competition. See Don Chull Shin, 'On the Third Wave of Democratization: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research', *World Politics* 47 (1994), p. 168.

[76] See David M. Olson, 'Compartmentalized Competition: The Managed Transitional Election System of Poland', *Journal of Politics* 55 (1993), pp. 415–41.

[77] On Yugoslav politics, see April Carter, *Democratic Reform in Yugoslavia: The Changing Role of the Party* (London: Francis Pinter, 1982), pp. 132–54; Harold Lydall, *Yugoslavia in Crisis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 18–19, 231–4; and Jim Seroka and Radoš Smiljović, *Political Organizations in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986), pp. 179–223.

In 1974 the idea of multiple parliamentary chambers at the federal level was abandoned, an intricate six-tiered structure of indirect representation by delegates was created, state power was sucked away from federal and local bodies and vested in the republics, and the electoral process was reduced to a farce.

As the Yugoslav case shows, and as Oksenberg and Dickson affirm, 'the unintended consequences of great reform far outweigh the intended ones'.[78] In part this effect results from citizens' using the very freedoms granted them under liberalization to pursue their own goals, which may not coincide with those officially established by the state. As society stirs, albeit often with great self-restraint, the centrist, liberalizing coalition can no longer be managed. Having joined it for a variety of reasons, its members react differently to spontaneous, unexpected developments. When the moment arrives to transform the coalition from one initiating great reform into one sustaining it, some founding members defect and, as in the Czechoslovak case, plot its undoing with the help of outside intervention.

[78] Oksenberg and Dickson, 'The Origins, Processes, and Outcomes of Great Political Reform', p. 251.

2 Intervention

Almost all citizens of the former Czechoslovakia are familiar with the events of 1968. Around 60 per cent of Czech respondents in a 1993 survey had a personal memory of the Prague Spring, and another 30 per cent knew of it from history books, the media, or family lore. Yet there is a striking lack of consensus among them on why the Soviet Union decided to intervene with massive force in August. Thirty per cent attributed it to the Soviet Union's national interest as a superpower, 12 per cent ascribed it to fear of the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and 4 per cent blamed it on Soviet rivalry with the West. For 21 per cent it was intended to preserve communist rule in Czechoslovakia, and another 12 per cent saw it as motivated by a desire to suppress democracy and freedom. Three per cent viewed the invasion positively as the defence of socialism, while 13 per cent could not identify a single reason.[1]

Just as Czechs cannot agree, neither can scholars. Like many respondents, some authors emphasize the wider context of superpower relations on the eve of détente, and see the invasion as a move to tighten the Soviet grip before bargaining with the West and to seize an opportunity to station armies in Czechoslovakia.[2] Soviet leaders indeed feared that, unchecked, Czechoslovakia might quit the socialist bloc, fall under West German influence, disrupt the post-war balance of power, and possibly endanger European security. They feared this, however, even though Czechoslovak foreign policy in 1968 remained explicitly pro-Soviet and contained nothing that implied defection. To explain the decision to invade, therefore, we still need to discover why Soviet leaders felt threatened by Czechoslovak liberalization.

[1] Lubomír Brokl, 'Čím byl a čím zůstal osmašedesáty?', *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1994), pp. 354–5. Among respondents under the age of thirty, a full 20 per cent could not identify a reason for the invasion.

[2] Antonín Benčík, *Operace 'Dunaj': Vojáci a Pražské jaro, 1968. Studie a dokumenty* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994), and Jaroslav Dvořák, 'Vojenské důvody invaze do Československa v roce 1968', *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1994), pp. 591–7. But cf. Jan Paulík, 'Rozmístění sovětských intervenčních jednotek v Československu na podzim 1968 a jeho důsledky', *Historie a vojenství* 43 (1994), p. 50.

Without ignoring the important backdrop of international relations and security, other accounts have focused instead on dynamics within the Soviet leadership. In particular, they have looked at the structural and behavioural aspects of information processing to explain why the decision to intervene was taken around 17 August, less than three weeks after a lengthy summit between Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders seemed to have resulted in a compromise that would allow liberalization to proceed. Little changed in Czechoslovakia's internal situation during the relatively calm period of 3–17 August; there were no public events that could be regarded as sufficiently serious to have provoked the overwhelming Soviet response. So what prompted the Soviet decision?

The bureaucratic-politics approach and its problems

In his 1979 study, Jiří Valenta argues that the decision to invade resulted from bargaining between the leaders of the most important bureaucracies, each of whom took a somewhat different view of the Czechoslovak crisis 'depending on his bureaucratic position, domestic interests, and personal background and idiosyncrasies'.[3] Because of this multiplicity of perceptions, Valenta attempts a cybernetic explanation that combines organizational processes with cognitive norms, and relies on a modified version of Graham Allison's Model III. Often known as the bureaucratic politics paradigm, this model interprets policy as the resultant of jostling between and within state offices, each with its own goals and pay-offs.[4] Accordingly, Valenta sees the invasion of Czechoslovakia as the outcome of intense debate within Soviet élites that culminated in mid-August 1968 when a coalition of advocates of intervention – party leaders in non-Russian Soviet republics, regional party officials, apparatchiki in ideology, the KGB, the political control network in the armed forces, and the Warsaw Pact command – had gathered enough influence to be able to override a counter-coalition that was sceptical about the use of force and push a vacillating Leonid Brezhnev into action.[5]

Although bureaucratic politics certainly existed in the Brezhnev era, Allison's Model III does not provide a satisfactory explanation of the 1968 decision. First, the model itself has been widely criticized on empirical and logical grounds. Reviewing the Cuban missile crisis, which Allison originally set out to explain, Scott and Smith conclude that Model

[3] Jiří Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968: Anatomy of a Decision* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 15.

[4] Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), especially pp. 144–81.

[5] Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968*, pp. 20–39, 140–3.

III is undermined by new evidence.[6] Rhodes has also found that the model fails to explain decisions about procurement and force posture in the United States Navy, an organization that should lend itself easily to bureaucratic analysis because of its clear factions and need to lobby for resources.[7] As a paradigm it has been criticized as 'an analytical kitchen sink', internally incoherent and of limited heuristic value.[8] It is unclear why 'government leaders have competitive, not homogeneous interests',[9] whether the unit of analysis is conflicting individuals or conflicting coalitions, whether the model assumes perfect or bounded rationality, and what the role of hierarchy (or democratic centralism) is.

Another problem with the bureaucratic politics explanation is that little evidence has emerged since the opening of archives to corroborate Valenta's thesis of coalition conflict. As one reviewer noted in 1982, he provides ample evidence of advocates of intervention but little of its opponents.[10] One witness from the period, V. A. Aleksandrov, claims that Brezhnev was predisposed to military intervention and required no bullying.[11] Dmitrii Volkogonov, who had access to Brezhnev's private papers as well as Politburo records, gives no indication of a power struggle, bureaucratic pressure, or coalition formation during 1968.[12] Russian archivist R. G. Pikhoia's account of Politburo proceedings, though selective in use of sources, similarly does not depict clear alignments for and against invasion.[13] Georgii Arbatov's suggestion that Brezhnev was pressed into the decision to invade has been vigorously refuted by former Politburo member Aleksandr Shelepin.[14]

New general accounts of that period in Soviet history suggest that, by the time of the Czechoslovak crisis, Brezhnev had already consolidated his hold on the Secretariat by outmanoeuvring rivals such as Nikolai Podgornyi and Shelepin, had neutralized Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin, and was starting to install Dnepropetrovsk clients into key posi-

[6] Len Scott and Steve Smith, 'Lessons of October: Historians, Political Scientists, Policy-Makers, and the Cuban Missile Crisis', *International Affairs* 70 (1994), pp. 678–80. See also David Welch, 'The Organisational Process and Bureaucratic Politics Paradigms: Retrospect and Prospect', *International Security* 17 (1992), pp. 112–46.

[7] Edward Rhodes, 'Do Bureaucratic Politics Matter? Some Disconfirming Findings from the Case of the US Navy', *World Politics* 47 (1994), pp. 1–41.

[8] Jonathan Bendor and Thomas H. Hammond, 'Rethinking Allison's Models', *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992), p. 318.

[9] Allison, *Essence of Decision*, p. 146.

[10] Robert M. Cutler, 'The Formation of Soviet Foreign Policy: Organizational and Cognitive Perspectives', *World Politics* 34 (1982), pp. 418–36.

[11] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 134–6.

[12] Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Sem'vozhdei*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), vol. II, pp. 40–52.

[13] R. G. Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god, vzgliad iz Moskvy. Po dokumentam TsK KPSS', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, pp. 3–20, and 1995, no. 1, pp. 34–48.

[14] 'Istoriia – uchitel' surovyi', *Trud*, 15 March 1991.

tions. He enjoyed the blessing of leading ideologue Mikhail Suslov and the support of Andropov, and had become 'the real "number one" in the party leadership', whose views were 'decisive', increasingly so in international relations.[15] It appears that Brezhnev was neither so powerful that he could get everything he wanted nor so vulnerable that he would have to bow to coalition pressure. Moreover, with the Khrushchev years still fresh in their memory, Politburo members would have had little appetite for factional strife: the Ukrainian party leader at the time, Petr (Petro) Shelest, has admitted that he generally supported Brezhnev, because otherwise 'there would be no order'.[16]

Valenta asserts that the pro-invasion coalition argued its case in the course of a long Politburo session on 16–17 August, yet no evidence has emerged to suggest that such a debate in fact took place. A coalition might have pressured Brezhnev and other leaders through different channels; as in the Afghan and Polish crises of 1979 and 1980–1 respectively, the Politburo established a special commission on 23 May to handle the Czechoslovak crisis, but it did not include Brezhnev or Kosygin as formal members and it is unclear how much influence it actually had.[17] Conflict might have been occurring outside formal institutions, but no survivor from the period has betrayed any hint of alignments or systematic pressure. Latent rivalry, though present, is not an adequate *explanans*.

The new materials do confirm Valenta's supposition that Soviet leaders' perception of Czechoslovakia was influenced by the one-sided, unduly alarmist information they were being fed by the KGB and Prague embassy, which led them to exaggerate the significance of minor incidents, demonize certain personalities, and misjudge the likely outcome of intervention. Here too, however, qualifications must be introduced. One of the most influential sources, as Valenta suspected, was I. I. Udal'tsov, the minister-counsellor at the Soviet embassy. Udal'tsov's reports to Moscow were uniformly negative, as his opinions were shaped exclusively by lieutenants of the deposed Novotný, and by May he was recommending that Dubček be replaced. Udal'tsov's outlook, however, did not go

[15] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 134–6. See also John Löwenhardt, James R. Ozinga, and Erik van Ree, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo* (London: UCL Press, 1992), pp. 59–65; and two books by Roi Medvedev, *Lichnost' i epokha. Politicheskii portret L. I. Brezhneva*, book I (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), pp. 101–220, and (with Dmitrii Ermakov) *'Seryi kardinal': M. A. Suslov. Politicheskii portret* (Moscow: Respublika, 1992), p. 174. The Kremlin physician Evgenii Chazov, who tended Brezhnev and Andropov from 1967, has the impression that the battle against Shelepin and Podgornyi was a relatively easy one. See *Zdorov'e i vlast'. Vospominaniia 'kremlevskogo vracha'* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), pp. 14–20.

[16] Quoted in Löwenhardt, et al., *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo*, p. 65.

[17] The commission consisted of Podgornyi, Suslov, A. Ia. Pel'she, Shelepin, Mazurov, K. V. Rusakov, Andropov, Gromyko, and A. A. Epishev. See Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, p. 17.

unchallenged; for example, the Politburo was alerted by the deputy editor of *Pravda* that his accounts were inaccurate.[18]

Udal'tsov's superior, Ambassador Stepan Chervonenko, had been serving in Prague since 1965, and by the time of Dubček's appointment was already troubled by stirrings in, as he called them, 'anti-socialist, anti-Soviet' groupings in the Czechoslovak intelligentsia, with their 'petty-bourgeois origins' and 'Jewish influences'.[19] Nevertheless, his initial response to Dubček's election was extremely positive, and he held out hope for much of the Prague Spring that Dubček could be convinced to restore control. His reports, though distorted, were more measured than Valenta anticipated.[20]

Moreover, it appears that bureaucracies like the KGB had only a limited opportunity to colour the information they were supplying. Andropov complained after the invasion that every scrap of information obtained had gone immediately, raw and without prior analysis, to the Politburo.[21] Most went directly to the Secretariats of Brezhnev and Suslov, and it was their decision with whom to share it, thereby allowing them to modulate their colleagues' knowledge of Czechoslovak events. It would probably have been very difficult for Soviet officials not ordinarily involved in foreign affairs to acquire information not already cleared by Brezhnev and Suslov, and to use it to argue against current policy. Many Politburo members reportedly preferred to read special TASS reports, simply because they were much more concise than what the KGB or Central Committee departments supplied. When it became necessary in the summer to systematize the flow of information, the task was entrusted to a small force, consisting of five or six employees of Central Committee departments, under the control of loyal Brezhnev aides Blatov and Kirilenko.[22]

A final problem stemming from ambiguities in Model III concerns the link between an individual's reading of information and bureaucratic allegiances.[23] While implying that, for example, a KGB analyst would seek and supply types of information that would suit his organizational interests, Valenta also asserts that decision-makers held a common set of images of national security that could override narrower ones.[24] He does not, however, go on to speculate how these images affected the acquisition and reading of information, and whether it was the power of images, or

[18] A. D. Cherneva, '"Ot raskrytiia arkhivov po 'Prazhskoi vesne' nikuda ne uiti . . . "', *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, 1993, no. 3, pp. 89–90. [19] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 4.

[20] Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968*, p. 126. [21] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 63.

[22] Valerij Musatov, 'Poznámky o srpnu 1968', *Rudé právo*, 28 April 1992.

[23] James M. Goldgeier, 'Soviet Foreign Policy', in Raymond Taras (ed.), *Handbook of Political Science Research on the USSR and Eastern Europe* (London: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 228–9.

[24] Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968*, p. 4. Cf. pp. 124–6.

personal idiosyncracies, or organizational interests, that mattered more. KGB Chairman Iurii Andropov, for example, was particularly hostile to liberalization in Czechoslovakia, as Valenta surmised; as early as 15 March 1968, he was urging the Politburo to consider the use of force. Witnesses suggest, however, that this belligerence stemmed from a 'Hungarian complex' dating to his experience as Soviet ambassador in Budapest in 1956, and not from his role as head of the security apparatus.[25] Although the KGB may have felt that its organizational interests were threatened by changes inside the Czechoslovak security services, there is no hard evidence that it feared a spillover of unrest into the USSR, as Valenta speculated. Two KGB situation reports from 16 and 24 July 1968 reported instead that the 'overwhelming majority' of Soviet citizens disapproved of the Czechoslovak reforms and supported the Politburo's stance.[26]

Similarly, only one instance has been reported, on 21 March, of Ukrainian party leader Shelest arguing in the Politburo that Czechoslovak liberalization had to be reversed because it was having a 'harmful' influence on party organizations in Ukraine.[27] It is not clear whether he meant that Ukrainian party activists were espousing reformist ideas, or that they simply wanted order restored in a neighbouring state. Again, we cannot determine whether Shelest's stance reflected an intolerant personality or the institutional interests of a republican party boss.

Because of the new evidence, Valenta concedes in his 1991 revised edition that, in the later stages of the 1968 crisis, Soviet leaders probably shared the same perception of events and were unanimous in their decision to invade.[28] This concession, however, undermines his explanation of why the shift in Soviet policy took place in the crucial two August weeks.

Crisis as explanation

Karen Dawisha, in her reconstruction of events, notes that when a crisis enters its most stressful phase, leaders tend to play down differences, retreat to safe, black-and-white images of the world, and defer to the will of the innermost circle, especially if the latter monopolizes information from the crisis zone.[29] The decision to invade can thus be explained by

[25] Georgii Arbatov, 'Iz nedavnego proshlogo', *Znamia*, 1990, no. 10, p. 211.
[26] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 152 and 154.
[27] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, p. 11.
[28] Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968*, rev. edn, p. 181.
[29] Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 3–14 and 341–66. See also Dimitri K. Simes, 'The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Limits of Kremlinology', *Studies in Comparative Communism* 8 (1975), pp. 174–80.

the logic of rising tension, as it led anxious statesmen into ever less sophisticated perceptions of reality.

While expressing reservations about 'the effect of political infighting on the decision to invade', and correctly surmising that after 20–1 July the entire Politburo had concluded that intervention would be necessary unless the Dubček leadership carried out a drastic restoration of control, none the less she too accepts rumours that action was prompted in mid-August by malcontents in the Central Committee and Brezhnev's rivals in the Politburo.[30] Thus, though she rejected the bureaucratic politics model, Dawisha still saw the shift in policy in mid-August as catalysed by dynamics *within* the Soviet élite, and we again encounter the problem of confirmation.

The role of images and interaction

An alternative approach is to focus on the interaction not among Soviet leaders themselves, but between Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders, and on the role in this interaction of cognitive frameworks cited by Dawisha and Valenta, such as images, ideas, and beliefs. Much of this interaction was direct, in face-to-face encounters or over the telephone; even if the Politburo was being misled by inaccurate information, its most important members also had numerous opportunities to observe the behaviour of Czechoslovak reformers at first hand. Although the relationship between the two leaderships, and between Dubček and Brezhnev personally, has usually been listed as one of many possible factors in the Soviet decision to invade, it has never been given pride of place as a central concern. Materials released since 1989 suggest that it fully deserves prominence, as they support Jervis's claim that 'much of politics consists of the proffering, scrutinizing, accepting, and rejecting of interpretations of behavior'.[31] Sessions of the Politburo and consultations with other East European leaders revolved around the need to fathom the intentions, preferences, strategies, and very nature of the Dubček coalition.

Chapter 5 will analyse the actual process by which the Soviets, along with East European allies, concluded that intervention was necessary and then prepared and executed the invasion. To explain why it was concluded that military force was unavoidable, however, it is necessary to explain here and in chapter 4 the interaction that took place from January to August 1968 between Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders, in particular to show why Moscow lost its initial trust in the Dubček coalition.

[30] Cf. pp. 283–7 and 362–6 of Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*.

[31] Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. xix.

First, new materials provide ample evidence of the role of images during interaction with, or speculation about, foreign leaders. As American intervention in Latin America can be linked to prevalent images of those states as dependent and underdeveloped,[32] so Soviets seemed to have seen their client neighbours in Central Europe as vulnerable to reactionary subversion and ungrateful for all that the USSR had done since the liberations of 1945. It also appears that most Soviet leaders held extremely narrow views of what could constitute a Marxist-Leninist, pro-Soviet system, and any deviation (be it as important as the Action Programme or as trivial as long hair on a male student, a mini-skirt on a woman, or an anonymous placard at a rally) was immediately suspect.[33] If such rigid cognitive predispositions did obtain, then almost any information, positive or negative, could be read to confirm their non-falsifiable thesis of counter-revolution.

The new materials also suggest that during this interaction beliefs about correct political behaviour played an extremely important role in shaping Soviet perception. Members of the transnational communist nomenklatura were expected to conform to an operational code of reliability, predictability, transparency, and familial loyalty. Particularly revealing passages in transcripts of meetings between Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders expose Brezhnev's almost mafioso doctrine of 'political love', demanding trust and sincerity. Quoting a Russian folk saying, he claimed in October 1968 that between political leaders 'without trust there is no love. And thus we have to find a solution so that there will be not only trust but mutual love, political love, as well.'[34] In another meeting, he repeated that 'trust is very important in both political and personal life. You know that in high and low politics personal relations have important significance [*sic*].'[35]

While confidence and loyalty are factors in all political systems, they acquired particular salience in the Soviet partocracy, for three reasons: first, because of the central role of patronage; second, because refusal to admit the possibility of systemic problems meant that all crises had to be attributed to 'subjective', personal shortcomings; and third, because Stalinist show trials had imbued a generation with the fear that outwardly devoted Bolsheviks might in fact be covert agents of counter-revolution.

[32] Martha L. Cottam, *Images and Intervention: US Policies in Latin America* (Pittsburgh and London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).

[33] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 134–6. See also Arbatov, 'Iz nedavnego proshlogo', *Znamia*, 1990, no. 9, p. 214.

[34] A KV ČSFR, Z/S, 'Stenogramma peregovorov delegatsii KPSS s delegatsiei KPCh', 3 October 1968.

[35] A KV ČSFR, Z/S, 'Stenograficheskaia zapis' besedy s t.t. Dubchekom, Chernikom, Gusakom v Varshave 15 noiabria 1968 goda'.

There is evidence that in 1956 Soviet leaders interpreted events in Hungary as a conflict between two narrow groups (the party leadership and the 'enemy') and dwelled on the inscrutability of characters such as Ernö Gerö, Andre Hegedüs, and Imre Nagy.[36] Soviet loathing of obscured loyalties emerged very strongly also in their perception of Nicolae Ceauşescu's dalliance between China, the West, and the Warsaw Pact.[37] During a summit on 8 May 1968 between the leaders of the USSR, GDR, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, the discussion became so fixed on the vagaries of personalities throughout the communist world that a frustrated János Kádár urged his counterparts not to dwell on alleged psychological dysfunction: 'If someone thinks that Mao Zhedong and his allies are abnormal, Castro is a petty-bourgeois, Ceauşescu a nationalist, and the Czechoslovaks have gone mad, then he is incapable of solving anything.'[38] Kádár's advice, however, was neither welcomed nor heeded.

With the new materials, it is possible to identify three ways in which Dubčekite centrists deviated from the Soviet operational code: (1) they tried to avoid meetings with Soviet counterparts; (2) they did not indicate clearly whether they allied themselves to the pro-Moscow faction within the CPCS leadership; and (3) they repeatedly promised to reassert control of the reform course but never carried out the measures Moscow expected. These resulted largely from the contradictions of the liberalizers' centrist programme of limited change, as noted in chapter 1. In aiming to satisfy the Soviets, their own people, and their own wishes, liberalizers unintentionally mixed their messages to Moscow, which were received as indicators of dangerous dithering, if not outright deceit.

These 'deviations' can be analysed from another angle, through Jervis's categories of signals and indices. Signals are statements or actions intended by the sender to create a particular image in the eyes of the receiver, for example, talking tough or shifting armies to deter (often through deception) a potential aggressor. Indices are statements or actions creating an image that the receiver will consider to be beyond manipulation and that can be used to predict the sender's behaviour; many indices are inadvertent or unintended for the receiver's consumption, such as emotional outbursts, intercepted information, or a leader's

[36] János M. Rainer, 'Sovětské dokumenty k maďarské krizi 1956', *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1994), pp. 563–5.

[37] This impatience is evident in accounts of the Romanian leader's visits to Moscow in 1970 and 1971. See A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information from Miroslav Sulek, Czechoslovak ambassador to Romania, 2 June 1970, and a copy of the Soviet transcript 'Zapis' besedy A. N. Kosygina i M. A. Suslova s N. Chaushesku v aeroportu Vnukovo-II 24 iunia 1971'].

[38] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 5.

traits.[39] Throughout 1968 the Dubček coalition issued many signals, especially promises to maintain or restore control of the country, but few indices to authenticate them. Instead, the only indices the Soviets detected led them to suspect a different set of intentions and capabilities, and it was the accumulation of such indices in the first half of August, I will argue, that brought them to the decision to use force.

[39] Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, pp. 18–40.

3 Normalization

Though at times uncertain of the motives and reliability of the Dubček coalition, the Czechoslovak public overwhelmingly supported the changes introduced in the first half of 1968. Around 60 per cent of citizens were content with the pledges of the Action Programme, while another 21 per cent favoured a more radical approach; about 17 per cent would have preferred a more restrained reform or none at all.[1] Given such levels of support, how can we explain public acquiescence to the rollback of reforms, and then quiescence for two decades under the authoritarian regime of Gustáv Husák? Put differently, how was normalization accomplished in a society that would clearly have preferred to proceed instead to full democratization?

The meanings of normalization

The term 'normalization'[2] should first be explained. The word was coined in the 1860s to mean the action of making something normal, be it a situation or a thing; originally it was applied to orthographical and metallurgical standardization. In the 1920s it was adopted by psychologists to describe subconscious devices for altering images or patterns to resemble more familiar forms. In the late 1930s it came to mean the advent or renewal of stable relations between two once-hostile states, in particular a local hegemon and a weaker power. After 1955 it was frequently used to describe Soviet–Yugoslav dealings,[3] and appeared in West Germany's *Ostpolitik*.[4] In Russian *normalizatsiia* has two meanings: the process of 'making normal'; and the adaptation of an object to conform to a norm.

[1] Drahoš Šmejc and Jiří Hudeček, 'Předběžná zpráva o demoskopickém šetření k problematice politického systému Národní Fronty a volební soustavy v ČSSR', unpublished survey (Prague, 1968), p. 17.

[2] Although I will refrain from putting the term in inverted commas every time it appears in the text, it can be taken as always euphemistic in character.

[3] Veljko Mičunović, *Moscow Diary* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), pp. ix, 1–8.

[4] Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), pp. 15–16.

After the 1956 crises it entered Soviet parlance as a euphemism for the restoration of communist control, the return to the 'normal' Soviet-type system, or, to use its second Russian gloss, the re-calibration of the local system to match the norm represented by the Soviet model.[5]

Among Western scholars, Taborsky understands normalization as 'the re-establishment of rigid centralized control over Czechoslovak society by a disciplined, pro-Soviet party'.[6] Kusin sums it up as a 'restoration of authoritarianism in conditions of a post-interventionist lack of indigenous legitimacy, carried out under the close supervision of a dominant foreign power'.[7] Gitelman considers it the attempt 'to reconcile populations to regimes after they had been brought together by force, or, minimally, to demobilize and neutralize populations that have gone through a period of intensive political activity'.[8] For Valenta it is a long-term policy 'to partly or fully reverse revolutionary change', distinct from consolidation, which is just the immediate post-intervention clampdown.[9]

Altogether these definitions capture the many nuances of the word; a single working gloss is elusive. Furthermore, we should consider definitions provided by normalizers themselves. Husák, who preferred the term 'consolidation', spoke of a process of ensuring

> a quiet life for people, upholding legality, the free development of society, favourable conditions for the development of economic activity, stability, social and existential certainty, a perspective for people, so that they do not live from week to week, so that there be no scares with supplies or the currency. It all creates conditions to live well and quietly, so that it is worth living.[10]

In his 1970 New Year's address, President Ludvík Svoboda described normalized life as one guided by the 'three certainties' of an assured opportunity to work calmly and systematically 'for a better tomorrow', the 'leading role' of the party, and hermetic alliance with the Soviet Union.[11] What these definitions convey is that if democratization is about intro-

[5] On 6 September 1968, *Pravda* defined 'normalization' as 'the full exposure and suppression of subversive activity by rightist, anti-socialist forces, the elimination of their influence over part of the population and particularly the young, and the decisive strengthening of the Communist Party's leading role in the work of state agencies, in the ideological and public spheres, in the country's entire life'. For examples of the use of the term with regard to Hungary in 1956, see *Pravda*, 19, 21, and 28 November 1956.

[6] Edward Taborsky, 'The Return to "Normalcy"', *Problems of Communism* 19 (1970), p. 31.

[7] V. V. Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77: A Study of 'Normalisation' in Czechoslovakia, 1968–1978* (Edinburgh: Q Press, 1978), p. 145.

[8] Zvi Gitelman, 'The Politics of Socialist Restoration in Hungary and Czechoslovakia', *Comparative Politics* 13 (January 1981), p. 187.

[9] Jiří Valenta, 'Revolutionary Change, Soviet Intervention, and "Normalisation" in East-Central Europe', *Comparative Politics* 16 (1984), p. 128.

[10] 'Proč byl leden nutný', *Rudé právo*, 5 January 1970.

[11] *Rudé právo*, 3 January 1970.

ducing organized uncertainty, then normalization is primarily about restoring extreme predictability, far beyond the certainty provided, for example, by the rule of law. After a period of not knowing what might be published tomorrow, who will be in office, or how much potatoes will cost, the normalized citizen goes about her day in the shadow of a very certain future that stretches on in terms of multi-year plans that ensure a social minimum and quinquennial party congresses and bogus elections that produce few or no surprises. In an ideal normalized setting, from the point of view of the rulers, all outcomes are intended, desirable, and certain.

Explaining quiescence

This language of enforced predictability partly explains the quiescence of most citizens under the Husák regime. It signalled to the public that many items of policy and ideology were non-negotiable, and that the disgruntled should not expect an opportunity to participate in decision-making. In this light, quiescence could be explained either as conditional tolerance (a rational choice made by each citizen after weighing up the costs of insubordination),[12] or as a non-rational response of frustration. Unlike rational action, which is goal-oriented and instigated by motivation, frustration produces behaviour that simply tries to relieve or avoid anxiety or pain. Typical outcomes include individualism, fatalism, and dependence on the immediate family, resulting on a community-wide scale in an 'analgesic subculture'.[13] Frustration can be reproduced by an illegitimate ruler mobilizing systemic bias through various forms of power (such as the use of language, symbols, myths, rituals, and, not least, coercion) to persuade the discontented that there is no alternative to the status quo and even to convince some of them of its self-proclaimed virtues.[14]

Explaining acquiescence

Before these reinforcing cycles of powerlessness could begin, however, normalizers first had to win access to power and secure initial public

[12] Jan Pakulski, 'Legitimacy and Mass Compliance: Reflections on Max Weber and Soviet-Type Societies', *British Journal of Political Science* 16 (1986), pp. 35–56.

[13] Richard A. Ball, 'A Poverty Case: The Analgesic Subculture of the Southern Appalachians', *American Sociological Review* 33 (1968), pp. 885–95. See also Harry Eckstein, 'Rationality and Frustration in Political Behaviour', in Kristen Renwick Monroe (ed.), *The Economic Approach to Politics: A Critical Reassessment of the Theory of Rational Action* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

[14] John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Petr Fidelius, *Jazyk a moc* (Munich: Karel Jadrný Verlag, 1983).

acquiescence to their hegemony. The textbook explanation is that 'the Warsaw Pact, led by Soviet tanks and infantry, entered Czechoslovakia on August 20, 1968, ending the "experiment with socialism with a human face". The invasion was not resisted by the people or by the Czechoslovak armed forces.'[15] The intervention was of course essential to normalization; it was a momentous event, the sort that inspires witnesses to use superlative adjectives, but all of them surprisingly positive. Instead of sending Czechs and Slovaks cowering under their beds, the invasion provoked a week-long campaign of massive non-violent resistance that specialists describe as 'the most significant attempt thus far to improvise civilian struggle for national defense purposes'[16] and 'the most dramatic case of non-violent action against foreign aggressors that the world has ever known'.[17] For journalist Jiří Lederer it was 'the most fantastic film I have ever watched',[18] and for Milan Kundera it was 'the most beautiful week that we have ever lived through'.[19] The ample evidence of overwhelming opposition to the invasion, and of its unintended consequence of instilling in Czechs and Slovaks an even stronger commitment to reforms and reformers, destroys a simple attribution of acquiescence to foreign intervention.[20]

Other studies have interpreted the authoritarian restoration as a metaphorical social compact, under which the public acquiesced to normalization in exchange for regime promises of assured employment, a reasonable standard of living, and adequate (if mediocre) public goods. It was also part of this metaphorical contract that the regime would not subject citizens to random terror and would demand of them 'little real effort, personal involvement, or individual initiative'.[21] Many Czech and Slovak thinkers feared that compatriots had succumbed to the insidious notion that 'for a man it is "only natural" that he limit his life to uninspired sustenance and willingly exchange his soul for a cushy existence',

[15] Joseph Held, *Dictionary of East European History Since 1945* (London: Mansell, 1994), p. 165.

[16] Gene Sharp and Bruce Jenkins, *Civilian-Based Defense: A Post-Military Weapons System* (Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 16.

[17] Adam Roberts (ed.), *Civilian Resistance as a National Defence: Non-Violent Action Against Aggression* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 7.

[18] Jiří Lederer, *Touhy a iluze II* (Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1988), p. 7.

[19] Kundera, 'Česky úděl', *Listy*, 19 December 1968.

[20] Josef Macek, et al., *Sedm pražských dnů. 21.–27. srpen 1968* (Prague: Academia Praha, 1990), available in English as Robert Littell (ed.), *The Czech Black Book* (New York: Praeger, 1969). See also Jindřich Pecka, *Spontanní projevy Pražského jara, 1968–1969* (Brno: Doplněk, 1993), and Fred Eidlin, *The Logic of 'Normalization': The Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia of 21 August 1968 and the Czechoslovak Response* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1980).

[21] A. J. Liehm, 'The New Social Contract and the Parallel Polity', in J. L. Curry (ed.), *Dissent in Eastern Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

and to an 'idea of society, the goal of which is no longer the growth of free people but a life of contented farm animals in the model byre of the Grand Inquisitor'.[22]

This social-contractual interpretation, however, is also inadequate, for two reasons. First, the analogy is unsatisfactory, since contracts are bargained between two parties and are enforced by a third; without the outside enforcer, one of the parties would probably defect to seek a more favourable arrangement.[23] Though it was a critical factor in Czechoslovak politics, the Soviet Union could not be described as this requisite third party, as it hardly acted as a neutral arbiter between the regime and the people. The Church in Czechoslovakia never played the third-party role that it could in Poland. Moreover, there was no mechanism by which to arrive at some sort of social-contractual understanding; it might have been created only if the corporatist reforms had continued.

Second, in 1969–70, when normalization took place, rulers were in no position to offer economic security, nor did the public believe that they could. In fact, the economy was in disarray, markets were bare, and inflation was threatening.[24] Thanks to these conditions, Czechoslovak leaders told a sequence of East German visitors in October and November 1969 (more than a year after the invasion) that 'there are still very great political problems in Czechoslovakia',[25] that 'people are nervous and have no trust in the otherwise correct measures taken by the party and government',[26] and, with a severe winter predicted, 'the breakdown of political morale has become so bad . . . that further economic deterioration is endangering the party's consolidation process'.[27] It was not until late 1970, after the normalization regime had entrenched itself, that consumer expectations improved, as the opinion polling data in tables 3.1 and 3.2 indicate.

[22] Erazim Kohák, *Národ v nás. Česká otázka a ideál humanitní v údobí normalizace* (Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1978), pp. 9–10. Otto Ulč subscribes openly to the social contract interpretation in his contribution to Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (ed.), *Communism in Eastern Europe*, 2nd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Kusin's richly detailed *From Dubček to Charter 77* avoids an explicit thesis of how normalization was possible but leans towards this interpretation. See also his article 'Husák's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation', *Problems of Communism* 31 (1982), pp. 24–37.

[23] Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, pp. 22–3. See also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men', in *The Essential Rousseau*, trans. Lowell Bair (New York: New American Library, 1974), pp. 190, 193.

[24] See, for example, the complaint lodged on 5 May 1969 by the Slovak Union of Women concerning shortages in Bratislava of basic foodstuffs, in Pecka, Belda, and Hoppe, *Občanská společnost, 1967–1970*, p. 263.

[25] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 46 [Husák to Gunther Mittag, 7 November 1969].

[26] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 45 [Černík to Mittag, 7 November 1969].

[27] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44 [Biľak to Hermann Axen, 9 October 1969].

Table 3.1. *Which of the following statements on the development of prices in the coming months reflects your opinion? (in percentages)*

	December 1968	November 1969	November 1970	June 1971	May 1972	April 1973	February 1974	February 1975	April 1977
Will rise	88	73	37	14	22	22	29	59	53
Will stay the same	6	18	44	52	54	56	59	27	26
Will fall	3	4	11	25	16	14	12	3	3
Don't know	3	5	8	9	8	8	0	11	18

Source: Kabinet pro výzkum veřejného mínění, č.j. 8/77–4.

The economic recovery after 1970 made it easier for people to seek solace in the private pursuit of a good life, and thus contributed to quiescence, but cannot explain the initial acquiescence to normalization.

A third possible explanation would invoke political culture, but this tack is problematic, as its precise content could be the subject of endless dispute. Western scholarly debates before 1989 tried, indirectly or directly, to address the origin, nature, and effect of the Stalinist sub-culture that made authoritarian rule possible when the dominant culture seemed to prefer pluralism. Some analysts saw the sub-culture as exogenous and dependent on Soviet meddling.[28] Skilling, taking a more pessimistic view, saw it as originally exogenous but, over time, endogenized,[29] while Rupnik presented it as having taken root in the Czech working class in the 1930s thanks to economic depression.[30] Confusion over just what the Czech(oslovak) political culture *is*, either in terms of patterned behaviour or self-reported value systems, renders it unoperational as an explanatory framework. Ultimately, cultural explanations collapse in the face of Milan Šimečka's protest that any other

[28] Archie Brown and Gordon Wightman, 'Czechoslovakia: Revival and Retreat', in Brown and Jack Gray (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States* (London: Macmillan, 1977); David Paul, 'Czechoslovakia's Political Culture Reconsidered', and Archie Brown, 'Conclusions', in Brown (ed.), *Political Culture and Communist Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1984); David W. Paul, *The Cultural Limits of Revolutionary Politics: Change and Continuity in Socialist Czechoslovakia* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1979), pp. 277–8.

[29] H. Gordon Skilling, 'Stalinism and Czechoslovak Political Culture', in Robert Tucker (ed.), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977). See also Skilling, 'Czechoslovak Political Culture: Pluralism in an International Context', in Brown, *Political Culture and Communist Studies*.

[30] Rupnik, 'The Roots of Czech Stalinism', p. 310. See also Rupnik, *Histoire du Parti communiste tchécoslovaque. Des origines à la prise du pouvoir* (Paris: Press de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1981), p. 93.

Table 3.2. *Do you believe that market supply is at present: (in percentages)*

	February 1970	April 1973	January 1975	May 1975
Generally satisfactory	6	55	40	43
Not entirely satisfactory	42	39	51	47
Unsatisfactory	51	4	7	8
Don't know	1	2	2	2

Source: Kabinet pro výzkum veřejného mínění, č.j. 16531/75–9.

European people, put in Czechoslovakia's position, would have acted no differently.[31]

A final explanation on offer is that of the Czech historian Vilém Prečan, who seeks the origins of public acquiescence in the behaviour of reformers after the invasion:

> I am of the opinion that the private capitulation by which traumatized, internally divided, and demoralized people adapted externally to the rules of real socialism (living in falsehood) was the result of deep disillusionment and disappointment; its beginning was the small-minded and defeatist policy of the 'leaders' of the Prague Spring . . . The people did not give up their rights 'for a mess of pottage', on the basis of a 'social contract' with the rulers. At the beginning was disappointment and disgust for those whom they considered 'their' representatives; after that quickly followed fear of losing what little social certainty the renewed order could provide and of being socially degraded overnight with the entire family.[32]

Prečan does not idealize the people – they were not lions led by donkeys – but stresses that it was the poverty of political leadership in 1968–9, the gradual metamorphosis of beloved leaders back into aloof apparatchiki and the sense of frustration that this generated, and not the Soviet invasion or the temptations of private consumerism, that made normalization possible without terror.

Given the lack of relevant polling data from the critical period between August 1968 and January 1970, we cannot reconstruct definitively the primary motives of citizens in acquiescing to the reversal of the reforms they fervently supported. What my account will do instead is to pick up Prečan's argument in looking at the strategies adopted by liberalizers after the invasion, in particular at the incentives they gave the public to

[31] Milan Šimečka, *The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia, 1969–1976* (London: Verso Press, 1984), pp. 151, 162.

[32] Vilém Prečan, 'Lid, veřejnost, občanská společnost jako aktér Pražského jara, 1968', in Jindřich Pecka and Vilém Prečan (eds.), *Proměny Pražského jara, 1968–1969. Sborník studií a dokumentů o nekapitulantských postojích v československé společnosti* (Brno: Doplněk, 1993), pp. 24, 27. See also Prečan, 'The People – the Public – Civil Society: Protagonists in the Prague Spring, 1968', *Czechoslovak and Central European Journal* 8 (1989), pp. 10–11.

refrain from collective action. Archival evidence plus close reading of public statements suggest that a deal was offered, though not the trade-off between compliance and material comfort of the purported social contract. Rather, reformers signalled very openly that if citizens refrained from exercising their new liberties, rulers in turn would attempt to salvage as much of the reform programme as possible. It was a powerful inducement to deter most people from resuming the effective campaign waged in the invasion week, and served unwittingly to demobilize a society that had only just reawakened.

Moreover, this account will try to demonstrate the effect of liberalizers' limited goals, including the contradictions within the reform programme identified in chapter 1, in facilitating normalization. Disturbed by the largely unintended pace and direction of events after February 1968, many leading reformers were already contemplating the reimposition of central control long before foreign intervention occurred. While partly wishing to soothe Soviet displeasure, centrists like Dubček sincerely disliked some of the more radical trends appearing in the intelligentsia and within the party, and already in the spring of 1968 were introducing into public discourse terminology from orthodox denunciations of revisionism. The more radical reformers inside the party were branded 'rightist', based on the militaristic metaphor of a social-democratic deviation from the Bolshevik line of march, and/or 'opportunist', suggesting a short-sighted attempt to curry favour with the masses (especially the trade unions and workers) at the expense of Leninist principles.[33] Those outside the party were 'anti-socialist' or, at their most extreme, 'counter-revolutionary'. The use of such language confused many party activists and ordinary citizens, crudely obscured subtle variations in socialist outlooks, and helped to revive the us/them dichotomy of authoritarian pseudo-solidarity.

So, in an effort to resume mastery of the reform course and defend a centrist position, reformers unintentionally performed some of the most onerous tasks of normalization, and demoralized much of the public in the process. This disappointment quickly resurrected the frustration that citizens knew well already from the pre-reform period, with only a small minority clinging to the hope that direct action would restore reformers' mettle.

The executors of normalization

It follows from this that many normalizers were in fact erstwhile champions of reform who had succumbed to a profound fear of uncertainty or glimpsed an opportunity to advance their careers by pleasing Moscow or

[33] Waller, *The Language of Communism*, pp. 62–8.

saw themselves as playing the role of the 'lesser evil'. Normalization was executed by four general groups, the three most influential of which were affiliated to the reform coalition: centrist reformers like Dubček who unwittingly wounded reform in an effort to save it; those who renounced reform in the months after the invasion (an act they initially condemned), who might be called 'realists'; and those who had joined the coalition to overthrow Novotný and introduce very limited reform but quickly turned against it and collaborated actively with the invasion, to whom I will refer as 'neo-conservatives'. The final group were the confirmed conservatives (often called 'ultras' or 'supernormalizers') who had opposed reform from the very beginning.

What is particularly striking is the continuity in élite membership during the entire period under review here. As Jan Pauer notes, it was essentially the same Central Committee that overthrew Novotný, invested Dubček with only one vote against, unanimously approved the Action Programme, removed Dubček and installed Husák with almost no opposition, annulled the reform programme, and finally turned on itself in a vicious purge.[34] The only significant change in the Central Committee's composition was the sweeping co-optation of eighty new members in late August 1968, but they were all considered advocates of reform, as shown by the fact that 90 per cent of them were eliminated from the Central Committee by 1971. Only after normalization was completed did a new cohort ascend that had not participated in either the pro- or anti-reform campaigns: half of the 115 members of the Central Committee elected at the 1971 party congress were new, and only twenty-six were survivors from the 1966 congress.[35]

That leading normalizers were not just elderly, unreconstructed Stalinists but often younger members of the reform coalition emerges from a glance at the post-Dubček Presidium and Secretariat from April 1969 to late 1970. Apart from Husák, these were men of Dubček's age, born in the 1920s, members of the charmed cohort that built the new establishment after 1948, and who realized by their mid-forties that Novotný had failed them. If we look at the eleven full members of the Presidium in September 1969 (a critical time in normalization, when it was unanimously decided to expel Dubček from the Presidium and purge the entire party), we find that only one, Biĺak, had actively collaborated with the Soviet-led invasion a year before; the rest had denounced the

[34] Jan Pauer, 'Sovětská vojenská intervence a restaurace byrokraticko-centralistického systému v Československu, 1968–1971', in Pecka and Prečan, *Proměny Pražského jara*, p. 174.

[35] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; working paper for cadre preparation of Fourteenth (Official) Congress of the CPCS]; RFE background report no. 24 (25 June 1971).

occupation and later had to convince Moscow of their reliability and 'realism'.[36] It is noteworthy that the man who took Dubček's place in the Presidium, Josef Kempný, had so opposed the invasion in 1968 that he had called publicly for Czechoslovakia to leave the Warsaw Pact.

Particularly revealing are the career paths of four prominent normalizers, two of whom had not conspired with the Soviets in August 1968 and two who had: Gustáv Husák, Lubomír Štrougal, Vasil Biľak, and Alois Indra. Husák (1913–91), a communist activist since 1929, and one of the most powerful men in Slovakia in 1945–9, knew at first hand the cruelty that the party could mete out: denounced by rivals as a Slovak nationalist, he was arrested in 1951, tortured, sentenced (under Novotný) to life imprisonment, and spent nine years behind bars, six of them in solitary confinement, before being amnestied.[37] After his release, he quietly developed a following in Bratislava, especially amongst students, who regarded him as progressive and a true Slovak. His media were revisionist historiography and the Slovak writers' weekly *Kultúrny život*, in which he published articles far bolder than any to be found in Czech publications. Indeed, the first clarion call for democratization in 1968 was written not by Dubček, Černík, Mlynář, or Smrkovský, but by Husák, in *Kultúrny život* on 12 January. At that time his radicalism was equalled only by that of another contributor to the weekly, the Czech theoretician Milan Hübl. As fate would later have it, Husák ended up in power, Hübl in prison.

In December 1967 Husák wrote to Dubček to offer his services. An answer came in February 1968, when he was granted an audience with Biľak, whom Husák assured of his fervent wish to help Dubček and the reform course.[38] Husák, however, was viewed with suspicion, and was offered a vice-premiership in the central government in April 1968, to draw him to Prague away from his following in Slovakia. None the less, he continued to publish pro-reform views and through the spring of 1968 his popularity in Bratislava continued to grow, such that by the summer he was the third most popular figure in Slovakia, after Dubček and President Svoboda. The Soviets were wary of him largely because he had no contact with the Soviet embassy in Prague or the Soviet consulate in Bratislava,[39] and because the KGB still had him on file as a 'bourgeois nationalist'.[40] Husák was not involved in the plot to invite Soviet intervention, and his

[36] One other member, Jan Piller, had been counted on to support the invasion, but during the night of 20–1 August he voted in favour of the Presidium's declaration condemning it.

[37] Viliam Plevza, *Vzostupy a pády. Gustáv Husák prehovoril* (Bratislava: Tatrapress, 1991), pp. 45, 62–79. [38] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15 [uncatalogued].

[39] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 1, p. 35.

[40] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 63. In March 1968 Brezhnev named 'Gussak' as a counter-revolutionary along with Šik and Smrkovský. See A KV ČSFR, Z/N 61.

reaction was reportedly, 'Look what that idiot Brezhnev has done to us now.'[41]

Husák, however, was enchanted by power, and was always willing to ingratiate himself with the authorities to promote his own chances. In the para-fascist Slovak state during the Second World War, he frequently agreed to refrain from subversive activity to avoid detention. When he was arrested in June 1941, his wife secured the help of her former teacher, the governor of the Slovak National Bank, to arrange Husák's release. He remained at large despite sweeping arrests of other communist functionaries; when detained in May 1942 he denied being a communist and was released again after a week.[42] Husák believed that Germany would defeat the Soviet Union and it was only after Stalingrad, in February 1943, that he re-established contact with the Slovak Communist Party. To curry favour with Moscow, he appealed to the USSR in July 1944 to annex Slovakia rather than let it be re-acquired by the Czechs, since, he claimed, the Slovaks had now enjoyed five years without them.[43]

In the lead-up to his arrest in 1951, Husák had been characteristically willing to perform self-criticism in the hope that it would appease his rivals; once in prison, however, he bravely resisted three years of horrific interrogation. During the Kremlin negotiations that followed the August 1968 invasion, Husák was initially hostile to the Soviets, but soon he saw a chance to further his ambitions by presenting himself as a reasonable negotiator. After August, having become party leader in Slovakia, he turned against reform and gradually accepted the Soviet line. Although it was widely rumoured that he was too compromised by his reformist past to survive for long, Husák ruled as head of the CPCS from 1969 to 1987 and as president from 1975 to December 1989, when, as his final act, he swore into power the first non-communist federal government.

Another leading normalizer who had originally opposed the invasion was Lubomír Štrougal.[44] Born in 1924, he had served dutifully in the party apparatus since 1948, with a hiatus in 1959–65 when he was minister for agriculture and then the interior. In Novotný's last years, Štrougal was the Central Committee secretary for agriculture, and was heavily involved in the plot to oust the party leader. Like Husák, he was a lawyer

[41] Stanislav Sikora, 'K vývoju v KSS od októbroveho zasadania ÚV KSČ v roku 1967 do 21. augusta 1968', unpublished study (Bratislava, 1991), p. 93.

[42] Jozef Jablonický, 'Husák v rezistencii, 1939–1943', *Národná obroda*, 7, 8, and 9 August 1991.

[43] Vilém Prečan, 'O vývoji a situaci na Slovensku', *Svědectví* 58 (1979), pp. 361–82.

[44] This sketch is based on details from Martin Hodný, *Českoslovenští politici, 1918/1991* (Prague: M. Hodný, 1991), p. 69; Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, pp. 125, 215–16; KV ČSFR interviews with Štrougal, 21 February 1990 and 23 May 1991, and with Čestmír Císař, 29 March 1990.

and served in 1968 as a deputy prime minister, and he demonstrated his commitment to reform during the invasion, when he ran the government in the absence of Černík, who had been abducted and taken to Moscow. Also like Husák, Štrougal quickly turned 'realist' and was rewarded with powerful positions, first as head of the party in the Czech lands, then as federal prime minister from 1970 to 1988. Štrougal differs from Biĺak and Husák in that he could pass himself off in public as an intelligent, rational technocrat, neither too keen on Šik's reforms nor oblivious to the problems of central planning. He rationalized his place in high office as a duty to prevent normalization from reverting to Stalinism, yet he was also a calculating opportunist bent on safeguarding and exploiting his privileges, and post-1989 interviews reveal a highly unstable personality.

Biĺak, born in the impoverished Ruthenian village of Bystrá in 1917, joined the party in 1945, was propelled up through the apparatus, and emerged in the 1960s as an ally of Dubček. Biĺak served as Slovak ideology secretary after 1963, and enjoyed a reputation as a moderate by association with Dubček's relaxed attitude towards the intelligentsia and the campaign against Novotný in 1967. Thanks to this profile, and Dubček's patronage, Biĺak succeeded him as Slovak party leader in January 1968. His support for reform, however, soon yielded to his lack of imagination and paranoia; his memoirs, published in full in 1990,[45] reveal a man racked with fear. He had no formal education and very little grounding in Marxism, having received only an accelerated indoctrination at the party's Central Political School in Prague in 1951–3, a course he describes as having 'more a military than a university character'.[46] Unlike similarly rising functionaries such as Dubček and Mlynář, Biĺak was not sent to Moscow in the 1950s and thus was not influenced by Khrushchev's thaw.

For him, 1968 became 'so extraordinarily menacing that many a time I was covered in a cold sweat and a feeling of uncertainty arose whether I would weather this difficult test as a man, a citizen, a communist. Nineteen sixty-eight etched such a strong scar in my thought, heart, and memory that I must continuously turn to it.'[47] He feared that mobs would tear him apart during the August invasion, as he was among those who had invited neighbouring armies to intervene. Several Presidium members recall vividly that when they were first informed of the invasion, Biĺak rent his clothes and screeched like a trapped animal, 'Go ahead, lynch me!'[48] Ensconced in Soviet armoured vehicles and the Soviet

[45] *Paměti Vasila Biĺaka*, 2 vols. (Prague: Agentura Cesty, 1991). For a review, see Kieran Williams, 'Czechoslovakia, 1968', *Slavonic and East European Review* 74 (1996), pp. 84–6. [46] Biĺak, *Paměti*, vol. I, p. 41. [47] Ibid., p. 5.

[48] A KV ČSFR, R43 [KV ČSFR interview with Čestmír Císař, 29 March 1990]; Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, p. 165.

embassy, however, Biľak was quite safe, and he retained a place in the Presidium and Secretariat until 1988.

Finally, Alois Indra (1921–90) at first glance seems to be just another calculating party apparatchik, having shot up quickly during the social revolution after 1948 from working on the railways to become head of a Central Committee department by 1960. Like Biľak, he experienced the party's own militarized form of university in 1950–1, and he had the dubious honour of having overseen the State Planning Commission in the disastrous days of 1962–3, for which he was demoted to working as transport minister in 1963–8. Probably out of resentment, he turned against Novotný and developed the reputation of a permanent critic, often willing to rebuke incumbents and join alliances against the status quo. He was rewarded for his role in Novotný's downfall with enormous power in 1968, becoming Central Committee secretary for the economy and chairman of the commission to rewrite the party statutes and prepare the Fourteenth Party Congress, and by summer 1968 held the status of deputy party leader (like Ligachev under Gorbachev). During those months he was openly critical of radical reformers and intransigent Stalinists alike, and he inspired many nervous moderates as a potential 'Czech Kádár', someone who could introduce necessary changes while maintaining control.[49] Indra established regular contact with the Soviet embassy, and was at the centre of the conspiracy to topple Dubček with Soviet military assistance. He survived the political failure of the invasion, serving as a Central Committee secretary to 1971, and then as a full Presidium member and speaker of the federal parliament from 1971 to November 1989.

The problematic of normalization, therefore, is intimately linked with that of liberalization through the tasks of maintaining and transforming a reform-initiating into a reform-sustaining coalition.

The means of normalization

Normalizers could draw on a rich tradition of communist crisis management. On numerous occasions in the past, authoritarianism had been restored in part through the use of force, purges, and restrictive new legislation, but also through the power of persuasion. To avoid recourse to sweeping, indiscriminate terror, normalizers attempted to divide the opposition between centrists and radicals, a process they often referred to as differentiation. That many of them were once reformers, as shown above, enabled them to present themselves as the lesser evil, as the responsible, realistic alternative to deluded liberalizers and stodgy con-

[49] A KV ČSFR, Z/P 1.

servatives. These tactics can be seen in three precedents that merit consideration: the normalizations of Hungary and Poland after October 1956, and that attempted by Novotný in his last desperate months in power in 1967.

Hungary, 1956–1957

The standard distinction in modelling normalization is between military and political forms, with Hungary and Poland in 1956–7 as respective examples. Hirszowicz defines a military normalization as one involving coercion and repression, an externally imposed leadership and authoritarian policies, with immediate public alienation but, over the long run, tactical concessions. A political normalization starts with a popular new leadership conceding to mass demands and pursuing liberal policies but eventually resorting to repressions.[50] Considering the brutality of the second Soviet invasion of Hungary, it is natural to assume that János Kádár's normalization was accomplished thanks to overwhelming military force.

A closer study, however, of the weeks after the arrival of the 'Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government' (RWPG) in Budapest on 7 November 1956 reveals that at first Kádár actually controlled nothing, with true power in the hands of workers' councils and revolutionary committees.[51] The resistance switched from violent to non-violent methods (in particular strikes), centralized its organization, and tried to bargain with the RWPG from a position of strength. Resorting to persuasion, Kádár promised to continue 'the noble goals of the mass movement launched on October 23' (except pluralism and neutrality), with no return to the Stalinism of the earlier Rákosi–Gerö regime, and he made the withdrawal of Soviet troops contingent on the people's good behaviour. The black-and-white reality of street fighting was replaced by the greyer world of negotiation; once Kádár showed a willingness to talk, the opposition suddenly had something to lose and something to gain.

The RWPG vacillated between compromise and coercion until early December, when under Soviet pressure it enacted harsh legislation and made arrests. The self-discipline of the opposition snapped, street clashes ensued, and once the RWPG proved that it could muster native (not

[50] Maria Hirszowicz, *Coercion and Control in Communist Society* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), p. 148.

[51] My summary of events is taken from János Kis's 1986 study, 'The Restoration of 1956–1957 in a Thirty-Year Perspective', in his collection *Politics in Hungary: For a Democratic Alternative* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1989), pp. 33–84.

Soviet) means of violence, the will to resist was broken. Differentiation set in as moderates in the factories broke with the radicals and agreed to deal with the RWPG in hope of salvaging economic reforms and helping Kádár fight off a hardline resurgence. Purges began in public offices, while creative unions and territorial workers' councils were outlawed and arrests, especially of intellectuals, abounded. Though as late as 11 January 1957 unarmed workers clashed with militia units and Soviet tanks, and hope persisted of a revived opposition in March, by April workers' councils were folding rather than letting themselves become cogs in the machine as the promised continuation of economic reforms vanished. New members flooded into the resurrected Communist Party, and very gradually Kádár lessened the severity of his regime.

Poland, 1956–1957

The Hungarian example shows that, beyond the violence of invasion and street battles, normalization was ultimately a political process relying heavily on dividing the opposition and offering incentives to the public to demobilize. This is borne out even more clearly by the simultaneous normalization in Poland.[52] After a summer of unrest, Władysław Gomułka returned to power in October 1956, enjoying enormous popularity as a victim of Stalinism (like Husák and Kádár) and as a national communist, which he then used to secure public discipline while Hungary exploded. He used it also to win public acceptance of limits on reform and self-censorship in the media while promising workers' councils and other forms of local self-management, decollectivization, petty capitalism, and multi-candidate elections. He insisted that Poland's alliances would not change, and that Soviet troops would remain. This understanding was put to the test in relatively free elections in January 1957, and he emerged victorious.

Gomułka then began a crackdown on the media, culminating in the ban on the outspoken journal *Po prostu*. Loath to permit real pluralism, Gomułka (like Kádár) vowed from the start to wage a 'two-front battle' to vanquish dogmatists and revisionists alike but with the latter considered the main enemy. Between November 1957 and May 1958 more than 200,000 were expelled from the party, a 15 per cent reduction in

[52] This summary is based on Hirszowicz, *Coercion and Control in a Communist Society*, pp. 147–89; Nicholas Bethell, *Gomułka: His Poland and His Communism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 208–38; Raymond Taras, *Ideology in a Socialist State: Poland, 1956–1983* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 48–75; Jan B. de Weydenthal, *The Communists of Poland: An Historical Outline* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), pp. 92–8.

membership.[53] After the Tenth Plenum Gomułka entered into an uneasy alliance with old Stalinists, and though no attempt was made to re-collectivize agriculture, worker self-management was snuffed out.

Czechoslovakia, 1967

Compared to these relatively successful restorations, Novotný's attempted normalization of Czechoslovakia stood as an example of what not to do. It should be remembered that Novotný's style of rule had changed considerably after the ouster of Khrushchev in October 1964. Hitherto a stalwart ally of Moscow, Novotný was outraged by the Brezhnev takeover and he made his displeasure known by befriending Yugoslavia and Romania, ceasing polemics with China, and sending out feelers to West Germany. Internal party debates were allowed an anti-Soviet tinge, reconsideration of Czechoslovak military doctrine was permitted, censorship was erratic and flexible, and the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1966 adopted mildly reformist resolutions.[54] Though late Novotnýism was not systematically liberal, it represented a considerable slackening of control.

By the summer of 1967, pressure for consistent reform was mounting from within the party (in particular from Slovak communists) and social organizations (the youth union and cultural unions). Central Committee functionaries close to Novotný began to warn that the situation was tense and 'under certain circumstances could be misused for counter-revolution'.[55] The security police (StB) was convinced that various groupings in cultural circles were coalescing into a unified underground force 'which they could use at an advantageous moment as a power means for the assertion and realization of their counter-revolutionary goals'.[56] Novotný and Jiří Hendrych, the main party ideologue, moved to tighten the reins, and blamed the growing challenge to their authority on the spread of 'anti-socialist' thinking.[57] According to a memo from the Central Committee's Eighth Department (for the army, judiciary, and security), 'rightist forces' were thought to be trying to infiltrate the state and corrode it through heterodoxy.[58]

To combat them, Novotný gave a series of speeches beginning in June

[53] Adam Bromke, *Poland's Politics: Idealism vs Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 186; Bethell, *Gomułka*, p. 237.

[54] Moravus, 'Shawcross's Dubček – a Different Dubček', *Survey* 17 (1971), p. 208. See also Antonin Ostrý, *Československý problém* (Cologne: Index, 1972), pp. 13–15.

[55] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2342, č.j. ÚKRK-11878/68-Hab.

[56] A FMV, fond A9, k. 30, i.j. 437, č.j. SV-0093/01-1967.

[57] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1 [uncatalogued; transcript of Presidium meeting of 5 September 1967].

[58] A ÚV KSČ, 1967, VIII. oddělení, nezařazena (Bizík).

1967, intended to sharpen the attack that had begun in May with the ban on two controversial films and the trial of writer Jan Beneš. In a standard normalization move, Novotný stressed the basic values of socialism while absolving the masses of blame for current problems, blaming their 'disorientation' on the growth of 'frivolous' outlooks in films and the media. To rebuff growing criticism of Stalinism, he declared that all decisions taken after 1945 were correct, and he condemned efforts to 'smuggle various theories' into public opinion that taught otherwise.[59] Newspapers began to run articles warning readers of the enemy's 'ideological diversion', which, combined with propaganda glorifying the party and the StB, was meant to foster an atmosphere of vigilance.

Hendrych, meanwhile, was preparing punitive measures against outspoken writers who had enraged him at their June congress. His proposal to the Presidium on 19 September 1967 rested on the cynical arithmetic that only a small fraction of the members of the writers' union sympathized with the radical socialist line of Ludvik Vaculík, Milan Kundera, Jan Procházka, A. J. Liehm, Pavel Kohout, and Ivan Klíma. The majority in the union could thus be counted on to discipline their obstreperous colleagues, while the union's weekly, *Literární noviny* (Literary Gazette), along with all publishing houses, would be transferred to the ministry of culture, in order to exercise stricter control. If the situation did not improve, the union would be disbanded and a new one established.[60]

The radical writers had no defenders in the party Presidium. Even those members who would emerge as leading reformers in 1968, such as Černík (at that time a deputy prime minister) and Dubček, endorsed Hendrych's strategy. Černík and Dubček, however, joined by Drahomír Kolder and Jaromír Dolanský, urged their Presidium colleagues also to ponder the actual reasons for dissent and alienation. Dubček in particular stressed the need to 'win over' the majority of communist writers, as he saw it as a perfect opportunity for the party to learn to exercise its dominant position by new methods corresponding to new class relations. His arguments did not go without effect: though Novotný considered the writers an organized opposition bent on restoring bourgeois democracy, he rejected Hendrych's plan to transfer control of all publishing houses, as it would punish (and displease) many perfectly loyal scribblers. The Presidium then agreed (apparently unanimously) to the rest of Hendrych's plan, which included the expulsion of Vaculík, Liehm, and Klíma from the party.

That all these intimidatory measures were not having their desired

[59] *Rudé právo*, 2 September 1967; Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 19–21.
[60] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P2909.

effect became clear on the last night of October, when several hundred students took to the streets in spontaneous protest against living conditions in their Strahov dormitory (as the French May Events would also be triggered the following spring). After marching close to Prague Castle, where the Central Committee was in session, their chants acquired an increasingly political nature, and they were brutally dispersed by police at the bottom of Neruda Street. Several were badly injured and retreating students resumed their protest outside their hostels, prompting another police assault.[61]

In this case, the use of force did not contribute to normalization. The severity of the police response outraged already disenchanted students, who generally favoured socialism but, as one StB report on universities deduced, 'react sensitively to any discrepancies between socialist theory and actual practice, often critically and one-sidedly judge the realization of Marxist-Leninist ideas as carried out by the party in all areas of social life'.[62] Six thousand students were allowed to visit the West in 1966–7, which fuelled the appetite for greater contact and emulation. The suppression of the Strahov demonstration also shocked normally docile youths; as one wrote to his parents, 'If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed that it could have come to such a thing in our society . . . Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.'[63] The StB intercepted ninety letters from students and found such opinions to be commonplace.

Student leaders demanded an investigation into who was responsible for the police's brutality, and a meeting of 1,000 students on 20 November at Charles University threatened to stage another march if the inquiry proved unsatisfactory.[64] When the Presidium met a week later, the increasingly paranoid Novotný announced that the 'unfavourable' political situation in the nation's universities had to be 'liquidated'. Hendrych advocated his usual policy of isolating the student leaders while acknowledging and resolving the miseries of student life. Attempts to form independent student organizations had already been broken up earlier in the year, when leaders were expelled from university and drafted into the army; it would therefore be just a matter of silencing the few who persisted, such as Jan Kavan. The discussants (Dubček and Černík were absent or silent) concurred that although the students had some legitimate grievances and most of them were not hostile, any public demonstration constituted an unfriendly political act and violation of public order and would be suppressed.[65]

[61] A FMV, fond A9, k. 31, i.j. 451, č.j. VB-306/02-67, VB-87/02-68.
[62] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2133, č.j. OS-0767/73-67.
[63] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2133, č.j. OS-0767/73-67.
[64] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2133. [65] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P3424.

Novotný was resorting to most standard normalization tactics, but ultimately failed to safeguard his position because of the coalescence of the coalition around Dubček. These opponents agreed that the situation was critical, but concluded that it would be better resolved by very different methods.

Arguments for normalization

Novotný's attempt to protect his position, however, is noteworthy for its fear of the power of ideas. Normalizers, for all their materialist orthodoxy and profound fear of conspiracies and Western intrigue, often attributed crisis to forces that had nothing to do with concrete social relations. Rather as Lenin suspected that the working class, if left to itself, would never aspire to anything more radical than 'trade-unionism', so normalizers questioned whether the triumph of socialism really signalled an irreversible change in mass consciousness. Such concerns were often expressed by Czechoslovakia's conservative neighbours during 1968; the East German leader, Walter Ulbricht, repeatedly rebuked the CPCS for years of failure to address 'the alteration of the population's consciousness' ('die Bewußtseinsänderung der Bevölkerung') and the 'long-term ideological process' of working with 'the broad masses of the people'.[66] Gomułka agreed in July 1968 that counter-revolution stemmed from the heritage of 'the past in the human spirit, from the heritage of capitalism, the thoughts, the mentality of capitalists. After all, remnants of the propertied classes remain.'[67] Biľak dutifully regurgitated such opinions, agreeing that exploiters have children, and grandchildren, and they propagate old bourgeois values despite the socializing efforts of the state. Hostile ideas thus remain in circulation, continue to influence certain groups, and continue to pose a threat. Free up the media and hold open elections, he feared, and the regime could be overthrown bloodlessly by constitutional means.[68] For him, this not unrealistic fear of a velvet counter-revolution justified a permanent state of emergency.

Believing in the power of ideology, therefore, normalizers did try to find arguments that might persuade the public to see the benefits of

[66] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 61. See also Brezhnev's remarks in A KV ČSFR, Z/S 2.

[67] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 62, 'Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung führender Repräsentanten sozialistischer Länder am 14. und 15. juli 1968 in Warschau'.

[68] See, for example, his speech to the November 1968 Central Committee plenum (*Zasedáni ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 14–17. listopadu 1968*, part I, p. 76.) In his more unhinged moments, however, he did also fear that the media would rouse the masses to slaughter communists by the thousands. See his July 1969 'mountains of corpses' speech (quoted in Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77*, p. 100).

dictatorship. One line followed the conservative jeopardy thesis, that reform, though well intended, might endanger cherished existing achievements.[69] The reversal of reform was justified by the claim that, had it been allowed to proceed, it would have undone the social revolution carried out after 1948, which (it was alleged) had ended exploitation, alienation, and immiseration. Reformers' talk of market relations and pursuits of group interests, as Štrougal warned the 1971 party congress, were 'meant to deprive the working class and all the working people of the revolutionary attainments and of their fundamental political and economic security'.[70]

As normalization was thus presented as the defence of the revolution, as the re-revolutionizing, re-Bolshevization of the party,[71] and since many normalizers were themselves originally reformers, they tried to convince themselves and the public that they were in fact creating something new and bold, not restoring a mouldy *status quo ante*. They often used the rhetoric not of reaction but of reform, marketing their policies as the quest for an effective power structure that could calmly resolve the problems of socio-economic development. As one normalizer told a Soviet contact in autumn 1968, 'We should snatch the popular banner of January [the beginning of the reform period]' from the centrist liberalizers.[72]

Grand, if vague, ambitions fill some normalization speeches. In November 1968, presenting a three-stage plan to the Central Committee, Indra predicted that after the party had isolated 'liberal tendencies' in its ranks and removed them from state offices, re-evaluated the reform programme, bolstered the army and security police, and taken control of the media (stage one, to last several weeks), and had repaired the economy (stage two, lasting two or three years), it would embark on a bold ideological, political, and technological offensive to modernize the country.[73] Two years later Husák justified a deep purge of the party to make it 'capable of solving all problems and fulfil[ling] all the expectations of our working people', 'so that never again will a situation similar to that which arose in 1968–9 be able to be repeated, so that above all there will be no internal conditions in our party . . . for revisionist and opportunist views

[69] Albert Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1991).

[70] Quoted in Batt, *Economic Reform and Political Change in Eastern Europe*, p. 228.

[71] Jacques Rupnik, 'The Restoration of the Party-State in Czechoslovakia Since 1968', in Leslie Holmes (ed.), *The Withering Away of the State?* (London: Sage, 1981).

[72] The speaker was Oldřich Švestka. See ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 334–43 (copy in author's possession).

[73] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 14.–17. listopadu 1968*, part I, pp. 156–62.

and tendencies'.[74] The aim was not just to establish order, but to achieve an order immune to future crises.

Soviet expectations

Ultimately, of course, normalization took place because Moscow demanded it. Many liberalizers who transformed themselves into anti-reformers did so partly because they discovered that the post-Khrushchev Politburo would not tolerate qualitative changes to the Soviet political model. The Soviets, however, communicated only a general set of expectations and left the actual detail of normalization to local cadres. In 1968, but in other cases as well, Moscow stressed that its primary concern was that the West have no reason to suspect (or be able to exploit) fissures within the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. This meant that no satellite should undertake any policy (domestic or foreign) that would generate international speculation of weaknesses or disputes within the Soviet sphere of influence. This also meant that any factionalism within ruling communist parties had to be concealed and decision-making restricted to the innermost circle of party functionaries. The duty of any functionary or institution outside the inner circle, especially the media, was to relay and execute, not debate, official policy. The army and security police had to be operational, either for war or surveillance and riot control.

This was the end-state that the Soviets expected to result from normalization; they were willing to be flexible on how it would be achieved as long as they could trust those who had assumed the responsibility of power. For Brezhnev in particular, the ultimate guarantee of party hegemony was the promotion of reliable cadres, comrades who Moscow sensed had the authority or nous to keep their country off the front pages of Western newspapers. And just as nothing pleased the Soviets more than a transparent, predictable comrade, nothing infuriated them more than one who seemed to be playing games.

[74] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018 [Husák's speech to conference of regional and district secretaries, 17 April 1970].

Part II

January 1968–December 1970

4 The erosion of Soviet trust

The interaction that took place in 1968 between Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders confirms another of Robert Jervis's suppositions, that 'While a state's intentions may be obvious in retrospect, they are often obscure at the time. A look at the information available to decision-makers as they draw inferences about other states must make us less harsh on those whose judgements prove to be incorrect. Few actions are unambiguous. They rarely provide anything like proof of how the state plans to act in the future.'[1] Despite the extensive information available, Soviet leaders found it extremely difficult to gauge the real intentions of the Dubček coalition. If anything, their task became all the more onerous as time passed, more information was gathered, more encounters were arranged, and more promises were made.

Even at the very start, the positive Soviet response to Dubček's election was accompanied by awkwardness and ambiguity over signals and indices. Three weeks before, Brezhnev had come to Prague at Novotný's request to help the latter fend off the alliance that had begun to form against him. Brezhnev, who seems to have had only a vague sense of what was happening, arrived on 8 December 1967, five days before the Central Committee was due to convene; this session was likely to resume the critical debate provoked by Dubček at its October meeting. After talking with Novotný, Brezhnev met separately with other Presidium members, including Dubček, with whom he later claimed to have conversed all night and 'never have I spoken with anyone so openly'.[2] The Soviet leader concluded that Novotný was in the wrong, but his priority was to prevent the dispute from escalating into a public quarrel that would expose the myth of monolithic power in Eastern Europe. Brezhnev's aim, therefore, was to avoid blatant interference, yet at the same time, as he told Kádár later, 'contribute to the unity of the

[1] Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, p. 9.

[2] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 61, 'Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung von sechs Bruderparteien in Dresden am Sonnabend, dem 23. März 1968'.

[Presidium] and Central Committee and render support to comrade Novotný'.[3]

To this end Brezhnev urged the Presidium to postpone the impending plenum until they had decided how to proceed with Dubček's proposal that Novotný surrender one of his two functions (the presidency and party leadership), and not quarrel about it in the Central Committee.[4] Once consensus in the inner circle had been attained, he advised, Novotný could give a self-critical speech and they could settle the Slovak question and other matters undramatically, 'so that the status quo will be preserved in advance'.[5]

Brezhnev departed on 9 December, probably believing that he had prevented an open conflict; he certainly did not abandon Novotný to his fate as many later Western accounts reported.[6] At first his advice seemed to be honoured; after four days of exhaustive bickering, the two factions agreed to convene a Central Committee plenum on 19 December at which discussion would be limited to the economy and reform of government structures. It was proposed that the presidency eventually be replaced by a collective body, at which time Novotný's future as party leader would be decided. As Brezhnev had recommended, the Presidium's internal disputes were not to be revealed.[7]

The plenum, however, did not stick to this neutral agenda, but erupted into open conflict after the economist Šik announced that the country was in crisis and called on Novotný to step down as party leader. Seven of the first nine speakers at the plenum that day made the same demand. The Dubček–Černík coalition could no longer follow Brezhnev's bidding, and the power struggle resumed in earnest. After a fortnight of protracted bargaining, amidst reports (wildly exaggerated) that Novotný was considering the use of force, it was finally agreed during the night of 4–5 January 1968 that Dubček would take over as party leader while Novotný would remain president and not be pensioned off as Khrushchev had been.[8]

It is not yet clear just how fully Moscow was informed of developments after Brezhnev's Prague visit, although a Soviet embassy official did meet on 23 December with Zdeněk Fierlinger, who described the power struggle in detail.[9] That the aged Fierlinger, wartime ambassador to Moscow and then the first post-war prime minister, went to great lengths to assure

[3] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 1. [4] A ÚV KSČ, fond A. Novotný, CHA, sv. 7.
[5] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 1.
[6] One account of Brezhnev's visit that has proved accurate is Pavel Tigrid, *Why Dubček Fell* (London: Macdonald, 1971), pp. 21–2.
[7] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 23–5. [8] Ibid., pp. 27–9.
[9] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 138.

the Soviets of the good intentions of the anti-Novotný coalition, and of Dubček personally, must have eased Soviet misgivings about the dispute. On 29 December Udal'tsov met with Ludvík Svoboda, the former commander of Czechoslovak units attached to the Red Army, who similarly endorsed the anti-Novotný group.[10] Also, because of his childhood in Kirghizia and Russia, his study period in Moscow in the mid-1950s, and his warm encounter with Brezhnev in December, Dubček was probably regarded by Soviet leaders as a reliable client, preferable to the petulant Novotný.

On 10 January 1968, Dubček was invited by Ambassador Chervonenko to meet with Soviet leaders in Moscow.[11] It is unclear whether he accepted the offer immediately, as there is evidence that, while the Action Programme was still being drafted, he wanted to refrain not only from any substantial policy statements during his first public appearances, but also from engaging the Soviets in serious discussion.[12] Instead, on 20 January, he held a secret rendezvous in southern Slovakia with János Kádár, as he respected the Hungarian leader's ability to cope with Moscow while adapting the Soviet model to suit local conditions.[13] After a day's hunting, Dubček outlined his timetable to Kádár: he would make his first programmatic speech sometime in February, followed by a trip to Moscow in March, after Central Committee approval of the Action Programme. Kádár, who warmed to Dubček, did not object but urged him first to unify the Presidium, which 'the whole world' knew had split over Novotný's dismissal, as no reforms could be successfully executed by a divided leadership.[14]

Five days later the Presidium held its first important meeting since the plenum, and it was indeed paralysed by the differences between the reform coalition and Novotný's clique.[15] Soon after this session, perhaps

[10] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 124. Svoboda and Fierlinger, it should be noted, both expected Černík to become party leader. [11] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, p. 133.

[12] For Biľak's claim that Dubček was trying to keep his distance from Moscow, see *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 25.–26. září 1969. Stenografický zápis* (Prague: n.p., 1969), part I, p. 111; Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. I, p. 104; and A KV SR, 'Rozhovor s panom Vasilom Biľakom . . . zo dna 3.10.1990'. For Dubček's rebuttal, see his letter to the Presidium on 29 October 1969, in A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; 'Pripomienky a stanovisko k niektorým otázkam vystupenia s. Biľaka na septembrovem plene ÚV KSČ 1969'].

[13] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 3. In his memoirs (*Hope Dies Last*, pp. 133–4), Dubček asserts that it was Kádár who first proposed the secret meeting, probably at Brezhnev's behest. In contrast, reports from the Hungarian consulate in Bratislava, which arranged the encounter, show that it took place at Dubček's request, and that he wanted the meeting to be secret because 'for the moment he is not prepared to hold official, substantial talks' with the Soviets. See Komisia vlády SR pre analýzu historických udalostí z rokov 1967–1970, *Slovensko v rokoch 1967–1970. Výber dokumentov* (Bratislava: n.p., 1992), pp. 14–16.

[14] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 3. [15] Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. I, p. 120.

to boost his authority, Dubček went to Moscow. According to the account of the two-day visit that he provided the Presidium on his return, Dubček assured the Soviets of Czechoslovak commitment to the socialist camp and explained that the end of class antagonisms in his country allowed his party to develop genuine 'democratic centralism', exercise a true leading role in society, and combat 'undesirable petty-bourgeois and anarchist tendencies'.[16] As he wrote in his memoirs, he avoided such provocative terms as 'reform' or 'revision', using only the tamer 'renewal' and 'revival'.[17] During the meeting Brezhnev assured Dubček that the new leadership could count on full Soviet support in resolving internal problems, and apparently made no mention of Novotný's removal. Instead he emphasized, as he would many times in 1968, that the bloc had to stand firmly united and struggle to maintain post-war borders in Europe.[18]

Soviet support was iterated a month later, when the bloc's leaders convened in Prague to mark the twentieth anniversary of the February 1948 CPCS takeover, but certain concerns were expressed. The gathering was a sullen, tense affair, as the Romanians and Yugoslavs had been invited. Coming on the heels of the Soviets' own fiftieth anniversary, it was not originally intended as a top-level gathering, but on Chervonenko's advice the Politburo had already decided on 18 January to attend as a show of support for Dubček; Brezhnev apparently had to cajole Gomułka and Walter Ulbricht to do the same.[19] During the gathering the Soviets reaffirmed their 'full confidence' in Dubček, but did reveal just how closely they were monitoring events, citing specific articles and television appearances that disturbed them and inquiring in minute detail about personnel changes.[20] At Brezhnev's insistence Dubček had to omit from his speech to the opening gathering in Prague Castle passages that acknowledged the atrophy besetting the party and state institutions and the disaffection of the youth, reinterpreted 'democratic centralism' and the party's 'leading role', and expressed a new commitment to rights and freedoms.[21]

Although the February celebrations were seen as a collective endorse-

[16] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P3745 [information for the Presidium's 58th meeting, 8 February 1968].

[17] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, p. 134. [18] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P3745.

[19] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, p. 7; A KV ČSFR, Z/M 3; A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued; 'Záznam z jednání dne 26. srpna v Kremlu']. [20] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225.

[21] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued; 'Záznam z jednání dne 26. srpna v Kremlu']; Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. I, pp. 123–4; A KV ČSFR, R131 [KV ČSFR interview with Karel Kaplan, 1 March 1991]. The lines that had to be removed from the speech can be found in the Czech edition of Dubček's autobiography. See Dubček (with Jiří Hochman), *Naděje umírá poslední. Vlastní životopis Alexandra Dubčeka* (Prague: Svoboda-Libertas, 1993), p. 148.

ment of Dubček's team, the Soviets expected that their discreet displeasure at minor phenomena would trigger a thorough Czechoslovak crackdown. These signals were kept sufficiently ambiguous so as not to be misinterpreted as calling for Novotný's return. Dubček and his comrades, however, seem to have misread these signals, assuming that Moscow was comfortable with the reform course. The Soviets would only resort to blunt demands in the wake of two trends: the collapse of censorship and the paralysis of the Czechoslovak élite.

The collapse of censorship

To maintain control of the reform course and prevent Soviet displeasure, censorship after the January plenum was absolutely essential. It was also unrealistic given the hunger for information and the appetite for debate. The Dubček leadership certainly welcomed and encouraged the lessening of restrictions on freedom of speech, as it believed, like Gorbachev later, that wider discussion of the country's problems would help revitalize the economy and society. The Presidium, however, failed to establish at the outset the limits of this discussion. Publishers, editors, and journalists were trusted to sense what to permit and what not.[22] Dubček apparently was trying to duplicate the arrangement obtaining in Slovakia since 1963, with editors licensed to venture criticism as long as 'the writers maintain a calm and matter-of-fact tone'.[23] Imported into the Czech lands, however, such licence led to bold and sometimes sensationalist polemics.

First, how and why did censorship wither away? Although institutionalized censorship had existed since 1953, editors knew that censors were only performing the bidding of top party officials, to whom publishers would have to answer in the event of serious infraction. The party discipline underlying censorship was made explicit in an August 1966 Presidium decree.[24] Editors were also kept in line through Hendrych's news briefings every Thursday, which were essentially dictations. The continuation or end of censorship, therefore, depended on these very politicians.

There was an immediate change after the January 1968 plenum in that Hendrych soon stopped his briefings. Though glad that they were no

[22] See the Presidium communiqué of 21 March, in *Rudé právo*, 23 March 1968.

[23] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, p. 91. See also A KV ČSFR, Z/S 2.

[24] For a history of censorship in communist Czechoslovakia, see Frank Kaplan, *Winter into Spring: The Czechoslovak Press and the Reform Movement, 1963–1968* (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly, 1977), pp. 17–100. See also Dušan Havlíček, *The Mass Media in Czechoslovakia in 1956–1968*, Experience of the Prague Spring XVI (n.p.: n.p., August 1981), part I.

longer being told what to report, journalists were confused by the silence that followed. Despite repeated invitations, not once during his first months in office did Dubček visit even the offices of the party's own daily, *Rudé právo* (Red Right).[25] It was not until mid-February that he finally contacted Jiří Pelikán, the director of state television, to say that the media should calm the public and not irritate the Soviets. He did not contact Pelikán next until late March, when he again gave no specifics on the limits of debate.[26] One reason for the silence was the compromise with Novotný: he had been promised dignified public treatment, so coverage of the Central Committee plena and even the internally circulated party bulletin had to be limited and falsified.[27] Many people knew from Western radio, however, that they were not being told the full truth.

Party members had their chance to demand information during the *aktivy*, the meetings routinely held after plena, to which Central Committee members would be delegated to lay down the official line. Ironically, it was Hendrych, who had tried to normalize the country only months before, who summoned about forty Central Committee members to his office in mid-January and authorized them to speak more frankly about the recent plena.[28] Desperate now to save his political life, Hendrych tried to reinvent himself as a man of culture and tolerance. In early February, in defiance of centrists' advice not to, Hendrych allowed the writers' union to begin publishing a new weekly, *Literární listy* (Literary Pages). The first issue appeared on 29 February, and it soon became one of the most controversial vehicles for political criticism and historical revision.[29] Hendrych's third contribution was his proposal, adopted by the Presidium on 4 March, to revoke the August 1966 decree that had reduced journalists to party spokesmen.

The loosening of censorship unleashed a flurry of investigations into long-taboo subjects, in particular the many injustices of Stalinist terror and Pragocentrism, the Masaryks and the First Republic, and musings on such core concepts as democracy, socialism, power, freedom, and identity.[30] This frenzy of rediscovery was taking place outside the party's own propaganda machine and was thus increasingly beyond its control. The Presidium persistently failed to revitalize its own *Rudé právo*, which was

[25] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P71/68, P4168.
[26] A KV ČSFR, R124 [KV ČSFR interview with Pelikán, 18 October 1990].
[27] Karel Lanský, 'Ústřední tisk, rozhlas, a televize', unpublished study (Prague, August 1990), p. 6.
[28] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103 [Smrkovský in Presidium, 15 October 1968]; A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968 [transcript of the meeting of leading secretaries of regional and district party committees on 12–13 May 1968, section II:26, speech by Jan Piller].
[29] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P70/68, č.j. P4174.
[30] Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 198–9.

paralysed by internal conflicts, so readers were flocking to the non-party press, such as the trade unions' daily *Práce* (Labour). They also switched on their televisions on 4 February to hear Eduard Goldstücker, the new chairman of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, expose the cover-up of the truth about Novotný's downfall. Huge but orderly meetings were held on 13 and 20 March, amply covered by the press and radio, at which students and young workers grilled panels of writers such as Goldstücker, Pavel Kohout, and Jan Procházka (erstwhile bards of Stalinism turned critics), and victims of the 1950s such as Smrkovský, Zdeněk Hejzlar, and, notably, Husák.[31] The party monopoly on ideas and history had collapsed.

Elite paralysis

The floundering over censorship policy was indicative of the paralysis that beset the party's central organs after January. In the first quarter of 1968 there was no communication between Presidium and Central Committee members,[32] the Presidium and Secretariat rarely met, and when they did their internal divisions precluded effective decision-making. In February the discredited heads of several of the Central Committee departments were replaced, but this move, and Dubček's failure to respond to requests from leading apparatchiki for consultations and directions, created an atmosphere of uncertainty and aimlessness.[33] Furthermore, the Presidium was still weighed down by the Novotnýite practice of discussing a range of disparate problems, and Dubček allowed speakers to ramble *ad nauseam*. On 19 February, for example, it took almost fourteen hours to cover an agenda of twenty-two points.[34] The new leadership was squandering the precious opportunity to decide, without having to reckon with a mobilized public, whether to pursue limited reform or revolutionary change.[35]

By mid-March several Presidium members had begun to fear that they were losing control of the country. The liberalizers' authority was hurt by their hesitation to reveal the full truth behind Novotný's removal, and by the continuing presence in the Presidium of Novotný and Hendrych, who were coming under heavy public pressure to resign in the wake of the defection of General Jan Šejna at the end of February. Šejna, the head of

[31] Václav Vrabec, *Vybočil z řady* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1991), pp. 124–6; Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 45–6; Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 200–1. [32] *Rudé právo*, 4 April 1968.

[33] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 21, a.j. 200; A KV ČSFR, Soviet file (AVP SSSR, f. 5, op. 60, d. 299, ll. 76–82). [34] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1 [uncatalogued].

[35] Moravus, 'Shawcross's Dubček – a Different Dubček', pp. 206–7.

the party network at the defence ministry and a protégé of Novotný, had used his connections to enrich himself through shady deals. Fearing indictment, he fled to Italy and with CIA help reached the USA. The defection of such a high-ranking officer was a rare breach of Czechoslovak security, and prompted an immediate visit from the WTO supreme commander to estimate the damage.[36] In this atmosphere, Novotný's paranoid rantings took up a large part of Presidium meetings.

More ominously, several members of the reform coalition were also growing nervous. Drahomír Kolder warned the Presidium on 14 March that the army, interior ministry, the courts, and public prosecutors were in disarray, and, although he remained optimistic, he warned that the party had to regain control of the reform course. According to Emil Rigo, a new member of the Presidium from eastern Slovakia, the impression had already arisen 'below' that the Presidium was not in charge.[37] Indeed, at the routine spring conferences of district party officials, there was growing criticism of the new leaders, regardless of whether the speakers were liberalizers demanding the resignation of discredited officials, more resolute reform, and more information about the Stalinist terror and Novotný's downfall, or were conservatives favouring tighter control.

To regain mastery of events, liberalizers in the Presidium invested tremendous hope in the persuading and mobilizing power of the delayed Action Programme, which was not to be submitted for prior approval by Moscow, although drafts were being leaked by conservative apparatchiki to the Soviet embassy and thence to Moscow.[38] Liberalizers also concluded that the next Central Committee plenum would have to remove Novotný and his confederates from the Presidium. Under constant pressure from the media, many were already quitting, and on 21 March Novotný announced that he was surrendering the presidency. That same day, however, Dubček received a telephone call from Brezhnev, urgently summoning him to East Germany.

Dresden

With the Dresden summit the Soviets moved from discreet signalling to outright demands. A declassified briefing for Soviet party functionaries confirms that at a Warsaw Pact meeting in Sofia on 6–7 March, Soviet leaders had openly expressed concern to Dubček about 'phenomena of an anti-socialist character'. Dubček had reportedly assured them that his leadership would permit no 'undesirable development' of events. Despite

[36] Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, pp. 19–21; Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 43–4. [37] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P3930.
[38] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, p. 59, n. 79.

such assurances, the briefing noted, 'events recently have been developing in a negative direction'.[39] Alarmed by the pace of change, the Politburo met on 15 March and decided to invite Dubček, in whom Brezhnev's faith was already waning, to pay another visit to Moscow. The invitation was relayed by Brezhnev over the phone to Dubček and officially in writing.[40] As in January, however, Dubček did not automatically comply.

Novotný's resignation, which the Soviets had been anticipating all month, provoked a debate on Czechoslovakia in the Politburo on 21 March. Brezhnev recounted all his contacts with Dubček and all the reassurances he had received that order would be maintained, yet public pressure was bringing down more and more 'good and sincere friends of the Soviet Union'. Kosygin expressed exasperation at Dubček's persistent assurances that everything was in order. It was agreed that direct pressure had to be exerted on him.[41]

A multilateral meeting was called to convene in Dresden town hall on 23 March, which Ulbricht opened by asking Dubček to inform the gathering of his party's policy plans, especially the Action Programme, as events in Czechoslovakia were increasingly of concern to the whole socialist camp.[42] Dubček and his entourage (Prime Minister Lenárt, Kolder, Černík, and Biľak) were caught off balance, having expected the discussion to touch only on improving economic cooperation within Comecon. Upon arrival they had been struck by the heavy presence of Soviet and East German generals and, when Černík inquired about their presence, Brezhnev responded jovially, 'So that in case we need help in solving Czechoslovak matters it can be rendered immediately.'[43] This surprise notwithstanding, Dubček answered Ulbricht with a lengthy account of the end of class antagonism and its consequences for party operations, especially in dealing with intellectuals and the young. He admitted that the situation needed 'consolidating', but argued that the party could best achieve it through non-coercive measures.

Brezhnev replied with an equally long (but better prepared) tirade, attacking Dubček for failing to articulate clearly 'what is understood

[39] Cherneva, '"Ot raskrytiia arkhivov po 'Prazhskoi vesne' nikuda ne uiti..."', pp. 88–9.

[40] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, p. 10; A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. č. 787.

[41] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, pp. 11–12.

[42] Although Brezhnev had the room cleared of all advisers and stenographers, a German transcript of the meeting exists, and my account is based on it. See A KV ČSFR, Z/N 61, 'Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung von sechs Bruderparteien in Dresden am Sonnabend, dem 23. März 1968'. Biľak provides a reasonably accurate account in A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; undated account of Dresden meeting that he wrote for Husák], and Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. I, pp. 127–44.

[43] A KV ČSFR, R2 [A KV ČSFR interview with Černík, 19 January 1990]; author's interview with Černík, 24 April 1992.

there [in Czechoslovakia] by democratization and liberalization'. He swiftly answered his own question: the discussions taking place in the emancipated media and the ousting of old functionaries were evidence of a counter-revolutionary conspiracy, which he alleged was led by literary scholar Václav Černý and writer Jan Procházka.[44] With apparently genuine emotion, he invoked Hungary in 1956 as proof that assaults on the party always begin with seemingly benign little groups of writers, and the blood of hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers spilt in liberating Czechoslovakia as evidence of the USSR's commitment to upholding socialism there. He ended by exhorting the Presidium to show the will, desire, and courage to act. The other Soviet speaker that day, Kosygin, echoed Brezhnev's resentment of media coverage of Soviet economic exploitation of Czechoslovakia, and tried to discourage any thought of greater contact with Western markets and creditors.

Gomułka and Ulbricht restated Brezhnev's conspiracy theory in even more shrill terms, the former noting with contempt that 'your leadership and your government have basically taken nothing in hand. You do not lead. You do not govern.' The more sympathetic Kádár argued that counter-revolution was not yet afoot in Czechoslovakia, but warned that it could develop once well-meaning but unprincipled people lose their bearings, as Imre Nagy did, who was 'no agent, was no counter-revolutionary in the sense that he had the intention to overthrow socialism in Hungary'. He warned the Czechoslovak team that 'these events could make one of you an Imre Nagy'.

The Czechoslovak delegation to a man (even Biľak) resisted this barrage of criticism, and persuaded the other countries to omit from the prepared press release any mention of the need for 'decisive steps' against 'revisionist, anti-socialist elements' in Czechoslovakia. They concealed the true nature of the summit from the Czechoslovak public (Dubček lied very artfully in an interview to *Rudé právo* four days later), and proceeded to convene the Central Committee, approve the Action Programme, and elect a new Presidium, president, and government. They did so in the belief that it was the best way to put centrists back in charge, and Dubček's speech to the Central Committee plenum on 28 March dwelled on the need to consolidate and stabilize the reform course, enact-

[44] Černý had long been under StB surveillance as a suspected counter-revolutionary, and this information appears to have been relayed (presumably by the KGB) to the Politburo shortly before the Dresden summit. On 3 April, Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko alerted Soviet ambassadors in Eastern Europe to the alleged Černý–Procházka cabal, which was said to include Václav Havel, Pavel Kohout, Jan Beneš, Milan Kundera, and Ludvík Vaculík. See A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams 1 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 126, d. 582, ll. 195–7).

ing the changes outlined in the Action Programme that was being submitted for approval, while at the same time eliminating 'anti-socialist' elements.[45]

In the ensuing plenary discussion no one openly disagreed, though some expressed concern that events were slipping out of the party's hands. The majority of the discussants dwelled on the need to rehabilitate the victims of Stalinism and bring their tormentors to justice, and to pursue democratization rigorously and consistently. A whole new Presidium was elected, which omitted Novotný, Hendrych, and six other discredited figures, although an embryonic normalization faction, still considered loyal to the reform course, was strongly represented. The new Secretariat consisted almost exclusively of Dubčekite centrists.[46]

The actual reassertion of the party's 'leading role', however, was turning out to be a difficult task. The Action Programme in its final draft, published on 10 April, was obtuse, contradictory, and bloated. Even the reform-minded Kádár scorned it as a 'big zero', crippled by compromises.[47] Although some analysts in the Soviet apparatus reportedly found no fault with the Programme,[48] Brezhnev denounced it in the Politburo on 6 May as 'a bad programme, opening up possibilities for the restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia'.[49] The programme was received positively by the public but few people took the time to scrutinize it: a poll conducted ten days after the programme's publication found that 16 per cent of respondents had read the whole thing and 25 per cent had read parts of it, while the rest only knew its contents from media coverage or knew nothing about it at all. Few people believed that all of its proposals would be implemented.[50] The party's own apparatus, which was still populated primarily by petty bureaucrats, was very reserved in its response: a poll of eighty-one functionaries in the Prague-west district in early May showed that only eleven of them had read the entire programme, seven had 'studied' it, three had not read it, and the rest had skimmed through select passages.[51]

Moreover, the programme lagged well behind the media. A week before it appeared, for example, Václav Havel had argued cogently in *Literární listy* for the creation of an opposition party, followed by demands from philosopher Ivan Sviták for a genuine three-party system, a desire

[45] Such rhetoric of 'consolidation' was already creeping into official statements before Dresden. See, for example, the Presidium communiqué in *Rudé právo*, 23 March 1968.

[46] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 65–70; Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 210–16. [47] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 5. [48] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 134–6.

[49] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, p. 14.

[50] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 70–1.

[51] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968 [transcript of the meeting of leading secretaries of district and regional party committees, 12–13 May 1968].

shared by most voters.[52] Already new political movements were forming to articulate the interests of those who did not feel represented by the CPCS. To the Soviets' horror, no steps were taken to disband the Club of Non-Party Engagés (Klub angažovaných nestraníků, KAN) founded on 5 April by 150 intellectuals as an alternative forum, or K-231, a pressure group founded on 31 March to lobby for the rehabilitation of the estimated 128,000 victims of Stalinist terror.[53] In short, the Action Programme was not proving to be a document that, to use Novotný's phrase, all of society would dance to.

Similarly, the new government appointed on 8 April and headed by Oldřich Černík was publicly viewed as conservative and disappointing. Dubček and Černík had chosen the new ministers alone, consulting almost no one, not even the Soviets, and had deliberately included old hands like Josef Krejčí, the minister for industry, to counterbalance bolder reformers such as Šik, Husák, and Interior Minister Josef Pavel. The new cabinet suffered from rumours (apparently started by spiteful Central Committee members) that it would survive only a few weeks at best.[54]

The party leadership also disappointed Moscow in its handling of the election of the new president of the republic. It had started on a good footing: 'On the active initiative and support of the Soviet side', Dubček quickly offered the job to Ludvík Svoboda.[55] The geriatric general was an ideal candidate because of his good standing in the USSR (he had led the Czechoslovak army in Soviet exile in 1939–45); he had served as defence minister in 1945–50 until falling under suspicion as an enemy of socialism, for which he was reduced to working as a humble farm accountant. He then became the paragon of a rehabilitated victim of Stalinism, that is, loyal, gracious, and completely unvindictive. He also seemed the ideal candidate for domestic consumption, since the alternatives, who originally commanded more devout followings, would have divided the country. Czechs favoured Smrkovský and the unorthodox ideologue Čestmír Císař, who, recalled from his semi-exile as ambassador to Romania, had quickly amassed an avid following among Czech students. Both had reputations as Czech nationalists.[56] Slovaks, on the other hand,

[52] For Havel's essay, see *Literární listy*, 4 April 1968; it is reprinted in Remington, *Winter in Prague*, pp. 64–71.

[53] BBC SWB, EE/2771, 16 May 1968; Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 202, 265–6, 547–8; Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia*, p. 81; Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, p. 74.

[54] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P70/68, č.j. P4174; A KV ČSFR, Z/S 2.

[55] Galina Takhnenko, 'Avgust 1968 goda. Obzor dokumentov Arkhiva vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii', *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 1992, nos. 8–9, p. 154.

[56] A KV ČSFR, Russian file (AVP SSSR, r. 9756, f. 5, op. 60, d. 299, ll. 47–52).

were agitating for Husák or the poet Novomeský. Under the circumstances, Svoboda was the only candidate acceptable to both parts of the republic.[57]

Though Svoboda's election by parliament was easily arranged, nothing was done to disperse the crowds of thousands of youths who were marching around Prague and calling for Císař or Smrkovský instead. As these groups exercised utmost restraint, like the college armies that had mobilized that same month in the USA for Eugene McCarthy, the police did not intervene, unlike their counterparts in Poland only weeks before. The unsuccessful contenders for the presidency were well compensated. Císař, who had held high office under Novotný, was made Central Committee secretary for the mass media, science, education, and culture, and was soon infuriating the Soviets with speeches insisting on the right to invent a more 'European' Marxism. Husák was made a deputy prime minister with responsibility for constitutional reform, including federalization. Smrkovský, whom Brezhnev and Ulbricht had denounced at Dresden as a counter-revolutionary, was awarded the chairmanship of parliament, a move taken by the innermost group of reformers without alerting Moscow.[58] Whether these appointments, and the shake-up of leading party organs, were intended by Czechoslovak liberalizers as provocative snubs to their Dresden interrogators is not clear; in any event, they soon evoked a response.

Dear Aleksandr Stepanovich

Around 11 April, the CPSU Politburo and secretaries gathered to dictate a phoney personal letter from Brezhnev to Dubček.[59] The letter's very opening address, 'Dear Aleksandr Stepanovich', was a loaded signal: Slovaks do not have patronymics, so by bestowing one on Dubček, thereby Russifying him, the Soviet leaders were indicating that they considered him one of the family, with all its privileges but also its obligations. This was reinforced by use of the familiar *ty*, whereas all previous correspondence had used the formal *vy*.

The premise of the letter is that an insomniac Brezhnev, 'in the late hour of the night', is pondering 'the current strengthening of the class struggle between the two world systems' and finds his thoughts turning to 'friends, brothers' on the common front. 'Right now I feel like having a chat, consulting with you, but alas!', he cries, 'It is too late even to telephone. I want to put my thoughts down on paper, without worrying too

[57] Karel Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní*, p. 95.
[58] According to Černík, in interview with the author, 22 April 1992.
[59] Leonid Shinkarev, 'Byl mesiats avgust', *Izvestiia*, 13 August 1991.

much about polishing my phrases.'[60] A reader raised in the Soviet tradition should have immediately detected the text's Stalinist overtones: the image of the sleepless leader brooding on the Kremlin ramparts.[61] Through these images, the letter's authors were directly appealing to Dubček personally to put a stop to those trends that alarmed them: 'The fates of the party and the state are now directly connected with your activity and your personal responsibility.' The letter avoided specific instructions, but recommended that Dubček use the letter as leverage in arguments with more radical reformers. Apparently he simply filed it away, as he would whenever such communications arrived.

Though the new Dubček Presidium took Soviet concern into account and continued to warn against 'anti-socialist' extremes, during the second half of April the party apparatus finally began to be churned up. Routine conferences held to elect new regional party committees replaced almost all the leading secretaries after lively, often polarized debates about the reform course. The degree to which the regional apparatus was affected started to unnerve the army of district and local party officials and conservatives in the Central Committee who were losing their power bases. Under pressure from Kolder and Indra, the Presidium started to curtail the formation of new associations, banning the resurrection of the old Sokol gymnastic movement. Yet on May Day the traditional procession turned into a spectacle of an awakening political society as veterans of the First World War and the Spanish Civil War, old Scouts in their uniforms, and new groups such as KAN and K-231 took part, often carrying placards demanding official recognition and free elections. Though visibly pleased by the spontaneous outpouring of popular support, Dubček made the usual speech clearly committed to socialism and alliance with the Soviet Union, 'our great ally and friend . . . whence our liberation came, whence also in the future we can always expect fraternal help'.[62]

The May Moscow summit

The sight of tens of thousands beaming in genuine affection for their leaders infuriated the Soviets and the four other parties that had attended the Dresden summit. The Soviet Politburo had already decided before May Day that further consultation was in order. At first Brezhnev wanted only a private meeting with Dubček 'to open his eyes in so far as it concerns the danger of the situation', but then it was concluded that it would

[60] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. č. 787.
[61] One member of the 1968 CPCS leadership who has noticed this similarity is Václav Slavík. See A KV ČSFR, R50.
[62] BBC SWB, EE/2760, 3 May 1968.

be better to invite Černík, Biľak, and Kolder as well, as Soviets did not know them well and wanted to see if differences might exist among them.[63] Dubček was evasive, pleading lack of time, and when he did agree to meet he proposed that Smrkovský, as the new chairman of parliament, replace Kolder in the entourage.

The meeting was held on 4–5 May in the CPSU Central Committee building in Moscow.[64] Brezhnev began by announcing that the Soviets, very alarmed by developments in Czechoslovakia, wanted to hear how the CPCS intended to remedy the situation and how the CPSU could help them. Dubček replied with a two-hour presentation, starting with assurances that the recent policy and personnel changes were intended to raise the party's authority. He admitted that there were 'negative tendencies', and he mentioned as examples the increased activity of churches and efforts by *Literární listy*, 'petty-bourgeois elements', and émigrés to create a real opposition to the party. The party's leading role was, he insisted, 'not open to discussion', and 'we will allow no one to create a real counter-weight in the country to the Communist Party'. Although they would still rely on non-coercive measures, such as new legislation to regulate political activity and new oversight of radio and television, Dubček promised that steps would be taken to improve the condition of the security police. He concluded by stressing that the only assistance Czechoslovakia might request of the Soviets would be a long-term loan.

Brezhnev was clearly disappointed by this optimistic report. Presenting copious clippings and documents, he reiterated and updated his Dresden conspiracy theory, attributing 'anti-Soviet' newspaper articles, the founding of KAN and K-231, and now the May Day celebrations to the counter-revolution of Černý and Procházka. Dubček rushed to agree that Černý was a 'negative personality, he works against the CPCS', 'there is nothing good' about KAN, and to share Soviet alarm over the state of Czechoslovak radio. Černík confirmed that 'anti-socialist' forces must be given no chance to foment counter-revolution. Ultimately, however, they, Biľak, and Smrkovský all insisted that the party could best control the country by building its authority, which required patience and persuasion. Smrkovský explicitly promised that within a month they would have the situation in hand.

Brezhnev took a strong liking to Smrkovský, whom he had very recently branded a counter-revolutionary, but he was still dismayed, stressing that

[63] *Lidové noviny*, 20 February 1991.

[64] Unless otherwise noted, details are from the Soviet transcript of the meeting. See A KV ČSFR, Z/S 2, 'Zapis' peregovorov s delegatsiei ChSSR 4 maia 1968 goda'. For the Czechoslovak delegation's own record of the summit, see A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4199.

'We want to believe, that you understand: this is the most crucial period in the history of your state, party, in the history of the building of socialism in Czechoslovakia.' Kosygin, furious that Dubček had not presented a detailed plan for carrying out his many promises, demanded to know 'how much longer this [would] continue' and 'which concrete measures [would] be taken on your part for the normalization' of undesirable events. Dubček again made sure to agree: 'The enemy is operating. He wants to steer events in the interests of counter-revolution'; he concurred in the view that writers like Procházka and Kohout were indeed members of a 'provocation group'. This concession only inspired Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgornyi to demand that such people be imprisoned and that Dubček's team start being the 'real leaders of this party'.

Before parting the two sides agreed to hold war-games in Czechoslovakia, although they could not agree on a date (the Czechoslovak side preferred June, the Soviets wanted mid-May). The Soviets agreed to consider the loan request, although Kosygin in particular was reluctant to make a commitment. Dubček's delegation returned to Prague deeply unsettled, and convened a Presidium session on 7 May that lasted for twenty-four hours,[65] punctuated by brief intervals in which Dubček relayed details to Moscow. As usual, the meeting was organized around protracted monologues by each participant, but it was not, as some Western observers suspected, a clear conflict between a nascent anti-reform cluster and liberalizers.

Biľak, Kolder, and Indra, though certainly sharing many views, were still divided by disagreements on key issues, such as the recent demand by four regional party conferences for an early party congress. Biľak, against an early congress on the grounds that it could not be properly prepared by the party apparatus, threatened a boycott by Slovak delegates if it were held. Indra agreed, warning that the 'rightist danger' and the emergence of 'guided and organized' anti-communist platforms meant that they were entering a period 'of a direct struggle for power', as in Hungary in 1956. Kolder, however, wanted to convene a congress in early 1969 precisely in order to expel the radicals already in the Central Committee and elect a more united, centrist leadership.

Another reason why the meeting cannot be described as a factional conflict was that there was no qualitative difference between the views expressed by Indra, Kolder, and Biľak and those of the more popular liberalizers. If anything, the most alarmist remarks came from Smrkovský. On the previous day, he had told security officers that disrespect for law

[65] All details of the meeting are from the transcript (A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P70/68, č.j. P4174).

and order in Czechoslovakia was unmatched anywhere in the world, that legislation had to be enacted to allow them to conduct surveillance (such as wiretapping), and that in the worst case 'the power of the working class' would be unleashed on the streets to crush 'anti-socialist' forces as in February 1948.[66] He now reminded the Presidium that, 'As a communist functionary, I definitely have no wish . . . to experience a counter-revolution in our country.' He warned that the party might lose the next general election unless the media were tamed by personnel changes, persuasion, and the creation of supervisory committees, rallies in factories held to elicit pressure from the working class, the army and StB 'consolidated', and the party congress held 'around Christmas'. Černík agreed that they were now locked in a power struggle against old 'bourgeois elements' and new malcontents, directed by an unknown centre.

Other centrists, while seconding these views, used more moderate language. Mlynář, since April a member of the Secretariat, said that he concurred with Smrkovský, Černík, and especially Indra, but argued that the best way to master the crisis was to convene the congress early in 1969 and address society's needs. Although wary of remnants of 'exploiter classes', he dismissed talk of a conspiratorial centre, warning that 'anti-socialists' would attack only if the party interrupted its efforts to gain the people's trust. A similar view was expressed by Císař.

The odd men out in this discussion were those few who expressed a confident commitment to reform. The new chairman of the National Front, František Kriegel, argued that if an early party congress met to elect a new Central Committee and make a clean break with the past, the party could easily assume the supremacy that the Action Programme had failed to deliver. Václav Slavík, a political theoretician and new Secretariat member, insisted that the situation was not as dire as Smrkovský claimed: had things really changed so much, he asked.

Dubček stepped in and argued that they had. Though he dismissed talk of a conspiratorial centre, he did believe that 'foreign agents' were misusing the situation for their aims, that 'negative tendencies' since April had created 'the most fertile ground for the activity or formation of counter-revolutionary elements'. Summing up at the end of the session, he detected consensus on several points: Černík's cabinet would enact measures to regulate the electronic media, Císař and Dubček were to enliven the leaden *Rudé právo*, select Presidium members were to influence party cells in other newspapers and at radio and television. In

[66] A KV SR, fond Kohn, appendix 14. His remarks were quickly relayed to Moscow, and delighted Brezhnev. See *Lidové noviny*, 22 February 1991. In 1948 Smrkovský had helped organize the party's militia during the seizure of power.

general, editors were to be held responsible for what their papers or studios produced. Dubček also mentioned that the Presidium had to decide whom to oust from the Central Committee, and arrange the promulgation of a new statute for the National Front and new laws on the press, and rights of assembly and association. These legal changes had been promised as guarantees of civil rights, but they could also serve to eliminate undesirable phenomena.

The reformers had made a major concession: they had acknowledged the existence of a threat to socialism resulting not, as they had so far contended, from justified public discontent, from dogmatic intransigence, or Novotný's negligence, but from undefined hostile elements. In doing so, centrists were undermining their own position: having acknowledged the existence of 'anti-socialist forces', they were now committed to doing something about them.

That this shift in policy coincided with growing alarm in the party apparatus emerged at a conference of district and regional party bosses on 12–13 May. Such gatherings were held periodically and, being less orchestrated and publicized than Central Committee plena, were frank and confrontational. Dubček's opening speech to the conference reflected the Presidium's new outlook, warning that 'rightist opposition forces with a varying degree of anti-communist and anti-socialist orientation' had emerged and, unless they were confronted, 'the danger threatens that after some time these anti-socialist tendencies could grow such that a serious crisis will arise which only a power conflict could solve'.[67] Such forces, therefore, had to be curtailed to prevent the development of an 'anti-communist counter-revolutionary platform'. This would best be done by fostering public trust, but if there ever were an open attack, he vowed, 'we will mobilize all means and we will suppress these forces'. To combat rumours of Soviet intimidation at the Moscow summit, Dubček declared that, 'Our party is threatened by no danger from the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.' He feared only that 'If the rightists have greater scope, then it will weaken socialism and democracy, which is an issue for us all.'

The district functionaries who spoke after him were confused by much of this terminology (what exactly, for example, was a rightist?), but they were greatly relieved that the party leadership had acknowledged that problems existed. Many complained that they were not receiving a clear, unified policy line from the Presidium, mourned the Action Programme

[67] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968 [transcript of the meeting of leading secretaries of district and regional party committees, 12–13 May 1968]. All details of this meeting are taken from this transcript.

as 'a definite disappointment',[68] and warned that attendance levels in some local party cells were declining. One speaker from North Moravia was applauded when he declared, 'I believe that today's meeting . . . comes not at five minutes to midnight but right at midnight itself, and I think that the condition of the party and of society is far more critical than comrade Dubček said.'[69]

Members of the Presidium also addressed the conference, mostly agreeing self-critically with the incensed local officials, but they disagreed on how desperate the situation was. The most militant pessimism was voiced by Biľak, whose rousing appeal for working-class mobilization, according to the transcript, was the only speech to receive 'stormy' applause. Also well received was Mlynář, who agreed that steps had to be taken to break the 'united pressure' of 'anti-socialist tendencies'. Among his recommendations were the expulsion from the party of journalists who violated communist discipline and closure of the radical (and party-subsidized) weekly *Student*. In complete contrast, Kriegel's confident depiction of the party's growing popularity and authority ('What forces are there that could really oust us?') provoked shouts of disagreement and was the only speech not rewarded with applause.

In subsequent days, Presidium and Secretariat members embarked on their mission to bring the media into line. It had become all the more urgent since the Writers' Union had decided in mid-April that in the autumn it would resurrect the old liberal daily *Lidové noviny* (The People's Paper) under the editorship of the same trio (Liehm, Jaroslav Šedivý, and Václav Klaus) who already tormented the reform coalition every week in *Literární listy* under the pseudonym Dalimil.[70] If it were to compete, and in general set the tone and limits of public debate, *Rudé právo* would require a new identity. Although a rebellion of junior editors had produced some improvements, the Presidium failed to realize that one of their members, the discredited editor-in-chief, Oldřich Švestka, was obstructing the requisite total transformation of the paper. The Presidium finally debated the daily's health on 14 May when several of

[68] See in particular the speech by Bares, from Bruntal; Ladislav Karda, from Plzeň, found that the Action Programme was poorly known at the large Škoda car factory and elsewhere in the West Bohemian region; Vyčítal, from Pardubice, said that the Programme's generality did not lend itself to effective propaganda, as party functionaries themselves poorly understood it, and he accused the Presidium of breaking its 21 March promise to send consultation groups to all districts to clarify it.

[69] The speaker was František Meduna from Karviná. North Moravian leaders, among the most conservative in the party, had told Polish counterparts a week before that they feared bloodshed, and that counter-revolution could only be prevented by the arrival of Soviet troops. See A KV ČSFR, Z/P 1.

[70] A. J. Liehm, 'Za sebe', *Listy* 24 (1994), pp. 23–4.

the mutinous editors were invited to present their case. After eight hours of talk, however, the Presidium unanimously defended their colleague, and left the party daily in the hands of an ineffectual hack who would soon be one of the main collaborators with the Soviet-led invasion.[71]

While the rebels at *Rudé právo* were left to their own devices, from May onwards the Central Committee's media department was being staffed with new, open-minded functionaries and overseen by Císař, who was willing to try out more sophisticated approaches.[72] Although he browbeat the media for allegedly failing to interpret party policy correctly, and pledged to introduce special oversight councils and a new press law that would define 'anti-socialist, anti-social, and . . . anti-constitutional activity'[73] as liable to prosecution, he and Dubček did persist in consultations with editors, as some were now more willing to take the Presidium line. Císař also introduced Western-style press conferences and briefings, and he exhorted Presidium and Secretariat members to circumvent journalists by addressing the public directly. It was only in June, for example, that Dubček gave his first speech to the country over television and radio.[74] Kolder and Indra, however, expected the charismatic Císař to speak on their behalf and were furious when he refused.[75]

The decision to hold the congress

On 17 May the Soviet premier suddenly arrived in Czechoslovakia, ostensibly for a cure in the western spa town of Karlovy Vary. He met eventually with all leading party and state officials, and his lecturing spurred them to think about how party control of the reform course could be reinforced. After telephone calls to Moscow, and with Kosygin's blessing, they decided to convene the party congress sooner than planned, in the hope that it would give the party the authority that the Action Programme had not. It is here that we encounter some of the most ambiguous signals sent to Moscow by centrists such as Dubček, and they concern the vital issue of whom they considered to be their allies in the CPCS leadership. Though factions were only now crystallizing, there was an identifiable spectrum of opinion on how far reform should go. At one end were figures such as Kriegel and Slavík, who do seem to have been genuine democrats. At the other end were Biľak, Indra, and Kolder, who wanted only enough controlled change to ease social tension and refine economic per-

[71] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P71/68, P4168.
[72] A KV ČSFR, R43 [KV ČSFR interview with Císař, 29 March 1990].
[73] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1968 [transcript of the meeting of leading secretaries of district and regional party committees, 12–13 May 1968].
[74] Havlíček, *The Mass Media in Czechoslovakia in 1956–1968*, part II, pp. 30–1.
[75] A KV ČSFR, R21 [KV ČSFR interview with Císař, 22 March 1990].

formance, and who were cultivating impeccable reputations in Moscow. The problem, then, was with whom centrists like Dubček, Černík, Smrkovský, Špaček, and Mlynář aligned themselves.

It was a given that the congress would have to remove all those members of the Central Committee who had been discredited for their incompetence or involvement in the Stalinist terror. New materials, however, suggest that the congress was also intended to eliminate the most radical members. Significantly, those who now wanted the congress were those who were most unhappy about recent trends (except for Biľak, who was still against early convocation). It is clear from several sources that the decision to convene the congress on 9 September was made on 25 May (the day of Kosygin's departure) by Dubček, Černík, Indra, Kolder, Lenárt, and the Central Committee secretary for agriculture, Štefan Sádovský.[76]

Dubček explained the plan to Ambassador Chervonenko on 12 June. Central party organs, Dubček said, would instruct party committees in industrial areas to nominate himself, Černík, Indra, and Kolder for re-election to the Central Committee, while any attempts by Kriegel and Šik would be blocked. Dubček assured Chervonenko that the congress was part of a new strategy to smash the 'rightists' and 'anti-socialist forces', especially by shifting the nomination process to the conservative district level, whereby 'those regional committees which have a strong liberal wing will be paralysed'. Consequently, Dubček predicted, at the congress the 'rightists' would be outnumbered and 'precisely this situation should be used to strike an open political blow' against them. He implied that the new Central Committee, free of any taint of conservatism, would be free to use not only political but also coercive measures to crush dissent.[77]

If Dubček was speaking truthfully, he and Černík considered Kolder, Indra, and Biľak to be allies, and Šik and Kriegel to be, if not opponents, at least a nuisance. This is confirmed by a message from Brezhnev to Dubček, dated 11 June, which mentions that in conversation on 5 June Dubček had named Černík, Biľak, Indra, Jozef Lenárt, and Kolder as his *edinomyshlenniki*, which in Russian can mean both 'confederates' and 'those holding similar views'.[78] This is supported by the fact that Indra at this time was given enormous authority as deputy party leader and put in

[76] For statements from Dubček to this effect, see A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103 [transcript of meeting of the Presidium on 15 October 1968]; *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 14.–17. listopadu 1968*, part I, p. 7; and A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7659. For Kolder's account, see his speech to the September 1969 Central Committee plenum in *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 25.–26. září 1969*, part I, p. 134. Černík's unreliable account is in A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; 'Jednání se soudruhem Oldřichem Černíkem v ÚKRK KSČ dne 16. června 1970']. See also A KV ČSFR, Z/S 42 (AVP SSSR, r. 9754, f. 5, op. 60, d. 295, ll. 98–101).

[77] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams 11 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 123, d. 570, ll. 16–31).

[78] Cherneva, '"Ot raskrytiia arkhivov po 'Prazhskoi vesne' nikuda ne uiti . . ."', p. 91.

charge of congress preparations. The Presidium took other measures to insulate the congress from radical influence: on 3 July, it assigned Císař to make sure that the 'selection of candidates for membership in the new Central Committee . . . is an internal party matter' which should not be prejudiced by the media.[79] Moreover, Císař was expected to collaborate with Indra in developing a pre-congress media campaign. Dubček also tried to subdue Císař's revisionism by suggesting to Chervonenko that Císař be invited to Moscow, where orthodox ideologues could dampen his heresy.[80] All in all, Dubček seemed to be declaring to the Soviets that he associated himself with a group well reputed in Moscow but increasingly unpopular with the people of Czechoslovakia.

Regardless of Dubček's real intentions and allegiances, his efforts would soon have serious unintended consequences, once special conferences started gathering to elect congress delegates and nominate candidates for the next Central Committee. Despite what Dubček had told Chervonenko, little was done to protect less popular figures against attacks in the media or to control the nomination process. Although Indra, Kolder, Biľak, and other neo-conservatives were all nominated for re-election by safe districts in June, so were Kriegel and Šik, which was not supposed to happen.[81] Kolder's and Indra's approval by subsequent regional conferences then proved enormously difficult to arrange, and 735 names were put forward by 25 July to contest just over 100 seats on the new Central Committee.[82] A candidate had to receive the support of at least 50 per cent of congress delegates to win a seat, and surveys submitted to Dubček's Secretariat in the second half of July confirmed that neo-conservatives would have to campaign very hard to clear this threshold. It is likely that most of them would have, but the neo-conservatives were prone always to assume the worst, and they appealed instead to Dubček to annul the mandates of liberal congress delegates and stage-manage the elections. His eventual refusal to do so cast into doubt all his communications to Moscow about his allies and allegiances.

A two-front struggle?

The formal decision to convene the congress on 9 September was taken by a Central Committee plenum at the end of May. The plenum also endorsed the line that had been emerging since late March, which a resolution summed up in Kádáresque language as a two-front struggle against dogmatism and radicalism alike, with the latter, the 'rightist

[79] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. 4468/25.
[80] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams 11 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 123, d. 570, ll. 16–31).
[81] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P82/68, č.j. 4253/26.
[82] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P90/68, č.j. P4612/26 and č.j. P4613/26.

threat', branded the more serious. Dubček's keynote speech, and much of the discussion that followed, was a replay of the earlier conference with local party officials. With surprising unanimity, dozens of speakers lambasted the media as disloyal and destructive, and insisted that the party should refuse to share power with other parties or new political movements. Because the sentiments expressed by Dubček and other speakers were so out of touch with the progressive mood of the country, many details of the proceedings were concealed from the press.[83]

The Soviets were pleased with the plenum's results, which reinforced the very positive impression given by Kosygin's report to the Politburo on his return from Karlovy Vary. The premier admitted that the visit had caused an earthquake in his opinions of events in Czechoslovakia, and he had come away confident that the incumbent CPCS leadership could find a solution to the crisis. Though he felt that Bil'ak, Kolder, and Štrougal were more decisive and realistic, he did not see much difference between them and Dubček, Černík, and especially Smrkovský.[84] Kosygin's rosy account, however, was dashed by alarmist reports from Bil'ak, who was so scared for the future that he was already asking the Soviets about the possibility of asylum. On 4 June Bil'ak urged Soviet leaders to invite himself, Dubček, Černík, Indra, Lenárt, Sádovský, and Barbírek for new consultations.

The Politburo accepted his suggestion, and dispatched the invitation on 11 June. Repeating earlier offers of 'all possible support and help', Brezhnev urged Dubček to attend 'bilateral, unofficial, friendly' talks around 15–16 June in eastern Slovakia or Soviet Ruthenia. Since the Presidium had decided that its members would forgo foreign meetings and devote themselves to congress preparations, Brezhnev offered to meet in total secrecy.[85] Hours later, a second telegram was sent, in which a furious Brezhnev reacted to three recent articles in the Czech press, in particular the latest column by Dalimil in *Literární listy*. Such articles, Brezhnev claimed, contained open appeals for 'the complete change of [the party's] current leadership at the approaching congress', and for 'depriving the Communist Party of its leading role as a result of elections to the National Assembly'. He warned Dubček that these articles were a 'serious confirmation that the struggle of the anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary forces is acquiring still greater zeal and the situation is becoming all the more dangerous'.[86]

When Chervonenko delivered the invitation on 12 June, Dubček

[83] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, pp. 97–9.
[84] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, p. 17.
[85] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 9 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 126, d. 583, ll. 155–7); A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. č. 817.
[86] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 10 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 126, d. 583, l. 159).

thanked the Soviets for their concern and committed himself in principle to meeting, saying that events were indeed moving too fast. Yet when it came to setting a date he begged off, claiming that the coming fortnight was already booked up and that with the media dogging his every step it would be impossible to hold a confidential summit. Instead he offered to use the pretext of a holiday in the Crimea in July or August to allow him, Černík, Biľak, and others to meet with Soviet leaders without having to divulge any details to the press or even to the Presidium.[87] Not only was this the fourth time that he had failed to respond immediately to a Soviet invitation, now he was creating the image of a leader held hostage in his own country, wanting to oblige his Soviet friends yet afraid to do so in public.

Meanwhile, Czechoslovak leaders were working on measures to counter the 'rightist danger', as promised at the May plenum. Contingency plans were drawn up for the event of violent unrest, although nothing was happening in Prague akin to the pitched battles being fought that year in Western capitals. Since the presidential campaign rallies, students had trooped around Prague on 30 March, winding up around midnight in front of the Central Committee meeting, where they talked with Dubček; then on 3 May the magazine *Student* organized an anti-communist rally attended by about four thousand people; and on 16 May the annual student *majáles* carnival, involving several thousand youths, became a sea of banners and placards criticizing the Dubček leadership's timidity. Yet none of these gatherings sparked any violence – banners at the *majáles* specifically declared solidarity with the peaceful demonstration in Paris on 13 May rather than the earlier Latin Quarter riots – and they were contained with ease.

None the less, fearing that worse might come, on 20 June the Presidium assigned Černík and Interior Minister Pavel to draw up 'relevant security measures'. The resulting four-page plan, dated 11 July, would have empowered the deputy interior minister in an emergency to create an operational staff for collecting information, and overseeing and protecting the media, telecommunications, and arms warehouses, and to put the StB on full alert.[88] Although this document was never submitted for final approval, Pavel reportedly notified Černík, and the operational staff was created on 18 July.[89] On Černík's initiative a plan was also drafted to set up detention camps for, as Dubček later admitted, 'the political isolation of people in the event of open uprisings against social-

[87] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 123, d. 570, ll. 16–31).
[88] A FMV, k. 41, 73/7-8, č.j. IMV 003/ZO-70.
[89] A FMV, k. 41, 73/7-8, č.j. IMV 003/ZO-70.

ism'.[90] On 15 July the defence ministry's collegiate board also discussed measures to suppress an 'anti-socialist' uprising, and informed Svoboda, Černík, and Dubček.[91]

On the whole, however, the two-front struggle was to be waged through peaceful means, in particular through new legislation. On 27 May the Presidium adopted a timetable of legal measures, submitted by Smrkovský and Černík.[92] One of its most important items was the legal circumscription of all political activity to the National Front (NF). On 15 June representatives of NF organizations signed a joint declaration affirming what the interior ministry, which was responsible for the registration of any new organization, had already declared on 24 May: no political activity could take place outside its framework.[93] These announcements were the prelude to the adoption of a new NF statute that would predicate NF membership on adherence to four principles: acceptance of the February 1948 communist takeover, of the CPCS's 'leading role', of Marxism-Leninism, and of the restriction of all political organization to the NF. Similar preconditions were built into a proposed amendment to article 6 of the constitution, which the Presidium discussed and approved on 4 July.

Communist leaders insisted that both the statute and the constitutional amendment be passed by parliament during its July session; otherwise the summer recess would delay ratification until September. Such legislation was deemed urgent because in addition to KAN and K-231, there was now the threatened revival of the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Until 1948 the SDP had been one of the most influential parties in Czechoslovakia, and had been forcibly merged in July 1948 into the CPCS. Emboldened by the climate of reform, former SDP functionaries set up a committee on 22 March to prepare their party's resurrection. The CPCS Presidium, out of either paralysis or benign neglect, did not get around to discussing this rather important issue until 21–2 May, during another marathon session, after which Smrkovský, Indra, and Kriegel met with five members of the SDP. Those talks broke down in acrimony, and the SDP vowed to forge on.

They made contact instead with functionaries at the Prague municipal CPCS committee, one of the most progressive party organizations in the country. By 21 June the two sides had struck a gentleman's agreement, whereby the SDP would refrain from any public activity until the CPCS

[90] See Dubček's November 1985 letter to the editors of *Rudé právo*, the Slovak *Pravda*, and *Práca*, reprinted in the émigré *Listy* 15 (1985), p. 7.

[91] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; report of Defence Minister Dzúr to the Central Control and Review Commission, 9 June 1970].

[92] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P74/68.

[93] SÚA, fond ÚV NF 1945–1968, kr. 19.

congress, while communists would stop attacking the SDP in the press.[94] This deal was communicated to the CPCS Presidium by Bohumil Šimon, the new leader of the Prague municipal committee and a candidate (non-voting) Presidium member, and Evžen Erban, himself a former social democrat and Kriegel's deputy at the National Front. Šimon and Erban argued that the SDP had been duped by the deal and that the CPCS should try to split the social democrats by offering some of them attractive positions in public offices, while continuing anti-SDP propaganda to discourage the curious from joining the SDP after the CPCS congress.

Mlynář, however, argued for a more resolute policy. Using StB information, he showed that the SDP was using a legal ramblers' club as a front to establish a central committee and build networks,[95] and he argued that a lasting solution could be reached only by enacting the draft National Front statute to ban the SDP and all other unofficial political groupings. All social democrats employed in the media would be fired.[96] The Presidium decided that it would follow the Erban–Šimon policy while quietly preparing the course of action recommended by Mlynář.[97]

To contain the media, a bill was drafted to create supervisory councils for radio and television, but the promised new press law was being delayed by disputes between the ministry of culture and the journalists' and writers' unions, so the existing law had to be amended instead.[98] The precise contents of the amendments to the press law were still to be decided, and were the subject of heated and, as usual, protracted debate in the Presidium on 25 June. Mlynář proposed that the government retract the draft amendment explicitly outlawing censorship that it was about to submit to parliament, retain some state influence over the media, and reprimand communists who strayed from the Action Programme. He was opposed by Císař, Černík, Culture Minister Galuška, and, notably, Husák, all of whom supported the government's amendment. Dubček drew up a compromise decree, rejecting Mlynář's call for reprimands and upholding the government amendment, but including a clause that reminded editors of the power of the courts to prosecute violations of

[94] A KV ČSFR, R117 [KV ČSFR interview with Přemysl Janýr]. The agreement came four days after the social democrats had taken the bold step of appealing to trade unions for support. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 9, a.j. 88.

[95] A FMV, fond A7, i.j. 585. The information was sent to Dubček by Deputy Interior Minister Šalgovič on 25 June.

[96] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P4359/26.

[97] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 9, a.j. 88.

[98] A PV ČSSR, fond Karel Laco (místopředseda vlády), č.j. 1371/68-sekr. A serious obstacle to the new law appears to have been the inability of Deputy Culture Minister Chňoupek to conceptualize one. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103.

state secrecy. A list of untouchable themes would be compiled and circulated.[99] The following day, with thirty nays and seventeen abstentions by disgruntled conservatives, the amendments passed the parliament. Thanks to this, and to Dubček's appearance at the journalists' union congress on 23 June, a modus vivendi had been reached between the party and the press. It was to last all of twenty-four hours.

Two thousand words

On 27 June four Czech publications carried the '2000 Words' manifesto. Written by Ludvík Vaculík and signed by dozens of eminent intellectuals and even a few Central Committee members, it was an eloquent appeal to citizens not to succumb to summer complacency but to make the reform process a grass-roots movement. So far the Prague Spring had consisted primarily of riveting but removed clashes between sectors of the party, state, and intelligentsia. The immediate benefactors of the awakened society had been the two minor Czech parties in the National Front, the Socialists (CSP) and the People's Party (CPP). For years they had been kept under firm control: the chairman of the CSP, Bohuslav Kučera, had been an informer for the StB since 1952, submitting over 600 reports on colleagues, party meetings, and plans,[100] and the CPP had been dominated by the collaborative priest Plojhar. In 1968, however, both parties enjoyed significant autonomy and expansion; despite Kučera's efforts to enforce a selective admissions procedure, the CSP grew from 10,706 members in January 1968 to 17,223 in July 1968 (and to 28,425 by September 1969), while the CPP grew from 20,692 to 46,000 (to 91,118 by 1969), largely among Moravian farmers.[101]

Otherwise, there had been no substantial increase in membership of any organization, new or old. The Communist Party's membership *declined* between January and July 1968 by 3,412 members (0.2 per cent of the total).[102] Since May all sides had been wooing the working class, as party leaders orchestrated numerous industrial rallies, the Socialist Party was setting up factory cells, and intellectuals around KAN, which had attracted probably a few thousand members at best, made pilgrimages in

[99] Havlíček, *The Mass Media in Czechoslovakia in 1956–1968*, part II, p. 33; Frank Kaplan, *Winter into Spring*, p. 114; 'Boj o cenzuru', *Listy* 8 (1978), pp. 60–2.

[100] A FMV, fond IM, k. 10, sv. 72/4, č.j. IM-001/50-01/1-72. Kučera stopped informing for the StB on 9 February 1968, when he was elected a functionary of the National Assembly. He served as justice minister in the first Černík cabinet, and then as minister without portfolio in 1969–71.

[101] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5448; A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information from Central Committee department for social organizations, 7 November 1969].

[102] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 26, a.j. 273.

search of proletarian contacts.[103] All of these efforts, however, had done little to stir people up. As Vaculík pointed out, no real institutional changes had been introduced, and further change was dependent on the party's benevolence. Bolder reformers such as Kriegel knew only too well the limits of centrists' tolerance, and via contacts in the Academy of Sciences they commissioned the publication of a manifesto to mobilize the masses.

Accordingly, Vaculík appealed to ordinary citizens to establish their own watchdog committees throughout the country as a loyal counterweight and, if need be, to launch strikes. In doing so, he unintentionally gave Czechoslovak neo-conservatives and the Soviets precisely the evidence they sought of a cabal out to destroy the party's power. The Presidium was hurriedly convened on the night of 27–8 June, even though most members still had not had time to read the document.[104] Černík, presiding in Dubček's absence, described the manifesto as 'definitely a political matter, aimed at the disintegration of the party', and at influencing the district conferences that were beginning to meet to elect delegates to the party congress.[105] Indra insisted on a resolute response, such as putting the StB and party militia on alert, and Kolder demanded that the Central Committee be summoned for a critical discussion of the reforms. As usual, the most fiery talk came from Smrkovský, who warned that measures had to be taken or 'it will be too late, it will be solved independently of our will. Perhaps I'm using tough words now, but if we do not curb these expressions now it will be ascribed to us that we betrayed the socialist revolution. I will not associate my name with that.' When Dubček arrived, Smrkovský told him, 'If we do not put a stop to this now, then tanks will solve it.' Dubček agreed that with its 'alarming' calls for strikes, the manifesto was attempting to divide the party and disorient intellectuals.

The less panicky members, though furious at the manifesto's appearance, offered more constructive courses of action. Mlynář recommended that the Presidium officially condemn the manifesto as an attack on the party, and take 'preliminary' measures, such as a warning from the Attorney General that such appeals could be punished under article 100 of the penal code: 'Psychologically that would have influence, it is not at variance with the law.' At the same time, he wanted to run a counter-cam-

[103] The size of the new political group's memberships is the subject of much speculation. By August 1968 KAN claimed to have 15,000 members, and the leaders of K-231 claimed to have 60,000, but the CPCS's own information department reported only 2,218 and 5,760 respectively. See Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 547–8.

[104] Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, p. 159.

[105] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P81/68. All details of the debate are from these shorthand notes.

paign of appearances by the most popular liberalizers and ideologues. Císař, committed to *rapprochement* with intellectuals, urged colleagues to reprimand only those who organized the document while reaching out to those who simply signed it. Černík proposed a statement depicting it not as a counter-revolutionary document but as another move by forces preparing counter-revolution. Smrkovský interrupted that it was indeed 'the advent of counter-revolution with all that it entails. If we do nothing now, in two to three months it will be too late and it will be resolved by blood[shed].'

Indra drafted and dispatched an outraged telex, reflecting Černík's line and calling on party organs and conferences to support the Presidium's stand. The Presidium's original decree also incorporated almost all the suggestions made during the nocturnal meeting, but in re-drafting it was so watered down that in its final version it simply called for Černík to *discuss* with the attorney general the *possibility* of issuing a warning that such an appeal *might* be considered agitation; security measures were to be decided by Dubček and Černík 'according to need'; and Černík, Mlynář, Smrkovský, and Indra were to draw up a political guideline on how to respond 'if such destructive activity continues'. It is not clear whether these dilutions took place in the Presidium or later in Dubček's Secretariat, where the drafting of a decree would normally be handled. In any event the final decisions marked a considerable climbdown, as did milder subsequent public comments on the manifesto by Dubček, Černík, Smrkovský, and Kriegel that conflicted with Indra's telex.[106] While again signalling resolve to intervene, the coalition's final response was an index of less drastic intentions.

Invitation to Warsaw

Vaculík's appeal to form committees went unheeded by the public, and although only one-third of party conferences supported the official condemnation, there was never any threat to public order or party hegemony. Leaders like Smrkovský and Černík, hitherto alarmed by trends, saw this lack of upheaval as evidence that conditions were finally 'consolidating'. The Soviets, however, believed that the situation in Czechoslovakia, despite improving after the May plenum, had deteriorated further and that the '2000 Words' was proof of counter-revolutionary operations. They regarded the CPCS leadership as irresolute, and the increasingly 'unprincipled' Dubček as moving from the centre to the 'right'. Moreover, they feared that the CPCS congress would be hijacked

[106] Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, p. 167.

by 'rightists' and Czechoslovakia would set off on a Yugoslav course and thence into the bourgeois camp.[107] The Politburo met on 2 and 3 July (which will be discussed in the next chapter), and concluded that it was necessary to subject the CPCS to another Dresden-style meeting, to be held on 6–7 July or soon thereafter, but no later than the 12th, preferably in a capital other than Moscow. The Soviets also decided that the summit would convene even if the CPCS refused to attend. The summit would be preceded by a letter to the CPCS Presidium, and the Soviets asked the other four parties to dispatch similar letters.[108]

The Soviet letter, dated 4 July and signed by the CPSU Politburo, articulated Moscow's displeasure with unprecedented force and was the first official use of the loaded terms 'normalize' and 'normalization'. In addition to the standard conspiracy theory, the letter warned that counterrevolutionaries had the sympathy of some party members, even in the Central Committee. It reiterated previous demands for censorship and élite unity, and promises of 'all necessary help'.[109] Clone letters were written by the other four parties on 4 and 5 July, all modelled on the Soviet example; only the Hungarians adopted a slightly more sympathetic tone.

Chervonenko delivered the Soviet letter on Thursday, 4 July, although Brezhnev had called Dubček in advance to describe its contents and to propose a multilateral summit, to be held on Sunday, 7 July.[110] Dubček replied the next day, 5 July, claiming that the other Presidium members were scattered around the country at regional conferences and could not meet until Monday, 8 July, to discuss the offer. He then sent a formal letter reiterating his position and asking for the proposed agenda of such a meeting.[111] In the meantime he told no one about the existence of the 4 July Soviet letter, locking it away in a vault, but word got out after Chervonenko alerted Smrkovský and Císař on 5 and 6 July respectively.[112]

According to one source, Kádár then persuaded the Soviets to propose another set of later dates.[113] On 6 July Brezhnev sent a written invitation to a summit to be held in Warsaw on Wednesday, 10 July, or Thursday the 11th. Chervonenko delivered it to Dubček and Černík on the morning of the 8th, half an hour before the Presidium was to meet. According to the ambassador's account, Dubček yet again avoided commitment to a

[107] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 12. [108] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 12.
[109] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued]. [110] Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. II, p. 46.
[111] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued]; A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225; A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 26, a.j. 273; A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 12 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 55–6).
[112] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 123–8).
[113] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued; A KV ČSFR DII/14, document 28].

summit, pleading lack of time, but Černík promised that they were about to restore control of the media. Chervonenko pressed the premier on how this would be accomplished with regard to the party congress. Although Dubček interjected that 'it [was] necessary to do something with the organs of mass information', 'recount[ing] examples of anti-socialist and anti-Soviet statements', Černík 'said nothing about what the Presidium or government intended to undertake to change the situation in this area'.[114]

Dubček opened the Presidium meeting that morning by recounting the arrival of the letters and the summons to Warsaw where, Brezhnev had told him, Czechoslovakia would be discussed.[115] Dubček's aide then read out the texts of the five letters, after which Smrkovský admitted that he had already read the Soviet text on Friday the 5th. At this point the proceedings were interrupted by the wrath of those Presidium members who had not been alerted to the letters' arrival. Jan Piller, seeing the letters as a gross misunderstanding, implied that either Czechoslovak leaders at previous summits had presented their side poorly 'or our renewal process isn't worth shit'. Dubček replied that he and the others had indeed informed the Soviets properly, that he sympathized with the allies' concern, and that it was time to rebuff 'rightists'.

After rambling over these problems, Dubček returned to the point of business: a Presidium response outlining what would be done to allay allies' concerns. Císař felt that more was needed, and recommended bilateral meetings with each of the five parties. Černík, growing bolder in his defence of the reform course, saw the letters as a concentrated effort to alter policies in the run-up to the congress, which would only hinder 'consolidation' by displeasing the public. He supported the idea of bilateral talks, which he felt should include Romania and Yugoslavia. Kriegel and Špaček, fearing that events were beginning to resemble the 1948 expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, urged colleagues not to go to Warsaw.

Mlynář, though supporting the proposal of bilateral talks, gloomily declared that the country contained 'very many serious political antagonisms' and 'anti-Soviet tendencies', and that 'if we do not make sure to take some political things in hand, it could mean that it would strengthen tendencies from the right, that it would open up the way for them'. Mlynář, like Kolder, advocated a Yugoslav-style system of self-censorship in the media and clearer limits on reform: '[We] mustn't take things to a position where further progress has to lead at this point to open political

[114] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 14 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 123–8).

[115] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225. All details of the Presidium session are from this transcript.

systems of free play of political forces. If we do not think these things out, our step could go down in history very badly.'

The neo-conservative faction was still not united, and refrained from outright identification with the Soviet viewpoint. Biľak and Kolder, seeing a chance to effect a turnabout in policy, wanted to go to Warsaw and to convene the Central Committee to discuss the letters. They were supported by Švestka, Antonín Kapek (the general director of the massive ČKD factory in Prague, a candidate member of the Presidium, and an old Novotný protégé with an anti-reform track record), and Miloš Jakeš, who sat in the Presidium *ex officio* as chairman of the party's internal disciplinary commission. Indra, forecasting that 'I honestly feel as a communist that it is stuffy in this country, and that the storm will soon break', urged convocation of the plenum but opposed a summit in Warsaw.[116]

As the discussion lapsed into bickering, Dubček wound it up by trying to accommodate most strategic suggestions: (1) they were agreed that they were not prepared for a joint meeting and that bilateral talks should come first, including Yugoslavia and Romania; (2) they would offer to host a multilateral meeting in Prague during the party congress; (3) they would not launch a populist or nationalist campaign against the letters and would strive to maintain good relations with the other parties; (4) a response to the Politburo's letter would be drafted; (5) within three days Černík, Smrkovský, Lenárt, and Mlynář were to present a situation report and propose measures against the 'rightist' threat and a 'counter-revolutionary' uprising.

Dubček called Brezhnev that evening to report their decisions and ask the five parties not to meet without them.[117] The next day, 9 July, on Dubček's instructions, Lenárt (now the Central Committee secretary for international affairs) discussed with Chervonenko the possibility of bilateral talks. Chervonenko expressed his regret at the decision, remarking that he did not see a 'sincere desire' on the Czechoslovak side to meet with the CPSU, that this step put relations between the two parties 'on a new course', and that the Soviets now wondered whether the CPCS under Dubček would remain an 'internationalist' member of the camp. He then digressed into a nightmare scenario on how Czechoslovakia could disrupt the balance of power in Europe. Lenárt divulged that the Presidium was not united and that he disagreed with its decisions.[118]

Possibly because of Chervonenko's rebuke, Dubček called Brezhnev

[116] While informing Chervonenko of the Presidium's decision during a pause in the proceedings, however, Indra agreed with the ambassador's view that it would be a great error not to go to Warsaw. See A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 123–8). [117] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued].

[118] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 15 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 145–9).

that night to propose dates for a bilateral meeting: Sunday, 14 July, or Wednesday, 17 July. Two days later, on the morning of Thursday, 11 July, Dubček summoned Chervonenko and asked him to inform Brezhnev that they could meet with a Soviet delegation in Košice, in eastern Slovakia, on Sunday the 14th. The Soviet ambassador returned at 5 p.m. to deliver a collective response from the five parties rejecting bilaterals and repeating that a multilateral meeting would be held, which it was hoped the CPCS would attend. No date was specified, but Chervonenko mentioned that it might be [*mogla by*] Sunday, 14 July. Dubček replied that the Presidium would meet the next day, 12 July, and that he did not know what it would decide. Chervonenko warned Dubček that he and the Presidium were assuming enormous responsibility if they refused to attend, and urged Dubček to rely on the 'healthy forces' (Indra, Kolder, Biĺak) and distance himself from Kriegel, Špaček, and Císař.

Dubček shrugged him off, replying that he intended to avoid any severe new measures before the party congress, as he was now able to keep the media in line by talking with editors. Chervonenko, however, noticed the following day that newspapers were publishing articles that Dubček promised would not appear. The ambassador reported to Moscow that Dubček was blinded by popularity, failed to see the 'rightist' threat and believed that his authority sufficed to keep the country on the socialist path. This, the ambassador believed, was a 'dangerous delusion'.[119]

Rumours were now rife that the Soviets were about to intervene, with soldiers still in the country from war-games that had ended in June. On 11 July *Pravda* published its most severe criticism of the reforms so far, and the Warsaw Pact commander, Marshal Iakubovskii, having postponed the return of Soviet forces to bases in the GDR and Poland, promised that they would leave within days. Neo-conservatives in the Presidium, therefore, had to prevail in the 12 July session if they wanted to convene a Central Committee plenum and cause a major policy reversal or even a *coup d'état* before Soviet troops withdrew and the multilateral convened.

The Presidium met that day to discuss Lenárt's thirteen-page response to the letters of the five parties.[120] Kolder, and later Kapek, quickly produced prepared speeches critical of the reform course, respecting (but not completely agreeing with) Soviet unease, and calling for a Central Committee plenum to unify the 'healthy forces'. These efforts might have succeeded but for recent changes in the attitudes of Smrkovský and Černík. The protracted presence of Soviet troops in the country, the

[119] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 17 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 262–71).
[120] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225. All details of the meeting are from this source.

public's subsequent displeasure at the limits of Czechoslovakia's sovereignty, and the genuine popularity of the reform programme had emboldened Smrkovský. No longer bellowing about counter-revolution, he bitterly criticized the other parties for their crude power politics. Refusal to go to Warsaw, he said, would not automatically ruin relations, as he wanted to believe that the Soviets would not 'resort to some drastic measures with unforeseeable results, which would have significance not only for us but which would have a European significance at the very least'. He also opposed efforts to summon the Central Committee, and was supported by Černík and Mlynář.

Dubček, joined by Šimon, did not categorically dismiss allies' concerns, but thought their prescriptions unrealistic. The Soviets' behaviour hurt rather than angered Dubček: 'I think the comrades do not doubt my good attitude towards the Soviet Union, it is almost my second homeland, but I do not understand this ultimatum-like standpoint, I think it's not good and the comrades did not consider this side of things enough.' After further discussion Dubček concluded (1) that the Central Committee would not be convened; (2) that Lenárt's draft would be toned down (many speakers found it too insolent in places) and modified to address each of the five parties individually; and (3) that they would invite the Soviets for bilateral talks to be held on 17 July. The Kolder–Kapek effort had failed.

Lenárt handed over the five tailored responses to the respective ambassadors the next day, 13 July, and mentioned to Chervonenko the offer of talks in Košice; the latter promised to notify Moscow but he repeated that the Soviets wanted the other four parties to be present. He apparently did not inform Lenárt that Brezhnev, Podgornyi, Shelest, and Katushev were in fact already en route to Warsaw. Instead, Černík and Dubček found out from the Czechoslovak press agency while flying to Komárno, on the Slovak–Hungarian border, to meet with Kádár.[121] On the ground, Dubček complained that to meet without the CPCS 'naturally evokes in us the feeling that we are in the defendant's dock and not partners'.[122] Exasperated, Kádár said that he had been disturbed by trends in Czechoslovakia since the May plenum and since 8 July in particular. Their rejection of a multilateral meeting, he warned, was their biggest mistake so far, as it had 'radically changed relations between the six parties. A serious situation has arisen, and no one can say what will be next.'[123] The Hungarians would travel to Warsaw the next morning, and he urged the CPCS to attend.

[121] A KV ČSFR, R4 [KV ČSFR interview with Černík, 1 February 1990].
[122] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued]. [123] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 15.

Černík and Dubček, Kádár reported later, were shocked and then deflated as a result of their visit to Hungary, sensing that doors they believed were still open had been slammed in their faces.[124] They returned to Prague and in the night fired off a telegram to the five parties in Warsaw to protest the decision to meet and to ask them not to take any decisions.[125] Dubček and Chervonenko then met on 15 July, at 4 p.m. when the latter handed over a short Politburo letter agreeing to consider a bilateral meeting after Warsaw.[126] After mutual recriminations, Dubček, who struck Chervonenko as nervous, vowed to mend relations with the allies, since 'independent of whether [Dubček] will or will not be first secretary of the CPCS Central Committee, he will always proceed from a position of sincere fraternal relations with the CPSU, with the Soviet Union'.[127]

The Warsaw letter

Less than two hours after this meeting, a second plea, signed by Dubček, Svoboda, Černík, and Smrkovský was sent to Chervonenko to pass along to Brezhnev in Warsaw. It too asked the five parties to break off their meeting and arrange a bilateral meeting in Košice between the CPSU and CPCS within the next forty-eight hours, with a multilateral session to follow in a fortnight.[128] When this message reached Warsaw, however, the meeting was already over and the participants had adjourned for cocktails. Chervonenko called Dubček at 10 p.m. to report that the Czechoslovak message had reached Warsaw too late but that the Soviets agreed to hold bilateral talks with the CPCS, and that he had a collective letter to deliver. Dubček, unwell, asked him to present it the next morning.[129]

At 9:30 a.m. on 16 July, representatives of the five countries' embassies gathered at the Central Committee and Chervonenko read aloud the text of the letter. It repeated much of the 4 July Soviet missive, and, as it was also intended as a rallying cry for the 'healthy forces' inside Czechoslovakia, it was addressed to the entire Central Committee rather than to Dubček or the Presidium.[130] Chervonenko recommended that Dubček acquaint 'a broad circle' of 'healthy' communists with it. This letter, he explained, could be the impetus for a campaign 'to undertake

[124] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 15. [125] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225.
[126] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued].
[127] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 22 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 385–91).
[128] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued]; A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 571, ll. 385–91).
[129] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued].
[130] Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, p. 211.

the restoration of the May plenum's aims, unleash the attack on the right-ist, anti-socialist, and counter-revolutionary forces . . . [and] embark on the path of consolidation of all healthy forces in the party and society'. Dubček avoided a firm answer, saying he was grateful to the other parties for their attention but iterating commitment to his preferred methods.[131] Later that day he called Brezhnev and they agreed to hold bilateral talks, with the Soviet leader suggesting Moscow, Kiev, or Lvov on 22 or 23 July, venues unacceptable to the Czechs and Slovaks.[132] On 17 July the CPSU Central Committee met, attended by Chervonenko, who returned to Prague and confirmed that the Soviets wanted bilateral talks but offered no date or place.[133]

The Czechoslovak side, all the while seeking reconciliation, simultaneously prepared a resolute response to Soviet intransigence. The Presidium met on 16 July to discuss the Warsaw letter and start work on a reply, which was approved the following day when the Presidium also decided that if the five published their letter, they would convene the Central Committee to legitimate the Presidium's response.[134] Fearing a repeat of the Yugoslav expulsion of 1948, the Presidium also directed the government's Economic Council to prepare for the possibility of economic sanctions.

On the 17th Lenárt handed Udal'tsov a proposal from the Presidium for bilateral talks with the CPSU on the 20th in Košice and asking that, in the interest of good relations, the Warsaw letter not be published.[135] When the letter appeared none the less in the newspapers of the five countries the next day, 18 July, the Presidium telexed CPCS regional and district committees, telling them to acquaint party activists with the Warsaw letter and the Presidium's response and then to select five representatives to attend a special Central Committee plenum. It was hoped that packing the plenum with these extra participants would lend the Central Committee greater legitimacy and overwhelm the conservatives.[136]

The plenum met on 19 July for the sole purpose of approving the already-published Presidium response to the Warsaw letter; although many had misgivings about the confrontational approach, it was adopted. On the same day, the Presidium received a proposal from the CPSU

[131] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 24 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 572, ll. 5–12).
[132] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 26, a.j. 273.
[133] A ÚV KSS, fond 02 [transcript of the plenum of the ÚV KSS, 18 July 1968, remarks by Bilak]. As yet there is no archival evidence to support reports that Chervonenko brought with him a conciliatory letter from Brezhnev proposing talks in Košice on 19 July. Cf. Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, pp. 223–4.
[134] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225.
[135] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued].
[136] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued].

Politburo to hold talks in Moscow; the Czechs and Slovaks, however, insisted that the meeting take place in Prague or Košice, or that it begin in a border town such as Uzhgorod in Soviet Ruthenia and then continue in Košice, or that they begin in Prague and adjourn to Moscow.[137] In the Politburo on 19 July, Kosygin suggested that the proposal of a bilateral summit be accepted as a means to push Dubček into restoring order. Apart from Andropov's claim (supported by Dmitrii Ustinov, Konstantin Mazurov, and Ivan Kapitanov) that such a meeting would accomplish little, 'the majority of the CPSU leadership considered that the meeting with the Czechoslovak leaders had to be held as a last means of exerting pressure on them'.[138] On 22 July the Soviets offered to hold talks on the 29th in Čierná nad Tisou, a Slovak village on the border with Ukraine; the Presidium accepted immediately.[139]

Throughout this flurry of diplomacy, the Presidium was still preparing measures to restore control in the run-up to the party congress. On 16 July Císař and Slavík were told to prepare a 'strict regime' for controlling the mass media 'from one place . . . so that any arbitrary conduct can be prevented in time and so that no reasons will be given in statements and broadcasts to stir up anti-Soviet moods and tendencies'. On 17 July the Presidium decreed 'that we will resort to party measures and administrative interventions' if the media failed to support its policy.[140] On 22 July Mlynář argued that parliament should adopt laws allowing the state to take 'extraordinary measures' in an emergency. As the NF statute and constitutional amendment still had not been submitted, the Presidium re-assigned Smrkovský and Černík to oversee the ratification of laws authorizing the government to curtail freedom of speech and association. Kriegel, Erban, and Mlynář were ordered to disband K-231 and the SDP, and to see that KAN only continued if it conformed to NF membership requirements. All of these decisions were to come into effect before talks began with the Soviets.[141]

On 25 July the Presidium debated 'consolidation' for ten hours. Smrkovský reported that according to legal experts the amended press law fully allowed for oversight of the media by the ministry of culture. Existing laws also permitted the interior ministry to ban KAN and K-231. After a long discussion the Presidium decided not to promulgate new powers, although the NF statute was still to be ratified by 16 August. Culture Minister Galuška, meanwhile, was assigned to issue a letter reminding the media of the state's authority under the press law, and

[137] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 26, a.j. 273.
[138] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 1, p. 36.
[139] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P89/68. [140] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225.
[141] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P89/68.

Smrkovský and Císař were told to bargain a compact of co-responsibility with the journalists' union.[142] Šimon reported that the SDP had agreed to suspend all activity until six months after the CPCS congress.[143]

It seemed that a little persuasion had succeeded, and the Presidium shied away from using the suppressive powers it already possessed. Its members thus went to meet Soviet counterparts buoyed by the belief that their reliance on political means of containment was viable. Moreover, they went with the blessing of their people. On 26 July, the author Pavel Kohout published an appeal in *Literární listy* entitled 'Socialism, alliance, sovereignty, freedom'. The message, secretly pre-approved by Smrkovský to generate public pressure on neo-conservatives in the Presidium so they would not dare to break ranks at Čierná, became the basis for a petition signed by more than one million citizens. The text assured the Presidium that they had earned the love and trust of the people, but reminded them that in becoming the people's true representatives, they were obliged to defend their interests and remain faithful to the reform course. It concluded with a slogan that was to become the rallying cry of that summer: 'We are with you, be with us!' In this phrase Kohout captured both the people's desire to consider the reform coalition their legitimate rulers, and the people's fear that in Čierná they would lose courage and buckle under Soviet pressure.[144]

Čierná nad Tisou

The Čierná meeting opened on 29 July in the local railway workers' club.[145] After customary greetings from Dubček, Brezhnev launched into a two-hour prepared speech that differed little from those given in Dresden and Moscow. Speaking later, Kosygin revealed to what extent Moscow saw Czechoslovakia as nothing more than an appendage of the Soviet Union, bluntly declaring, 'We can assure you that if we wanted to, we could occupy your entire country in the course of twenty-four hours . . . I think, comrade Dubček and comrade Černík, you cannot but answer that we have only one border, the border with the West and that is our border also. It is the border of the Second World War, it is a border from which we shall never retreat, I tell you that openly.'

Dubček responded with an indignant speech, tossing in a number of complaints against Moscow's conduct, which, he said, only hindered the

[142] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P90/68.
[143] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P90/68. On 26 July the SDP ordered its regional committees to shut down so as not to complicate the upcoming Čierná talks. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 9, a.j. 88.
[144] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, p. 134.
[145] All details are from the transcript (A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 26, a.j. 274).

'consolidation' process begun by the CPCS in May. He reported that imminent legislation would dissolve 'anti-socialist' groups like KAN and the SDP, while the party congress would elect an authoritative new Central Committee. The new electoral law would be rigged to guarantee the CPCS a majority in parliament, and if all else failed they would use force to protect the party's 'leading role'. In conclusion Dubček assured the Politburo that Czechoslovakia would remain faithful to the WTO, the CMEA, and the USSR, and asked that both sides halt press polemics.

Černík followed, restating Dubček's arguments more concisely and forcefully. When the discussion opened up after his remarks, the Soviets addressed most of their points to Černík, and he fielded them deftly. Kosygin, Podgornyi, and Shelest repeatedly tried to get him to name 'rightists' and 'conservatives' rather than talk about them abstractly. Černík headed off this attempt to drive wedges into the Presidium; he admitted that people like Šik were a nuisance, but he refused to provide the Soviets with the lists they wanted. In a statement that reveals much about himself, he noted, 'We say that there is no division into conservative and progressive people. Of course we must say that the psychosis and atmosphere caused by the mass media divide people into progressive and conservative. Yet that dividing line runs through every person. It is not that one person is progressive from birth and another conservative.'

The talks dragged on until midnight with no result, so Brezhnev proposed that they adjourn and that a multilateral meeting be convened in Moscow (without the Romanians). He clearly wanted to enlist the other parties to help break the impasse, but the CPCS delegation spurned the idea.[146] Czechoslovak reformers realized that the Soviet determination to open up splits within the Presidium was preventing a breakthrough, so when the Presidium met separately, Špaček proposed that a smaller group of the top four leaders from each side meet instead the next morning. Consequently, on the morning of 30 July, Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgornyi, and Suslov met with Dubček, Černík, Svoboda, and Smrkovský in the first of two 'four-by-four' talks.

When the full meeting reconvened shortly before 11:30 a.m., the Soviet speakers continued to try to break down the façade of Presidium unity. Suslov, guardian of ideology, delivered a lengthy attack on Císař's revisionism in the hope that this assault on an absent colleague (Císař, a member only of the Secretariat, was not eligible to attend the Čierná talks) would inspire some Presidium members to signal their agreement. Biľak certainly tried: in response to the Soviet request for specific names of 'conservatives', he named himself, Švestka, Kolder, and Indra. He

[146] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 16.

agreed with Brezhnev's complaints and with 80 per cent of the Warsaw letter, but concluded that the 'healthy forces' could triumph without outside help. Kolder, Piller, and Rigo similarly kept some distance from the Soviet view while indicating their sympathy. After a lunch break, with Brezhnev absent ostensibly because of illness,[147] the debate turned even nastier. Shelepin savaged Kriegel, then Ukrainian leader Shelest launched an attack on the reformers so vicious that it reduced Dubček to tears. At this point, just after 8 p.m., the meeting broke down with relations between the two sides worse rather than better for the day's talk.

The Czechoslovak instinct, as throughout 1968, was to avoid conflict amongst themselves and with the Soviets; Kosygin's outburst, after all, should have reminded them of the very real danger of direct Soviet intervention. The Presidium met at 9:30 the next morning, 31 July, and agreed to a proposal by Dubček that a summit of the six parties be convened to clear up the tension caused by the Warsaw letter. Brezhnev and Dubček had met privately to mend the damage, resulting in the agreement to hold a multilateral meeting. Another four-by-four meeting was held in the Soviet train, and though Dubček and Černík have always publicly denied it, there is overwhelming evidence that in this meeting the Czechoslovak side made six oral promises: (1) to safeguard the party's 'leading role'; (2) to take the mass media in hand and cease all polemics with other communist parties; (3) to issue a law that would disband K-231, KAN, and the SDP; (4) to rescue the StB from radical reforms by dividing Pavel's interior ministry into a new ministry for the protection of public order and a security ministry (Černík apparently claimed that this would be arranged by 15–20 August);[148] (5) to guarantee that Biľak would not be excluded from any future leadership; (6) to remove television director Pelikán, Kriegel, and Císař from their positions, if need be by convening a Central Committee plenum within ten to fifteen days.[149]

These promises were not reported to the Presidium when it met just

[147] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 16.

[148] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 19 [Kádár's report to a closed joint session of the HSWP Central Committee and the Hungarian Council of Ministers, 23 August 1968]. Brezhnev told leaders of the five countries on 18 August that the separation was to take place by 25 August, at which point the StB would be entrusted to Deputy Minister Šalgovič. See A KV ČSFR, Z/P 3.

[149] See A KV ČSFR, Z/M 16 [an account of the Bratislava conference written by a Hungarian deputy foreign minister]; A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. c. 822 [Brezhnev's letter to Dubček on 16 August]; Andrzej Garlicki and Andrzej Paczkowski (eds.), *Zaciskanie pętli. Tajne dokumenty dotyczace Czechosłowacji 1968 r.* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 1995), p. 166 [Brezhnev's remarks to the meeting of representatives of the five invading states on 18 August]; A KV ČSFR, Russian file (ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1824) [transcript of the Soviet–Czechoslovak summit in Moscow on 4 October]; A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103 [discussion in the CPCS Presidium on 15 October 1968]; and Jindřich Pecka, 'Záznam telefonického rozhovoru L. Brežněva s A. Dubčekem 13.8.1968', *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1994), pp. 577–90.

after midday, but Dubček did announce that he and Brezhnev had agreed that the multilateral meeting would adopt a joint declaration of principles that would avoid any mention of Czechoslovakia and the Warsaw letter. There would also be an end to press polemics.[150] When the two leaderships reconvened in full, Brezhnev announced that the meeting, to take place 3 August in Bratislava, was intended to show the entire world that the socialist bloc was firmly united, to be enshrined in a binding document. As for the Čierná meeting, there was to be no public information except a vague communiqué. Any violation of the blackout, he warned, was tantamount to a total rupture in relations between the two parties.

Bratislava and after

The Bratislava conference was nothing more than a long editing session, as the six parties refined the Soviet draft of a joint declaration. When this draft appeared, it included criticism of Czechoslovakia's internal situation, which was unacceptable to the CPCS delegation. After seven hours of quibbling, most of the Czechoslovak amendments were incorporated and offending passages deleted. At the core of the resulting document were the contradictory principles of each socialist state's right to pursue its own form of socialism and, at the same time, of other socialist states' right to intervene if they feared counter-revolution. To dispel the confusion that the document generated, Dubček addressed the people on 4 August, and implied that a new opportunity to continue liberalization had been created thanks to the good will of Soviet comrades. While few believed that this benevolence would persist, most now expected that the party congress would take place as planned.

The Presidium met on Tuesday, 6 August, to discuss how to implement the results of Čierná and Bratislava. The anti-reformers, now the eyes and ears of the Soviets, came to the meeting expecting tough measures to be proposed. Instead, the working materials proposed a series of seminars with communist editors and a longer-term propaganda campaign.[151] It smacked too much of the old policy of persuasion. Mlynář agreed with Indra that the working materials were implausible, since 'it probably can't be done without censorship'.[152] Kolder demanded that the Central Committee be summoned, but Dubček and Špaček argued that it could not be convened until the materials for the congress were ready. Indra protested that it was precisely this congress preparation that was at issue. The political-organizational department, overseen by Indra but staffed by

[150] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 78, a.j. 110–14. [151] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 22, a.j. 225.
[152] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 78, a.j. 117, b. 2. All details of this Presidium session are from these shorthand notes unless otherwise noted.

progressive functionaries, had failed to produce anything worthwhile. Moreover, there was no efficient division of responsibilities among the secretaries, and central authority was devolving to other bodies: as part of federalization, a Czech parliament had recently been elected by the National Assembly without prior Presidium approval, and the South Moravian regional party committee, also without central clearance, had elected Jaroslav Šabata, one of the most radical socialists of the time, to be a secretary. It all boded ill for the outcome of the congress elections.

After Mlynář and Biľak quarrelled over Soviet behaviour at the Bratislava conference, Dubček proposed a concluding decree: (1) Indra, Lenárt, Císař, and Mlynář would draw up further measures on how to implement the results of Čierná and Bratislava; (2) the next Presidium session would decide whether to convene the Central Committee; (3) Císař and Lenárt would work out a guideline for media work; (4) all Central Committee secretaries would present to the next session an evaluation of the current situation and inventory of main tasks.[153] Hard decisions had been postponed again.

Brezhnev, like most of the Politburo members, had gone on holiday in Ialta after the Bratislava conference but was kept informed of developments by his close associate, Kirilenko, back in Moscow.[154] It appears that, before dispersing, the Politburo had decided on 6 August to ask the Soviet embassy in Prague for an update. Chervonenko met with Dubček and Lenárt on 7 August and inquired what the CPCS intended to do to keep its side of the Čierná agreement. Dubček responded, however, by sketching plans for the congress, admitting that it would be marked by sharp conflicts within the party and media; he promised that reporters would be kept in line but did not specify how. Dubček claimed that he and Černík had discussed measures that day to disband unofficial clubs and 'anti-communist' organizations, including a public order law allowing the state to disperse demonstrations, but avoided mention of the personnel changes agreed at Čierná. Chervonenko's telegram to Moscow was damning:

[Dubček] does not see the complexity of the political situation, or approaches it differently than the healthy forces in the CPCS leadership do. There is no reason to believe that he behaved sincerely or completely openly even this time with a Soviet representative. The impression is given that an internal struggle is still taking place inside him, at least today he still is not ready to follow the path of consistent and decisive struggle with the rightist forces in the CPCS and outside it. In these conditions it is evident that additional steps are necessary to pressure

[153] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P91/68.

[154] Valerij Musatov, 'Poznámky o srpnu 1968', *Rudé právo*, 28 April 1992. The author of the article was a former employee and translator in the CPSU central apparatus.

him, Dubček, and Černík, on the part of the CPSU leadership and of other parties.[155]

Alarmed, Brezhnev telephoned Dubček from Ialta on 9 August to warn that 'the impression is being created in our country that the obligations which you and we undertook at Čierná nad Tisou are not being fulfilled, such as those which we undertook in the bilateral meeting with all members of the CC Presidium, and the cadre questions which were agreed upon in the four-by-four meeting'.[156] Brezhnev asked how the Soviets could be of help. Dubček thanked him for the offer but said that no assistance was needed. 'We have come to the conclusion', said Brezhnev, 'that the rightists – you, of course, know who that means – are again carrying out organized subversive work against the decisions taken by us at Čierná nad Tisou.' Dubček agreed that all problems were due to 'rightist tendencies'. Brezhnev followed, 'In connection with that, Sasha, I would like to underscore that we are now living through a very crucial moment. It will determine our future ties and relations in many respects.' He urged Dubček to join with the many 'healthy forces' in the Presidium

> because during all the days of our meeting with you I saw your concern and along with that I noticed your doubts and vacillations. Therefore I want to say one more time to you, Sasha, that without tough people, without tough helpers, without people devoted to our cause, you will not cope with the rightists, and everything now depends on victory over the rightists.

Dubček assured Brezhnev that measures were being drafted to implement what had been agreed in those meetings. When Brezhnev immediately asked to know more about fulfilment of the personnel agreements, Dubček turned evasive, pleading that such matters could only be decided by the Central Committee, which would probably meet on 19 August, but that a date had not been fixed.

Brezhnev complained about the alleged persecution of ninety-nine workers at the Auto Praga factory who had written a letter to the Soviet Union complaining of the threat to socialism, for which they were allegedly being harassed in their workplace. The letter was published in *Pravda*, but was first shown to Dubček by Chervonenko, and he had told the ambassador that he thought it a good letter. (Dubček also told the Presidium on 6 August that he had found 'nothing bad' in it.) Dubček explained that the harassment was 'in fact attacks by the rightists. Yesterday we talked with Černík, we are also examining it and are there-

[155] Takhnenko, 'Avgust 1968 goda', pp. 148–9.

[156] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, 'Beseda 9 avgusta 1968'). My account of the conversation is based on the Soviet transcript.

fore taking measures so that this does not spread to other factories and so that the press ceases all the racket over this.' Černík and Lenárt were drawing up measures to prevent spontaneous demonstrations, he added. They are not spontaneous, shot back Brezhnev, Císař and other anti-party elements are organizing them. Dubček reported that he had ordered an inquest into Císař's activity but Brezhnev was unimpressed.

As the conversation drew to a close, Brezhnev again urged Dubček to join forces with the likes of Biľak. 'It is especially important now', Brezhnev explained, 'when the struggle with the rightists has entered the most crucial and decisive moment, and in this situation the healthy forces' unanimous collective actions and bravery are especially important.' Brezhnev remarked that 'in our country a certain uneasiness is already arising that these decisions are not being executed, and I would like to ask you to think on this, find the time and ways for realization of what we agreed on. In my opinion this is very important now.' Dubček assured him that they were working on these problems. Brezhnev rang off: 'Well, I wish you success, I wish you all the best, Sasha.'

Brezhnev telephoned again, at 5:35 p.m. on 13 August, apparently at the request of Czechoslovak neo-conservatives, who had been informed of the 9 August conversation and wanted Brezhnev to call during the next Presidium session.[157] In this discussion, though still addressing Dubček warmly as Sasha, Aleksandr Stepanovich, and alternating between *ty* and *vy*, Brezhnev was clearly running out of patience.[158] He began with an attack on the Czechoslovak media, which, he claimed, were violating the cease-fire agreed at Čierná. He then reminded Dubček of the promises to remove certain leading revisionists and to protect the security forces. Dubček acknowledged those promises but argued that Císař, Kriegel, and Pelikán could be removed from their posts only by decision of a Central Committee plenum, which would take place most likely at the beginning of September, and that plans to federalize the state would postpone the desired restructuring of the interior ministry until October. Brezhnev was appalled by Dubček's procedural excuses, stating, 'Well, what can I say to you, Sasha? Doesn't this mean a new deception? It is another fact showing that you are deceiving us, I can call it nothing else, and I will be completely open with you: if you are unable to resolve this

[157] A KV ČSFR, Z/P 3. According to inventories of Soviet documents on 1968, it appears that Brezhnev spoke to Biľak on 10 August. See Cherneva, '"Ot raskrytiia arkhivov po 'Prazhskoi vesne' nikuda ne uiti . . ."', p. 112.

[158] All details are taken from the Soviet transcript. See Pecka, 'Záznam telefonického rozhovoru L. Brežněva s A. Dubčekem 13.8.1968'. For less complete accounts, see also Marta Csontosová, 'Brežnev: "Nemôžeme dlho čakat"', *Sme*, 2 June 1994; Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 1, p. 42; V. Musatov, 'Poznámky o srpnu 1968', *Rudé právo*, 28 April 1992.

question, then it seems to me that your Presidium has lost all power.' Speaking so loudly that Dubček reportedly had to hold the phone half a metre from his ear, Brezhnev warned that 'such an attitude towards the fulfilment of the obligations undertaken at Čierná is creating an entirely new situation . . . which obviously forces us to assess anew the state of affairs and adopt new, independent measures'. Dubček nervously replied that the Politburo should take all measures that it saw necessary. Brezhnev was displeased by Dubček's nervousness and his rather glib reply, and at length urged him to carry out the promised steps immediately.

Deeply unsettled, Dubček then began to talk about quitting his post as party leader and returning to humbler work. Brezhnev dismissed such notions and advised him to remain at the helm but rely on men such as Biľak while eliminating Kriegel and Císař. Although he tried to steady the lachrymose Dubček, Brezhnev constantly couched matters in very personal terms: 'I ask you to understand that if you do not fulfil all that we agree on . . . then that will be the end of trust. After all, the whole meaning of our meeting at Čierná nad Tisou lies in the great trust of a friend for a friend. After all, all of our decisions were taken under great trust, and precisely that binds us conscientiously to fulfil all that we agreed on.' A frazzled Dubček repeated his intention to step down at the next plenum, but asked Brezhnev to forgive him for his irritated remarks and reassured him of their wish to resolve the matters discussed at Čierná. In closing, Brezhnev tried to seem indulgent while maintaining the pressure to carry out by the end of the month all the measures agreed at the start of it. Though the conversation ended on a cordial note, and Dubček had regained composure, he could not repair the damage he had inflicted through an index of emotion that created an image of himself as unstable and the Presidium as not in control of events.

Despite Brezhnev's intervention, that day's Presidium session came no closer than before to enacting the promises made at Čierná. Indra certainly tried to provoke a critical discussion by submitting a situation report from the party's information department on KAN, K-231, and the SDP.[159] He also expressed alarm at a gathering of about 300 youths on 8 August outside the Central Committee, which turned nasty until they were allowed to hold a rally on Old Town Square.[160] Then, on 10 August,

[159] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P92/68. Unless otherwise noted, all details are from these shorthand notes.

[160] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, a.j. 87, sv. 8/a, str. 132–40. According to this report, the crowd began pushing at the doors and tossing rocks, and only dispersed when Jan Kolář, a leading party official under Indra, announced that a meeting could be held on Old Town Square for general discussion of current events. There the crowd grew to 2,000 and called for free elections, legalization of the SDP, and support for Dubček and Tito, who was then in Prague.

a public petition calling for the disbandment of the party's armed militia was initiated in the centre of Prague. Within four days the organizers (mostly youths, possibly StB provocateurs) claimed to have collected 19,000 signatures. The militia, growing restless, threatened to step in if the state did not.[161]

Indra demanded resolute action and Kolder reminded the Presidium to decide when to convene the Central Committee and discuss the National Front statute and the general political situation. He proposed that Dubček set up a special commission to control elections to the new Central Committee at the congress, and that another small group be established to draft a public statement on the situation. Biľak hinted that the conferences' choices of congress delegates and future Central Committee members should be annulled, while disobedient party members should be threatened with expulsion. He warned that the Central Committee had to be convened as soon as possible to be told what had been agreed at Čierná: 'We are playing with fire rather dangerously. If we do not uphold what we said, it will be considered treachery and a crime.'

Dubček, possibly with Brezhnev's words still ringing in his ears, denounced all the 'anti-Soviet' and 'anti-socialist' obscenities that had sprung up in recent days, despite the leadership's efforts to control propaganda. Referring to Čierná, he insisted that there had been 'no treaty, no obligation', but that they had said they would take care of their own affairs with their own means, without outside interference: 'Like any other state, we will impose order.' Mlynář pointed out that many measures were set to go: all that needed to be done was to ratify the law on association and then political life could be controlled through the National Front.

After Smrkovský claimed that if it were up to him he would take the party militia on to the streets and make arrests, Dubček again promised 'active short-term steps' to control the mass media and prevent any anti-Soviet invectives by 'extreme *déclassé* elements'. Publicists had to be found who could defend the party line, since they could not 'ignore what the riff-raff are raising hell about . . . It is a disgrace when we cannot react in *Rudé právo* to students' stupidities.' He had no doubt that the crowd that had gathered on Old Town Square on 8 August, which he also derided as 'riff-raff', had been organized by a 'gang' that had to be identified. 'We must take practical steps. Talk with comrades, leading workers

[161] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 8/a, a.j. 87, str. 141–65. Dubček's secretary Soják, who was collaborating with Indra, wrote to Interior Minister Pavel on 9 August to ask the ministry to provide party leaders with daily information on the security situation, especially in Prague, because Dubček (Soják wrote) felt that 'there are appearing organized activities of certain elements and further significant boundlessness and uncontrolledness, which could be misused'.

in publicism who can do something to preserve the situation. Otherwise it'll drive us elsewhere. We cannot avoid this . . . We have a week to do it. No more.'

In summing up, Dubček postponed specific debate of the situation report until the next meeting, at which they would also discuss appropriate 'concrete measures for the party's further approach', to be drafted by a working group headed by Indra and including the heads of the main departments.[162] The Presidium still had not decided when to convene the Central Committee.

Last efforts

Brezhnev made two last overtures to Dubček. On 13 August the Politburo and Soviet government sent the CPCS Central Committee a brief memorandum, repeating complaints about several articles that they felt had violated the Čierná cease-fire; clearly testing Dubček's resolve, the Soviets demanded 'measures'. When Chervonenko delivered the complaint, Dubček promised that the Presidium would take steps to control the media at its next meeting on 20 August, but he did not elaborate.[163] Brezhnev then dispatched a personal letter to Dubček, dated 16 August, in which he repeated many of the complaints and demands made over the telephone and again underscored the seriousness of the situation.[164] Dubček seems to have concealed both Politburo dispatches from his colleagues.

The Soviets also enlisted the help of Ulbricht and Kádár, who met with Dubček on 13 and 17 August respectively to press him to act. Ulbricht had been informed of Brezhnev's 9 August conversation with Dubček and was asked by the Soviets to stress the need to carry out the Čierná promises.[165] The meeting was inconclusive, and before he went on holiday on the Baltic coast Ulbricht told the Soviet ambassador to the GDR that he saw in Dubček 'a clever bourgeois diplomat, who says one thing and thinks and does another'.[166] Kádár had just returned from vacationing in the Crimea, where he met with Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgornyi in Ialta from 12 to 15 August to discuss Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian leader claimed later that the Soviets spoke about recent developments with genuine fear and impatience, troubled by the petition against the militia, the still-unruly press, and the apparent inaction of Dubček and Černík. It was agreed, apparently on Soviet initiative, that

[162] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 7, ar.j. 81. [163] Takhnenko, 'Avgust 1968 goda', p. 150.
[164] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. c. 822.
[165] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 31 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 127, d. 585, l. 118).
[166] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 32 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 573, ll. 294–5).

Kádár would speak with Dubček one more time, in a last effort to make the man see sense.[167]

Kádár was under pressure from other Hungarian leaders to take a tougher line on Czechoslovakia,[168] and he now feared that the CPCS congress would end in a revisionist takeover and schism with the rest of the bloc.[169] Meeting secretly with Dubček in Komárno on 17 August, Kádár stated that the Čierná and Bratislava agreements had to be enacted 'sincerely'. Dubček assured Kádár that his Presidium would submit the NF statute and that by the end of the month there would be a Central Committee plenum and special session of parliament 'where legal, cadre, and other measures will be taken to safeguard the conclusions taken at Bratislava'.[170] He insisted that the battle against the 'right' had top priority, that the Czechs and Slovaks were simply going about it by political means, and that other parties extend the courtesy of allowing them to handle their internal affairs. Kádár gave no hint of the coming invasion, only reiterating that when socialist power was jeopardized, as in Hungary in 1956, it was of concern to all parties. Whereas their first secret meeting in January had been warm and intimate, this one ended in awkwardness and estrangement.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to make a case for interpreting the Soviet decision to invade not as the result of internal dynamics, but in the context of general Soviet expectations of proper political conduct ('political love') and the need to be able to anticipate the behaviour of allies in sensitive locations. Russian archives, of course, remain largely closed and oral history might still produce evidence of coalition conflict in Soviet politics, but the new material suggests that it was the erosion of confidence in the Dubček team, brought about by repeated violations of the unwritten rules of nomenklatura interaction and the contrast between Czechoslovak indices and signals, that drove the Politburo to use force. Once it was suspected that Dubček was capable of deceit, then he was considered capable of anything, including a maverick foreign policy and special relationship with West Germany; the warm welcomes given Tito

[167] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 19. Kádár told Dubček that he had first suggested the meeting and the Soviets had agreed to it (see A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4774), but later told the HSWP Central Committee and the secret meeting of the five parties in Moscow on 18 August that he had done so at the Soviets' behest.

[168] A telegram dated 1 August from the Czechoslovak embassy in Budapest reported that, while Kádár and Prime Minister Fock were sympathetic to the reforms, Politburo members Komocsin, Appro, Biszku, and Szirmai were not. See A FMZV, telegram 7278.

[169] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 17.

[170] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4774.

and Ceauşescu during their visits to Prague in August seemed to vindicate Politburo fears that a 'Danubian collusion' or new Little Entente might coalesce.[171] Seeing 'the non-fulfilment of the obligations undertaken at Čierná as the CPCS Presidium's betrayal of fraternal relations with the CPSU, as betrayal of friendship with the USSR', the Soviets concluded that 'they have embarked on the path of deceiving the CPSU Politburo'.[172]

[171] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 1, pp. 34–5.
[172] Takhnenko, 'Avgust 1968 goda', pp. 154–5.

5 The failure of Operation Danube

During the night of 20–1 August, under the code-name Operation Danube, an invasion coalition led by the Soviet Union moved 165,000 soldiers and 4,600 tanks into Czechoslovakia from southern Poland, the GDR, and northern Hungary. Within a week, after further contingents arrived, approximately half a million foreign soldiers and more than 6,000 tanks were roaming over Czechoslovak territory. Although they started seizing state offices and utilities, the armies had not been dispatched to establish an occupation government. Their arrival was coordinated (albeit hastily and poorly) with Czechoslovak conservatives and neo-conservatives who had signalled their willingness to take power and fulfil all the promises made by Dubček. Knowing that they could not rely on the support of the pro-reform Czechoslovak army officer corps or of the bewildered security police, these conspirators in Prague and Bratislava needed external intervention, a *coup de main* to support their *coup d'état*.[1]

The armed intervention was intended to install a more reliable regime in Prague, intimidate the 'counter-revolutionary' forces into submission, and signal to the world that the Soviet Union would only enter détente from a position of strength, with its sphere of influence unassailable and united. Though the Soviets anticipated costs, including the outrage of communists in Western Europe, they calculated (a) that the pay-offs of intervention would be greater than the costs, and (b) that the costs of intervening would be less than those of not intervening. The intervention, however, had unintended consequences, both immediate and long-term. The immediate consequences were the complete discrediting and temporary elimination from political life of precisely those people the *coup de main* was supposed to hoist into power; the transformation of the liberal-

[1] Edward Luttwak defines a *coup de main* as the simultaneous insertion of units walking, driving, parachuting, and landing to block hostile movements, attack major targets, and seize key facilities with enormous force, 'in order to overwhelm the defenders, to make any resistance seem hopeless'. See 'Just Cause – A Military Score Sheet', *Washington Post*, 31 December 1989.

izers, hitherto popular but regarded as timid and not entirely reliable, into heroes and martyrs; the creation of an even stronger bond between the reformers and the people, and of an even deeper commitment to reform. Over the long run, the invasion did reconsolidate Soviet suzerainty, but inflicted irreparable damage on the international communist movement, destroyed historic Russophilia among Czechs and Slovaks, and convinced many politicians, thinkers, and citizens throughout the bloc that the Soviet model could not be reformed, only overthrown.

In the previous chapter I tried to show why Soviet leaders lost patience with events in Czechoslovakia. In this chapter I will trace the preparations for intervention during the spring and summer of 1968, the involvement of other East European leaders in the process, and the recruitment of an alternative Czechoslovak leadership. Then I shall consider the failed *coup d'état* against the background of the relatively successful *coup de main*, and conclude with a look at the negotiations in the Kremlin at the end of August 1968 that resulted in the Moscow Protocol as the basis for normalization.

Early forms of pressure

Until more Russian archives are opened up, we cannot know precisely when Soviet leaders began talking seriously about the possible need for military intervention in Czechoslovakia. One former Soviet apparatchik claims that already in January doubts were being expressed in Moscow about what was happening.[2] As early as February, Soviet units in the GDR received sealed envelopes, to be opened on receiving a special signal, containing instructions to move their units to the Czechoslovak border.[3] Soon after the Dresden conference, at which military officials had figured prominently, several Soviet and East German units were relocated to the southern GDR.[4] On 8 April, the creation of a special strike force was ordered within the WTO's Southern Group, involving Soviet and Hungarian units,[5] and on 19 April Gomułka was asked to commit Polish units to an imminent war-game that would be played in Czechoslovakia for an explicitly political effect.[6]

[2] Arbatov, 'Iz nedavnego proshlego', *Znamia*, 1990, no. 9, p. 213.

[3] According to Russian journalist Leonid Shinkarev, at the International Conference on Czechoslovakia in 1968, Its International Context and Consequences, held at Liblice, Czechoslovakia, 3 December 1991.

[4] Antonín Benčík and Václav Kural, 'Vojenská intervence proti Československu v srpnu 1968 a politická porážka její puvodní koncepce', *Historie a vojenství* 42 (1993), p. 4.

[5] Iván Pataky, 'Zatiahnutie Maďarska a Maďarskej ľudovej armády do agresie proti Československu v roku 1968', *Historie a vojenství* 42 (1993), p. 56.

[6] Leszek Pajórek, 'Účast polské armády na operaci DUNAJ', *Historie a vojenství* 45 (1996), p. 65.

Gomułka was only too eager to contribute, as he was already telling the Soviets that recent unrest in his own country was due in part to the contagion of the Czechoslovak experiment, and that 'our immediate interference is needed, one cannot remain an indifferent observer when counter-revolutionary plans are beginning to be realized in Czechoslovakia'.[7] By March 1968, the East German Politburo was already telling the Soviets that 'it is time to suppress reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces in Czechoslovakia collectively and with all means'.[8] The Bulgarians had been so cool in their response to Novotný's replacement that they were reprimanded by Soviet diplomats for not showing Dubček the requisite support. They were increasingly displeased after Zhivkov visited Prague on 23–6 April, when he was secretly asked by Kolder to urge Moscow to consider rendering 'international help'.[9] On his return to Sofia, Zhivkov sent the allies a report on the 'very dangerous development of events' in Czechoslovakia and proposed a new Dresden-style multilateral meeting, an idea immediately seconded by Ulbricht.[10]

Anticipating this intolerance, the Hungarian Politburo had decided on 23 January that it would act as a sort of advocate for Dubček. Although Moscow had accepted the new CPCS first secretary, the Hungarians sensed that it might still 'be necessary for us to influence the Soviets according to our modest abilities. Or for example the Germans, and in contact with the Poles it is directly desirable that we . . . try to influence them.'[11] By May, however, even Hungarian goodwill was fading in the wake of information from their Prague ambassador (who met with Kolder) and Bratislava consul. The HSWP international department warned on 22 May that Czechoslovakia was in the hands of 'rightist opportunists' bent on pursuing Yugoslav reforms as an intermediate stage towards capitalist restoration. Though they dismissed claims of counter-revolution, the Hungarians did fear that awakening Slovak nationalism was directed against them and that Czechoslovakia might pursue a socialist Little Entente with Yugoslavia and Romania unless 'healthy forces' rallied. (By late May Gomułka was similarly telling Moscow that Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania might form a secret alliance to break away from the socialist camp.)[12] The HSWP department advised support for Dubček while disabusing him of his 'illusions' and flirtation with 'revisionism'.[13]

[7] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 123, d. 566, ll. 364–6).

[8] *Lidové noviny*, 3 January 1992 [9] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, p. 82.

[10] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 123, d. 567, ll. 353–5); Mark Kramer, 'New Sources on the 1968 Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 3 (Fall 1993), p. 5. [11] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 3.

[12] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 5 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 126, d. 583, ll. 83–5).

[13] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 6, 7, 9, and 10.

After the failure of the Dresden summit to effect a turnaround in Czechoslovak events and then the spectacle of May Day in Prague, the CPSU Politburo invited the leaders of the other four concerned states to coordinate policy. The seven-hour meeting, held in Moscow on 8 May, was a milestone in that it marked the end of trust in Dubček, whom Brezhnev maligned as 'not a man of strong will', and 'inexperienced, he doesn't understand, or is he a sly fox?'[14] As Kádár reported to the HSWP Politburo afterwards, 'The Soviet leadership can now say with certainty of Dubček that he is a weak, naïve, and inexperienced man. It is possible, however, that there is more at stake than that, that he is fulsome, and in the depths of his soul there could be something else.'[15] With Dubček now under suspicion, the search was on for a possible replacement.

Brezhnev, reiterating Soviet fears of counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia and the concomitant threat to Soviet security, briefed his guests on the recent meeting with the Czechoslovak leaders. While expressing hope that the summit had inspired the CPCS to restore order, he reported that the Soviets had been impressed by the notorious Smrkovský and concluded that he, along with Biľak, Indra, and Kolder, could be trusted. Ulbricht was pleased that the Soviets had succeeded in inducing differentiation among the Czechoslovak leaders, since 'it is necessary to rely at least partially on a part of the party leadership'. He suspected that Černík would cooperate, but was wary of Smrkovský, and as for Dubček, 'that's something completely hopeless and I don't want to speak about it'. Ulbricht urged the Warsaw Pact to hold exercises in Czechoslovakia as soon as possible.

Kádár tried to inject some reason into the discussion, arguing that if any one person was to blame for Czechoslovakia's conditions it was Novotný, while Dubček was an honest communist, albeit naïve. No counter-revolution was taking place, and the incumbent leadership, though weak, should be helped to wage a 'two-front battle'.[16] These efforts at moderation were swiftly attacked by Zhivkov, who characteristically declared full agreement with Brezhnev, and recommended that the Soviets move forces into Czechoslovakia and keep them there as long as possible. Gomułka insisted that, within two years, Czechoslovakia would again be a bourgeois republic, a quiet coup perhaps achieved through multi-party elections. Gomułka still had not decided where

[14] My account of the meeting, unless otherwise noted, is from a Polish transcript (A KV ČSFR, Z/P 2), which was also published in Czech translation in *Lidové noviny*, 20 and 21 February 1991. Brezhnev had told the Soviet Politburo that 'the impression is created that [Dubček] deliberately says one thing and does absolutely the other'. See Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, p. 14.

[15] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 3. [16] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 5.

Dubček really stood, but agreed that a 'healthy core' of Indra, Bilak, Kolder, Lenárt, and Černík, with outside assistance, had to launch a one-front battle against 'revisionism and counter-revolution'.

As in a Politburo session, Brezhnev concluded the meeting by laying out the points of agreement, of which the most significant were (1) the CPCS leadership was disunited, and one faction was willing to fight against counter-revolution; (2) this 'healthy core' must be identified, consolidated, and assisted, whoever they may be, though it was preferable that they were led by popular figures such as Smrkovský and even Dubček if he could be reclaimed; (3) the Warsaw Pact should hold manoeuvres in Czechoslovakia, preferably in mid-May before the next CPCS Central Committee plenum would be convened, as a show of support for the 'healthy core'.

The last point of agreement simply confirmed what the Soviet Defence Council and Politburo had already decided on 6 May, that military manoeuvres should take place for an express political purpose. It is possible that the Soviets hoped that on 9 May, the anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, the CPCS leadership would appeal for Soviet help against counter-revolution.[17] On 6 May the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw was directed to tell Gomułka that a Soviet motorized infantry division in southern Poland would conduct exercises around Cieszyn, right on the Czechoslovak border, to start around 8 May.[18] Though one overeager Soviet general in fact briefly moved some of his forces into northern Moravia, no appeal for fraternal help came from Prague on 9 May. Instead, from 10 to 23 May a war-game was conducted in southern Poland, near the Czechoslovak border, involving one Soviet and one Polish army, more than 80,000 men and 2,800 tanks. Even when the war-games were completed, the units did not return to their original postings but remained near the border, ever ready to intervene.[19]

At the same time, Kolder was trying to rouse the party's own shock force, the People's Militia, to press liberalizers into adopting stricter policies. The militia, with 78,000 members in squads in more than 2,000 factories, was half the size of the Czechoslovak army and answered to the party leader via the Central Committee's Eighth Department.[20] Mobilized by Smrkovský, Kriegel, and Josef Pavel in 1948 to facilitate the party's seizure of power, by the 1960s its raison d'être in the 'all-people's state' was no longer clear. Císař and Václav Prchlík, the reformist general in charge of the Eighth Department, recommended that the militia's

[17] Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, p. 84.

[18] V. Sharov, 'Shel avgust 68-ogo goda', *Pravda*, 18 February 1991.

[19] Benčík, *Operace 'Dunaj': Vojáci a Pražské jaro, 1968*, p. 33; Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring*, pp. 104–5.

[20] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 20, a.j. 190, str. 17–36.

ranks be opened up to include non-communists, while Husák publicly suggested that it simply be disbanded. Increasingly anxious, the militia eagerly responded to Kolder's suggestion of a rally on the eve of the May Central Committee plenum. During its long session on 21–2 May, the Presidium considered but postponed the rally until after the plenum.[21] Dubček apparently fixed the date, 19 June, under pressure from Soviet defence minister Grechko, who was in Czechoslovakia to arrange the start of war-games. Because reformers feared misuse of the 10,000 militiamen who would attend the rally, it was held in a hangar at Ruzyně airport and there was no media coverage. Dubček attended and contained the rally through a persuasive speech, but Indra, with Soviet approval, arranged the adoption of an alarmist letter addressed to Soviet workers, which appeared two days later in *Pravda*.[22]

On 21 May the Czechoslovak defence minister, Martin Dzúr, announced that his country was willing to conduct joint summer military exercises, and five days later it was agreed that they would commence on 20 June. Advance Soviet units, however, led by General Kazakov (the commander in Hungary in 1956) and including a number of generals, officers, and intelligence units, began crossing the Czechoslovak border on 30 May, just as the CPCS Central Committee plenum was beginning. Eventually about 24,000 foreign soldiers were on Czechoslovak soil, of which about 16,000 were Soviet.[23]

Though structured as a mock conflict with NATO, the aims of these June manoeuvres, code-named Šumava, were purely political: to have a sizeable Soviet contingent in Czechoslovakia for support should a group within the CPCS Presidium try to take power and restore control of the country. As the Hungarian defence minister, Lajos Czinege, explained in a memorandum to the HSWP Politburo, the exercise's aims were to deter NATO from any 'provocative attempts' against Czechoslovakia, and to remind Czechs and Slovaks that the WTO was prepared to act on behalf of communists 'loyal to the revolution and socialism' and intimidate the 'internal enemy'.[24] To keep foreign units in the country for as long as possible, Soviet commanders withheld all vital information from the Czechoslovak defence ministry and general staff, not even disclosing when the exercises were supposed to conclude. After repeated extensions the manoeuvres were officially ended on 30 June, but some units lingered in the country until after the Čierná talks.

[21] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P72/68.
[22] Jaromír Navrátil, 'K historii jednoho "srazu" aneb první zvací dopis', *Reportér*, special supplement to issue 39, 1992 (30 September–7 October); 'Milice táhnou na Prahu', *Listy*, July 1978, pp. 33–5. [23] Benčík, *Operace 'Dunaj': Vojáci a Pražské jaro, 1968*, p. 44.
[24] A KV CSFR, Z/M 12. See also Pataky, 'Zatiahnutie Maďarska a Maďarskej ľudovej armády do agresie proti Československu v roku 1968'.

The Warsaw summit

The withdrawal of these forces was the topic of a long Politburo debate on 2–3 July. The majority, including Kosygin, Shelest, Podgornyi, Gromyko, and Andropov, felt that the soldiers should be kept in place, since, as Gromyko argued, 'It is now already clear, obvious, that we cannot manage without armed intervention.' Suslov, Shelepin (with misgivings), and Ambassador Chervonenko argued that the troops should be punctually withdrawn. This latter group, however, took just as gloomy a view of events in Czechoslovakia as did the former; they simply feared that if the Soviet soldiers overstayed their welcome, they would arouse hostility. Although Pikhoia's account is ambiguous, the Politburo seems to have taken a compromise decision to leave the troops in Czechoslovakia but also to rely mainly on political pressure (letters to CPCS leaders, an invitation to a multilateral inquisition, recruiting of pro-Muscovites in the CPCS) to effect change.[25]

Brezhnev's primary concern at this point appears to have been the need for accurate information about potential alternatives to Dubček. The Warsaw meeting, therefore, had the CPCS sent a delegation, would have served a dual purpose of exerting collective pressure on Prague while providing the Soviets an opportunity to assess first-hand the behaviour of Czechoslovak leaders. Even in their absence, the meeting was held in Warsaw to coordinate reactions to Czechoslovak events.

Gomułka opened the gathering on 14 July by announcing that Czechoslovakia was now in the initial phase of transforming itself into a bourgeois republic, and that the CPCS was in an advanced phase of transformation into a social-democratic party.[26] The September party congress, he predicted, would determine whether the country proceeded in 'the peaceful transformation from socialism into neo-capitalism'. Kádár, who had been coolly received for having met with Dubček and Černík the previous day, still argued that socialist revisionism, not counter-revolution, prevailed in Czechoslovakia; the country was moving towards the Yugoslav political system, not a new bourgeois capitalism. What mattered now, he said, was to find people in the CPCS who would be willing to conduct a 'Marxist-Leninist offensive' and help them 'with all forces'. Ulbricht disagreed, arguing that a counter-revolution was underway according to 'the grand concept of the global strategy of the USA and West Germany and it has been taking place for approximately ten years'.

[25] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, pp. 19–20.

[26] All details of the meeting are from the East German transcript. See A KV ČSFR, Z/N 62, 'Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung führender Repräsentanten sozialistischer Länder am 14. und 15. juli 1968 in Warschau'. For the Polish version, see Garlicki and Paczkowski, *Zaciskanie pętli*, pp. 119–64. For Kádár's account, see A KV ČSFR, Z/M 15.

So far none of them had mentioned direct military intervention. Ulbricht proposed only that the meeting issue a collective statement that would help the 'struggle groups' in their battle with counter-revolution, and then a multilateral meeting in Prague to see 'whether Dubček has the courage, whether they now have the courage to remove counter-revolutionaries and other elements from the mass media'. Zhivkov, who had already been advocating for over a month a Hungarian-style 'revolutionary' dictatorship,[27] was the first to argue that Czechoslovakia could be saved only 'by the armed forces of the Warsaw Treaty'.

It was only at 3:30 p.m., five hours after the meeting opened, that Brezhnev presented the Soviet view. His prepared speech resembled Gomułka's, and declared that 'we must take all steps, use all means' to prevent Czechoslovakia from leaving the socialist commonwealth and disrupting the post-war division of Europe. At great length he recounted developments in the media, personnel changes, new political formations, and the likely outcome of the party congress as evidence that the current Dubček leadership was capable of taking only 'half-measures', and that they were losing control of the country. Announcing that the Soviet Union was prepared to offer 'all necessary help', he agreed with Ulbricht that a collective statement be issued, containing advice on combating counter-revolution; if Dubček spurned this counsel, Brezhnev added, then other forces must be identified who would 'normalize the situation in the country'.[28]

Recruiting 'normalizers'

The rest of the Warsaw meeting was devoted to preparing this statement, deciding whether and when to publish it, and whether to hold further bilateral or multilateral meetings; Ulbricht was the only advocate of additional summits, as the other leaders preferred to gauge the impact of their collective letter. After the CPCS Presidium and Central Committee rejected the letter, the Soviets doubled their efforts to identify and recruit 'healthy forces' in Czechoslovakia. Chervonenko's long report on the April Central Committee plenum results had listed Lenárt, Piller, and 'maybe' Bilak as reliable,[29] and speculated that Kolder, Martin Vaculík, and Antonín Kapek would, on certain issues, oppose revisionist views. He

[27] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 8 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 123, d. 569, ll. 252–3).

[28] Extracts of Brezhnev's speech are reprinted in Kural, *Československo roku 1968*, vol. I, p. 206.

[29] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 23 (AVP SSSR, r. 9756, f. 5, op. 60, d. 299, ll. 202–41). This initial assessment illustrates Chervonenko's poor judgement of character: Lenárt and Piller would prove to be, from the Soviet perspective, two of the less 'reliable' party leaders during the August invasion.

admitted that he still could not predict the actions of Indra, Dubček, Černík, Barbírek, Rigo, and Švestka, but he identified Dubček, Biľak, Kolder, Černík, and Švestka as the decisive group to pressure.

The Soviet Politburo, which had already assigned Shelest on 6 May to open secret talks with Biľak, Lenárt, and others, debated this issue on 16 May. At that time Brezhnev's conviction that the 'healthy core' consisted of Biľak, Kolder, Indra, Lenárt, and 'to some degree' Smrkovský was quietly challenged by Kosygin and P. N. Demichev, who were not yet certain that they comprised a united and reliable group.[30] After his Karlovy Vary visit, Kosygin developed a much more favourable opinion of Smrkovský, who was offered Dubček's job on 14 June in a private meeting with Brezhnev in Moscow.[31] Smrkovský refused, and Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders did not feel that they knew any of the other possible candidates well enough yet to make a similar overture.[32]

The Soviets thus appear to have regarded the Čierná talks as an opportunity to size up all CPCS Presidium members and catalyse differentiation among them. It appears that the talks were supposed to last only one day; once the façade of Presidium unity had been broken, it was hoped, the Czechoslovak normalizers would force a change in policy, accept the Warsaw letter, form a new Presidium and 'revolutionary' government, and perhaps request foreign military assistance, again camouflaged by new military exercises. The Soviets would then have returned to Moscow and met with leaders of the other four states to coordinate their actions. Already on 20 July, Soviet functionaries began drafting appeals to the people and army of Czechoslovakia explaining why military intervention had had to take place at the behest of the 'Revolutionary Government' of Czechoslovakia. These texts were edited and then approved by the Politburo on 26–7 July.[33] A telegram from East Berlin to Moscow, dated 28 July, the day before the Čierná talks were due to open, reports that a delegation headed by Ulbricht would arrive in Moscow on the 30th to discuss these documents and the optimal date for starting the next round of military 'manoeuvres'.[34]

Hungarian and Polish sources also provide considerable evidence that the Soviets were planning to intervene with overwhelming force in late July.[35] On 10 July, two days after the CPCS Presidium had rejected the

[30] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 6, pp. 15–16. In the 6 May Politburo session Brezhnev ranked Indra as first among the 'healthy forces', followed by Kolder, Biľak, Sádovský, and Černík. [31] Vrabec, *Vybočil z řady*, p. 135.

[32] Leonid Shinkarev, 'Kto priglasil v Pragu sovetskie tanki?', *Izvestiia*, 17 July 1992.

[33] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 1, p. 37.

[34] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 41 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 573, ll. 50–1).

[35] See Pataky, 'Zatiahnutie Maďarska a Maďarskej ľudovej armády do agresie proti Československu v roku 1968', pp. 62–9, and Pajórek, 'Účast polské armády na operaci DUNAJ', pp. 69–74.

invitation to Warsaw, Hungarian defence minister Czinege was informed by his Soviet counterpart, Grechko, that the Soviet leadership had decided to conduct another round of military exercises 'to the north of Hungary' at the end of July, and requested two Hungarian divisions. At around the same time the Poles were informed that a large-scale war-game, code-named Dull Summer '68, would be held in southern Poland at the end of the month and into early August. Kádár avoided commitment before the Warsaw meeting, but eventually conceded to Grechko's demand, lodged on 22 July, that the Hungarians supply at least one division to war-games to be held 'in the near future'.

On 24 July, Soviet officers disclosed that the manoeuvres would take place at the end of the month 'to render help to the Czechoslovak people in defeating counter-revolution'. Wojciech Jaruzelski, the Polish defence minister, was similarly informed on 27 July, and by 8 p.m. the following day Polish units were in position to move into eastern Bohemia. Soviet units in Poland and East Germany were also on the road. By the time of the CPSU Politburo's arrival in Čierná on 29 July, an estimated twenty divisions had been moved to within immediate striking range of Czechoslovakia.[36]

As we saw in the previous chapter, the Čierná talks did not go according to plan: the CPCS Presidium did not polarize and was able to deflect Soviet pressure by shifting the real negotiations into the four-by-four bargaining. In addition to the promises made in those talks by Dubček, however, Brezhnev had been given a special letter from Antonín Kapek, a candidate Presidium member. Kapek assured him that the Presidium was not united and that many of its members opposed the 'second centre' around Smrkovský, Kriegel, Špaček, Šimon, Císař, and Slavík. Fearing that the party was 'so paralysed that we can no longer prevent with our own internal forces the further deepening of the unfavourable course of events', he appealed for 'fraternal help'.[37]

This was the first letter of invitation from a high-ranking Czechoslovak official. The second came only days later, during the Bratislava conference. On 3 August, in a lavatory rendezvous arranged through the KGB station chief, Biľak handed Shelest a similar appeal signed by himself, Kapek, Indra, Kolder, and Švestka.[38] Written in Russian and addressed to Brezhnev personally, it stated very briefly that counter-revolution was underway, and there was no power in Czechoslovakia that could resist it, and asked the Soviet Union to intervene 'with all the means that you

[36] Benčík, *Operace 'Dunaj': Vojáci a Pražské jaro, 1968*, p. 77.
[37] Shinkarev, 'Kto priglasil v Pragu sovetskie tanki?', *Izvestiia*, 17 July 1992.
[38] Ibid. See also Valerii Alekseev, 'V chem zhe vinovat Vasil Biliak?', *Pravda*, 2 October 1992, and Petra Procházková and Jaromír Štětina, 'Dopis předal rezident', *Lidové noviny*, 3 October 1992.

have'.[39] The signatories had disguised the true extent of their alarm during the Čierná talks, when they were in the company of their reformist colleagues. There was now a specific group willing to legitimize, and cooperate with, Soviet military intervention.

The decision to invade

Just as what remained of Soviet faith in Dubček was fading in the fortnight after Bratislava, so did it grow in the group that promised to replace him. One of the more striking aspects of the newly released materials is the extent to which the Politburo left them (working closely with Chervonenko) to prepare the coup and took guidance from them on how and when best to intervene. Indra, Kolder, Biľak, and Oldřich Pavlovský, the trade minister and former ambassador to Moscow, were the core planners. Much of the plotting appears to have taken place in the opulent Soviet embassy and at Orlík, the party's recreation centre in southern Bohemia.[40]

Most of the new details of the conspiracy come from a report given by Brezhnev to a meeting of the leaders of the five invading states, held in Moscow on 18 August, one day after the Politburo had decided to intervene.[41] It was assumed that the anti-Dubček coalition could count on six of the eleven full (voting) members of the Presidium, thus putting them in the majority.[42] The process of assembling this coalition, and reaching agreement with Moscow on what course to take, had been marked by 'certain hesitations, various plans', and one member, Jan Piller, was known still to be wavering. The date of intervention had also been the subject of discussion: the Soviets had been debating whether to dispatch their forces to coincide with the 20 August Presidium meeting, or to wait until the Slovak party congress, due to open on the 26th; and it was the Czechoslovak side that specifically requested the night of the 20th. They intended to force a debate in the Presidium on the state of the country, and demand that Dubček read aloud the two letters that he had recently received (one from Brezhnev personally, the other from the entire Soviet Politburo), in which the promises made in the four-by-four talks at

39 Shinkarev, 'Kto priglasil v Pragu sovetskie tanki?', *Izvestiia*, 17 July 1992. See also František Janáček and Marie Michálková, 'Příběh zvacího dopisu', *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1993), pp. 87–101.

40 A KV ČSFR, R154 [KV ČSFR interview with Stanislav Provazník] and R40 [KV ČSFR interview with Jan Kašpar].

41 All details are from the Soviet transcript of the meeting. See A KV ČSFR, Z/S [uncatalogued], 'Stenogramma soveshchaniia predstavitelei kommunisticheskikh i rabochikh partii . . . 18 avgusta 1968 goda'. See also Garlicki and Paczkowski, *Zaciskanie pętli*, pp. 165–86.

42 The six were Barbírek, Biľak, Kolder, Piller, Rigo, and Švestka.

Čierná were explicitly listed.[43] The coalition would then accuse Dubček of failing to reveal and keep these promises, would demand and win a vote of no confidence in the 'rightists', and seize power. The new leaders would then issue a formal appeal for 'fraternal help', based on the letter delivered at the Bratislava conference but now to be signed by fifty members of the Presidium, Central Committee, and government. Deputy Interior Minister Šalgovič would close the borders to Westerners but Czechoslovak citizens would not be prevented from leaving, as it was thought best to let 'counter-revolutionaries' flee.

During 21–2 August a Central Committee plenum and special session of the National Assembly were to be convened and would 'undoubtedly', according to Brezhnev, endorse the actions of the new leadership. (The Soviets, expecting gunfire in Prague, assumed that the Central Committee and the parliament would not convene until the 22nd.) Relevant documents were being prepared by accomplices in the CPCS apparatus, and a core group of twenty to thirty editors and commentators were being recruited so that radio, television, and *Rudé právo* could issue propaganda in support of the takeover. On the morning of the 21st, one of the coup leaders would appear on national television and radio to explain the situation.

Because liberalizers varied wildly in their views, the core group did not exclude the possibility of cooperation with several key reformers. Therefore, though they drew up tentative lists of reassigned party and government posts, the conspirators were prepared to wait until after the intervention to see who would join them, and then the formal redistribution of portfolios would be decided at sessions of the Central Committee and parliament. That several members of the leadership, such as Dubček, Smrkovský, Císař, Špaček, and Kriegel, were to be removed is certain, but the original plan called for the use of formal, legitimate procedures. President Svoboda would be approached 'once the soldiers are in control

[43] The first of these letters, written by Brezhnev in the Crimea, was approved by the Politburo and delivered to Dubček by Chervonenko on 16 August. The second, also requested by the Czechoslovak coalition, was drafted and approved by the Politburo on 17 August, but Chervonenko could not deliver it until Monday the 19th, because there was no one to receive him at the CPCS Central Committee on Sunday. When Dubček accepted it, he refuted its claim of promises from Čierná, insisting only that 'specific plans and intentions' had been expressed there, which were to remain confidential and not to be revealed to the entire Presidium. Chervonenko replied that Dubček and Černík themselves had 'repeatedly ranked Kriegel, Císař, and others . . . among the rightists', so it was not interference to put that in writing and expect 'concrete measures'. Dubček, growing irritated, replied that he was not aware that any deadlines had been imposed at Čierná. He ignored Chervonenko's advice that they immediately convene the Presidium to discuss the letter, choosing instead to bury it on the agenda for the regularly scheduled meeting the next day. See Takhnenko, 'Avgust 1968 goda', pp. 153–4.

of the situation', but they suspected that they could count on Černík's 'ambition and cowardice' to get him immediately to agree to head a reconstructed government. If he refused, they would install a 'temporary revolutionary government' under Pavlovský. Defence Minister Dzúr would be asked to order the army not to resist, though whether he would be notified before the invasion began is not clear.

The Soviet role in all this was very specific: to prevent the Czechoslovak army from mobilizing against the coup and to help eliminate pockets of armed resistance. 'Their main aim', Brezhnev explained, 'is the securing of all centres and facilities of military commands.' From his remarks it is clear that Soviet politicians had left the planning of this side of the operation to Grechko and other officers; already on 23 July the commanders of the five invading armies had convened in Moscow and agreed which routes would be followed and which sites targeted.[44] Trust in the Soviet armed forces, however, was not absolute. On 20 August, the Politburo assigned one of its own members, Vice-Premier Kirill Mazurov, to serve as the real supremo in Prague since Brezhnev feared that 'the military could make a mess of things'.[45] Under Politburo instructions 'to do everything in [his] power to avoid a civil war', Mazurov travelled to Prague where he issued orders under the *nom de guerre* of General Trofimov and essentially performed the same role as Malenkov in Hungary in 1956, informing Moscow on the fate of the seizure of power.[46]

Also on the political side, Brezhnev said the Soviets would prepare policy papers and had already published, at Indra's request, an article that day in *Pravda* denouncing recent 'hooliganish' incidents in Prague.[47] They would also dispatch Soviet party functionaries from areas paired to Czechoslovak districts to help with 'political work', and would take their lead from the Czechoslovak conspirators. Finally, Brezhnev expected that the invaders would have to prepare economic aid to compensate for anticipated damage and destruction.

As this plot was being hatched, the Soviet Politburo reconvened in Moscow on 16 August under Kirilenko, attended mostly by the junior members, to discuss a situation report on Czechoslovakia submitted by the Blatov team. By the following day the senior Politburo members had returned to Moscow from their vacation retreats and a full meeting con-

[44] Pataky, 'Zatiahnutie Maďarska a Maďarskej ľudovej armády do agresie proti Československu v roku 1968', p. 54.
[45] Leonid Shinkarev, 'Eto bylo v Prage', *Izvestiia*, 19 August 1989.
[46] A KV ČSFR, Z/P 6; Leonid Shinkarev, 'Byl mesiats avgust', *Izvestiia*, 14 August 1991.
[47] This detail defeats Valenta's supposition that the article was evidence of the seriousness of the debate inside the Politburo and a form of pressure on Soviet opponents of the use of force. See Valenta, *Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968*, p. 142.

vened. Brezhnev opened it by reporting Kádár's promise to meet that day with Dubček as a last effort to 'tear him away from the rightist forces'. He then recounted his 13 August telephone conversation with Dubček, whom he described as 'politically disoriented', and he concluded that there was a genuine threat that at the upcoming congress the 'rightist' wing would triumph. He reported, however, that the Czechoslovak 'healthy forces' had worked out a plan, and that this group recommended a Soviet intervention on 20–1 August. Brezhnev deemed this plan, including the date, as 'acceptable on the whole'.[48]

Details of the rest of the 17 August Politburo session are still unavailable, but what has been divulged indicates no debate or dissent, and hardly any discussion at all.[49] During the 18 August multilateral meeting, Brezhnev noted that the Politburo and Secretariat had 'unanimously' agreed to render military assistance because 'we came to the conclusion that Dubček will not fulfil any obligations, he has gone fully over to the right'. The Politburo informed the Czechoslovak conspirators of their agreement to invade in a short telegram sent via the Prague embassy on 18 August, with a longer message of assurance on the 19th. They then summoned the leaders of the four other countries to Moscow on the 18th to hear Brezhnev outline the invasion plan. All four, including Kádár, expressed complete willingness to participate. Much of the discussion revolved around the content and timing of various statements and articles justifying the intervention to the world, to the people of Czechoslovakia, and to the people of the invading states. Their meticulous attention to this issue suggests that they really believed in the power of their propaganda to quell the anger that they knew would follow. Apparently, no one sensed the gross insensitivity of sending German troops to the Czech lands and Hungarian forces to Slovakia.

The failed *coup d'état*

Once notified that the five armies would arrive on the night of the 20th–21st, the Indra group moved into top gear. They notified collaborators working in radio, television, and ČTK to stand by to broadcast the expected announcement of the political takeover and appeal to the army to remain neutral. Deputy Interior Minister Šalgovič, the main collaborator in the interior ministry, readied units to secure Prague airport for incoming Soviet planes, prevent foreigners from entering the country, and assist the takeover of essential facilities.

[48] Pichoja, 'Než přijely tanky', *Listy*, 1994, no. 4, p. 94.
[49] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 1, p. 44.

This operation collapsed in almost every regard. The only relatively successful part was the invasion of the five armies, which had been months in the making. Even in this area problems quickly arose: an almost immediate collapse of supply lines forced troops to beg for food and water from an uncooperative population. The Czechoslovak side of the operation, though partly frustrated by civilian resistance, failed primarily because of shoddy last-minute preparation and a technicians' revolt.

Conspirators in the Presidium were dealt an immediate blow when the session opened on the afternoon of 20 August. They had counted on using the first point on the agenda, the postponed discussion of an alarmist situation report from the party's information department and of a related draft statement on the political situation after Bratislava, as a way of provoking a debate on the 'rightist' threat. Dubček, apparently suspecting only that Indra and Kolder were trying to impede congress preparations, met with Špaček that morning in a villa in northern Prague and they agreed that they would refuse to discuss the report because Indra had not submitted a proposal for 'concrete measures', as he had been assigned.[50] Dubček then moved the second item on the agenda, a draft of his keynote congress speech, to the top. Discussion of such an important policy statement lasted until nightfall.

Eventually, with the discussion of the congress speech out of the way, Dubček mentioned that the Presidium should decide to convene the Central Committee by the end of August.[51] Indra and Kolder, however, insisted that they be allowed to present the fifteen-page statement that they had prepared. Highly critical of the current situation, which they branded counter-revolutionary, the statement provoked a bitter argument, with Biľak, Kapek, and Rigo supporting it while Černík, Kriegel, and other reformers rejected it.

During the discussion Černík left the room several times to receive telephone calls, as unusual information was arriving. At 6:10 p.m. a telegram arrived at the foreign ministry from the Czechoslovak ambassador in Hungary, reporting that the ČTK office in Budapest had received an anonymous warning that Czechoslovakia would be occupied at midnight.[52] One hour later a similar telegram arrived from Warsaw.[53] Defence Minister Dzúr later claimed that at 10 p.m. Černík called to ask if anything unusual was happening along the country's eastern borders.[54] At

[50] A KV ČSFR, R9 [KV ČSFR interview with Špaček, 5 February 1990].
[51] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P8479.
[52] A FMZV, 1968, telegram 7723. The telegram was decoded by 6:45 p.m.
[53] Jan Moravec, *Antipoučeni* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1990), p. 433.
[54] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; from Dzúr's confession of 9 June 1970 for the Central Control and Review Commission].

11:40 p.m., Černík found out that there was, and returned to the Presidium to announce: 'The armies of the five parties have crossed the borders of our republic and are occupying us.'[55]

At first the Presidium was stunned by the news, and for some time reformers could only vent their feelings of betrayal while the conspirators were also in disarray, as they had apparently misjudged the start of the invasion (there may have been a mix-up between Moscow time and Central European time) and had not yet forced through the promised vote of no confidence. Eventually discussion turned to the need to respond somehow to what was happening outside. Armed resistance was immediately ruled out as foolhardy and impractical, as indeed it would have been. So it was proposed that the Presidium do what it always did in such situations: issue a declaration. Dubček assigned Mlynář, Slavík, and Císař to draft it.[56]

While they set to work, Dubček produced the letter from the CPSU Politburo dated 17 August and addressed to the CPCS Presidium. Afterwards, Mlynář submitted the draft statement on the invasion. It was quite unlike any of the dozens of declarations and resolutions that they had adopted that year: concise, resolute, and couched in terms of international law rather than Marxism-Leninism.[57] Aware that state radio was about to finish its evening transmission and that little time remained to speak to the country, reformists called a vote on Mlynář's declaration; Barbírek and Piller defected from the conspiracy, giving the reformers a 7:4 majority.[58] The meeting over, Dubček asked all members to remain but Biľak and Indra immediately absconded to the Soviet embassy, Kapek vanished to his dacha, Piller left for Kladno, while Kolder locked himself in his office. Černík headed for the government seat across the river, where he was arrested by Soviet paratroopers. The remaining Presidium members sat in Dubček's office, afraid to leave lest the conspirators return and usurp their posts.[59]

At the same time, the technical side of the coup was also coming undone, for three reasons. First, the conspirators were constantly outwitted because of their poor knowledge of the country's radio, television, and communications networks. Although StB officers took control of the main radio building in central Prague around 1:15 a.m. on the 21st, they failed to prevent one studio from broadcasting the Presidium's denunciation of the invasion, which was received over the small wire units commonplace in Prague apartments. Soviet troops, after killing fifteen unarmed Czech protesters, entered the building at 7:30 a.m., seized the

[55] Macek, et al., *Sedm pražských dnů*, p. 22.
[56] Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, pp. 165–70; Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. II, pp. 104–11.
[57] A KV ČSFR, R9 [KV ČSFR interview with Špaček, 5 February 1990].
[58] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P8479.
[59] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, p. 182.

first and second floors and severed all telephone lines, but failed to notice for almost two hours that studios on the third floor were still transmitting. After these broadcasts were terminated, they were resumed from the sixteen auxiliary studios that state radio operated in and around Prague. Thinking that everything could be controlled by seizing the centre, the conspirators and Soviets had apparently not bothered to identify these secondary facilities in advance. Radio was also immune to centralized disruption because its main transmitters were so antiquated and unreliable that a network of smaller backup transmitters had been established; this system was used by underground broadcasters.[60]

Secondly, the conspirators had overlooked a number of areas in which they ought to have recruited technicians. Admittedly, they had assembled a sizeable team around Karel Hoffmann, the director of the Central Communications Directorate, which included the director of ČTK, a deputy director of state television, a deputy minister of culture (Bohuslav Chňoupek), the former director of state radio (Marko), party ideologue Auersperg, and about thirty-five StB officers.[61] But, just as 'a single cooperative technician will be able temporarily to put out of action a radio station which would otherwise require a full-scale assault team',[62] so too could one uncooperative technician prevent the use of a successfully occupied institution.

One example can be found in the very directorate that Hoffmann commanded. His deputy, Vomastek, was told by the StB to shut down all radio transmitters in the country, but he refused, insisting that such an order had to come either from the government or parliament. He rejected a similar demand from the Soviet deputy minister for communications, Klokov.[63] Technical resistance occurred at the StB's Seventh Directorate, which operated communications lines between state offices. In the early morning of 21 August, the directorate's commander, Oldřich Šebor, refused Šalgovič's urgent plea for help in turning off radio transmitters. At noon, when asked to activate jamming transmitters to disrupt television, Šebor again refused to cooperate. When asked two hours later whether the directorate had the technology to detect the location of radio transmitters, Šebor lied and said that it did not. Throughout the 21st, Šebor resisted direct pressure from the Soviets to provide their embassy

[60] A KV ČSFR, R123 [KV ČSFR interview with Zdeněk Hejzlar, 1 October 1990]. See also Jiří Dienstbier, Karel Lánský, Věněk Šilhan, and Bohumil Šimon, *Srpen 1968* (Prague: Práce, 1990), pp. 33–77.

[61] A FMV, fond IM, k. 70, sv. XII [deposition of CCD deputy director Vomastek].

[62] Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'état: A Practical Handbook* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 119.

[63] A FMV, fond IM, k. 70, sv. XII. Hoffmann called that evening from the Soviet embassy and repeated his order, but Vomastek again disobeyed.

with desperately needed links to Moscow and other capitals. Meanwhile, Šebor's staff made contact with colleagues at Hoffmann's directorate and in the army to keep underground radio going. On 22 August at 7 a.m., Šebor stopped jamming Radio Free Europe and turned the devices against the East Germans' Vltava station. After a deputy StB commander finally succeeded on 23 August in disconnecting wire radio transmissions, Šebor's directorate, together with Hoffmann's technicians, managed to restore them. Finally, on 24 and 25 August, Soviet forces occupied the interior ministry's switchboard, thereby severing all contact between the ministry's central offices and the regional commands, but Šebor and his crew retreated to back-up facilities and restored normal communications.[64]

Third, when conspirators were able to secure cooperation, they did so by claiming that the invasion had been invited by most Presidium members, including Dubček. Once this claim was exposed as a lie, compliance ceased. This was especially true in the interior ministry, where Šalgovič was known to be a friend of Dubček and was initially able to convince StB officers of Dubček's approval of the invasion.[65] Šalgovič called Dubček around 9 a.m. on 21 August to ask if he really had invited the foreign armies, which Dubček categorically denied.[66] After this call, Šalgovič began to drink heavily, issued contradictory orders (such as for the release of Císař, whom he had arrested only hours before), and by early evening was telling colleagues that 'terrible things are happening', that he was trapped between Dubček and the Indra group. At 9 a.m. on 22 August he left to join the rump Presidium and ended up completely drunk in the Soviet embassy.[67] Eventually he fled to Bulgaria. Marko, on whom the conspiracy had counted to reassume his old job as director general of radio, similarly lost his resolve and refused to arrange broadcast of the unsigned invitation of military intervention.[68] When radio broadcasting resumed at 4:30 a.m. with the Presidium's condemnation of the invasion, the StB officers present refused their superior's order to stop the broadcasts, as they feared the angry crowd that was gathering outside.[69]

Two men on whose tacit or active support the conspiracy relied, and who did not disappoint, were President Svoboda and Defence Minister

[64] This account of Šebor's activity is taken from A FMV, fond IM, k. 70, sv. X. Šebor was imprisoned in 1971 for his actions.
[65] A FMV, fond IM, k. 70, sv. XII and XIII; A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 19, a.j. 185, str. 57–64; Leonid Shinkarev, 'Byl mesiats avgust', *Izvestiia*, 15 August 1991.
[66] A KV ČSFR, R83 [KV ČSFR interview with Vítězslav Hlavaček].
[67] A KV ČSFR, R151 [KV ČSFR interview with Mlynář, 9 August 1990].
[68] A FMV, fond IM, k. 70, sv. XII.
[69] A FMV, fond IMV, 02-2/1, kr. 19, č.j. OS-00352/72-68.

Dzúr. Svoboda had become a surprisingly active head of state; he had hoped to be elected to the party Presidium, and when he was not, he tried (with the help of his daughter Zoë and son-in-law, the former Czechoslovak envoy to the UN) to turn the normally ceremonial presidency into a more influential office.[70] Svoboda, however, was a severely limited man, and the Soviets sensed that they could count on his compliance. Chervonenko began preparing him on 17 August during a very emotional meeting. The ambassador warned that 'the non-fulfilment of the obligations undertaken at Čierná' was viewed as 'the CPCS Presidium's betrayal of fraternal relations with the CPSU, as betrayal of friendship with the USSR'. Shaken, the president openly warned Chervonenko that the Soviets should not consider the use of force. Instead, he pleaded, 'give us time, show patience'. Chervonenko replied that if the situation in Czechoslovakia did not improve, the option of military action could not be excluded. In his report to Moscow, the ambassador concluded that Svoboda could be counted on to obey the Soviet will.[71]

On 19 August, Gromyko instructed Chervonenko to inform Svoboda the next day that Moscow had received a request from the majority of Presidium members and from several government ministers for armed help. 'Comrades Dubček, Kriegel, Smrkovský, Císař, and several others are behaving insincerely and dishonestly', Chervonenko was told to report, 'and in essence they are supporting the activity of reactionary forces.'[72] Svoboda was to be asked to tell the Czechoslovak army and public not to oppose the invading forces, who would arrive at midnight as 'loyal brothers'. Chervonenko wired back on 21 August that Svoboda, though unhappy, had agreed to strive to prevent conflict. During the *démarche*, which probably began around 11 p.m., Svoboda mentioned that he had received a summons to the CPCS Presidium. Chervonenko advised the president to hold to his promise, and Svoboda assured him that he would.[73]

When Svoboda walked into the Presidium meeting, he grinned and said, 'Well, they're here.'[74] The smile disappeared once he realized that the majority of the Presidium had not invited the invading armies and had in fact denounced it. Svoboda soon returned to the Castle's garden lodge, where he spoke with Brezhnev over the telephone.[75] At 8:15 a.m.

[70] Antonín Benčík, 'Ludvík Svoboda a srpen 1968', *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1993), p. 25.
[71] Takhnenko, 'Avgust 1968 goda', pp. 154–5.
[72] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 37 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 127, d. 586, ll. 36–8).
[73] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 39 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 574, ll. 167–8).
[74] Bilak, *Paměti*, vol. II, p. 106.
[75] A KV ČSFR, R5 [KV ČSFR interview with Ladislav Novák, 16 January 1990].

Svoboda read an extremely brief statement over the radio, telling citizens to remain absolutely calm and display dignity and discipline.[76] Though not welcoming the armies, he kept his promise to Chervonenko: at no point, either then or in another statement that evening, did the head of state denounce the invasion of his country, and he strove (unsuccessfully) to prevent discussion of it in the UN Security Council.[77]

Whether Dzúr knew of the invasion in advance is still a mystery. Kádár told the Hungarian Central Committee on 23 August that the five had 'agreed' with Dzúr 'before the entry of our armies'.[78] By his own 1970 confession,[79] Dzúr was first definitively informed of the invasion by the WTO's top representative in Czechoslovakia, Soviet General Iamshchik, at around 11:45 p.m. on 20 August. Without consulting the Presidium or Svoboda or knowing their opinions, Dzúr decided to order all Czechoslovak military units to remain in barracks and render the invaders 'maximum all-round help'. He spoke with Chervonenko, Brezhnev, and Grechko, all of whom praised him for his decision. Dzúr then informed the general staff, and the order was issued at midnight. Even when Dzúr learned of the Presidium's condemnation of the invasion, he stood by his original order, which Svoboda wholeheartedly supported.[80]

New materials confirm Eidlin's conjecture that the arrest of leading reformers was not part of the original plan.[81] Dubček, Smrkovský, Kriegel, Špaček, and Šimon were not detained until around 9 a.m. on 21 August, ten hours after Soviet units reached the capital. Until then the group had been simply waiting in Dubček's office for the arrival of a Soviet official with whom they could negotiate. Dubček seems to have been under the illusion that Soviet leaders would eventually turn up and another Čierná-style meeting would be held to sort out the mess. Until then, he would give no instructions for any form of resistance. Though Smrkovský and others toyed with ideas of going underground or appealing for people to form a human wall around the Central Committee building, Dubček refused to risk bloodshed. Šimon, prodded by the bolder Prague municipal committee, proposed that they call a general strike and convene at least a meeting of the Prague delegates to the party congress. Whether or not Dubček gave explicit consent is unclear, but the Prague committee went ahead and on 22 August managed to gather most

[76] Macek, et al., *Sedm pražských dnů*, pp. 39–40.
[77] Jan Pauer, 'Exkurs o úloze L. Svobody v srpnových událostech, 1968', in Pecka and Prečan, *Proměny Pražského jara*, pp. 191–2. [78] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 19.
[79] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Dzúr's report for the Central Control and Review Commission, 9 June 1970].
[80] Pauer, 'Exkurs o úloze L. Svobody v srpnových událostech, 1968', p. 189.
[81] Eidlin, *The Logic of 'Normalization'*, p. 65.

of the Czech delegates for a clandestine congress in the industrial quarter of Vysočany.[82]

By that time, however, Dubček and the others were in the Soviet Union. Although the order to arrest Dubček and the other leaders undeniably came from the Soviets, it is not clear whether it was initiated in Moscow or in Prague by Mazurov. It appears that the original intention was to detain the leaders in the Central Committee and then at Ruzyně airport to see if they would cooperate; only on the evening of the 21st, when it became clear that they would not, was it decided to secrete them out of the country. Černík, for example, was originally detained by Soviet paratroopers at 3 a.m. but was not actually removed from his office for fourteen hours. During the night he received, and rejected, an invitation from Biľak and Kolder to meet them at the Soviet embassy.[83]

That the Soviets in Prague were near panic after the original plan collapsed is clear from Mazurov's dispatches to Kosygin. One of them, from around midday on 21 August, noted that Dubček, Kriegel, and Smrkovský were 'closed away' in the Central Committee, while 'our friends' were in shock after their failure. Mazurov still hoped to salvage the operation if someone could be persuaded to form a new government and seize the media.[84] A second report, probably from around 6 p.m. on 22 August, was far more gloomy. 'Politically it does not look good . . . Comr[ades] from the CPCS overestimated their abilities, they were unable to convene the plenum or the National Assembly.' With the 'rightists' still broadcasting and crowds gathering in the streets, 'it was decided yesterday evening to take D[ubček], Č[erník], K[riegel], and Špaček to the Soviet Union'. Mazurov recommended that Dubček and Černík be spoken with one more time, before lunch the next day; otherwise battles could erupt in Prague. 'What is to be done?', he asked desperately.[85]

The abduction of several of the country's most popular public officials was actually something of a blessing. As Havel points out, the removal of the irresolute Dubček and his colleagues lifted a restraining hand on the public, which was then free to organize itself through non-violent resistance.[86] The Vysočany congress resolutely endorsed the condemnations of the invasion already pronounced by the Presidium, government, and National Assembly, and elected a new Central Committee and Presidium

[82] See Šimon's recollections in Dienstbier, et al., *Srpen 1968*, pp. 172–6. See also Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, pp. 181–2. For the congress's proceedings, see Pelikán, *The Secret Vysočany Congress*.

[83] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Černík's questioning by the Central Control and Review Commission, 16 June 1970]; Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. II, p. 114.

[84] Takhnenko, 'Avgust 1968 goda', p. 158. [85] A KV ČSFR, Z/P 6.

[86] Václav Havel, *Dálkový výslech. Rozhovor s Karlem Hvížďalou* (Prague: Melantrich, 1989).

completely free of neo-conservatives and probably far more radical than they would have been had the invasion not occurred. There then followed a disciplined, active campaign to disorient and demoralize the invading armies by removing street signs, withholding food and water, and haranguing them in Russian. The kidnapped group served as the focusing issue, around which the crowds could rally their protest by demanding their return.

The Indra group, however unsettled by its bungling in the Presidium, was determined to try again. After talking with Brezhnev on the morning of the 21st, when he berated them for letting 'counter-revolutionary' elements prevail, Kolder, Indra, Biľak, and Lenárt left their refuge in the Soviet embassy and travelled in Soviet vehicles to Prague Castle. There they proposed to Svoboda that he appoint an emergency body that would assume the powers of the cabinet and Presidium and liaise with the invading armies. Indra even produced a list of possible portfolio assignments. Svoboda did not reject the proposal outright, adding only that Černík should be included. The Indra–Kolder group might have succeeded had Svoboda's chancellor, Ladislav Novák, not intervened to point out that under the constitution any new government would have to be approved by the National Assembly (which had managed to go into permanent session that morning and was firing off vehement condemnations of the invasion). Reminded of such niceties, the president refrained from appointing the emergency body, and simply asked the Kolder group to keep him informed of events.[87]

By around 9 p.m. on 21 August, as many Central Committee members and candidate members as could be found in Prague, about 41 of 108, had assembled in the bar of the party's hotel, with Kolder, Indra, Biľak, and Barbírek arriving under armed Soviet escort. The gathering was split between those who bitterly denounced the invasion and wanted to convene the party congress, and the conspirators who still wanted to convoke the Central Committee to discuss the Politburo letter of 17 August. It was agreed to convene the plenum the following day, 22 August, at 4 p.m. In the meantime, Biľak, Barbírek, and all Central Committee members from Prague were to try to dissuade the congress delegates from converging on the capital.[88]

The next morning, at 10:15, the rump Presidium met in the Central Committee building with Kolder presiding. When a call came through after forty-five minutes that the congress had begun proceedings, it was

[87] Benčík, 'Ludvík Svoboda a srpen 1968', pp. 29–30.
[88] Macek, et al., *Sedm pražských dnů*, p. 72; A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 21, a.j. 216. A partial, uncatalogued transcript of this meeting exists in the Central Committee archive.

clear that the new priority was to stop it. After two hours it was resolved that Piller would act as temporary first secretary, and that all those present would adjourn to the Soviet embassy to demand the release of Dubček and the others so that they could participate in the Presidium's and congress's deliberations.[89]

At the embassy, Chervonenko rejected this request, claiming that the congress had no regard for the Presidium and so could not be controlled. Mlynář tried to convince the ambassador by using dogmatic language: the congress, he explained, was in the hands of extreme 'rightists' and there was a danger that a second leadership might be created. Unless Dubček, Černík, and the others were allowed to attend the congress and direct it, 'the only solution would be in the hands of the armed forces, in which case the Soviet military units cannot leave, because if they left it would mean the end of socialism'.[90] Mlynář urged Chervonenko to consult Brezhnev on this suggestion.

Chervonenko lectured his guests on their failure after the Bratislava meeting to arrest counter-revolution, and insisted that the congress be stopped and a new one properly prepared. Rigo politely argued that only Dubček and Černík had the authority needed to stop the congress, even if they would eventually have to leave the Presidium. Jakeš and Lenárt concurred. Mlynář chipped in that the natural authority of Dubček and Černík combined with the presence of so many troops would be the optimal solution to the crisis.

Kolder, declaring himself a 'man of hard reality', then tried to steer the conversation towards acting without Dubček and Černík. After Chervonenko left around 5 p.m. to call Moscow, Bil'ak proposed that they establish a revolutionary government of eleven to fifteen members, to be headed by Indra, with Sádovský as vice-premier. Kolder seconded Bil'ak's proposal. There then followed lengthy haggling over who should occupy which position, with everyone trying to evade whatever someone else nominated him for. Mlynář gave his nominal support to the idea of a new government, but recommended that it be headed by Svoboda, with Lenárt and Štrougal as deputy premiers. As acting first secretary, Piller concluded the discussion by accepting Mlynář's less radical approach. At

[89] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, a.j. 120; Bil'ak, *Paměti*, vol. II, p. 120. The only liberalizers were Mlynář and Sádovský.

[90] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; notes from the meeting of members of the Presidium and Secretariat with comrade Chervonenko on Thursday 22 August 1968 in the Soviet embassy]. The accuracy and authenticity of this transcript cannot be vouchsafed. That Mlynář used this sort of language, however, is confirmed by Brezhnev's remark to Dubček on 23 August that Mlynář feared that the Presidium chosen at Vysočany 'means that Czechoslovakia will quickly become bourgeois'. Dubček replied that Mlynář was 'a prudent man'. See A KV ČSFR, Z/S 10.

6:15 p.m. Chervonenko, unable to reach Brezhnev, returned to hear their decision. He agreed that Svoboda, Štrougal, or Lenárt should lead a reconstructed government, but that it must be 'revolutionary'. All those present promised that it would be, although Sádovský and Mlynář also made it clear that they would not serve in it.

A delegation set out again for the Castle to meet with Svoboda. Deputy Premier Štrougal and other ministers were also present, as a rump cabinet had been operating within the Castle; vehemently condemning Černík's abduction, they refused to discuss changes in the government without him present. Svoboda, however, was no longer interested in the various options, as he had already decided before the Presidium delegation arrived that there had been some terrible misunderstanding. He told his chancellor, 'I think that Brezhnev does not have full information. If he heard this shooting and saw the occupation of Prague, he would stop this. He and I met on the front, he knows what war is, I should open his eyes!'[91]

Chervonenko was summoned to the Castle at 11 p.m., and there Svoboda told him of intention to go to Moscow the next day, 23 August, to secure the release of Dubček and Černík. He explained that, with their 95 per cent approval ratings, Dubček and Černík were essential to reach a solution, although he promised that they would both leave their functions immediately upon release and their 'mistakes' would be judged. The Soviets could not have been more relieved by Svoboda's offer, as it provided them with a desperately needed escape route. At 9:30 a.m. on the 23rd, spurning the pleas of the National Assembly that he not leave the country, Svoboda departed for Moscow with an entourage consisting primarily of such compromised characters as Indra, Biľak, and Piller, and including no one from the Vysočany congress.[92]

Slovak developments

One person Svoboda did make sure to collect on his way to Moscow was Husák, whom the invasion had inadvertently hoisted into power. The Slovak side of the conspiracy had been overseen by Biľak until he flew to Prague on 19 August, and then by his close associates in Bratislava, Miloslav Hruškovič and Jan Janík.[93] At 1:40 a.m. on 21 August, with Soviet tanks already rumbling across the Danube into the city, Hruškovič

[91] Leonid Shinkarev, 'Byl mesiats avgust', *Izvestiia*, 14 August 1991.
[92] Pauer, 'Exkurs o úloze L. Svobody v srpnových událostech, 1968', pp. 194–5; Macek, et al., *Sedm pražských dnů*, p. 138.
[93] Komisia vlády SR pre analýzu historických udalostí z rokov 1967–1970 and Politologický kabinet SAV, *Slovenská spoločnosť*, 3 vols. (Bratislava: RVO VVPS, 1992), vol. III, p. 85.

assembled the Slovak Presidium and Secretariat and announced that allied armies were arriving at the behest of Svoboda and the CPCS Presidium; only Kriegel and Smrkovský, he claimed, had voted against the invitation. In the ensuing discussion Janík and three other officials accepted the occupation, while an opposing majority argued that the situation in Slovakia was not so critical that it required intervention.[94] Their position was bolstered when a telex from Prague reported that leaders had not requested the invasion.

At some point during the night Husák arrived and took over the meeting, demanding that anyone present who had invited the invasion admit it. No one confessed, and the conversation turned to issuing a public statement. Husák and Hruškovič opposed such a move without further news from Prague; the majority, however, wanted to address the people, and a compromise declaration was drafted which did not condemn the invasion but insisted that 'the party and state organs in Slovakia had the situation firmly in their hands', declared fidelity to Dubček, Černík, and Svoboda, and appealed for calm and dignity.[95]

By dawn central Bratislava was swarming with Soviet tanks, and crowds were already sealing off key streets with barricades, from which they pelted the invaders with stones and insults.[96] Around 9 a.m. several thousand gathered outside the Soviet consulate to chant defiance, and protests continued through the day on the Square of the Slovak National Uprising.[97] The CPS Presidium began talks with the Soviet command to withdraw tanks from the city centre but, isolated from Prague and local organs, did not direct the spontaneous civilian resistance. Husák learned from Dzúr that a 'revolutionary' regime still might arise, and Biľak called from the Soviet embassy to ask that the CPS Presidium not condemn the invasion. Consequently, its statement on 22 August denied knowing of any invitation of the 'unjustified arrival' of the armies, distanced itself from 'everything that has been and is being undertaken beyond the legal, democratically elected party and state leadership', but still refrained from an outright damnation of the invasion and, like Svoboda, urged citizens to work normally and not provoke the soldiers.[98] The Slovak National Council (SNC), under its conservative chairman Klokoč, also prevaricated and unlike the Prague parliament did not go into permanent

[94] Komisia vlády SR and Politologický kabinet SAV, *Slovenská spoločnosť*, vol. III, pp. 85–6, 105–7; A ÚV KSČ, fond KSS, sv. 3, ar.j. 7 [remarks by Janík to CPS congress, 28 August 1968].

[95] A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar.j. 47. A later statement was less emphatic about the controlled pace of reform in Slovakia and repeated loyalty to the Dubček leadership without condemning the invasion. [96] Komisia vlady SR, *Slovensko v rokoch 1967–1970*, pp. 184–5.

[97] Jan Mlynárik, 'Slováci proti okupaci', *Lidové noviny*, 24 August 1991.

[98] A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar.j. 47.

session; after its 21 August meeting it did not reconvene for a week. The SNC Presidium did not use the term 'occupation' in communiqués until 23 August.[99]

The vacuum was filled by local party organs and by radio, which came on the air as usual at 4:30 a.m. on 21 August and broadcast the CPCS Presidium's condemnation of the invasion. After director Sarvas ignored orders from Hoffmann to stop the broadcasts, the Soviets seized the main studio, and Bratislava radio temporarily fell silent while regional stations continued. Makeshift studios were found in the capital and on 22 August transmissions resumed; the following day technicians were able to link up with Prague. They also liaised with the Bratislava municipal party committee, which was so frustrated by the Presidium's dithering that it threatened to take power.[100] The media not only coordinated actions and steered the economy, but also maintained ties between Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, and Ruthenians. Slovak commitment to the common state was iterated in a letter from the SNC Presidium on 24 August to its Czech counterpart, 'our dear brothers', and again the next day in a meeting with Czech representatives.[101]

After forty-eight hours of dithering, the Presidium had to start making decisions. On 22 August news arrived that the Prague municipal party committee was convening the party congress and wanted the Slovak delegates to attend. The Presidium had not been considering a congress (of either the CPCS or CPS) as an option and doubted whether the Prague committee had the authority to convene it. In the end, despite a call from Biľak urging against attendance, the Presidium decided to dispatch the delegates, most of whom were unable to reach Prague in time.[102] Its next decision was critical: hearing that Svoboda was assembling a delegation to negotiate in Moscow, the Presidium selected Husák to represent the Slovak nation. This act, which was seconded by the SNC Presidium, effectively removed Biľak as leader of the CPS.

The Moscow Protocol

Moscow's immediate concern was that the congress be annulled, and on arriving in the Kremlin Svoboda promised that this would be arranged. He asked only that the interned Czechoslovak leaders be allowed to

[99] Komisia vlády SR and Politologický kabinet SAV, *Slovenská spoločnosť*, vol. I, pp. 150–8; Komisia vlady SR, *Slovensko v rokoch 1967–1970*, pp. 228–30.

[100] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; draft analysis of activity of radio in Slovakia after January 1968]; A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar.j. 6.

[101] Komisia vlady SR, *Slovensko v rokoch 1967–1970*, pp. 231–3, 236–7.

[102] Komisia vlády SR and Politologický kabinet SAV, *Slovenská spoločnosť*, vol. III, p. 117.

return to Prague that very day, after which Dubček would be forced to resign.[103] The Soviets, however, were not ready to make such concessions yet, and Svoboda's hope of somehow enlightening them quickly faded.

The first full round of talks between the Soviets and Svoboda's delegation, held around 7 p.m., are noteworthy for the emergence of Husák. The Soviets attempted to bargain from a position of strength: they showed no remorse for their actions and refused to concede that they might have made a mistake.[104] Brezhnev opened the meeting by recounting the obligations undertaken at Čierná and Dubček's subsequent denial of those obligations during the 13 August telephone conversation, which to the Politburo 'smells of deception'. He accused the people of Czechoslovakia of having succumbed in the past two days to nationalism, which he blamed on the adulation of Dubček, 'a cult bigger than under Stalin'. He then agreed to release Dubček and Černík (and eventually withdraw Soviet forces) on the condition that this time they really did fulfil the Čierná agreements and declared the Vysočany congress illegal.

After a similar speech by Kosygin, Husák spoke up. While agreeing that various extremes and mistakes had to be eliminated, especially 'anti-socialist and anti-Soviet' opinions, he was contemptuous of Soviet blundering. He acknowledged that the Soviet Union was a world power with interests in Central Europe, but reminded them that Czechoslovakia was a small nation sensitive to any violation of its sovereignty. 'What has happened', he concluded, 'has had a very bad impact. The CPCS will have to work many years to correct it.' According to him, there were now only two possible solutions: total occupation and martial law or a political agreement that would allow the Czechoslovak government and party to resume their functions. The latter was naturally preferable, but it required the release of the interned leaders and Soviet surrender of occupied ministries.

Husák's reprimand infuriated Brezhnev and Podgornyi, the former declaring that 'we came to save you and now you accuse us'. Biľak intervened to salvage the talks by reassuring the Soviets of their infallibility, and within hours Husák redeemed himself by ordering Bratislava to postpone the imminent Slovak party congress. Duly impressed by such efficacy, the Soviets made a 180-degree turn in their opinion of him, as they had with Smrkovský in May.

Around 11 p.m. Svoboda, and later the entire delegation, was allowed to talk with Dubček and Černík, who had been flown to Moscow separ-

[103] Antonín Benčík and Václav Kural, 'Moskevský protokol – třetí diktát Československu', *Právo lidu*, 4 December 1991.

[104] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued; transcript of meeting on 23 August in the Kremlin].

ately hours earlier from Ukraine, where they had been held in government villas. Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgornyi, and Russian premier Voronov had already spoken with the two men, stressing the same two basic demands: that the congress be invalidated and that they fulfil the Čierná agreements. Dubček, vacillating fitfully between defiance and compliance, had refused to negotiate as long as he did not know what was happening in Prague.[105] Černík, however, quickly said that he was willing to declare the congress invalid. Under Černík's influence the ailing Dubček began to concede to this demand.[106]

To the Czechs and Slovaks in the Kremlin, the Soviets presented a cold, monolithic façade of superpower khans determined to take as long as necessary to get their way. In reality they were scrambling. They were holding daily meetings with the leaders of the other four invading countries, beginning on the morning of 24 August, where they revealed their wish to end the crisis as quickly as possible with minimal loss of prestige. During these meetings Brezhnev was clearly on the defensive: he had to persuade the other leaders to accept the Soviet decision to work with Dubček and permit the restoration of the old Presidium, without seeming soft on 'counter-revolution'. He also appealed to them for suggestions on how to resolve the mess they had created.

Because of the different personalities involved, however, the consultations tended to degenerate into fruitless quibbling. Ulbricht and Zhivkov were violently opposed to any dealing with Dubček, and still favoured the creation of a 'revolutionary' government. Gomułka was verging on hysterics, declaring that Czechoslovakia was now essentially outside the Warsaw Pact and that the 'counter-revolutionaries' would target Poland and the GDR next. He was not, however, against exploiting Dubček: his signature on a condemnation of counter-revolution, for example, would compromise him while confusing the upstarts. Gomułka also recommended that the CPCS Central Committee convene in the near future, which the leaders of the five parties would attend to lay down the 'correct' line. He and Zhivkov also wanted to use the Czechoslovak army against protesters, a tactic Brezhnev abjured.

This first brainstorming session on 24 August continued in this vein for two hours, and the Soviets gave up on fishing for constructive advice from the other leaders, meeting with them twice more only to brief them on dealings with the Czechs and Slovaks; Brezhnev did not even attend the

[105] See A KV ČSFR, Z/S 10, for the Soviet transcript of these deliberations. The excerpts reprinted in Dubček's autobiography (*Hope Dies Last*, pp. 190–200) emphasize his defiant moments, and omit his many promises to cooperate.

[106] *Lidové noviny*, 8 February 1991. This is what Brezhnev told Ulbricht, Gomułka, Kádár, and Zhivkov on 24 August.

second meeting on 25 August. Talks continued with Svoboda, Husák, and Biľak (Dubček was too ill) over whether Černík should take over the party, Husák head the government, and Lenárt chair parliament. Svoboda repeatedly promised to have Dubček removed, but Brezhnev rejected the proposal as naïve, since he feared they would only install someone even worse. 'In no case', Brezhnev resolved, 'will it be either Indra or Biľak or anyone similar.'[107] Another possibility, already being floated among the Soviets by 24 August, was to leave the pre-invasion leadership intact but force it to sign a secret protocol committing it to the sorts of pledges undertaken at Čierná. These variants were discussed in the Soviet Politburo on 25 August with Kosygin presiding, who signalled that he and Brezhnev preferred the protocol solution as the most realistic. It was feared that the other options would make a martyr out of Dubček and reduce Svoboda's authority. Andropov and Ustinov held out for a revolutionary government, Podgornyi wanted to make Černík party leader and Husák prime minister, but Kosygin managed to overrule all objections.[108]

Both the Czechoslovak and Soviet sides were to draw up their own drafts of the protocol and then try to merge them; the Soviets had already given Biľak their version and wanted him to influence the drafting of the Czechoslovak one accordingly.[109] The resulting document would provide the platform for normalization, the implementation of which, Kosygin predicted, would so compromise and undermine Dubček that his downfall would eventually result.[110]

The Soviet draft, authored by Central Committee secretary Boris Ponomarev, broke down into fourteen points: (1) the signatories recommitted themselves to what was agreed at Čierná and Bratislava; (2) the Vysočany Congress was declared invalid, and the real congress would only be convened once the country had been normalized; (3) the CPCS Central Committee would convene within two to three days to discuss normalization, including the removal of 'those functionaries who do not assert the leading role of the working class and party and who do not defend the interests of socialism and close ties to fraternal socialist countries'; (4) the CPCS would restore full control over the media, eliminate unacceptable clubs and organizations, cleanse the party and state apparatus of 'compromised individuals whose activity does not correspond to the interests of the party and socialism'; (5) foreign armies would not meddle in internal affairs and would be gradually withdrawn from the

[107] *Lidové noviny*, 8 February 1991.
[108] Pikhoia, 'Chekhoslovakiia, 1968 god', *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1995, no. 1, pp. 46–7.
[109] Benčík and Kural, 'Moskevský protokol – třetí diktát Československu', *Právo lidu*, 6 December 1991. [110] *Lidové noviny*, 8 February 1991.

country once the threat to socialism had been dispelled; (6) the Czechoslovak army would cooperate with those of the five invading states; (7) meetings would soon be held on deeper economic cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the USSR.

On the foreign policy side, the draft stipulated that (8) both sides acknowledged the need for a tighter and more effective Warsaw Pact in light of 'imperialist' activity; (9) Czechoslovakia would follow the Soviet line on European security, Germany, and the permanence of post-war borders; (10) Czechoslovakia would prevent any discussion of its case in the United Nations; (11) Šik and Foreign Minister Hájek (who was abroad, speaking on behalf of his occupied country) would be removed from the government; (12) party and state delegations would exchange visits; (13) all details of the Moscow meetings would remain confidential, and Interior Minister Pavel would be removed from his post; and (14) both sides would strive to deepen friendship under the slogan 'United for all time'.[111] Notably, there was no clause committing the CPCS to allowing the permanent stationing of foreign soldiers.

The Czechoslovak draft, a collection of theses strung together probably first by Černík and then re-worked by Šimon, Špaček, and Mlynář, was a toned-down version of the Presidium's response to the Warsaw Letter a month before.[112] Svoboda, Černík, and Smrkovský had gathered at Dubček's side (he was bedridden with heart and nerve problems) and they agreed that the protocol could not include any mention of counter-revolution; could not overturn the Presidium's condemnatory declaration of 21 August; and would have to recognize the right of Czechoslovakia to continue its 'post-January course'.[113] Though they knew little of its proceedings, they abandoned the Vysočany congress. Thus the top leaders had already hammered out their principles before they had been briefed on the real situation in Czechoslovakia by Mlynář, who had been dispatched to Moscow to speak on behalf of Vysočany, on the 25th. When Mlynář defended the Vysočany congress, Husák played the Slovak card and Černík agreed that the congress had not been held correctly, though he proposed co-opting some of the new Central Committee members into the old.[114]

The Czechoslovak draft protocol was steamrollered by Ponomarev, who often resorted to outright threats to keep the Czechs and Slovaks in their villas in the Moscow hills as long as it would take to get them to sign the Soviets' draft, exhibiting, as Černík recalls, an attitude that was

[111] Ibid. [112] A KV ČSFR, R151 [KV ČSFR interview with Mlynář, 9 August 1990].
[113] A KV ČSFR, R18 [KV ČSFR interview with Černík, 16 February 1990].
[114] Benčík and Kural, 'Moskevský protokol – třetí diktát Československu', *Právo lidu*, 7 December 1991.

'hateful, superpower, cavalier'.[115] In the ensuing deliberations over the final text, conducted by Kosygin, Suslov, and especially Ponomarev for the Soviets, and Mlynář, Husák, and Šimon for the Czechs and Slovaks, the Soviets imposed their version, with only some modification: Šik and Hájek were not mentioned by name, the removal of Pavel was phrased more diplomatically, and more time was permitted to prepare and convene a plenum; but on Gomułka's recommendation clauses were added to provide for a formal treaty on the 'temporary' stationing of foreign soldiers in Czechoslovakia and to guarantee the safety of left-wingers in the CPCS leadership. Moreover, there appear to have been unwritten agreements between the Soviet leaders and Svoboda and Biľak: Kosygin told the leaders of the other invading states that the Soviets would expect a thorough cleansing of the CPCS apparatus and army, and that Svoboda and Biľak had promised that if the returning CPCS leaders were unable to control the situation, they would resort to martial law.[116]

The final deliberation over the protocol's text, beginning at 4 p.m. on 26 August, quickly became a spectacle of high drama.[117] With the two countries' oligarchies again face to face as at Čierná, first Černík and then Dubček (who spoke in Russian) launched into a bitter, defiant defence of the reform course and condemned the Soviet invasion as a grave error that had damaged the international cause of communism. But as in all his dealings with the Soviets, Dubček made it clear that he still wanted to work with them and asked for their patience and support. Brezhnev responded with a tantrum, pacing back and forth as he lectured the other side on how patient and supportive he had already been, how many of Dubček's promises he had heard and accepted, how blind the reformers had been to the danger before them. After Kosygin spoke in the same vein, a heated debate erupted and the Soviets goosestepped out.

Eventually Svoboda made the gesture of going to them to suggest a page-by-page discussion of the protocol itself to arrive at a wording acceptable to both sides. This brought the Soviets back to the table and all those present for the Czechoslovak delegation, apparently after some badgering from Husák, accepted the protocol (now with fifteen points) and pledged to carry it out point by point, with Černík and Dubček asserting that it was a matter of 'communist honour'. Once the Soviets agreed to omit specific names from the final draft, all of the Czechoslovak representatives put their names to the protocol, with the exception of

[115] A KV ČSFR, R18 [KV ČSFR interview with Černík, 16 February 1990].

[116] Benčík and Kural, 'Moskevský protokol – třetí diktát Československu', *Právo lidu*, 10 December 1991.

[117] The following details are from A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, zahr. kor. [uncatalogued; transcript of the 26 August 1968 meeting in the Kremlin].

Kriegel, who refused to cooperate and was confined to a room in the Kremlin.

The articles of the secret covenant contained little that was new: they simply enshrined the Soviets' minimum expectation of normalization and bound the Czechoslovak leaders to its pursuit. Moreover, the Czechoslovak representatives disputed very little of the protocol's contents, as they had been planning to carry out similar measures before the invasion. The protocol did not mention counter-revolution and did not specifically prohibit a party congress once things settled down, nor did it outlaw the reform course as a whole. There were even some grounds for optimism on the part of the reformers: Indra, Kolder, and Biĺak had played their hand and had displeased Moscow. Most important, it appeared that the country would be spared the miseries that had followed the German occupation, since the party-state leadership would remain essentially intact, minus only its bolder members such as Císař, Kriegel, Šik, and Pavel, whom the main circle of reformers was probably glad to discard. As they prepared to return to Prague, the exhausted Czechoslovak leaders could at least promise that normalization would have a human face.

6 Dubček's normalization

August 1968 was only the half-way point in Dubček's sixteen months at the helm of the CPCS. The second half of that tenure, though not graced by the optimism and exuberance of the spring and summer, saw the beginning of true free play among social groups, and confronted politicians with the gritty reality of ruling. As Prečan notes, the period from the invasion to Dubček's resignation in April 1969 marked the greatest liberty experienced in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989.[1] It was also a period absolutely essential for breaking resistance to the loss of that liberty.

Dubček's strategy in many ways resembled that of Gomułka on his return to power in October 1956, in that the party, having acquired (thanks to the invasion) the new authority that the reforms were intended to build, used its moral capital to lower expectations, trade off some gains on promise of future rewards, and persuade the majority to demobilize. This chapter will show how liberalizers, in the belief that they were salvaging the reform course, unintentionally facilitated the restoration of authoritarian rule by providing powerful incentives for public self-restraint. Citizens were asked not to exercise the very freedoms that liberalization had extended, and without which liberalization was meaningless. At all times, it was stressed that this suspension was purely temporary, until foreign soldiers had departed.

As before August, most people did comply, and many were plunged into despair once it became clear that the Dubček leadership was not in fact able to arrange the withdrawal of all occupying forces. That failure, however, prompted a minority of citizens to resume the direct action begun in August, which in turn made liberalizers' centrist position untenable and encouraged the 'realist' ascendancy within the reform coalition in early 1969 that culminated in Dubček's downfall.

Czechoslovakia's leaders returned to Prague in the early hours of 27 August. That evening the members of the pre-invasion Presidium con-

[1] Prečan, 'Lid, veřejnost, občanská společnost jako aktér Pražského jara, 1968', p. 19.

vened deep inside the Castle to lay down policy for the weeks ahead, while implementing the measures planned before the invasion and enshrined in the Moscow Protocol. It was to be primarily a herasthetic exercise: party leaders had already decided in Moscow that they had to inculcate in the citizenry what Dubček called a 'correct understanding of political reality' so that the country could settle down, foreign troops could leave, and reforms could continue. At the same time they had to continue to deserve the deep trust placed in them by the public, since any weakening of unity would lead to open conflict, which in turn would invite Soviet interference and total occupation. For this end the Presidium had to persuade the public, the media, and the party to comply.

Facing the public

Returning leaders were greeted by an anxious yet triumphant public. The preceding week's dignified campaign of non-violent resistance had given citizens the impression that they had won. Admittedly, the general strikes called by the trade unions were very brief in order not to damage the economy, and most people participated in the resistance by signing petitions and attending meetings, which the invading armies could have easily crushed had the Indra–Biľak group seized power. Mass disobedience, however, did create a powerful feeling of total inclusion in political life: each citizen had the precious opportunity to play a part, no matter how small, in the fate of the country. Even the most marginalized citizens, hardened criminals, publicly renounced their activities for the sake of unity.[2]

Normalization, therefore, meant not only carrying out the Moscow Protocol but also restoring normal political life, i.e. indirect, oligarchic governance. To achieve this without coercion would require a feat of persuasion. As after Čierná, it was Dubček's avuncular charisma that carried the day. The first public statements – an official communiqué out of Moscow, followed by Svoboda's radio address, broadcast on 27 August at 2:40 and 2:50 p.m. respectively – caused widespread disbelief and outrage. The communiqué insisted on fulfilment of the Čierná and Bratislava agreements (the contents of which were still a mystery) and reported that foreign troops would remain in Czechoslovakia for some time. The president's brief, flippant message paid homage to those who had died, but conspicuously avoided any condemnation of the invasion and disclosed that the foreign armies would only leave gradually once all was calm. The public's response was described in a memorandum from the party's information department:

[2] BBC SWB, EE/2871, 12 September 1968.

After the announcement of the communiqué the initial reaction of party organs, mass membership, and the general public alike was strongly negative. The talks in Moscow were characterized as outright capitulation. The speech by the president of the republic, comrade Svoboda, evoked disappointment in the communist ranks.[3]

Directly after his speech, the Prague city party committee, the North Moravian and West Bohemian regional committees, and all their subordinate district committees officially rejected the results of the Moscow talks, as did several of the highest party committees in the armed forces, while 40,000 employees at the vital Škoda Plzeň works demanded a referendum on them.[4]

Although in poor health, Dubček responded over the radio later that afternoon by offering the people a deal: in return for their good behaviour and cooperation, he and the other leaders would arrange the withdrawal of foreign soldiers as soon as possible and continue the basic reform course. 'We truly need order', he pleaded, since 'the sooner we succeed in normalizing conditions in the country and the greater support you give us, the sooner we shall be able to take further steps along our post-January road.'[5] State sovereignty (or rather, the illusion of it) would be restored, but only if citizens temporarily surrendered their civil and political rights. What made Dubček's speech so effective, however, was the manner in which he spoke: his halting, eggshell voice, minute-long pauses, and sobs conveyed a sense of his own physical and emotional ordeal during the past week, and convinced listeners that he shared their anger and grief. Some protests continued – including a throng several thousand strong outside the National Assembly demanding that the Moscow agreements be rejected – but the information department noted that

The situation essentially changed after the speech by the first secretary of the CPCS C[entral] C[ommittee], comrade Dubček, whose speech had above all an emotional impact. The hard results of the talks were understood as irreversible reality, from which things have to ensue. Comrade Dubček's speech convinced [listeners] that things are very serious and that the delegation's approach was to the highest possible measure honest and responsible. The organs which before his speech had adopted negative resolutions began to change their standpoints.[6]

Compared to Gorbachev's rather brusque manner on returning from captivity twenty-three years later, Dubček's broken humility was highly effective.

[3] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4741.

[4] In addition, in Central Bohemia the important Kladno district party committee and eighty-four factory and local cells passed resolutions denouncing the communiqué, while the Mělník district committee soon received 167 similar statements. In Kolin 22,000 people signed a petition defending the Vysočany congress, and a similar petition began in Prague. See Jan Moravec, *Sedmý den nebyla neděle* (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1990), p. 277.

[5] BBC SWB, EE/2860, 29 August 1968.

[6] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4741.

The persuasion campaign of the next fortnight, with popular leaders bombarding the public with pleas and threats, debunked the illusion of victory and made the restoration of normal politics relatively easy. An opinion poll in mid-September asked respondents what they would tell President Svoboda about the Moscow agreement if they had the chance: 85.2 per cent replied that they would thank him or express approval and support, and only 9.4 per cent would voice any doubts or disappointment.[7] Compliance, however, was not unconditional: the public expected that, in return, the leaders would keep them fully informed of developments and arrange the departure of foreign soldiers.[8]

Facing the media

Among the most daunting tasks was the reintroduction of censorship, but here too the country's leaders benefited from the new general willingness to cooperate. By agreement of the publishers no newspapers were issued on 28 August, to allow for a day of reflection in central editorial offices.[9] *Literární listy* and the even more outspoken *Student* were halted by their own staffs. Radio and television headquarters were occupied by the Soviets well into the first week of September, and when they were vacated editors found their offices and studios ransacked, with even personal belongings and stationery stolen. In the central television studio, taps were left running in lavatories, with the water seeping through the walls to flood the Central Bank next door. After demolishing the toilets, the soldiers defecated and urinated wherever the need struck them.[10]

Meanwhile, government ministers, in particular Vice-Premier František Hamouz, consulted repeatedly with leading editors to guarantee that the restrictions about to be introduced would be received as purely temporary and vital for troop withdrawal.[11] Radio commentators were soon explaining the consent behind this new censorship:

> The replacement of anger and protest with matter-of-fact realism in our reporting came about voluntarily, spontaneously, after Czechoslovakia's leaders . . .

[7] Jaroslaw Piekalkiewicz, *Public Opinion Polling in Czechoslovakia, 1968–1969* (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 260.

[8] The same poll found that 27.9 per cent (the largest single response) considered full information the main prerequisite for maintaining post-invasion unity. Two-thirds were confident that unity would endure. See ibid., pp. 66, 68.

[9] BBC SWB EE/2860, 29 August 1968.

[10] A PV ČSSR, fond F. Hamouz [uncatalogued].

[11] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; analysis of radio by deputy director Běhal, 2 February 1970]; *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 31. srpna 1968* (Prague: n.p., 1968), p. 7. Smrkovský told Soviet commander Ogarkov on 30 August that 'an agreement was reached whereby journalists will work according to the intentions of the government and party leadership'. See A PV ČSSR, fond F. Hamouz [uncatalogued].

returned from Moscow. They explained to the population and thus to us journalists too the harsh reality of our situation, the tragedy of a small nation living in the strategically exposed heart of Europe.[12]

Another journalist announced:

In the past few days we have formed the opinion that in the interest of the normalization of our life, in the interest of the departure of foreign troops, in the interest of our continuation along the post-January path, we shall have to swallow certain things, not open our mouths too wide, dilute the printer's ink, and muffle the microphone so that our uninvited guests may, at least formally, get out of the mess which they have caused by the occupation of Czechoslovakia with the least possible loss of face.[13]

This remarkable willingness to cooperate, however, was conditional: in return, party leaders would have to produce substantial results in a relatively short time. The presidium of the Union of Journalists consented to the creation of a new censorship office, but on the condition that it last for only three months.[14]

Facing the party

The returning leaders had to resolve immediately the problem of the Vysočany congress. The secret gathering had prevented a breakdown of the party similar to that which had occurred in Hungary in 1956 by electing a new Central Committee and Presidium and placing the party apparatus under Martin Vaculík. By 25 August these new bodies had been recognized by the trade unions, parliament, government, and the People's Militia as the legitimate party organs.[15] With the return of the old Presidium from Moscow there was thus a danger of two party centres arising.

The dirty job of persuading the Vysočany congress organizers that their work could not be honoured fell to Bohumil Šimon, head of the Prague municipal party organization. To refute accusations that the Moscow Protocol amounted to a capitulation worse than Munich, he promised that members of the new Central Committee and Presidium would be co-opted into the old, to be followed in a few months by the party congress and gradual troop withdrawal.[16] Yet it was only when Smrkovský appeared, promising that something could still be salvaged, that the champions of Vysočany conceded.[17]

12 BBC SWB, EE/2864, 4 September 1968. See also EE/2863, 3 September 1968.
13 BBC SWB, EE/2864, 4 September 1968.
14 Ibid. 15 BBC SWB, EE/2859, 28 August 1968.
16 Moravec, *Sedmý den nebyla neděle*, pp. 251–60.
17 A KV ČSFR, R131 [KV ČSFR interview with Karel Kaplan, 1 March 1991]; Karel Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní*, p. 271.

With the new centre neutralized, party leaders turned to persuading the old. In the early afternoon of 31 August the Central Committee assembled in Prague Castle. In his address Dubček immediately tried to circumscribe the day's debate by stating that 'the basic factor which today determines all aspects of our political situation is the occupation of our territory of our republic by the armies of five states of the Warsaw Pact. The question of when and under which conditions these forces will gradually leave the territory of our republic is the basic question to which the attention of our whole people is turned today.'[18] Dubček wanted his audience to accept that there was no alternative but to obey the Moscow agreements, as this would allow the country to continue the reform course. It was thus not the plenum's task to debate the reasons for the Soviet decision to invade.

To indulge curiosity, however, Dubček (and later Černík) did confess one mistake: overlooking the international context of the reforms. Such introspection, he said, was compounded by Moscow's loss of trust in Czechoslovak leaders, which had to be restored lest the Soviets resort to a 'catastrophic variant solution' instead of pulling out their troops. To create the necessary 'consolidated' conditions, Dubček called on all branches of the party and state to obey whatever top organs decreed, and he demanded order, responsibility, and heightened economic discipline to prevent 'serious social conflicts'.

After Dubček the podium was given to President Svoboda, not a member of the Central Committee, who delivered a characteristic oration of messianic paternalism. Smrkovský followed by reading out the fifteen articles of the Moscow Protocol, after which proceedings halted to allow members to digest and approve the extensive personnel changes that the Presidium had finalized earlier that day.[19] In keeping with the protocol, the more radical reformers had to leave the commanding heights, and most of them went readily in the hope that self-sacrifice would allow the reforms to continue. Kriegel had asked to be relieved from the Presidium and as National Front chairman, to be replaced by his deputy, Evžen Erban; Císař was to leave his position as a Central Committee secretary but remain chairman of the Czech parliament; Interior Minister Pavel had resigned the previous day. In coming days Šik, who had been in Belgrade at the time of the invasion and had been ordered by the Czechoslovak government to remain there, was removed *in absentia* from the post of vice-premier on 3 September. When Foreign Minister Jiří

[18] *Zasedání ústředniho výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 31. srpna 1968*, p. 1. Unless otherwise noted, all details of the plenum are from this transcript.

[19] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 124.

Hájek returned to Prague on 6 September, Svoboda, Dubček, and Černík made it clear that he would have to resign. Like the others, Hájek actually welcomed the chance to leave the limelight, and on 19 September Černík formally assumed his portfolio.[20]

At the same time, however, most of those associated with the invasion conspiracy also fell. Since the protocol forbade retribution against the pro-Soviet faction, their elimination had to be handled adeptly. The Presidium assigned Dubček to 'ask those members of the Presidium who believe that they cannot help the party at the present time to resign', to be replaced by members elected at the Vysočany congress.[21] Several managed to keep a foot in the door: Indra (whom Svoboda defended as a 'solid worker')[22] remained a Central Committee secretary even though he was still in Moscow, reportedly hospitalized.[23] Biľak had lost his position as head of the Slovak party, but it was agreed that he would remain in the Presidium and that his successor, Husák, would give him a 'leading function in the Slovak national organs'.[24] No such function materialized, and Biľak retreated to brood in the Tatra mountains. Soon bored, he barged into Dubček's Prague villa and refused to leave until granted the post of Central Committee secretary for international relations. He took command of the department in late September, to the open disgust of its staff.[25]

Others, however, realized that they had absolutely no authority and decided to retreat until circumstances turned in their favour. Kolder had utterly degenerated during the invasion week: although officially left in charge of the party apparatus after 23 August, he locked himself in his office, ranting obscenities about the miners of northern Moravia who had already sued to have him recalled as their member of parliament.[26] When he was summoned to report to Štrougal's rump government on 26 August he was so drunk and 'morally devastated' that he could do nothing other than utter a few incoherent remarks and stumble out.[27] When the abducted leaders returned from Moscow, he 'admitted that it would be hard for him to continue to work in the Presidium',[28] and it was

[20] A KV ČSFR, R94 [KV ČSFR interview with Hájek, 7 July 1990].
[21] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 122.
[22] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 575, ll. 370–7).
[23] This may have been true since he was already showing signs of physical and nervous problems in the Soviet embassy on 22 August. See A KV ČSFR, R151 [KV ČSFR interview with Mlynář, 9 August 1990]. Indra returned to Czechoslovakia on 28 September.
[24] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 121. [25] Biľak, *Paměti*, vol. II, pp. 152–6.
[26] A KV ČSFR, R151 [KV ČSFR interview with Mlynář, 9 August 1990 – interjection by Slavík]. By 28 August, 34,000 people had signed a petition to recall him. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 21, a.j. 206. [27] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 21.
[28] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1679 [Černík to Soviets, 10 September 1968]).

agreed to dispatch him abroad as economic counsel to the Czechoslovak embassy in Sofia. Švestka surrendered his untenable place at *Rudé právo*, so the Presidium promised him the editorship of *tribuna* [*sic*], the party's new weekly. Kapek had fled to his dacha on 21 August and was expelled from the Presidium because no one was able to contact him.[29] Rigo was released from the Presidium at his own request.

Dubček had reported this news to Brezhnev on 29 August, who later complained to Svoboda that Dubček 'started to ramble, he spoke ambivalently and incomprehensibly, just what is he thinking of doing?' According to Brezhnev, the Soviets regarded the personnel aspect of the protocol to be the most important: strict adherence to the agreement in this area was 'a test of the conscientious fulfilment of the signed protocol', while the removal of men like Kolder and Švestka represented 'to a certain extent' a violation of it.[30] At this point, however, the Soviets could only register their discontent.

Having read through these proposed changes, most of the speakers expressed agreement with Dubček. The two deviants of note, representing antipolar views, were General Otakar Rytíř and Jaroslav Šabata; the former insisted on blaming the invasion on the 'rightists' and the Dubček leadership for its failure to uphold the Čierná agreements, while the latter declared that true normalization depended not on implementing the protocol but on the departure of foreign troops. Although Šabata's bold speech elicited applause, indicating considerable sympathy in the audience, he was isolated in his defiance. Věněk Šilhán, chosen at Vysočany to be acting first secretary in Dubček's absence, reluctantly announced his support for the Presidium's approach, warning that petty feuding would only permit 'others' to exploit the situation. Dubček and Šilhán had deliberated alone several times beginning on the morning of the 27th, and the burly economist's cooperation was essential for bringing others around.

After one speaker, a working-class congress delegate, warned the Central Committee that they risked losing the new trust of the masses if they did not reconvene the congress before the end of October, Svoboda

[29] A KV ČSFR, R151 [KV ČSFR interview with Mlynář, 9 August 1990]. Among others implicated in the conspiracy, Karel Hoffmann could not be reinstated as head of communications as he too was in hiding, but he was given a similar post in the new federal cabinet in 1969. Černík tried to retain Pavlovský as internal trade minister but employees refused to work under him, so in November he was dispatched as ambassador to Finland. See A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 575, ll. 370–7) and ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1679 [Černík to Soviet leaders, 10 September 1968]; A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P5006.

[30] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, 'Zapis' besedy tov. Brezhnev L. I. s tov. Svobodoi L. I., BCh Moskva–Praga 31. VII. 1968 g. 20 chasov').

again took the floor. In the time since his first remarks he had been telephoned by Brezhnev, who was anxiously awaiting news of the plenum. When Svoboda confirmed that the Presidium had decided to remove several pro-Moscow members, Brezhnev denounced this move as a violation of the protocol, and firmly advised them to refrain from fixing a date for the congress.[31] With this reprimand fresh in his memory, Svoboda moved to snuff out all opposition to the protocol. He recounted all his efforts in August to prevent bloodshed and insisted that the outcome of the Moscow talks was not collaboration but a 'friendly agreement'. His paternal rebuke paid off: he was applauded and subsequent speakers guarded their tongues.

The most remarkable speech of the plenum, however, came from Husák. The new Slovak leader, giving his first speech to the Central Committee in almost twenty years, from the very beginning set himself apart from the incumbent leadership and defined his own agenda as a messianic yet pragmatic man of power. In a possible jab at Dubček, he said that the duty of a politician was not to cry with the nation in its hour of darkness, as any poet could do that. Instead, a leader's role was to assume responsibility, tell the people the raw, hard truth, and 'give them hope for life'. He declared that the party could not return to the Stalinism that General Rytíř seemed to prefer, because 'whoever rules by the bayonet ends by the bayonet'. He then denounced the populism that he accused Šabata of voicing, because Husák felt that a Leninist should have no wish to 'go with the people', 'For if there is a concept of "leadership", I think it is from "to lead" [*vést*] and not from "to ride on the tail" [*vézt se na chvostě*] of current moods.' Finally, Husák predicted that the current unity within and between the party and society would eventually yield to differentiation, so with struggle against 'anti-socialists' and dogmatists inevitable, firm leadership was essential. The applause that punctuated his speech several times and on its conclusion shows that he had struck a chord.

In a secret-ballot vote, Dubček, Husák, and Svoboda were elected unanimously to a new, massively enlarged Presidium; the twenty other candidates received near-unanimous or clear-majority votes. Of the twenty-one full (voting) members, only Bil'ak had actively collaborated with the invasion.[32] By a show of hands (a violation of the party statutes),

[31] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, 'Zapis' besedy tov. Brezhnev L. I. s tov. Svobodoi L. I., BCh Moskva–Praga 31. VII. 1968 g. 20 chasov').

[32] Piller and Lenárt, who flip-flopped several times during the invasion week, were also elected. From the old Presidium Černík, Smrkovský, Špaček, Husák, and Šimon (hitherto a candidate member) were re-elected, while Erban, Mlynář, Sádovský, and Slavík, all of whom already worked in the Secretariat, were also added. Those chosen from the

eighty congress delegates, pre-selected by regional party committees, were co-opted into the Central Committee, swelling the total membership to 191. Though they included such luminaries as Svoboda, Husák, Mlynář, Dzúr, Karel Kosík, Milan Hübl, and trade-union chairman Poláček, the majority of these new members were politically inexperienced and, as the ensuing months showed, were unable to act effectively as a coherent bloc to defend the reform course.[33] While such a large influx could have bolstered the reformist faction, it also dissipated pressure to convene the congress itself: a smaller co-optation, conversely, would have made the congress all the more urgent. The newcomers were easily outmanoeuvred by veterans of political intrigue, and some of them later proved indispensable in Husák's rise to power. One-third of the co-opted members were from Slovakia, and Husák took 'personal responsibility for each one of these people', according to Černík, thus providing the ambitious CPS leader with a built-in faction.[34]

With the plenum over, the leadership launched a month-long campaign of intra-party information. The moderate success of their efforts is shown by an internal party survey conducted in early October which found that the majority of members (65 per cent) accepted the Moscow talks as the 'only possible solution' to the crisis caused by the invasion, although a sizeable group (28 per cent) believed that the delegation should have rejected the agreement and found 'other ways of negotiation'.[35] Almost half of the respondents took a 'rational-sceptical' view of the present, stressing that the overriding concern was to not provoke the foreign troops; 21.7 per cent were firmly confident that eventually the reforms would proceed, while only 12 per cent were pessimistic enough to predict that the Soviet Union would never allow Czechoslovakia to

Presidium elected at Vysočany were Jarolim Hetteš (East Slovak party leader), Libuše Hrdinová (from the ZVIL factory in Plzeň), Vladimír Kabrna (chairman of the party committee at the Tesla plant in Prague), Václav Neubert (chairman of the South Moravian regional national committee), Josef Pinkava (a technician at a large chemical works), Václav Šimeček (a worker and member of the presidium of the South Bohemian party regional committee), Anton Ťažký (party leader in Central Slovakia), and Josef Zrak (a Slovak party secretary). Karel Poláček, the head of the trade unions, became a candidate member, as did Barbírek, demoted from full membership. The reconstructed Secretariat consisted of Dubček, Erban, Kovalčík (former party chairman in North Moravia), Lenárt, Mlynář, Sekera (the new editor of *Rudé právo*), Slavík, and Špaček. See *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 31. srpna 1968*, pp. 17–26. [33] Ostry, *Československý problém*, p. 186.

[34] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1679 [Černík to Soviet leaders, 10 September 1968]).

[35] Veronika Kotulanová and Eliska Novotná, *Výzkum diferenciace politických nazorů komunistů* (Prague: Útvar svodné informace, planů, a řízení ÚV KSČ, 1968), pp. 10–11. Among respondents aged eighteen to thirty, 35 per cent felt that the delegation in Moscow should have held out for a better agreement.

determine its own form of socialism. Notably, the percentage willing to claim that they supported the invasion had risen to 16 per cent (compared with almost zero in August), which foreshadowed the factional struggle lying ahead.[36]

Differentiation begins

To promote that struggle, Moscow was determined to break down the unity of the reformers and resume recruitment of an alternative to Dubček. The Soviet post-invasion propaganda campaign, designed in early September largely by Aleksandr Iakovlev, the future godfather of perestroika, had been tailored to boost the authority of Svoboda and Černík, while undermining Dubček.[37] Iakovlev and his colleagues also encouraged the resumption of personal contacts between Soviet representatives and potentially compliant Czechoslovak leaders. To this end, the Soviet deputy foreign minister, V. V. Kuznetsov, arrived in Prague on 6 September with almost no warning for the hosts.[38] A suave diplomat, Kuznetsov acted not as a *Reichsprotektor*, ominous though his sudden arrival seemed, but rather as an inter-party ambassador. Meetings with him at times turned confrontational, but Czechoslovak leaders came to respect his civility and apparent willingness to put in a good word for Prague.[39]

He met first with Svoboda and protested the exclusion of the pro-Soviet faction from the new Presidium. Svoboda, perhaps detecting that it was Kuznetsov's mission to recruit new leaders, explained the changes and went out of his way to stress Husák as an alternative to Bil'ak and Kolder. The president expressed his intention to elevate Husák to a central party function in Prague, and urged the Soviet envoy to make a

[36] Ibid., pp. 14–15. Overall support for the invasion generally increased according to age group: 21.4 per cent of those aged forty-one to fifty, 19.7 per cent of those aged fifty-one to sixty, and 29.7 per cent of those over sixty-one. Thirty per cent of respondents who joined the party before 1947 welcomed the invasion.

[37] Cherneva, '"Ot raskrytiia arkhivov po 'Prazhskoi vesne' nikuda ne uiti . . ."', p. 107.

[38] Chervonenko had informed Černík and Svoboda of Kuznetsov's arrival only the day before. See A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 88, d. 410, l. 118). In addition to finding out who really stood where, Kuznetsov would later send back dispatches describing the situation in the country, which indicates that the Soviets did not entirely trust Chervonenko's information. It was also his mission, as deputy foreign minister, to ensure that Czechoslovak foreign policy complied with Soviet interests, in particular to prevent discussion of the invasion in the United Nations. See A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1824).

[39] Mlynář reported that in conversation with Kuznetsov the minister 'expressed himself with great understanding', and that he had promised to soften the invading state's vicious propaganda. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, a.j. 126, b. 1, P100.

special trip to Bratislava to meet him.[40] Although already keen on the new Slovak leader, the Soviets were being cautioned by the Hungarians about this relatively unknown figure still tarred by old accusations of 'bourgeois nationalism'. As Kádár told the Hungarian Politburo on 27 August:

> We cannot choose cadres too much among the Czechoslovaks . . . We have insistently asked the Soviet comrades in conversations to be more restrained in this direction. Stormy events are taking place now. People's attitudes change . . . He whom we call good today might be bad tomorrow, he whom we consider bad today could be good tomorrow. Unfortunately such leanings always occur. For example in the middle of the talks they started to praise Husák a lot. They said he is so good in this way and so good in that way. We said: may God bless him, comrades, but he is our close neighbour. He's a regular Slovak nationalist – at least we have known him as such so far. May God keep him if he is good, but none the less we will wait.[41]

Splits within the CPCS Presidium were emerging even without external catalysts. Although Dubček claimed that the new Presidium would be able to meet more often and act more effectively than its predecessor, the inclusion of so many token representatives of key groups (workers, peasants, women, Slovaks) in the spirit of national unity had actually rendered it unworkable. While ostensibly united in their commitment to liberalization, there was a tangible division between those members co-opted from the Vysočany Presidium, most of whom had no prior experience of élite decision-making, and those who had served in the previous Presidium, many of whom were wary of their new colleagues' direct ties to the workforce.

Soon, with Soviet blessing, Dubček, Černík, Husák, Svoboda, and Smrkovský were meeting separately as an informal fivesome (*pětka*) to make policy in private without having to take into account the interests of the new Presidium members. As Černík told the Soviets on 10 September:

> In the conditions of the rather significant expansion of the composition of the CC Presidium we decided that comrades Svoboda, Dubček, Smrkovský, Husák, and Černík will form a group which will decide on a routine basis the practical questions of the life of the party and state. Such kinds of questions will not necessarily be discussed in the Presidium in its full composition.[42]

Černík would later be the driving engine to create a Presidium executive committee and a Czech Party Bureau to exclude and combat the more

[40] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 47 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 124, d. 575, ll. 370–7).
[41] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 20.
[42] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1679). Dubček told the Soviets on 3 October that he, Černík, Husák, Svoboda, and Smrkovský 'always meet to determine basic policy', not just for the Presidium but for the government as well. See A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1824).

radical reformers and preclude any direct working-class influence on Communist Party policy.[43]

Tension between Presidium members was already evident during an important six-hour policy-making session on 6 September. At the outset Špaček, who had assumed the role of second secretary in Indra's absence, submitted a general plan of approach. As he explained, differentiation was already creeping in as people argued over why the Soviets invaded and what the Moscow talks entailed, so to maintain the public's trust it had to be made clear why the protocol was the only solution to the crisis. The standard regulatory measures would be used: all party cells would receive a letter from the Presidium explaining the Moscow talks, while Presidium members and apparatchiki were delegated as special liaisons to the regional apparatus. By controlling information and interpretation, it was hoped, they could prevent conflict.[44]

Špaček's vague plan was accepted easily by the Presidium, which agreed that a tight lid had to be kept on public and intra-party debate. After this Špaček turned to another of his responsibilities, setting a date for the founding congress of the Communist Party of the Czech Lands (CPCL) as part of federalization. Since it would be impossible to convene the Fourteenth Party Congress before 27 October, when the federalization law was to be enacted, Špaček proposed that the CPCL congress meet on 30 September or 14 October to adopt a pro-federalization platform and elect a Czech Central Committee. Husák, in an effort to delay the congress, claimed that he supported the creation of a Czech party but did not consider it a prerequisite for ratifying the federalization law. Smrkovský, on the other hand, very much wanted the CPCL congress to be held in October, as he saw it as a contribution to 'consolidation' as well as national equality. Dubček snubbed Husák and committed Špaček to readying the congress before 28 October, though he did not specify a date.[45]

Černík then submitted his government's proposals for censorship and negotiations with the Soviets. Again, Husák and Smrkovský skirmished. In recent days rumours had begun circulating that intellectuals were to be arrested by Soviet agents; fearing a repetition of the deportations of Hungarians in 1956, thousands were fleeing daily across the open borders. Husák recommended the creation of special interior ministry

[43] In 1970 Černík admitted that he did not trust the new Presidium members who came from 'material production' because they brought with them various moods and 'nationalist passions' from the workplaces. See A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued transcript of Černík's questioning by the Central Control and Review Commission, 16 July 1970]. [44] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 125.

[45] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 125.

units to stop the haemorrhage of qualified young people, while Smrkovský simply urged Černík and Svoboda to use their authority to persuade everyone to stay home. Dubček agreed that guarantees had to be given that there was no danger of arrest by foreign operatives, and Černík saw Kuznetsov's arrival as an opportunity to extract precisely such assurances. Mlynář optimistically predicted that those who had fled would return if suitably assured: 'This isn't emigration, they left because they gave in to fear. Those who stay [abroad], let them stay. If we close the border unrest will arise.'[46] Husák's proposal was again rejected in favour of Smrkovský's, and the two of them put their name to a joint appeal, along with Svoboda, Dubček, and Černík, issued on 11 September. At the meeting's close, Dubček pleaded for unity, which above all meant no leaks to the press about the Presidium's internal differences.

Černík in Moscow

On 7 September Kuznetsov met separately with Dubček and Černík, the latter requesting a one-day audience with Soviet leaders to discuss questions like the CPCL congress; Černík hoped that such a meeting, plus Hamouz's efforts to extract Soviet gas, oil, and grain, would produce something positive to counterbalance all the grim measures about to be put to the National Assembly.[47] The request was relayed to Moscow and three days later Černík was again behind the high Kremlin walls.

As usual Černík dealt with Brezhnev, Kosygin, and Podgornyi in businesslike, if at times obsequious, terms. He justified the Central Committee co-optations, assuring them that he knew half the new members personally and that they wielded real authority: 'None of the rightists entered the C[entral] C[ommittee] composition – neither from the Prague organizations nor from circles of cultural figures . . . it is not some group of writers or other undesirably disposed people.'[48] Černík admitted that he disliked several new Presidium members, singling out Slavík as a 'theoretician detached from life, inclined more towards fantasizing than to practical work'. Because of such people, Černík claimed, the Presidium was weak and indecisive; hence the need for a *pětka* to do the real work.

After outlining proposed restrictions on the media and associations,

[46] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P99/68.
[47] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 48 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 125, d. 576, ll. 1–3).
[48] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no. P1679 ['Zapis' besedy t.t. Brezhneva, Kosygina, i Podgornogo s t.t. Chernikom i F. Gamouzom v Kremle 10 sentiabria 1968 goda']). Unless otherwise noted, all details of this meeting are taken from the Soviet transcript.

Černík moved into the thorny issue of troop withdrawal. As early as 28 August his cabinet had ordered the defence ministry to draw up a plan for temporarily housing at least some of the foreign troops currently on Czechoslovak soil, but Marshal Ogarkov, who was representing the Soviet side in talks with the Czechoslovak military, had proclaimed that some units would winter in Czechoslovakia, and demanded better housing sites.[49] Černík now bluntly told his hosts that there was simply no way to accommodate all the troops currently in Czechoslovakia, but did not oppose some sort of treaty to allow a portion to stay the winter, as it would allow the Soviets to withdraw 90 per cent of their forces. Soviet units were still roaming the streets, causing fatal accidents, harassing, detaining, and raping citizens, and interfering in the work of local government and the media. By 3 September the invading soldiers had killed 72 civilians, severely wounded 266, and lightly wounded 436.[50] Between 3–9 September another ten civilians were killed, the victims of drunken violence or reckless driving by military vehicles. On the very day of Černík's meeting in Moscow a drunken Soviet soldier shot and killed at point-blank range a fourteen-year-old apprentice, Miroslav Beránek, on the Prague street named in honour of Jan Opletal, a student executed by the Nazis. Soviet military authorities refused to allow Czech prosecutors to handle the case, and there is no evidence that the culprit was punished. Even lumberjacks were afraid to go to work because drunken Soviet soldiers encamped in forests often fired at random.

Dubček and Černík were informed of these crimes in great detail, but Černík did not introduce hard facts to support his insistence on Soviet withdrawal. Instead, he invited the Soviets to provide the Czechoslovak interior ministry with any information they might have on 'counter-revolutionary' activities by any Czechoslovak citizen. Expressing a policy very close to Husák's, Černík declared that no one was to be arrested for dissenting views but anyone who broke the law would suffer swift retribution. Černík promised that the new political clubs (now disbanded) and the SDP would be kept under surveillance and 'if they behave themselves properly, we won't touch them. If they renew their work we'll lock them up.' He also asked the Soviets for advice on a group of journalists (mostly Jews, he said) whom the Czechoslovak leaders wanted to send out of the country for five to ten years so as to avoid having to take 'politically undesirable administrative' steps against them; optimally they would be sent abroad as cultural or trade representatives, thus not serving as actual

[49] A PV ČSSR, fond F. Hamouz, č.j. 2/Pv/68.

[50] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 28, a.j. 289, str. 1–12, 23–206. Of those killed in the first fortnight after the invasion, three were children under 15, nine were aged 16 to 18, twenty-seven were between 19 and 30, and twelve were over 61 years old.

diplomats but not becoming embittered émigrés either. Brezhnev supported the idea, saying it would 'clear the air' in the party.

Next, Černík argued the case for convening the CPCL congress to allow the Czech nation to endorse federalization. The congress, he promised, would avoid any debate on the Moscow agreements or 'anti-Soviet propaganda', but he could not guarantee that reliable cadres would be chosen to run the new Czech party. Before speaking to this point, Brezhnev stressed that Czechs and Slovaks had to view the past and present, and understand what was meant by normalization, as the Soviets did. As Brezhnev saw it, to 'normalize the situation means to safeguard the achievements of socialism, to rebuff reaction', whereas for the Czechs and Slovaks it seemed to mean above all to arrange the withdrawal of foreign troops. 'Such a line', Brezhnev complained, 'causes extreme confusion in all of us', and he warned that to continue in it would only delay the withdrawal of forces. He revealed that the Soviet Politburo had concluded that Czechoslovakia was not fulfilling the Moscow agreements because the current 'abnormal situation' was being blamed on the invasion. The masses, he said, had to be oriented correctly and 'for this it is necessary that the C[entral] C[ommittee] and government make it clearly understood that the entrance of forces of the allied countries was a forced measure, provoked by the activity of anti-socialist elements'.

As for the Czech congress, Brezhnev confessed that he simply did not understand why the party had to be federalized, as it would mark an inexplicable departure from the Soviet model and risk an outburst of nationalism. No Russian Communist Party existed, Brezhnev explained, because Lenin foresaw that it 'would wittingly or unwittingly overwhelm the other less prominent parties, which could lead to unhealthy feelings of a nationalist character'. He then hinted that nationalist unrest in Czechoslovakia would be an embarrassment to the entire region and provoke Soviet intervention. As for the Fourteenth Party Congress, Brezhnev declared, it could not take place until 1969 at the earliest.

The Soviets then tried to turn their guest against Dubček. Podgornyi, particularly irritated, asked Černík, 'With hand on heart, do you consider the psychosis which had developed in Czechoslovakia around Dubček's personality to be normal, these constant hysterical cries which you can hear everywhere: "Our Dubček!", "Protect Dubček!", and so on? . . . What is happening now in your country exists in no other party.' Brezhnev added that they were all for each leader enjoying authority, but were against cults. Černík defended Dubček as a modest man immune to delusions of grandeur. Brezhnev interjected that Moscow had once thought the same but now they encountered 'phenomena of a different order'.

As the last point the Soviet leaders responded to Černík's remarks on troop withdrawal. Brezhnev assured him that the Soviets were planning the gradual departure of their forces, first of all from the centres to the peripheries of Prague and Bratislava on the eve of the National Assembly session. He suggested that the Czechoslovak government find a fiscal pretence to disband one or two divisions and then turn over their barracks to the Soviets, who would crowd twice as many soldiers into them. He did not disguise that some units would be staying in Czechoslovakia for 'a rather long time', but promised that they would be camouflaged so effectively that Czechs and Slovaks would not be aware of them.

Undoing liberalization

With the Soviet position clarified, Černík returned to Prague to secure ratification of laws planned before the invasion to legalize control of public life. In its first post-Moscow sessions the Presidium had demanded laws permitting necessary measures to ban 'anti-socialist organizations' and bring the media into line.[51] The cabinet meeting of 27 August, at which Černík announced 'I call for order and responsibility, for discipline', decreed that K-231 and KAN would be banned within five days and the new National Front law would be passed to prevent further such groupings.[52] On 30 August, after the consent of editors and journalists had been won, the government issued decree 292 for the creation of the Office for the Press and Information (OPI) under Josef Vohnout, the former head of the information division at the culture ministry, which would issue guidelines on what the media could not discuss.[53] The government also immediately appointed plenipotentiaries to head self-censoring 'administrative councils' at radio and television, as was planned before the invasion. On 31 August Interior Ministerial Order 51 established joint patrols with the army, with armoured personnel carriers in reserve in case of unrest, and assigned civil defence units to help protect property, political offices, telecommunications, transport, and supply lines.[54]

On 13 September, the National Assembly converted these stop-gap measures into long-term legislation. The public had been softened up by advance details of some of the legislation being debated in parliamentary committees, including the creation of OPI and a government media committee headed by Vice-Premier Colotka.[55] (The creation of the Colotka

[51] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 121, 122. [52] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 121.
[53] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 125. [54] A FMV, fond A/10, č.j. 84.
[55] BBC SWB, EE/2872, 13 September 1968. For Mlynář's eloquent defence of these restrictive measures, see BBC SWB, EE/2871, 12 September 1968.

committee on 12 September came in response to a weakening of the agreement between the government and the media, as detected at a press conference by Hamouz the previous day.)[56] As a palliative, the media carried reports of Soviet troops leaving the centres of the major cities, and of Soviet pledges to increase raw-material supplies.[57]

Without debate or opposition, the parliament adopted a bill establishing OPI and suspending the June amendment to the old press law, and another declaring the National Front as the sole basis of political action.[58] It also adopted a public order law (126/68), which was being drafted before the invasion, authorizing the forceful dispersal of public assemblies, demonstrations, and parades, and dissolution of organizations.[59] The impetus behind the public order law was not so much actual unrest but the need to impress the uninvited guests. The Soviet commander in Prague, General Kluev, was dissatisfied with public order in the capital and had begun usurping command of Czechoslovak army and police patrols. By early September Soviet units had detained at least 172 citizens, almost always for no reason, while there were countless searches of private flats and cars.[60]

Though now much empowered, the government found its work simplified by emigration and the new sense of national unity. The leaders of groups like KAN, K-231, and the SDP had fled abroad, while those who stayed behind voluntarily wound up their activities.[61] The media were on the whole observing the initial instructions issued by OPI at the start of the month, which forbade any discussion of foreign policy, the occupation, and the Soviet troops' presence, departure, or behaviour.[62] Whenever a publication stepped out of line, Deputy Premier Hamouz would call the editor-in-chief and his persuasion usually won short-lived obedience.[63] Radio was rather feebly trying to rally the republic for normalization with programmes focusing on historical anniversaries and

[56] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4791/32.

[57] Simultaneous talks between Hamouz and the Soviets secured badly needed increases in supplies from the USSR: an extra 300,000 tons of grain, 500,000 more tons of oil, plus a long-term agreement on natural gas and iron-ore pellets. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4791/32.

[58] BBC SWB, EE/2875, 17 September 1968. OPI was authorized to prevent publication of any information that violated vital interests, to warn and admonish publishers, to issue fines of up to 50,000 crowns, and to suspend a publication for up to three months.

[59] A FMV, fond A/10, č.j. 84.

[60] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 28, a.j. 289, str. 1–12, 23–206.

[61] A FMV, fond A7, č.j. 377; SÚA, fond ÚV NF 1945–1968, kr.č. 35.

[62] The first instructions appear to have been issued on 3 September and amended on Hamouz's order on 7 September after complaints from Ogarkov about press coverage of the Soviet army's conduct. See A PV ČSSR, fond F. Hamouz, č.j. 20985/68-121 and č.j. 2/Pv/68.

[63] A PV ČSSR, fond F. Hamouz, č.j. 2/Pv/68.

national themes while also expressing good will towards the invading states. Regular broadcasting resumed on 9 September, under tighter guidelines worked out by conservative editors that ruled out any live discussions, any commentary on politics apart from official statements, and any appearance by announcers who lacked 'full political trust'. Editors were to scrutinize all programmes and the long-disused practice of censored relay was revived, whereby a monitor could switch off the microphone if the reader strayed from the text.[64]

Another reason for radio's rather lukewarm efforts was the lack of central leadership. Because of the Soviet occupation and demolition of studios, many programmes had to be planned by editors in flats or cafés. Radio director Hejzlar reluctantly agreed to resign, hoping that if his demotion appeased the Kremlin then someone equally reform-minded could step in.[65] When radio employees learned of this, they threatened to go on strike, so Černík and Hejzlar agreed that he could stay at this post until things calmed down.[66] His dismissal was suddenly announced on 25 September, as was that of television director Pelikán, who had already been sent away on leave. After Hejzlar's removal no official replacement was named for four months, since no one would take the job; one candidate said he knew 300 more pleasant ways to commit suicide.[67]

In addition, it was proving extremely difficult to institutionalize censorship, primarily because no one wanted to do it.[68] OPI was a tiny operation, probably staffed by no more than four people, none of whom was particularly zealous. One conservative radio editor took it upon himself to seek out pre-1968 censors, but found that most were hesitant to return. By December 1968 only five had been persuaded to form an OPI branch, which was apparently the only case of an in-house censor, as the other media reached an understanding with OPI that the editor-in-chief would submit select materials to OPI for prior consultation.[69] Mlynář and Slavík tried to influence the more controversial periodicals,[70] but as before August, much depended simply on the willingness of editors and journalists to cooperate.

The second half of September was taken up with the introduction of new control mechanisms and propaganda to win support for the Moscow Protocol.[71] The work plan adopted by the Presidium on 17 September set out these main tasks:

[64] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Běhal's analysis of radio, 2 February 1970].
[65] A KV ČSFR, R123 [KV ČSFR interview with Hejzlar, 1 October 1990].
[66] A PV ČSSR, fond F. Hamouz, č.j. 2/Pv/68.
[67] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Běhal's analysis of radio, 2 February 1970].
[68] A KV ČSFR, Z/S (ATsK KPSS, *obshchii otdel, pervyi sektor, no.* P1824).
[69] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Běhal's analysis of radio, 2 February 1970].
[70] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 16, a.j. 152–3. [71] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P4789/32.

Increase the people's trust in party policy, acquaint them with existing problems, provide good information to squash rumours, use upcoming anniversaries to unify the people.

Fulfil the Moscow agreements, create conditions for troop withdrawal, and renew sovereignty.

Continue measures to carry out the Action Programme, 'oppose feelings of powerlessness and stasis', and focus on normal political and economic work.

Continue to prepare the party congress.

Hamstrung, however, by unresolved issues like the CPCL congress, the Presidium was falling into its old habit of simply not meeting, presumably leaving the day-to-day tasks to the *pětka*. The Central Committee's apparatus was stymied by uncertainty over who (if anyone) would serve in the new Czech party and by rumours that Špaček, as deputy party leader, was planning to purge all incompetent and overtly pro-Soviet functionaries.

Another ominous trend, of which the first signals came from Ostrava in early September, was the formation of small groups mostly of working-class, pre-war party members who had never supported the reforms. Encouraged by the Soviet press, they held rallies of up to 500 people and circulated pamphlets maliciously defaming reformers. Although probably not so effective that they represented a serious alternative to the Dubček coalition (many of them suffered from age- and drinking-related illnesses), they were in close contact with Biľak and Kapek, helped to dent the image of monolithic party unity, and would later be reliable foot-soldiers in the 1970 purge.[72]

Černík briefed the Presidium on 17 September about his trip to Moscow, and Dubček informed them of a telephone conversation he had with Brezhnev a week before, during which the Soviet leader had forbidden the Czech congress.[73] Dubček, after consulting with Černík, Špaček, and Mlynář, proposed to the Presidium the creation of a political bureau for the Czech lands until the founding congress could be convened.[74] Another summit would have to be held in Moscow to get Soviet consent, and the Central Committee would have to be convened in October to ratify it.

[72] Karel Jiřík, 'Události let 1967–1970 v Ostravě', unpublished study (Ostrava, 1991), pp. 84–92; A PV ČSSR, fond O. Černík, 'Zpráva o schúzi v libenské Čechii'; A KV ČSFR, R1 [KV ČSFR interview with Štrougal, 23 May 1991]; author's interview with Černík, 24 April 1992. [73] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, a.j. 126, b. 1, P100.

[74] This is according to Dubček's remarks to the following Presidium session on 2 October, when he referred back to this meeting on 17 September. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4840. Notes from the earlier meeting quote him as saying only that he and Černík would have to go to Moscow to inform Soviet leaders of federalization plans. Kosygin had mentioned to Černík in September that there once existed a special bureau for the party in Russia; this may have inspired the creation of a similar Czech bureau.

Such a plenum, however, would also require a substantial policy document to guide the party and satisfy demands for details about the past and future, so in mid-September Dubček's Secretariat began churning out 'The Main Tasks of the Party at the Present Time'. The 21-page draft read like a Christmas list, trying to balance reformist wishes with normalization priorities. It strictly avoided any analysis of events since January, stressing instead continuation of the main goals of the Action Programme while distancing the reforms from radical and conservative extremes alike. Though promising to prepare the CPCS and the CPCL congresses, the document stressed the need for unity, democratic centralism, a stronger police and StB, reconciliation with the invaders, and greater attention to the working class. It heralded an ideological offensive against bourgeois, 'anti-socialist' thought, and insisted that the state media must be run 'so that they explain and defend the political line *of the party* [my emphasis]'.[75]

When the Presidium met on 2 October (for the first time in a fortnight) to debate the draft, Dubček also requested Presidium authorization for himself, Černík, and Husák to go to Moscow to discuss a possible Czech bureau. Mlynář, seeing the upcoming plenum as analogous to the May session that had vigorously condemned 'rightism', liked the draft but recommended that it include at least some analysis of the year's trends, as it could pinpoint where the Action Programme had been 'distorted' while countering Soviet criticisms.[76] Smrkovský similarly accepted the draft, but a Czech bureau, in his opinion, was no substitute for the congress.

The harshest criticism of the draft, predictably, came from Husák. He mocked his colleagues' reluctance to probe the roots of the crisis, to speak clearly on the issues, and to provide a way out of the 'complex situation'. Dismissing illusions of unity in the party, he told them to wake up to the differentiation that was occurring. He demanded to know who was 'for us' and who was against, especially in the media, and called for discipline, order, and a 'party-army'. In the end the Presidium decided to convene the plenum in ten to fifteen days, assigned several Secretariat members to rewrite the draft resolution, and authorized Dubček, Černík, and Husák to fly to Moscow the next day.

The October summit

Dubček and Svoboda had been pressing the Soviets for a new summit since 21 September, probably acting on a decision made by the *pětka* at the Brno fair the previous day.[77] Before the Soviets agreed to it, however,

[75] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P4840/32. [76] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4840.
[77] BBC SWB, EE/2880, 23 September 1968; A KV ČSFR, Z/M 24.

they convened a strictly secret consultative meeting of the five invading states, which was held in Moscow on 27 September.[78] Brezhnev opened the session by declaring the August invasion a successful blow to 'counter-revolution' but deplored the generally negative direction of subsequent events. He suspected that Czechoslovak leaders were trying to fulfil the protocol only formally, while avoiding differentiation. Though this behaviour aroused the Politburo's distrust, Brezhnev said the Soviets would accept 'political reality' and deal with the current leadership. He also reported that the Soviets planned to keep five divisions (70,000–75,000 soldiers) in Czechoslovakia. A treaty on the temporary stationing of these units was to be signed in October by Černík and Dubček, in a deliberate effort to compromise the latter. Finally, Brezhnev proposed that the five parties coordinate and improve their propaganda against Czechoslovakia, as word had filtered back from anti-reformists that the current campaign was weak and counterproductive.

Gomułka was more pessimistic than Brezhnev, complaining that counter-revolutionary forces were still running amok and that more drastic measures had to be introduced to undermine the CPCS leaders. Kádár agreed that Czechoslovak unity had to be broken and differentiation induced, but that it was up to Czechs and Slovaks to speak out 'in the interest of a healthy purification'. Kádár also questioned the wisdom of forcing Dubček to sign a troop treaty. Ulbricht gloomily announced that the only positive outcome of Operation Danube was that it 'weakens West German imperialism, it blocks the new *Ostpolitik*'. Zhivkov feared that Husák would be the victim of a campaign directed by those 'nationalists and revisionists' Dubček and Černík.

The six-hour meeting concluded with the agreement that Brezhnev would invite Dubček, Černík, Husák, and Štrougal (already tipped to lead the Czech party) to come to Moscow on 3 October. Somewhere along the way Štrougal was excluded, as was Mlynář, who helped prepare the meeting and was to join the delegation.[79] The summit, which lasted two days, was one long harangue, behind which the Soviets had two particular aims: to get Dubček publicly to accept and justify the Soviet-led invasion, and to get other Czechoslovak leaders to turn against him. On the one hand they hoped his enormous popularity would get the Czechoslovak public (and the world) to relax their criticism of Moscow, while on the other hand they wanted to undermine Dubček by making him contradict and compromise himself, so that he could eventually be replaced.

[78] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 24. My account, unless otherwise noted, is based on this report to the Hungarian Politburo.

[79] A KV ČSFR, R151 [KV ČSFR interview with Mlynář, 9 August 1990].

When the two sides assembled on 3 October, Brezhnev welcomed his guests by announcing that he and Dubček had already established ground rules over the telephone: no questions were to be off-limits and if necessary they could take two days.[80] Brezhnev then reviewed the summits held since December 1967 and conceded that perhaps there had simply been a few 'misunderstandings' which could now be rectified, provided that the Czechoslovak side clearly stated its position, implying again that it was their ambiguity that was the source of the problem. He reprimanded his guests for never implementing what they had promised at previous summits; this time, he hoped, they would have 'the most honest course of talks', which would lead to greater 'trust, respect, [and] mutual understanding'. Brezhnev menacingly hinted that any Czechoslovak attempt at deception would be detected, but, to evoke sympathy, implied that he had to answer to others in his party, and invoked ancient ties of Slavdom. With this overture Brezhnev was inviting Dubček to redeem himself by acknowledging that the USSR had not erred in invading its tiny neighbour.

Dubček responded in Russian, and instead of explicit self-criticism he produced an earnest yet vague defence of the reforms. He reported that after returning from Moscow the CPCS leaders had implemented the protocol and Bratislava declaration, strove as ever to strengthen socialism, and combated the 'anti-socialist' tendencies 'that have accompanied our post-January course like parasites'. He insisted that throughout 1968 there had been no danger to the communist 'leading role', as there was no intention to admit new parties to the National Front. He stressed their fidelity to the WTO and CMEA, their firm stance against West German 'militarist tendencies', and their strict opposition to unfettered market and to private ownership on any scale, including that permitted in the GDR and Poland. Having thus reduced the reform programme to an innocuous minimum, Dubček admitted that they had still not entirely regained control of the media, although the *pětka* had drawn up plans for stricter censorship.

Irritated, Brezhnev interrupted to castigate Dubček for again not defining what the CPCS meant by its liberalization. Dubček adamantly denied ever using the word, but Brezhnev ignored him, launching into his customary practice of dredging up specific cases of heresy. Accusing CPCS leaders of the Khrushchevite sin of inconsistency, he urged them to do two things in particular: (1) renounce the Action Programme and (2)

[80] A KV ČSFR, Z/S, 'Stenogramma peregovorov delegatsii KPSS s delegatsiei KPCh', 3–4 October 1968. Unless otherwise noted, all details of the meeting are from this transcript. Present for the Soviets were Brezhnev, Kosygin, Podgornyi, K. F. Katushev, K. V. Rusakov; for the Czechs and Slovaks, Dubček, Černík, Husák, J. Šedivý.

undertake a public, self-critical analysis of events, which was a clear attempt again to get them to agree openly with the Soviet view and thereby relieve Moscow of international opprobrium for the invasion.

Whereas Brezhnev alternated between vulgar joviality and dark threats, Kosygin was categorical in his criticism. He reminded Dubček that the Soviet leaders read all of his speeches and found that so far he simply produced 'attempts at harmonizing, attempts to find a compromise' rather than a determined campaign to enact the protocol. He looked straight at Dubček and declared, 'You bear such enormous responsibility, which no one else in Czechoslovakia bears, regardless of any collective leadership, because the party has put great trust in you.'

Černík, speaking in Czech, tried a more plausible defence of the reforms, asking the Soviets 'to understand . . . that the essence of the post-January policy consists in the search for a way out of . . . the deep social crisis' that had begun well before 1968. To placate his hosts, he agreed that the thesis of class *rapprochement* was wrong in an era of international class struggle, that the Presidium never overcame its internal divisions, and that the elimination of censorship had been a 'big mistake'. He pledged that they would now strengthen the leading role and provide a deep analysis of the pre-and post-January period to explain why the invasion occurred. Such an analysis would induce differentiation in the party and its leadership, and in the media, which, Černík claimed, was now a part of the policy line decided by the *pětka* and the full Presidium. Popular slogans like 'democratic, humane socialism' and 'socialism with a human face' would be suppressed, since the only socialism was the Marxist-Leninist sort, and 'there can be no other'. Though tougher and less Sovietophilic than Dubček, Černík wanted to improve relations between the two countries, and went to dramatic lengths to display his concern:

> I want to assure you that the leadership of our party and the majority of members of the party, each individual member of the leadership of our party, is willing to sacrifice his life for Czechoslovak–Soviet friendship.

Instead of responding, Brezhnev invited Husák, who had been silent so far, to speak. He replied that he had no special plans, since he agreed that trust between the two countries' leaderships had to be restored and that the CPCS had to carry out a deep analysis of the roots of the crisis. As he saw it, the main flaw was the lack of party control of the media, which allowed the 'rightists' and 'anti-socialists' to terrorize party leaders.

Podgornyi then strove to isolate Dubček from Černík and Husák, praising the latter two for their awareness of the need for trust, for a thorough analysis, and for differentiation. To begin differentiation, however,

they would have to discard people like Smrkovský. Brezhnev agreed, and added Mlynář to the list. Unable to accept that anything could happen spontaneously, he accused the Presidium of organizing pressure actions against pro-Moscow officials. Špaček, he was convinced, had secretly organized the Vysočany congress as part of a grand plan – 'we know everything', Brezhnev insisted.

During this tirade Dubček could barely get a word in, and Černík and Husák made no attempt to defend those whom Brezhnev denounced. The meeting was adjourned at 11 p.m. and resumed twelve hours later on 4 October, with Dubček briefing the Soviets (again, in Russian) on preparations for the next plenum. After promising that the *pětka* would remove all cadres unwilling to fulfil protocol-based policy, Dubček moved into areas needing Soviet approval: the Czech bureau and Soviet troop withdrawal. A basic agreement on troop stationing had been reached on 17 September by Dzúr and Grechko but the final numbers remained undecided.[81] Dubček now announced that Czechoslovakia was willing to house up to 80,000 Soviet soldiers for the winter, though it would require the relocation of 104 Czechoslovak units, affecting 25,900 men and 3,500 families.

Probably in an effort to marginalize and demoralize Dubček, Brezhnev again did not respond to this attempt to negotiate seriously. He diverted attention to trivia, or crudely dismissed points raised by Dubček such as the emergence of Moscow-backed Stalinist groups in Czechoslovakia, claiming that the Soviets knew of no such tendencies. Dubček had also alluded discreetly to the ongoing problem of crimes committed by Soviet soldiers. Between 4 September and 18 October, 240 Czechoslovak citizens were arrested, questioned, and sometimes beaten by Soviet forces; Soviet vehicles caused 160 transport accidents; Soviet soldiers committed eighty-seven recorded thefts and ten muggings; seventeen citizens were killed and at least eight women were raped, often at gunpoint.[82] Brezhnev, however, simply insisted that the behaviour of Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia was exemplary: 'We have no cases of theft, violence, or unjust behaviour towards the population.' Though he was closely informed on these crimes, Dubček did not press the issue nor had he brought any details to support his claims. Instead, Brezhnev recommended that Dubček and Černík write articles praising the Soviet Union and reveal 'the truth', since 'truth, after all, is on our side'.

[81] In initial talks Ogarkov had demanded that 100,000 Soviet soldiers be stationed in Czechoslovakia for the winter, whereas the Czechoslovak side offered to house no more than 80,000. Dzúr also argued that all Soviet soldiers should leave by the end of 1969, to be enshrined in a treaty. Grechko made very specific demands for airfields and garrisons around major cities, including three sites around Prague. See A MNO, sekr. MNO-1968, č.j. 0030119/38. [82] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 28, a.j. 289, str. 1–12, 23–206.

The Soviets then advised strongly against creating any kind of Czech bureau. Dubček and Husák defended it as a valve to release pressure to convene the congress, but Brezhnev again could not understand why the Czechs did not simply play the same role as the Russians, who, he said, did not object to not having their own party. To end this quarrel he asked Kosygin to read aloud the fifteen articles of the Moscow Protocol to allow point-by-point commentary on their fulfilment. After the first two articles Brezhnev intervened to remind his guests that although the term 'counter-revolution' had been omitted, it was still very much of concern to the Soviets and he hoped that the analysis of events to be submitted to the plenum would mention the danger of it. Brezhnev also ordered that the next plenum declare the Vysočany congress entirely invalid and the delegates be stripped of their mandates. After some grumbling the Czechoslovak triumvirate agreed.

After he read the third point of the protocol, about convening the Central Committee, Kosygin added that though some reformers had been removed, the Soviets saw this as only the beginning of a bigger personnel overhaul: 'You should continue this matter, cleanse the party and state of people whose activity does not correspond to the interests of the party and the working class. If such work is not continued then we cannot consider this point [of the protocol] fulfilled.' Černík replied that the Czechoslovak leaders envisioned a process that would take place over time, perhaps years. Kosygin, however, had something more radical in mind: he wanted the CPCS purged down to the district committee level, with clear goals for how the party should look afterwards.

When Kosygin skimmed through article 5 on non-interference, declaring that 'the troops are not interfering. You can say nothing', Dubček begged to differ, but again did not have facts at hand to back up his position. Kosygin shut him off, and Brezhnev turned very emotional before finally addressing the matter of stationing troops: he accepted the numbers proposed by Dubček, and suggested that Kosygin and Černík conclude an agreement (the respective defence ministries had already prepared a text) that would resemble those concluded with Hungary, Poland, and the GDR, with no figures and no deadline for total withdrawal, although Brezhnev lied that 'we will keep our word, in connection with normalization we will pull out our forces in stages'. Černík held out for a treaty specifying numbers and dates, and stating that in spring 1969 the subject would be re-addressed. Kosygin bluntly rejected such a clause, though he accepted the spring review.

The remaining points of the protocol were skipped over as more or less fulfilled or requiring further discussion. Since the talks then continued without a transcriber, we know only that 'cadres' were the main subject. Possibly the choice of Štrougal to head the Czech bureau was resolved in

his favour: he was Černík's man, which perhaps explains the premier's upbeat mood on the delegation's return to Prague in the early hours of 5 October, telling reporters that he was pleased with the talks and depicting the troop treaty as a realistic step towards their departure. By contrast Dubček's sombre and broken expression, captured in profile on the front cover of the magazine *Politika*, revealed the ordeal of the past two days.[83]

Preparations for the next plenum continued, and on 15 October the Presidium debated the revised draft resolution, which like the Action Programme had ballooned in size. The rewrite team had tried to pair it with Dubček's speech in Moscow, although they knew that it would conflict with Soviet demands.[84] It took a stab at analysis of the socio-political crisis, stressing the failure to de-Stalinize after 1956, while attributing the messiness of 1968 to the concessions made to Novotný in January. Like the May plenum, it denounced the two extremes of 'petty-bourgeois liberalism' and 'sectarianism', dwelling on the former. On the whole, however, it portrayed 1968 as positive, omitted any mention of counter-revolution or the Vysočany congress, and upheld the Presidium's 21 August condemnation of the invasion. The party's current tasks were listed as unifying all communists around policy while opposing extremes, strengthening the party's dominance in society, limiting all political activity to the National Front, federalization, and using the media as two-way communication channels between rulers and ruled (unlike the original, this draft said the electronic media were to clarify and defend state rather than party policy).[85]

When he introduced the draft for Presidium discussion, Špaček stressed that the resolution had to define as strictly as possible who was 'anti-socialist' and who 'sectarian' in order to avoid alienating entire groups and arousing fears of arrest. A clear policy line was also essential because the party's lower echelons were increasingly confused and society was yielding to 'passivity, depression, lethargy', all of which gave extremists new opportunities to operate.[86] Biľak, however, was concerned less with current policy than with communicating Soviet demands. He called for a thorough, self-critical analysis of the crisis, condemnation of 'rightists', and renunciation of the thesis of class *rapprochement*. The reformers rebuffed him and focused on the persuading power of the resolution, arguing that it had to be clear and concise, and avoid the mistakes of the Action Programme. Piller drew his colleagues' attention to the growing

[83] *Politika*, 10 October 1968. [84] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103.

[85] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P4883/32. Details of the draft were quickly leaked to the Soviet embassy, which relayed them to Moscow. See ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 269–71 (copy in author's possession).

[86] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103. Unless otherwise noted, all details of this Presidium session are from this transcript.

grass-roots pressure to hold the Czech congress and get the Soviet troops out by the end of the month.

Jakeš, however, counterproposed that they bear Soviet wishes in mind more when making policy, and he welcomed the opportunity to start getting rid of 'certain forces'. Husák, dismissing the draft as too abstract for 'the masses', agreed with Biľak that 'anti-socialist' thinking persisted in people's heads after 1948 and that in 1968 the party, overestimating its own strength, opened the way for such thoughts to express themselves. The enemy, however, was not merely without, but also within:

> Was our party really so ideologically homogeneous that it believed that whoever had a party card was of the same confession? We know how many opportunists got into the party. If someone has worked somewhere, he knows how many people are in the party only formally.

Implying that a purge was needed, he said it was time to produce a document that explained all events since February 1948.

Mlynář, looking for scapegoats, accused the departed Kriegel of having 'sabotaged' Presidium efforts to maintain control in 1968. The Presidium as a whole, he reminded them, had never renounced the idea of 'power and administrative means of direction'. Although he did not want to name names in public, he felt that the resolution should point out that 'counter-revolutionary forces' had their supporters inside the party and that 'it is necessary to draw politically repressive consequences against several representatives. In this case I am not afraid for myself, because in these things I was not liberal.'

Dubček resisted any move towards a deeper analysis of events after January, especially one that would justify the invasion, although he conceded that negative developments existed (he named the SDP resurgence and K-231). He announced that the plenum could not be held until after 7 November because the materials for it could not be ready before then. As it would thus be another month before the centre would speak to its confused ranks, the Presidium decreed that the regional committees should be shown drafts of the resolution and their opinions solicited.[87]

Despite the efforts of Biľak, Jakeš, and Husák, despite the presence of Soviet troops and Stalinist gatherings, the Presidium consciously decided not to obey Soviet demands. Dubček's defiance, however, was weary: when he spoke to factory workers on 11 October he seemed exhausted and had trouble putting sentences together.[88] Lack of information from above had led to rumours that he was about to be removed, which Husák had tried to dispel in a speech in late September.[89]

[87] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P4883/32. [88] *Observer*, 13 October 1968.
[89] BBC SWB, EE/2887, 1 October 1968; *Politika*, 3 October 1968.

Černík travelled to Moscow on 14 October to complete negotiations on the troop-stationing treaty, and returned to Prague two days later along with Kosygin, Kuznetsov, Gromyko, and Grechko for a formal signing.[90] Before the treaty went to the full parliament for ratification, Černík had to persuade the communist faction to accept it. When several deputies protested the nature of the treaty, in particular its lack of a deadline for final Soviet withdrawal, Černík admitted that he had tried to win a better deal but also threatened that rejection of the treaty was tantamount to a vote of no confidence in his government, and the chaos that would ensue would only postpone the very departure of soldiers that everyone wanted. Despite vociferous opposition in the parliamentary committees when the text was submitted for prior approval, the possible ramifications of rejection, and the argument that the treaty would expedite the departure of 90 per cent of Soviet forces, kept deputies in line.[91] When the treaty was put to a vote on 18 October only four deputies (Kriegel, Božena Fuková, Gertruda Sekaninová-Čakrtová, and František Vodsloň) voted against and ten abstained.[92] Another fifty-eight simply did not show up for the vote.[93]

Černík claims today that reformers held out hope that all troops would be out within two years.[94] The very wording of the treaty, however, was close not only to that of the treaty with Hungary in 1957 but also to Voroshilov's pledges from October 1939 that Soviet forces in the Baltic republics would not intervene in internal matters and were there solely to protect those formally sovereign states against German aggression.[95] The political impact of the Soviet military presence was enormous: the 75,000 troops represented an alternative means of violence beyond the control of the party-state, able to intervene in a crisis or be used for a conservative takeover; the permanent presence of Soviet military intelligence meant yet another channel of information back to Moscow. Biľak and Indra wel-

[90] BBC SWB, EE/2901, 17 October 1968, and EE/2902, 18 October 1968.

[91] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 14.–17. listopadu 1968*, part I, p. 86.

[92] Kuznetsov relayed this information back to Moscow in a telegram dated 22 October 1968, mentioning that on the whole the response to the treaty in the Czechoslovak media and public was lukewarm, accepting the stationing as a 'forced' measure while there was still no effort to justify the August invasion. See A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegrams (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 125, d. 578, ll. 307–12).

[93] Alois Svoboda, 'Po pateční ratifikaci', *Politika*, 31 October 1968.

[94] A KV ČSFR, 'Poznámky k úsilí a k práci členů vedení KSČ a čs. státu (příslušníků reformního křídla KSČ) o zachování polednové politické orientace po vojenské intervenci pěti armád států Varšavské smlouvy po srpnu 1968' [notes made by Černík in May 1991], p. 16.

[95] For Voroshilov's orders, see I. N. Venkov, '"Dopustit' razmeshchenie vojsk"...', *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1990, no. 4, pp. 31–9.

comed the treaty as a boon to the 'consolidation of the healthy forces', i.e. themselves.[96] Although Dubček did not have to sign the document (Kádár's advice prevailed), the legalization of the Soviet presence was a terrible blow to his compact with the people: citizens had behaved with the remarkable restraint he had requested, but it had not brought the promised reward.

Leaders had also failed to keep the public well informed: not only could they not outline future policy, the communiqué after the October Moscow talks had vaguely implied that the Czechoslovak leaders would fulfil agreements made at Čierná, Bratislava, and Moscow in August; since the content of those pledges was still a mystery to most Czechs and Slovaks (one poll found that 20 per cent of party members still had not been informed about the protocol talks), the news of the recommitment to their realization was demoralizing.[97] Consequently the majority sunk into despair while a minority concluded that it was time to take to the streets.

The resumption of direct action and the November plenum

Party and state leaders had hoped to use the bevy of approaching anniversaries to inculcate a particular view of the past and the present and sustain hopes for the future. Instead, each key date became a flashpoint for unrest, as they coincided with the resumption of university teaching and the return of thousands of students to the cities. The interior ministry anticipated trouble and issued Order 68 on 21 October to detect and intercept any organization of protests and to bolster protection of WTO installations, monuments, and graves against desecration.[98] Černík claimed in 1970 that in October 1968 he put the army on alert without Dubček's knowledge.[99] The Presidium decided on 15 October to open talks with student leaders to prevent demonstrations during the upcoming anniversaries. This meeting took place six days later when Erban, the new National Front leader, warned the students that any disturbance would have 'serious consequences'.[100] The party leadership, however,

[96] A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 52 (AVP SSSR, f. 059, op. 58, p. 125, d. 578, ll. 307–12).

[97] The poll was taken in North Moravia and reported on 4 November 1968. See BBC SWB, EE/2918, 6 November 1968. The impact of the communiqué was described by one district party secretary on 19 November 1968 as 'having a very hard influence, a very depressing influence, it caused enormous passivity and such depression in our basic organizations'. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, [meeting of district and regional party secretaries, 19 November 1968, remarks by K. Mrazek].

[98] A FMV, fond A/10, č.j. 84.

[99] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Černík's questioning by the Central Control and Review Commission, 16 June 1970].

[100] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P4946.

had left such attempts at persuasion too late for them to have their full effect.

On 28 October, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia, protests erupted in most major cities. In Prague small groups had been marching with no interference by the security forces. In the evening about 4,000 people gathered outside the National Theatre, where Dubček and Svoboda were attending the opera *Libuše*, Smetana's hymn to the Czech nation that concludes with a prophecy of strong leaders protecting the people against foreign invaders. The police tried to persuade the throng to disperse, but in the end resorted to truncheons for the first time in almost exactly a year. When Dubček and Svoboda emerged, the crowd chanted, 'There's been another Strahov, there's been another Strahov!'[101]

On 7 November, the anniversary of the Bolshevik *coup d'état*, small groups roamed Prague pulling down and burning Soviet flags. As the day passed the number of protesters grew to more than 6,000 and they began building barricades near Republic Square. More than 1,800 police officers with truncheons and fire hoses were deployed, but ultimately the army and People's Militia had to send reinforcements. When the dispersed crowd re-assembled on Wenceslas Square the police responded with tear gas. By midnight calm was restored and over 160 had been arrested, mostly workers and students aged fifteen to twenty-five.[102] That day, at the other end of the spectrum, a rally of 5,000 Stalinists was held in a Prague theatre.

The incidents deeply unsettled the Presidium. During its 8 November session, the frazzled Prague party boss, Šimon, argued that leaders now had to muster popular support for the suppression of 'semi-hooligan and yobbish undertakings' both on the streets and in the media.[103] Černík, who now believed that an organized opposition existed, was terrified that student actions planned for 17 November (International Students' Day and the anniversary of the Nazi murder of Jan Opletal), if inflamed by the media, might escalate out of control. The country's leaders, he said, had to make it clear that force would be used against all 'displays of liberalism and moods which instil quiet defiance in people's consciousness'. Left unchecked, he predicted, within two or three months conflict would escalate, departing Soviet forces would return, and they, not Czechoslovak leaders, would impose order.

Biľak and Husák completely agreed with Černík. According to Husák,

[101] Petr Chudozilov, 'Co jsem viděl 28. října 1968', *Listy*, 7 November 1968; BBC SWB, EE/2913, 31 October 1968. Strahov was the neighbourhood of Prague where student marchers beaten in October 1967 lived. Please see p. 56 in this volume for a brief description of the Strahov events. [102] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2262, č.j. M-4487/68.

[103] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P4996.

the very existence of the party was at stake, the state was in disarray, and the cities were becoming 'war zones'. It was thus time to crack down on journalists, whom he accused of inspiring this organized disorder, and uphold everything through power. Pointing to the way in which de Gaulle pacified France, Husák concluded that all this 'liberalism' in Czechoslovakia must cease and the party adopt a 'firm course'. In a summary of his political philosophy, he announced:

> a normal person wants to live quietly, without certain groups turning us into a jungle, and therefore we must appeal to people so that they condemn this. This party wants to safeguard the quiet life. These groups want to terrorize not only the party leadership, but citizens as well. We must keep order in this state with a firm hand.

'Incorrect elements', he said, must be expelled from universities and anyone who would not support a tougher policy would have to leave the party.

As part of pre-plenum suppression measures, the Presidium decided to punish periodicals that had broken the agreement reached at the end of August. In the wake of the October Moscow summit the Presidium had decreed that the media must avoid all polemics with the media of the invaders, despite their unsubstantiated attacks on Czechoslovakia. The weeklies *Reportér* and *Politika*, however, insisted on returning fire. *Politika* also criticized the Presidium through thinly veiled articles, which was doubly embarrassing as the magazine was officially a party publication.[104] On 5 November OPI banned *Reportér* for a month, and the Presidium three days later suspended *Politika* indefinitely. Černík's government banned all political programmes on television and radio, which were still drifting without general directors.[105] As a result, the intelligentsia declared that the party leadership had broken with them and their unions,[106] while readers turned to the pages of non-party publications, such as the Czech writers' new weekly, *Listy*, which suddenly appeared on 7 November without prior Presidium approval; Mlynář alone had given the go-ahead on the condition that it remain strictly apolitical.[107]

The November plenum revealed in painful detail how bankrupt and

[104] The historian Miloš Hájek, criticizing President Hácha for submitting to German demands in March 1939, noted that 'The most horrifying extortion does not justify a statesman's giving his consent by his signature to the liquidation of state sovereignty.' See *Politika*, 10 October 1968. Other articles in the same issue reminded readers (and politicians) of times when even Gottwald would stand up to the Comintern (i.e. Moscow) to defend the country's interests. [105] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5004.

[106] Ladislav Helge in *Listy*, 14 November 1968. Helge, the head of the union for television and film industry employees, together with Ludvík Pacovský, the head of the coordinating committee of creative unions, officially complained to Černík on 7 November about the ban on political commentary. See A PV ČSSR, fond O. Černík [uncatalogued].

[107] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103.

paralysed the party élite was. Instead of providing lucid policies and allaying public fears, the Central Committee spent four days bickering and manoeuvring, almost oblivious to the reality that students and workers were poised to strike. In contrast to the unity of the August plenum, this session exposed internecine warfare.[108]

In his opening speech on 14 November Dubček, as in August, tried to steer discussion away from the past and towards active policy formulation, warning his audience that a clear line was needed to preclude 'uncontrolledness', conservatism, and especially the 'rightist danger'. He condemned the unrest of the week before, and vowed to keep order. At the same time, however, he urged people not to surrender to 'scepticism, passivity, "retreating into privacy", moods that nothing can be done, that all possibilities for continuing the post-January course of the CPCS CC have disappeared'. He wanted citizens to remain optimistic but disciplined.

The unrest, and the growing autonomy of social groups, also prompted Dubček to recast the idea of the party's 'leading role' in strictly orthodox terms, entitling communists to formulate binding policy for the state, economy, and social organizations and to appoint personnel. To perform this leading role, he added, the leadership needed an executive committee, a sub-group within the Presidium. Moreover, since the Czech party congress could not be held 'for at least another six months', a special bureau would be established. Dubček asked the plenum to give both new bodies its blessing.

Husák, in a strangely jovial mood, was chairing the first day's debate and shuffled the order of speakers to alternate contrasting outlooks. This dialectic had a reformer, usually very concerned about the fate of reforms and moods in society, followed by a conservative bellowing for a deep analysis of past mistakes and condemning the media and 'anti-socialist forces'. Instead of formulating policy, speakers traded accusations of blame for August, partly because many of them had not had time to read the latest draft of the proposed plenum resolution, which had been presented to regional and district leaders for feedback and distributed in its final form only that morning. Those who had read it found that it still did not clarify basic questions. When Husák adjourned the session shortly after 11 p.m. he appealed to speakers to adhere to the plenum's agenda (current policy tasks), since all of Czechoslovak society was eagerly awaiting a 'unifying line' from the party. The day's debate had contributed nothing to this end.

[108] All details of the plenum are from the official transcript, *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 14.–17. listopadu 1968.*

The second day of the plenum was no different. The philosopher Kosík noted with eloquence and dismay that 'our discussion in places resembles the debate of a closed sect that is so wrapped up in its internal arguments, skirmishes over prestige, and blind struggles between individuals that it forgets about the existence of the working class, peasantry, intelligentsia, and youth'.

Immediately after the session adjourned, Dubček, Černík, and Husák flew to Warsaw in total secrecy to meet with Soviet leaders.[109] Brezhnev had received a copy of the new draft resolution, and that night's meeting was essentially his monologue of demanded corrections. He was displeased above all with the Czechoslovak refusal to admit that a counter-revolution had been looming in August. As this would be a document of 'international significance', he ordered a substantial rewrite to justify the invasion. He insisted that the resolution honour the troop treaty as bolstering Czechoslovak sovereignty and security, and he rejected the depiction of the media as intermediaries, insisting on the Leninist concept of the media as 'conductors, propagandizers of the party's ideas, organizers of the masses in fulfilling the decisions of the party and government'. When Černík explained that the media enable the people to participate in policy-making, Brezhnev replied, 'This formulation smacks of opportunism.'

Brezhnev also wanted the amended draft to defend the Stalinist groupings while repeating the May plenum's identification of the 'rightist danger' as the main threat, and to stress the catholic (Soviet) features of a socialist system over national variations. Any treatment of problems before 1968, he said, must be brief and not imply that the Soviet Union was in any way to blame or that the entire pre-January system was bad. Brezhnev wanted no ambiguities in the final text, and insisted on the use of established terms such as 'rightist-opportunist', 'revisionist', and 'anti-socialist' to describe the year's more extreme phenomena. Perusing the text, Brezhnev rejected paragraph after paragraph as 'non-Marxist', 'non-class', or simply 'unacceptable'.

The Czechoslovak triumvirate returned home and allowed Soviet clients to redraft it yet again. They included stronger language about anti-socialist and anti-Soviet forces, about the 'rightist threat' within the party to its 'leading role' and their infiltration of the mass media, the failure of the Action Programme, and the need to remove those who could not

[109] All details are from A KV ČSFR, Z/S, 'Stenograficheskaia zapis' besedy s t.t. Dubchekom, Chernikom, Gusakom v Varshave 15 noiabria 1968 goda'. Word did later escape of the meeting, but Dubček vehemently denied to the Central Committee in December 1968 that it ever took place. See *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 12.–13. prosince 1968*, pp. 126–7.

support current party policy. Though the resolution still stopped short of justifying the invasion, the very act of allowing neo-conservatives to influence public statements was a major concession that delighted Moscow and further emboldened the conservatives.

Towards the end of the third day Černík and Husák gave coordinated, consecutive speeches. Černík, while still summarizing 1968 as essentially positive, denounced 'uncontrolledness' and 'anti-socialist and anti-communist thoughts', and stoutly defended Kolder, Biľak, Indra, Švestka, and Piller as 'honest communists who have worked for the party'. He stated bluntly that the state would not allow 'anti-socialist moods' to be expressed on the streets, and he demanded greater responsibility, especially from the media. Husák followed by calling for 'consolidation'. On the day before the plenum opened, in a controversial address to the People's Militia, he had expounded a new theory of two causes of the current crisis: the first, as usual, was Novotný's mistakes, but the second was the deformation that occurred after January, when 'anti-socialist' forces were allowed to hijack reforms. Recent unrest, he said, proved that there existed a nation-wide organization bent on destroying the socialist establishment.[110] The reforms, therefore, had to be reformed, and the answer, as he now told the plenum, lay in a greater realism, a sense of limits and inevitabilities: freedom lay in the discovery of constraints. As Husák saw it, within the CPCS were in fact two parties: a ruling party and a disloyal opposition party. This dichotomy sapped the CPCS of all energy and had to be overcome. Husák's oratory, unmatched by previous speakers, was interrupted several times by applause.

The Presidium then met and decided to put an end to the proceedings. Dubček asked the plenum to approve the creation of a temporary Czech bureau consisting of centrist liberalizers under Štrougal, and of an eight-member Presidium executive committee (the *pětka* plus Erban, Štrougal, and Sádovský); attempts by Kriegel and Marie Miková to have bolder reformers appointed to the bureau were torpedoed by Dubček and Špaček. Moreover, Mlynář, who had grown increasingly frustrated since his exclusion from the October Moscow summit, asked to be relieved of his positions.

To bolster the inadequate Secretariat, Dubček proposed that Biľak be appointed to it, since 'I have worked with comrade Biľak for many years and I would like to take this opportunity to say that his work is directly connected to the . . . post-January policy.' He was later elected with twenty nays and twenty abstentions out of the 141 voting members present, a tally that reveals how few of them were truly committed to reform and

[110] BBC SWB, EE/2926, 15 November 1968.

how many could easily be swayed. The creation of the bureau and executive committee (hereafter, ExCom) was approved by almost unanimous show of hands. The CPCS congress was postponed indefinitely but, contrary to Soviet demands, the mandates were not annulled. Finally, the plenum adopted the resolution as re-written yet again to reflect Soviet demands, with only two abstentions, and the exhausted plenum adjourned at 4 a.m. on 17 November.

There was immediate displeasure with the resolution in the party apparatus. On 19 November a conference of district and regional secretaries roundly criticized the document for neither answering questions about the past nor resolving fears about the future, and they warned that they could not muster the same determination to enforce this document that they had for the Moscow Protocol.[111] The lack of enthusiasm for the November resolution is also reflected in the fact that, of 6,565 resolutions sent to the centre from party cells between 11 November and 19 December 1968, only 359 expressed explicit support for the plenum's resolution and only two welcomed the creation of the Czech bureau. By comparison 1,349 demanded continuation of reforms, 1,239 called for measures against Stalinist factions, 983 insisted on greater information and 'open politics', 596 demanded that the Fourteenth Party Congress be convened, 566 called for the Czech congress, and 53 protested the creation of the Czech bureau.[112] A survey conducted in mid-December of party cell chairmen and rank and file in East Bohemia showed that the overwhelming majority had no interest in actually reading the document and only wanted to hear summary interpretations at meetings or on television.[113]

The public was even more dissatisfied with the outcome of the plenum, but the problem arose of how to express this displeasure. Even those groups (students and skilled workers) that decided to act imposed strict limits on themselves. Student activism had increased dramatically in the autumn; the percentage of all students who were politically 'engaged' doubled from 30 per cent before August to almost 60 per cent by October, of which about 15 per cent described themselves as radical.[114] Student leaders began discussing courses of action in Plzeň from 31 October to 2 November, and debate continued over the following two weeks. Slovak students wanted a one-week strike, which Czechs rejected

[111] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018 [meeting of district and regional party secretaries, 19 November 1968].
[112] A ÚV KSČ, Útvar svodné informace, planů, a řízení ÚV KSČ [information on meetings of the party regional committees about the decrees of the November CPCS CC plenum, 14 February 1969]. [113] *Rudé právo*, 11 February 1969.
[114] *Rudé právo*, 12 February 1969.

as too risky. Others wanted street demonstrations rather than a sit-in, but this too was rejected.[115] A strike was held at Charles University's philosophy faculty on 7–8 November, after which the CPCS Presidium was warned that another could follow ten days later.[116] Olomouc's 4,000 students began their strike on 15 November, and two days later, after the results of the Central Committee plenum had become known, the Union of University Students of Bohemia and Moravia (UUS) decided to launch a nation-wide sit-in strike. On the 18th they appealed to factories to join them.[117]

The student strike lasted until the 21st, during which Prague students issued their Ten Points manifesto. Declaring themselves to be solely for socialism, they insisted on enactment of the Action Programme, on open politics and adequate information, on the lifting of censorship within six months, on the rights to associate, assemble, and travel abroad, on artistic and intellectual freedom, on security of the citizen, on the removal of all discredited functionaries, on the creation of workers' councils, and on a foreign policy that respected international norms.[118] The Ten Points, however, indicate that there was no student movement *per se*. As one sociologist pointed out, Czechoslovak students did not espouse an ideology that differed from the dominant one; on the contrary, they tried to be more faithful to reform socialism than the reformers themselves. All organizational unity had collapsed in the spring, after which a dozen separate unions formed along with numerous councils, committees, and parliaments.[119] There were also irreconcilable differences between the more radical activists in Prague and moderates in Brno. The latter wanted to cooperate with the party through eventual membership in the National Front, while the former advocated direct action among the workers.[120] Activities flared up and subsided, without settling into a steady operation.[121] The failure of the November strike to achieve results was profoundly demoralizing: though some factions, such as the Kosmopolitas group, wanted to cause a general strike, most student leaders and followers sank into despair.[122]

A more serious threat was the potential independent working-class

[115] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2435, č.j. SM-1938/M-69.
[116] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 17, a.j. 162.
[117] Pavel Kadrmas, 'Studentské hnutí proti ústupkům a porazenectví', in Pecka and Prečan, *Proměny Pražského jara*, pp. 249, 259–62.
[118] Moravec, *Sedmý den nebyla neděle*, pp. 353–4.
[119] Jiřina Šiklová, 'Existuje u nás studentská "new left"?', *Listy*, 21 November 1968.
[120] Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia*, pp. 271–2.
[121] 'Improvizace na studentské téma', *Politika*, 27 March 1968.
[122] Jiří Lederer, *Jan Palach. Zpráva o životě, činu, a smrti českého studenta* (Prague: Novinář, 1990), p. 63.

movement. In March 1968 the trade-union (RTUM) apparatus, hitherto a pliant mechanism of party control, had demanded a new role as the main representative of workers' interests. Union committees were purged and the party cells within the unions (the guarantee of party influence) stopped functioning. Though party members still held all key union posts, and though after August the new union leader Karel Poláček was included in the CPCS Presidium, RTUM was in essence independent. This meant, for example, that after March all personnel decisions were taken in the unions themselves without prior party approval.[123] With 5.5 million members (more than 80 per cent of the working population), the potential of the unions to rival the party was tremendous.

It is therefore all the more remarkable that the Dubček Presidium ignored the trade-union question throughout the first eight months of 1968. The government was more aware of union power because of disputes in the spring to prevent closure of unprofitable enterprises, and in July, under union pressure, the government raised wages in several sectors. The invasion catapulted RTUM into the role of political organizer when, on 22 August, the union leadership instructed local branches to form committees to organize a one-hour general strike the next day. These committees then helped to keep production and supplies flowing. On 11 November RTUM and the government, in a remarkable semi-corporatist move, signed a consultation pact on wages and prices.[124]

During the autumn, conferences met to elect new committees for local union chapters and to select delegates to the next all-union congress, due to be held in March 1969. The elections were completely free, and cleansed the union apparatus of the old guard that had slavishly obeyed the party. None the less, the trade unions were divided on how to support the reform course. Two approaches, one cooperative, the other confrontational, were articulated at the September 1968 Central Council of Trade Unions session. The first argued that the Moscow Protocol had to be fulfilled if the reforms were to continue, while the second proposed a vigorous counter-attack on the invading states' propaganda.[125] At the district level, trade unions protested retreats on reforms even more vocally and were particularly critical of the November plenum. Hundreds of union committees declared their support for the students' Ten Points, and joined in with fifteen-minute strikes.[126] Like the students, however, they chose to back down rather than push events into outright conflict.

[123] František Velek, 'Přehodnocení událostí z let 1968–1970 v odborech', unpublished study, pp. 20–3, 36. All chairmen of the individual unions were party members, as were two-thirds to three-quarters of the members of union central councils.

[124] Myant, *The Czechoslovak Economy, 1948–1988*, pp. 167, 170.

[125] Velek, 'Přehodnocení událostí z let 1968–1970 v odborech', p. 45. [126] Ibid., p. 47.

Finally, the November plenum brought tensions between the party and intelligentsia into new relief. At the end of October writers, artists, journalists, and scientists signed an 'agreement of solidarity' in the belief that silence no longer contributed to normalization, and that they had to speak out before the next plenum.[127] Individual creative unions issued resolutions declaring that the trust placed in leaders after August had been broken by the return to closed politics.[128] During the student strike, intellectuals addressed countless meetings in a show of sympathy, and on 22 November a session of the coordination committee that linked all artistic unions severely criticized the Central Committee plenum. To prevent a complete schism with the party, members of the coordination committee met with Dubček, Černík, and Erban, who assured the intellectuals that they shared their concerns and promised to allow *Reportér* to resume.[129] On 26 November intelligentsia representatives again issued a joint statement, calling anew for open politics and freedom of expression.[130]

But as with the students and workers, the intellectuals stopped short of making a real challenge, knowing that to do so would only invite disaster. Whereas they had been the driving force behind the spring tumult with their calls for opposition parties and mass involvement in politics, they now limited themselves to reactive moments while deliberating whether the retreats of normalization demanded greater radicalism or realism. The culmination of this introspection was Kundera's controversial article 'Český úděl' [The Czech lot] in *Listy* on 19 December. With the same eloquence with which Vaculík in the '2000 Words' had exhorted citizens to be alarmed by the situation in June, Kundera now encouraged them to take pride in it. Borrowing the language of Czech mythopoeia, he declared that the attempt to build humane socialism and the dignity of the response to the invasion showed that the Czechs were fated to be a nation not of exploiters, but of creators of values. Defying public opinion, he declared that the Czechoslovak autumn was more significant than the Czechoslovak spring because it confirmed this ethical mission: the reform policies had not been abandoned, no 'police regime' had been installed, no principles were betrayed. He challenged the tens of thousands who

[127] *Politika*, 7 November 1968.

[128] See, for example, the declarations of the central committee of the Czechoslovak Composers' Union and of the Czech writers' *aktiv* in *Listy*, 7 November 1968. See also Květa Jechová, 'K historii koordinačního výboru tvůrčích svazů, 1968–1969', in Pecka and Prečan, *Proměny Pražského jara*, pp. 107–8.

[129] Jechová, 'K historii koordinačního výboru tvůrčích svazů, 1968–1969', pp. 110–11. On 27 November the government instructed OPI to permit the weekly's resumption, but the real impetus for this retreat was the editors' attempt to bring their case to court.

[130] *Listy*, 5 December 1968.

had fled abroad to return home, and those at home to be critically optimistic:

People who today are falling into depression and defeatism, commenting that there are not enough guarantees, that everything could end badly, that we might again end up in a marasmus of censorship and trials, that this or that could happen, are simply weak people, who can live only in illusions of certainty.

Kundera's essay was roundly criticized, for example by Havel, who disagreed that the question of guarantees was so trivial, and mourned the article as an example of typical Czech myopia (celebrating past glories rather than addressing present needs) and passive patriotism (rationalizing a disaster as a moral victory). Writing in February 1969, Havel feared that it was easier to say 'how good we were before August and how marvellous we were in August (when those baddies came here after us) than to examine what we are like now, who among us is still good and who not at all, and what must be done so that we are true to our previously earned merits!'[131] Kundera's views, however, demonstrate how even notorious sceptics were able to rationalize the retreats of normalization and disarm themselves intellectually: they still accepted Dubček's deal and trumpeted realism (discipline) not just as the way to continue reforms but also as a national virtue.

Husák contra Smrkovský

In addition to opening splits between and within the party-state and society, the November plenum institutionalized circumscribed politics. The creation of the ExCom and Czech bureau was an effort to eliminate the more radical and more conservative Presidium members from any influence over decision-making, allowing centrist leaders to pursue a controlled, technocratic policy, especially of economic reform. Differentiation, however, soon crept into even these sanctums, as prolonged crisis, ambition, and Moscow's influence drove some reformers back across the internal divide towards orthodoxy, gradually marginalizing and excluding committed reformers, and further alienating the public.

The ExCom, which did not hold its first session until 3 December, was Černík's brainchild as part of his continuing effort to eliminate the influ-

[131] Václav Havel, *O lidskou identitu* (Prague: Rozmluvy, 1990), pp. 195–6. For Kundera's reply, see *Host do domu* 15 (1969), no. 15, reprinted in *Svědectví*, 1985, no. 74, pp. 343–9. See also J. Střítecký, 'Úděl proměny a tvář sebeklamu', *Host do domu* 16 (1969), no. 6; Lubomír Nový, 'Metakritika krize', *Host do domu* 16 (1969), no. 9; and Karel Kosík, 'Váha slov', *Plamen*, no. 4, April 1969. For later responses, see Petr Pithart, *Osmašedesátý* (Prague: Rozmluvy, 1990), pp. 15–16 and Ostrý, *Československý problém*, pp. 207–11.

ence of the new Vysočany Presidium members, and the idea was apparently approved by Brezhnev and rammed through the Presidium without debate. It was also on Černík's recommendation that Štrougal was installed as head of the Czech bureau in place of more popular candidates such as Císař, Smrkovský, and Černík himself. As Černík explained in 1970, his aim was to include Štrougal somehow in the party leadership and establish a base from which to combat more extreme views until the Presidium could be purged.[132] Štrougal was given enormous power in the Secretariat as the deputy first secretary,[133] and worked closely with Černík, who also sat in the Czech bureau. Together with Husák they ensured that the sixty-six federal and republic ministers appointed in January 1969 would be technocratic centrists like themselves rather than devout reformers.[134]

Within the ExCom, meanwhile, a long-simmering conflict of personalities now threatened to turn Czech against Slovak and bring workers and students on to the streets against the party. Husák had heard in Moscow how much the Soviets detested Smrkovský, and probably had his own reasons to dislike him; with federalization approaching, Husák saw a chance to make a move. Speaking in the ExCom's second meeting on 11 December, Husák announced that the CPS Presidium wanted a Slovak to occupy at least one of the leading state functions, preferably the chairmanship of the federal parliament, because the Slovak nation currently did not see 'its man at the top'.[135] Legitimate though his demand was, he was clearly using it as a pretence to replace Smrkovský with a less radical figure.[136] Though Dubček had started the ExCom session by nominating Smrkovský for the post to allay the public's fear that reformers were falling from power, Husák was buoyed by his authority as Slovak leader and by the meeting in Kiev with Soviet leaders on 7–8 December, from which Smrkovský had again been excluded. At that summit Brezhnev

[132] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Černík's questioning by the Central Control and Review Commission, 16 June 1970]. See also A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 166, a.j. 245, b. 3. [133] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P108/68.

[134] Černík told Brezhnev in Kiev on 7 December that the new federal government would include 'no rightists', only ministers with 'clear political orientations' and specialized knowledge. Brezhnev replied that he did not know most of the nominees but would accept them 'on faith'. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, ar.j. 279.

[135] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/6, a.j. 2, b. 3. Husák had made an almost identical demand in June 1948, when he insisted that a Slovak replace the incumbent defence minister – Ludvík Svoboda, who at the time was reputed as something of a Czech nationalist for his zealous participation in the post-war expulsion of Germans and Hungarians. Husák's demand was rejected. See Karel Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní*, pp. 100–2.

[136] Already in early October 1968, informants were telling the Soviet embassy of plans to use national parity as a pretence to remove Smrkovský. See ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 211–17 (copy in author's possession).

warned Dubček, Černík, Husák, and Štrougal against placing 'anti-Soviets' and 'anti-Marxists' into the new leading federal and republic positions, marking Smrkovský and Císař for special criticism.[137]

In the ExCom, Štrougal and Sádovský immediately seconded Husák's demand; the other members (all Czechs) conceded that it was justified but feared the repercussions of Smrkovský's demotion. Černík offered to resign and let Smrkovský become premier, but the latter would have none of it, admitting that he had thought of retiring from politics but, like Dubček, feared that this would send the wrong signal to an anxious public. As the session continued pressure mounted on Smrkovský to resign gracefully, but he stood his ground. Dubček asked that the discussion remain confidential until the Central Committee met to approve appointments to the new governments.[138]

The December plenum, however, did not decide who should chair the federal parliament, and focused primarily on the mounting economic crisis caused by steady wage growth, shortages, and persistent rumours of an impending currency devaluation (conjuring up memories of the painful reform of 1953).[139] Once the public learned that Smrkovský's position was assailable the million-member Czech Metalworkers' Union (KOVO) sealed a pact with the students' union and announced that it would call a general strike should he fall.[140] Štrougal, terrified by the depth and breadth of support for Smrkovský, called an ExCom meeting, which finally convened on 20 December. Dubček agreed that the 'campaign' was alarming and urged Smrkovský to silence the media. Smrkovský denied that he had organized any campaign but still refused to resign. Erban feared that the party had lost control and events were escalating towards 'an even worse August'; Černík agreed that 'I have catastrophic fears for the fate of [our] peoples.' Dubček then revealed that the Soviet Politburo had forbidden Smrkovský's election to the federal chairmanship; although he admitted that it looked like salami tactics, he was also frustrated with Smrkovský for regularly departing from collective responsibility. The old problem of unity in top party bodies had resurfaced and was undermining Dubček's credibility as an effective leader. The ExCom session failed to reach a decision, postponing matters until the new year.[141]

[137] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, a.j. 279. [138] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/6, a.j. 2, b. 3.

[139] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 12.–13. prosince 1968*, pp. 16–17.

[140] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5197. Similar declarations were made by workers at the vital North Bohemian electricity generator and by congresses of the lumber industry workers' union and agricultural workers' union.

[141] A ÚV KSČ, fond VV PÚV KSČ, P-VV/3/68.

Husák, however, used the holiday lull to launch a counter-campaign of his own. In public speeches he implied that Smrkovský was part of the 'rightist' conspiracy and mobilized the Slovak media to trumpet the cause, eliciting in return volleys of hatred from the radical Czech periodicals and Prague ward party committees. Meanwhile, apparently acting separately, Kolder secretly arranged the printing of 52,000 copies of a pamphlet which tried to smear Smrkovský; most were intercepted and destroyed before distribution.[142] Fearing that the furore around him was destabilizing the country, Smrkovský capitulated on 7 January. He agreed to become first vice-chairman of the new federal assembly, under the Slovak Peter Colotka.[143]

To avert social explosion, Dubček went on television to defend Husák and the Slovak nation as a whole, performing yet another feat of persuasion. Smrkovský himself had already spoken on the 5th to ask workers not to strike on his behalf. The metalworkers were kept in line with a joint letter from Dubček, Smrkovský, Černík, and Svoboda on 8 January, in which they rebuked KOVO for only hurting reform by issuing dangerous ultimata: 'Thus under the slogan of the post-January policy serious obstacles are placed to its practical realization ... What our country needs most now is calm, active, and creative work, practical deeds.'[144] With time, though, it was clear that Husák's achievement had far-reaching implications: he had demonstrated not only that a popular reformer could be deposed without calamity, but that members of the ExCom could override the first secretary. From January onwards they rarely listened to Dubček, who remembered Husák's 'stab in the back [as] the worst of all the betrayals between August 1968 and April 1969'.[145]

With the new year the Presidium appealed to the nation for discipline in a declaration entitled 'Our country needs calm and active work'. The appeal warned readers that strike threats and confrontations only lessened the chances of continuing reform, and asked them instead to focus

[142] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 21, a.j. 212, and fond PÚV KSČ, č.j. P5/69. Who was behind the printing was not uncovered by the internal party investigation; Biľak credits Kolder in his memoirs (*Paměti*, vol. II, p. 186), which is plausible since the printing took place in Ostrava, where Kolder had many conservative allies, and the pamphlet cited archival sources, to which only a high-ranking official could have had access.

[143] RFE Research, East Europe – Czechoslovakia, situation report nos. 3 (7 January 1969), and 4 (9 January 1969). Soviet opposition to Smrkovský as federal assembly chairman was reiterated on 6 January, when CPSU official Konstantin Katushev denounced him to Dubček as the leader of the 'rightists', demanding that the ExCom indulge the Slovaks' demands. Dubček replied that he personally could not speak out on the subject 'because I am a Slovak. Then they'll say that it happened because I am a Slovak. Otherwise it will give the impression that the decision was such because I am a Slovak.' See A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, ar.j. 280.

[144] *Rudé právo*, 9 January 1969. [145] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, p. 235.

on 'creative work'. A leading article in *Rudé právo* agreed that 'It is incontrovertible that our people want and need calm for their work . . . It is high time that we begin to take intensive care of our economy, of safeguarding the conditions for creative work which would increase society's means and enrich the life of each of us.'[146] Over the next fortnight every member of the ExCom spoke directly to the public over television and radio to iterate this message. Persuasion still aimed to win public discipline to allow the reforms to continue, but it was acquiring an air of irritated desperation.

For what appears to be the first time since Dubček's election, OPI and the party's information department began supplying leaders with regular digests of the press, quantifying the extent of 'negative' articles. From these data it emerges that the locus of criticism had shifted from the increasingly docile Prague press to the 500 regional and district papers formally under the aegis of local party committees, beyond the limited surveillance capacity of OPI.[147] On 7 January 1969, the Presidium adopted measures to expand control of the media, relying primarily on urging politicians to speak frequently, while demanding that state-run media present and interpret party policy positively. Persuasion would also be used in regular meetings between party officials and leading editors, and controversial periodicals would be screened before issue. A steering committee under Culture Secretary Josef Kempný was to meet twice weekly with Jaroslav Havelka, the new federal OPI director, to evaluate the media. Uncooperative editors in the non-party press were to be removed.[148]

The limits of this policy, however, were revealed by an investigation five months later which showed that almost nothing had been done to implement the Presidium's decision. The party press had failed to propagandize the November resolution and party policies because of conflicts within the apparatus over interpretation. Kempný and Havelka met infrequently, while jurisdiction disputes between the federal and republic OPIs prevented effective monitoring. Party officials were unable to influence editorial boards, while the understaffed Central Committee department for media affairs failed to produce a timetable of press conferences or to convene meetings of the communist faction in the Union of Journalists. When the department did submit materials to the party Secretariat, the latter never made time to discuss them. The appa-

[146] *Rudé právo*, 6 January 1969.
[147] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/7, a.j. 11; fond 02/7, a.j. 12, B12/69 [weekly surveys from 17 January to 13 February 1969]; fond 02/7, a.j. 26. By the end of 1968, the Czech OPI was regularly monitoring around sixty publications as well as television, radio, and newsreels. [148] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5202.

ratus's contacts with the media had grown so weak that even *Rudé právo* found it easier to reach government ministers than party officials for comment.[149]

Palachiáda

In the middle of January the Central Committee convened again, the purpose of the meeting, Dubček told the Presidium, being to enforce the principle of 'democratic centralism'. As at previous plena, he wanted to limit debate and increase obedience to whatever policy line was formulated. Local party meetings were bogging down in emotional debates about the past rather than focusing on future tasks; the only contemporary issue under general discussion was how weak the reformers now appeared.[150] Consequently, in his speech to the plenum on 16 January, Dubček dwelled on the need for unity, denounced 'petty-bourgeois radicalism' and 'anarchistic' tendencies among the country's youth, and called for all political, economic, and social activity to fall again under party control.[151]

Despite this appeal for discipline and order, subsequent speakers, whether reformers or conservatives, subjected Dubček and his colleagues to unrelenting criticism. They all complained bitterly about the Presidium's handling of the Smrkovský affair, but had few serious policy recommendations of their own to offer. Then, at 4:30 p.m., Erban reported to the plenum that a young man had immolated himself on Wenceslas Square as a protest 'against the current political situation'.

Jan Palach's death three days later from third-degree burns jolted the country out of hibernation and sparked a brief outpouring of anger, frustration, and grief. Politicians, fearing Soviet intervention, scrambled to persuade the public not to respond with further suicides or mass protests. Though they paid tribute to Palach's courage, their preoccupation with order alienated the people, especially youth, who now saw even leading reformers as 'them' rather than 'us'. Political leadership broke down during the Palachiáda: Dubček fell ill and retreated to Bratislava, Štrougal's bureau and the interior ministry rather than the Presidium or

[149] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; report from Jakeš, 23 May 1969]. When *Rudé právo* editor Sekera resigned at the April 1969 plenum, he complained that 'during the whole time that I performed the function of editor-in-chief, I received no expressed help from party leaders'. See *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 17. dubna 1969* (Prague: n.p., 1969), p. 41.

[150] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P115/69.

[151] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 16.–17. ledna 1969. Stenografický zápis* (Prague: n.p., 1969), pp. 4–21.

ExCom ran the country, while the vast commemorative march on 20 January and the funeral five days later were largely self-organized and self-regulated by students.[152]

As Dubček later hinted, leaders toyed with the idea of calling in the army; since 4 January select army units designated to intervene in civil unrest had been kept on twenty-minute readiness alert.[153] Clashes between students and police on 26 January ended in almost 200 arrests, after which the Presidium thanked the police for 'selflessly and energetically managing to restore calm ... where groups of anti-social forces and various elements attempted to sharpen the situation, terrorize peaceful citizens, and disturb public order in a manner deserving condemnation'. As usual, almost all of the arrested were teenagers or young adults of working-class origin.[154]

The bedridden Dubček was publicly attacked by Husák for supposedly mishandling events and by the liberal press as well, especially *Listy*, which discouraged readers from emulating Palach yet viewed his act as a perfectly understandable response to the state of limbo in which the nation was trapped. One leading article denounced the endless 'appeals to reason' from politicians as appeals to 'adaptation, cowardice, "understanding reality", making compromises'. Other writers claimed that everyone was starting to go mad from uncertainty over how to respond to the gradual erosion of freedom.[155]

Palach had stated two demands in his note: revoke censorship and stop distribution of *Zprávy*, a Stalinist newspaper published with the help of the Soviet army; otherwise other students would repeat his deed.[156] With

[152] A KV ČSFR, R154 [KV ČSFR interview with Stanislav Provazník]. The ExCom did meet once during the crisis, on 20 January (the day of the funeral march). The interior ministry and army mobilized reserves into Prague in the event of unrest during the funeral, so that altogether they would have over 4,500 soldiers and police officers ready. Five hundred StB officers were stationed along the funeral route. See A FMV, fond A 2/3, č.j. 2345.

[153] RFE situation report no. 13 (6 February 1969); Jindřich Madry, 'Mocenský zvrat v dubnu 1969 a podíl vojáků na jeho provedení', *Historie a vojenství* 41 (1992), p. 111. To what extent Dubček was considering recourse to the use of force can be seen in a private letter he wrote on 22 February 1969 to the editor of a Charles University journal who had asked him about it. Dubček replied that, though some methods might at times seem undemocratic, they were in fact in the interest of democracy, which had to be defended against all extremists. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 16, a.j. 152–3.

[154] *Rudé právo*, 28 January 1969; RFE situation report nos. 9 (24 January 1969), and 10 (27 January 1969).

[155] Karol Sidon, 'Živá pochodeň', *Listy*, 23 January 1969.

[156] Dubček had appealed to Brezhnev on 20 November 1968 to stop *Zprávy*, but a group of Soviet officials (Aleksandr Iakovlev, Demichev, Katushev, and Rusakov) recommended that it continue because 'rightists' were waging a new campaign against normalization. See A KV ČSFR, Soviet telegram 56 and Z/S 203.

these specific demands he was not, as is commonly claimed, protesting the invasion, nor was his act anti-Soviet or anti-socialist. As Lederer points out, Palach was concerned primarily with freedom of expression and truth; it was not an act of desperation but of hope that the defiance of August could be revived.[157] Moreover, deeply dismayed by Dubček's behaviour since November, he was signalling that the compact struck between party and society at the end of August was null, that it was not enough to fill columns of newsprint with philosophical agonizing, and that it was time to act through a general strike.

Yet in his effort to stir the nation he opted for self-destruction rather than terrorism; he chose the morally superior route of defiance, just as the entire country had in August when it renounced violent resistance to the invasion. Though stunning in its dignity, this approach brought no political rewards. What he had not counted on was the symbolic power of the martyr in Czech constructs of identity; he became another member in a pantheon that Masaryk had denounced as an unhealthy distraction from genuine action.[158] His courage was venerated but his demands went unmet, as did his call for a general strike. Those who imitated his example, such as Jan Zajíc in Prague on 25 February, Evžen Plocek in Jihlava on Good Friday, and Michal Leučík in Košice in mid-May, received no such homage, as the media carried no news of their acts.[159]

Another unintended consequence of Palach's act was further to convince many centrist liberalizers that the country would only continue to lurch from crisis to crisis unless a new style of party leadership were adopted. In a tasteless analogy, Husák told the Central Committee on 17 January, 'We, and the whole party, pour petrol on ourselves and set ourselves alight and think what great fellows we are.' Instead, he told them, it was their duty to lead the people, because the people crave leadership and certainty:

> How long are we going to keep people in a situation in which they don't know what will happen in the night, what awaits them tomorrow, what awaits them in a week? How long is it possible to live like this when it is possible to live differently, when it is possible to calm things down, to solve our international relations

[157] Lederer, *Jan Palach*, pp. 91, 137.

[158] Robert B. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas of Nationality and Personality* (London: Central European University Press, 1994).

[159] Lederer, *Jan Palach*, p. 121; Tibor Ičo, 'Košické inferno '69', *Verejnosť*, 16 May 1991; Vladimír Vavrda, 'Druhý Jan', *Svobodné slovo*, 17 February 1990. Zajíc died immediately but was not allowed a funeral in Prague, being buried instead in his native Vitkov in northern Moravia.

honourably for our nations, honourably for this state, calm down normal human, even comradely and friendly relations can be had here and solve things at home honourably and progressively and democratically.[160]

The wild applause that these remarks provoked signalled the ascendancy of a new approach to reform and a new idea of normality.

[160] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 16.–17. ledna 1969*, pp. 18–19. I have not tried to order the syntax of Husák's speech, which was probably given extempore and with considerable passion.

7 The realist ascendancy

The Palachiáda deepened the splits in the ruling élite. Dubček (sidelined by flu from 18 January until 4 February) and Smrkovský were increasingly isolated while Černík, Štrougal, Svoboda, and Husák formed within the reform coalition the core of a 'realist' faction that was expanding to include more politicians who shared their crisis fatigue. This group still supported Dubček's attempts to convince the public that discipline and unity would protect reforms against Soviet and hardline subversion, but they added that problems lay also in certain revisionist ideas and spokesmen, and that only by correcting these deformations could reforms proceed. The result of this 'realism' was the fall of Dubček.

A veneer of calm settled on the country after the Palach crisis, even though the first quarter of 1969 marked the apogee of independent currents in the working class. Despite a government freeze on workers' councils in October 1968 and its reluctance to submit an enterprise law that would give the councils a legal footing, free elections went ahead and by January 1969 they were in place in 120 enterprises, representing almost 900,000 employees. The councils consisted primarily of men aged thirty-five to fifty and working in technical or managerial positions. About half of them were party members, and about one-third had tertiary education (compared to only one-fifth of enterprise directors).[1] Representatives of these councils met in Plzeň on 9–10 January to consult and establish a coordinating committee.[2]

During their congress in early March, trade-union representatives were still disagreeing over tactics, but they were united in their almost euphoric belief that, despite the party's retreats on reform, the unions' independence and influence were now unassailable. The new central union leadership freely elected at the congress was uniformly liberal, even radical, and the congress's recognition of the party's 'leading role' was

[1] Kovanda, *Zkušenosti demokratické samospravy v čsl. podnicích roku 1968.*
[2] *Rudé právo*, 11 January 1969; Fišera, *Workers' Councils in Czechoslovakia, 1968–1969*, pp. 50–75.

conditional on continuation of the reforms.[3] In addition, the creation of thirty new Czech unions entailed the creation of a new union apparatus of 3,500 functionaries, almost all of them new and pro-reform.[4] With party cells dormant, these posts were filled without their prior approval.

By this time, however, public attention had shifted to the economy, as a sudden coal shortage in the middle of the harshest winter in living memory plunged many regions, especially Slovakia, into an energy crisis. With Prague buried under heavy snow, the party press tried feebly to rally the country to increase output, even though the Czech government admitted that fault lay not with workers but with incompetent management.[5] A nervous party Presidium announced that the next Central Committee plenum would unveil measures to improve the economy, and urged the party cells to help resuscitate production within their spheres.

The discontent now pervasive in the party apparatus emerged at a meeting of district and regional functionaries on 6 February, which Štrougal used to develop the 'realist' platform that he and Husák had launched at the January plenum. He argued that unresolved tension prevented normal work and economic revival, while a new spectre of inflation now hovered and morality and values were in jeopardy. A counteroffensive against the 'right' was overdue, he said, to achieve 'consolidation' so as to pursue economic reform and new prosperity. To start this attack, he denounced radical reformers in unprecedented detail and venom, and he implied that they would have to be purged before the party congress and a general election could ever be held.[6]

Local officials who spoke next called for an end to constant squabbling in the political class and for firm leadership. One district secretary noted that Husák was widely admired within the apparatus because 'he speaks plainly, he tells the people the truth, he points to the dangers which exist here'. There were even several calls for the rehabilitation of Biľak and Indra. Towards the end Černík agreed that 'the conviction is growing in people that it is necessary to move from this feverish state of our society to the necessary calm, order, so that we in our party can gradually pick up again the positive features of our past policy and . . . on this basis expand the social wealth of our society'. The country was in real crisis, he argued, because the power of the party-state had been weakened while various

[3] Velek, 'Přehodnocení událostí z let 1968–1970 v odborech', pp. 52–5.
[4] A ÚV KSČ, Útvar svodné informace, planů, a řízení ÚV KSČ [text of Jan Kašpar's speech on current political situation, in Brno, 6 February 1969].
[5] *Rudé právo*, 6 February 1969.
[6] All details of this meeting are from A ÚV KSČ [uncatalogued; transcript of meeting of leading secretaries of district and regional party committees and chairmen of regional and district national committees, 6 February 1969 in Prague Castle].

'groups' plotted to destroy it. Lest anyone fear Soviet intervention, he assured them that unrest would be crushed by 'our tanks, so that *we* restore order in our country'.

Behind the scenes, meanwhile, subtle shifts were preparing the way for Dubček's fall. Preliminary censorship was imposed in over 100 publications and personnel changes occurred in the Czech media in February and March,[7] while a meeting in Ostrava on 27 February between representatives of the Czech and Slovak journalists' unions apparently resulted in an agreement to give Husák more favourable coverage in the Czech press.[8] Černík, Kempný, and Havelka similarly met with union representatives in March and persuaded them to show greater 'realism' and 'discipline' in political reporting.

Personnel changes in Central Committee departments led to a military presence almost unprecedented in the apparatus: the departments for the media, for education (including universities), science, and culture, and for defence policy were entrusted to colonels, all answering to the increasingly influential Josef Kempný.[9] The political-organizational department, usually supervised by the first secretary and crucial for controlling the party apparatus, was transferred from Dubček to Jarolim Hetteš on 25 February.[10] Dubček himself avoided public appearances and was drifting away from his old advisers.

Černík, meanwhile, was invited to Moscow for a one-day meeting with Soviet leaders on 13 March, during which he was offered Dubček's job. Though widely believed to be better qualified than Dubček to lead the party, Černík turned down the offer, claiming that he lacked the iron will for the nasty measures Dubček's successor would have to take. When Brezhnev asked who would do the job, Černík recommended Husák.[11]

The flood of demands and signals out of Moscow had not abated since the secret meeting in Warsaw in November 1968. At Kiev in December Brezhnev had expressed satisfaction with the November resolution but not with continuing disunity in the party leadership, stating bluntly that Smrkovský and others had to be purged. He was still displeased with the media and was particularly miffed that Czechoslovak television devoted more time to Western music than to Russian folk dancing. During the two-day meeting only Dubček tried to defend the reforms; Černík,

[7] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/7, a.j. 26. [8] A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar.j. 37.

[9] Madry, 'Mocenský zvrat v dubnu 1969 a podíl vojáků na jeho provedení', p. 125. The colonels were Vladimir Diviš, who had assisted Novotný and Hendrych in their 1967 attack on writers; Jaromír Obzina, who later served as federal interior minister from 1973 to 1983; and J. Macháček. Diviš had also been an informant for the Soviet embassy before the invasion, but lacked credibility because of his heavy drinking. See A KV ČSFR, Z/S 148. [10] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5682.

[11] Author's interview with Černík, 24 April 1992. See also Bilak, *Paměti*, vol. II, p. 185.

Štrougal, and Husák fell over themselves to agree with Soviet criticisms and to promise order.[12] In addition to formal talks, the two delegations went hunting in pairs, during which the Soviets warmed to Husák and Štrougal even more.[13]

In addition to monitoring the Czechoslovak media closely,[14] Soviet officials in the Prague embassy, Bratislava consulate, occupying armies, and foreign ministry had maintained regular contact with local informants, of which the following are typical examples:

10 September 1968: An unnamed official from the Czechoslovak foreign ministry accused a group in the party-state leadership of duplicity in implementing the Moscow agreements, and Špaček and Šimon of the most 'swinish' policy.[15]

19 September: General Rytíř and Karel Hoffmann complained to Chervonenko that recent Presidium decisions were not contributing to 'consolidation'.[16]

22 September: Mamula, former head of the Eighth Department, told a Soviet foreign ministry official to beware of Dubček, an 'unprincipled man who indulges the right' and 'cries to try to evoke compassion', and of Černík, who was 'very sly, secretive, slippery, and insincere'.[17]

27 September: Švestka told two Soviet army commanders that the party was divided down the middle between 'rightists' and 'leftists', that Dubček, lacking the resolve to take difficult measures, had moved to the right while Husák had moved to the left, and that Smrkovský was a 'political prostitute'.[18]

3 October: Czechoslovakia's ambassador to the USSR, Vladimír Koucký, complained that his country's leadership 'is not preparing to carry out what was agreed in Moscow [in August]', that the party apparatus was paralysed from lack of directives from the Presidium and Secretariat, that the cult of Dubček's personality was assuming monstrous proportions and that Černík, Svoboda, and Husák could be turned against him.[19]

21 October: Unnamed 'comrades' reported that the party was

[12] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, ar.j. 279.

[13] A KV ČSFR, R154 [KV ČSFR interview with Stanislav Provazník].

[14] For an example, see the Prague embassy's detailed digest of the Czechoslovak press in September 1968, in ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 33–52 (copy in author's possession).

[15] ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 73–8 (copy in author's possession).

[16] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 74 (ATsK KPSS, r. 9756, f. 5, op. 60, ll. 168–80).

[17] ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 58–9 (copy in author's possession).

[18] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 117 and 173.

[19] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 87 (ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 29–31). The Soviet contact on this occasion was Aleksandr Bovin.

accepting the Moscow Protocol but that disunity prevailed at the district level and local cells were passive.[20]

3 November: Energy Minister Jozef Korčák promised that Dubček, Smrkovský, and Špaček would be heavily criticized at the next Central Committee plenum and then ousted in December.[21]

3 November: Indra met for two hours with a Soviet embassy official he had known for twenty years, and complained that he had been usurped by Špaček as deputy party leader.[22]

7 November: V. Vedra, the head of the Central Committee department for representative assemblies, confirmed that the 'healthy part' of the party apparatus was growing in size and strength. He predicted that the next plenum would mark the start of a serious conflict inside the party, as approximately thirty Central Committee members had been recruited to attack the reforms.[23]

7 November: Filus, the new head of the party's internal-organizational department, complained to Kuznetsov that the task of reorganizing the party apparatus in accordance with federalization and the reconceptualized 'leading role' had been so arduous and so complicated by bickering between 'rightists' and 'leftists' that he had lost eight kilos in two months.[24]

19–29 November: A delegation of CPSU officials from Sverdlovsk oblast' visited the West Bohemia region, and reported that normalization was not taking place smoothly, that society was beyond party control, that the party leadership was divided, but that there existed a 'healthy core' around Svoboda, Černík, Husák, Biľak, Štrougal, Sádovský, Indra, and Kempný.[25]

21 November: Müller, Biľak's deputy in the international department, warned that 'rightists' would distort the recent plenum's policy choices, as after the May session.[26]

12 December: Vedra alerted the Soviet embassy that Dubček 'has again demonstrated his inconsistency and is retreating from what was agreed at Kiev', primarily by postponing an ExCom decision on Smrkovský's future as speaker of parliament.[27]

[20] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 112 (ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 259–62).
[21] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 124, 191.
[22] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 191. The official was L. Ia. Solovei, the third secretary at the embassy.
[23] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 124, 193. [24] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 193. [25] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 204.
[26] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 205. [27] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 130.

21 December: At the end of a two-week visit to the Soviet Union, an emotional Piller told his hosts that 'I have become stronger and more confident, the mistakes we have committed are clearer to me now, I know how to eliminate them. Such friends as I have in your country are hard to find anywhere else.' Piller and his entourage repeatedly denounced 'the duplicity of Dubček's position, the activity of Smrkovský and Špaček, which hinder the cause of the normalization of social life in Czechoslovakia'.[28]

Soon after Christmas, in the midst of the Smrkovský affair, Konstantin Katushev, the CPSU secretary responsible for relations with ruling communist parties, arrived with Kuznetsov and a large entourage for a two-week tour.[29] In search of future leaders they saved Dubček for later, meeting first with Biľak, Lenárt, and Kempný before fanning out to call on regional party bosses, Husák, Štrougal, and Černík. The Soviets questioned their hosts about the impact of the November resolution, about efforts to control the trade unions, media, and students, about the ideological vacuum that was being filled by Western culture with its 'idea-less and sexual themes', and about discipline in the Czechoslovak army. Like Brezhnev, they urged CPCS leaders to trounce Smrkovský and the 'rightists' and to write a thorough analysis of events.[30]

The Palach crisis provoked a letter from Brezhnev and Kosygin to Dubček and Černík on 23 January. The tense situation caused by the suicide, they said, was clearly being used by 'enemy forces' to stir up 'nationalist, anti-Soviet moods' and hinder normalization. As they were sure that it was an organized campaign, they expected an investigation and arrests, plus a counter-campaign among the working class (orchestrated rallies in factories).[31] Biľak was assigned to draft a response but did not produce it until 10 March; in it he agreed with Soviet claims but noted that Czechoslovak leaders had contained the crisis and assured them that an inquiry was underway.[32] Biľak then departed for a two-week visit to Moscow, during which he plotted with Soviet leaders on Dubček's removal.

Official delegations to Moscow also received an earful from their hosts. When Dzúr arrived on 21 February, Soviet defence minister Grechko

[28] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 210.

[29] Katushev was accompanied by his deputy A. Blatov, who had headed the Czechoslovak situation committee in the summer of 1968, and S. I. Kolesnikov, who headed the department's section for Poland and Czechoslovakia, plus oblast' first secretaries from Moscow, Voronezh, and Transcarpathia. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5267.

[30] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, ar.j. 280. [31] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, ar.j. 280.

[32] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P118/69 and fond 07/15, sv. 27, ar.j. 281. An investigation was carried out secretly by the interior ministry.

mentioned over lunch that the Soviets were still troubled by the situation in Czechoslovakia since his 'generation knows that the enemy must be dealt with firmly, there can be no liberalizing'. Later, Brezhnev scolded the CPCS for neglecting 'democratic centralism' and the West German threat. He openly regretted that the Soviets had not made arrests in August 1968, while he found it suspicious that CPCS leaders always promised to control the media but never did. Over and over, the Soviets told Dzúr that they did not believe Czechoslovak assurances of fidelity to the socialist bloc.[33]

Besides their usual concern over free speech, public disorder, and the health of the Czechoslovak army and StB, the Soviets feared again that Dubček would try to call the party congress with its original delegates. In December he had included preparation of congress materials among the party's strategic tasks, and in the Presidium on 14 January he reminded his colleagues to consider when the congress should be held.[34] Despite enormous pressure from the rank and file to convene it, on 5 February the Presidium overrode Dubček's attempt to set a date. He waited until 24 March, when he told the ExCom that a Central Committee plenum in April would have to decide on a time.[35] He reported this to Chervonenko as well, when the latter visited on 28 March to invite Štrougal and Husák to Moscow.[36] Another source indicates that reformers were aiming to have congress documents ready by October 1969.[37] The April plenum, moreover, would hear the much-awaited Piller report on Stalinist crimes of the 1950s, which would discredit still further the old system and implicate the Soviets. These impending developments, plus a desire not to see him represent Czechoslovakia at the world summit of communist parties planned for June, pushed the Soviets to authorize Dubček's replacement. All they needed was a flashpoint.

On 21 March the Czechoslovak ice hockey team defeated the Soviet Union in the first round of the world championship in Stockholm. Two thousand people gathered in central Prague to celebrate, some of them chanting anti-Soviet slogans. Knowing that the two teams would have to face off again a week later in the second round, Černík's cabinet began preparing security measures. When a second victory did come on 28 March, the jubilation was overwhelming: on that night half a million Czechs and Slovaks celebrated on the streets of sixty-nine towns and

[33] A MNO, sekr. MNO-1969, č.j. 0050 121/6.

[34] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5120 and fond 02/1 [uncatalogued; transcript of Presidium meeting no. 115, 14 January 1969].

[35] Madry, 'Mocenský zvrat v dubnu 1969 a podíl vojáků na jeho provedení', pp. 104–5.

[36] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, ar.j. 281.

[37] A ÚV KSČ, Útvar svodné informace, plánů, a řízení ÚV KSČ [Kašpar's speech in Brno on the current political situation, 6 February 1969].

cities.[38] Rejoicing soon turned to attacks on nine Soviet garrisons and peaceful protests around another twelve. The main office of Aeroflot in central Prague was demolished by a crowd 3,000–4,000 strong, though the real perpetrators were possibly StB provocateurs.[39]

Because army units assigned for civil unrest had stood down from twenty-minute readiness alert on 4 February, they were unprepared for such an event. Moreover, the order to intervene had to come from the political, not military, leadership. When the interior ministry and the deputy Soviet commander in Czechoslovakia asked General Dzúr for army assistance, he was unable to contact Černík or Svoboda, and Dubček refused to make a decision without more details.[40] Except in Bratislava, the police did not disperse the crowds. By early morning on the 29th all was quiet; since the Czechoslovak team lost its next match to Sweden and the Soviets won the gold medal, there was no further cause for celebration. *Rudé právo* carried almost no details of the events apart from the Czech government's condemnation of the attacks on Soviet sites, and on 1 April published a commentary by Šimon who claimed that 'the current internal political situation is characterized by a definite calming of social and political life and shift in attention towards internal-party and economic questions'. Although select army units were returned to twenty-minute readiness, neither the ExCom nor the Presidium convened to discuss what had just happened.

The Soviet Politburo, however, went into emergency session on 30 March and decided that this incident could be used to effect a major change in Czechoslovakia.[41] A joint declaration was drawn up with the Soviet government condemning the organized 'mass hooligan attacks' on Soviet installations by 'rightist extremists' and 'counter-revolutionaries'. Even sharper criticism was reserved for the Czechoslovak Presidium and government, in which, it was claimed, there were people like Smrkovský 'interested in unleashing counter-revolutionary, anti-Soviet actions in the country'. They concluded by warning that if such events recurred the Soviets would act unilaterally.[42] As in August 1968, the Soviets were using the letter to induce differentiation among Czechoslovak leaders.

[38] Madry, 'Mocenský zvrat v dubnu 1969 a podíl vojáků na jeho provedení', p. 108.

[39] A FMV, fond A/10, i.j. 199; RFE situation report no. 27 (2 April 1969); Josef Frolík, *Špión vypovídá* (Prague: Orbis, 1990), pp. 281–4. Within a week thirty young people were arrested, mostly young manual workers, and by the end of April this group was narrowed down to four core instigators (one manual worker and three apprentices, all aged between fifteen and seventeen). See A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2285, č.j. VB-388/02-69. It is not clear from the files what the outcome of the investigation was. The Aeroflot building had been attacked once before, during clashes after Palach's funeral, the perpetrators and cause of which are also unknown.

[40] A MNO, sekr. MNO-1969, č.j. 0030128/47.

[41] Madry, 'Mocenský zvrat v dubnu 1969 a podíl vojáků na jeho provedení', p. 112.

[42] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 27, a.j. 281–2.

The letter was delivered to the CPCS Presidium by a Soviet deputy foreign minister, Vladimir Semenov, who suddenly flew into Prague while Defence Minister Grechko arrived at Milovice, the main Soviet base in Czechoslovakia, on 31 March. Dzúr, along with Svoboda, Dubček, and Černík were all in western Bohemia at the time, inspecting Czechoslovak army units, and were not present to receive them. (At the time it was feared that the inspection was in fact a lighting strike to suppress a *coup d'état* in the Czechoslovak army; archives show that in fact the visit had been planned since January and was strictly ceremonial.)[43]

The next morning, 1 April, Grechko and an entourage of Soviet commanders met with Dzúr and members of the Czechoslovak armed forces' interdepartmental consultative body, the Military Council. After a long, cold silence, Grechko announced that he had been sent by the CPSU and Soviet government to protest the recent 'shameful event', which had been, he said, an organized, counter-revolutionary attack. He announced that Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia would begin tank, APC, and helicopter patrols and would disperse any demonstrations near Soviet garrisons, and added that another 15,000 Soviet troops might be moved into Czechoslovakia. If real trouble arose, Soviet commanders in the GDR, Poland, and Ukraine already had orders to move their forces into Czechoslovakia with no warning for Czechoslovak leaders.[44]

In the face of this open threat to re-invade, Dzúr tried to exonerate his inaction during the hockey riots by blaming the politicians. Grechko, however, was unforgiving, reminding him that 'both my arms were wounded [in World War II] for Czechoslovakia; many of the towns where there was disorder I personally liberated'. He demanded that the Soviet army receive an apology and total compensation for damages, and that something be done against the '100,000 counter-revolutionaries' at large in the country. Bedřich, head of the army's political control network, agreed that 'we must apologize very deeply to your comrades and take measures to deepen friendship'. The Soviet generals shot back that they expected not just friendship but love; Dzúr pointed out that they lacked the means to impose love, but suggested that they all have a drink. 'And to what shall we drink?', quipped Grechko. 'To lighten the atmosphere', Dzúr replied feebly. Instead, Grechko told Dzúr to go to the Presidium and relay the Soviet view. In parting he described the current situation as 'worse than before 21 August 1968; if you do not take measures it will be bad'.

[43] RFE situation report no. 30 (9 April 1969); Madry, 'Mocenský zvrat v dubnu 1969 a podíl vojáků na jeho provedení', p. 112.

[44] A MNO, sekr. MNO-1969, č.j. 0030128/47. Mobilizing Soviet armies from neighbouring states would have been relatively easy at the time, thanks to ongoing war-games in those countries and in Czechoslovakia.

Scalded by Grechko's words, the Military Council drafted a statement condemning the events as an anti-Soviet offensive inflamed by the media,[45] which Dzúr then took to an ExCom meeting that was discussing the letter delivered by Semenov. Dubček had opened the meeting by calling repeatedly for measures that would 'unconditionally control public activity',[46] after which Černík launched into a panicky tirade about counter-revolution. Husák, warning that the Soviets were close to re-invading, blamed the whole situation on the 'rotten' model of political reform itself. He regretted that no one had been arrested for 'political deeds' committed in August 1968, denounced Palach's suicide as an 'anti-Soviet and anti-communist action', tore into Smrkovský for allegedly joining the crowd on Wenceslas Square three nights before (which Smrkovský firmly denied), and called for his expulsion from the party leadership. Though this was not a counter-revolution, he said, political life was polluted by 'petty-bourgeois elements' which had to be purged, while a strict new law on public order was required to facilitate arrests. 'We are reaping the harvest which we allowed enemy forces to sow', he said, but the people, he predicted, would support a sharp change in policy.

Dzúr was then invited to speak. He recounted Grechko's words almost verbatim, and although he did not identify with them entirely, he acted more as a Soviet courier than as defence minister. What seems to have alarmed the ExCom most, however, was not what Grechko said (no one had even mentioned him before Dzúr spoke) but rather Dzúr's remark that the Military Council had already drafted its own statement, which it intended to publish. Dubček asked Dzúr if it would be released before the Presidium and government could present theirs; Dzúr assured him that they would wait. From that and subsequent questions Dubček seems to have been trying to gauge whether the army in fact still answered to the Czechoslovak government or had become an independent agent. Dubček also inquired whether Dzúr thought the CSPA could, if called upon, intervene against a *coup d'état* or armed uprising; Dzúr replied that it would oppose counter-revolution.

Dubček rambled on further about the Presidium issuing a declaration to condemn the events and the need for government measures to squash 'anti-socialist' forces and impose censorship. Instead of making proposals, however, everyone, including Dubček, turned on Smrkovský for allegedly deviating from the collective line. Smrkovský shot back that the

[45] A MNO, sekr. MNO-1969, č.j. 0030128/11.

[46] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1 [uncatalogued; transcript of ExCom meeting, 1 April 1969]. All details are from this transcript.

real problem was the failure of the dormant Central Committee departments to produce policies. None the less, he conceded that he did not want to impede good relations with the Soviets, so the upcoming plenum could remove him from the Presidium, 'if it will help the party'.

Biĺak and Kempný drafted a declaration, which was presented to the full Presidium at 11:30 that night. After eight hours of discussion it was accepted, and in a rare vote the Presidium decided to include a passage condemning Smrkovský's alleged deviations; only four members besides Smrkovský voted against the passage – Dubček was not one of them.[47] The document echoed the Soviet interpretation of events as not a spontaneous outburst of national pride but as a premeditated attack by 'rightist and anti-socialist forces' and the media, the organizers of which would be found and punished. It announced that full censorship would be installed and *Politika* would be suspended again (it had resumed only a month before).[48] The declaration's impact on the public was devastating: a survey found that, after it was read on the news, television viewing that day dropped sharply because viewers 'were unable to concentrate on subsequent programmes'.[49] The Dubček leadership had, for the first time, fully identified with its Soviet critics; in doing so it parted ways with the public it had courted for over a year.

On the morning of 2 April the government assembled to adopt drastic restrictive measures 'to secure peace and order'. These included preliminary censorship of controversial publications; an interior ministry hunt to expose the alleged organizers of the hockey celebrations; the systematic prosecution of 'anti-socialist forces'; and allocation of army units to back up the police in the event of unrest and reinforce patrols.[50] Černík, Dzúr, and Interior Minister Pelnář formed a security triumvirate authorized to use force in crises, while the defence and interior ministries began elaborating a general plan for a coordinated response to disorder, which was approved by the cabinet on 10 April.[51]

In the first week of April, Grechko and Semenov met repeatedly with Svoboda, Husák, Černík, Štrougal, Kempný, and Dzúr to encourage Dubček's removal; Grechko promised Štrougal that certain reforms could continue as long as the party was headed by someone Moscow could trust.[52] It was probably during this week that Svoboda promised

[47] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P122/69. Those four were Hrdinová, Kabrna, Pinkava, and Slavík. [48] *Rudé právo*, 3 April 1969. [49] A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar.j. 30.

[50] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2285, č.j. SM-0790/M-69; RFE situation report no. 28 (3 April 1969). By 14 April nearly 2,500 soldiers were assigned to help the police in protecting political and economic centres and Soviet garrisons.

[51] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2285, č.j. SM-001/M-1969.

[52] A KV ČSFR, R1 [KV ČSFR interview with Štrougal, 22 May 1991].

Grechko that Dubček would be replaced by Husák at the next plenum. With Grechko then in Poland and the GDR to arrange the transfer of 8,000 Soviet troops to Czechoslovakia, party leaders were working under a new deadline: May Day was approaching and would certainly be marked by disturbances unless preceded by major political changes.

On 8 April Dubček told the ExCom that he wanted to delay the Central Committee plenum until May, when it would discuss political and economic strategy. Štrougal immediately insisted that it be held in April, before May Day, which he feared would turn into a battle between locals and Soviet units. Husák added that district party officials were clamouring for a policy-making plenum to provide a sense of direction, and recommended 17 April, a date that had already been floated as a possibility. Černík called for an April plenum at which Dubček would tell the country that there were 'dark forces' lurking in society which had somehow organized the half-million-strong hockey celebrations; Husák agreed that these forces had to be exposed and arrested. After much cajoling Dubček reluctantly agreed to 17 April as the plenum date.[53] With this decision made, Husák and Štrougal used the Presidium meeting later that day to persuade the majority to turn against Dubček and end this 'eternal sequence of crises'.[54]

When the ExCom reconvened on 12 April, Štrougal submitted a plenum agenda proposal that he admitted was out of the ordinary. While remaining faithful to the reform course, the plenum would expel the 'political opposition', restore unity in the party leadership, and thoroughly critique events since January 1968. For the last point he submitted a draft report that revised the November resolution to acknowledge the threat of counter-revolution. Smrkovský immediately denounced the report as justifying the invasion and he predicted social explosion if it were adopted. Černík defended the draft, saying that the party had to 'liquidate ideologically and power-wise the rightist centres that exist', and Sádovský praised it as a potential platform for an anti-rightist purge. Dubček did not reject the draft as a whole and criticized it only for being unduly negative; he agreed with Černík that 'no scope can be given for rightist views, tendencies, and influences'.[55]

The notes of this meeting show that Dubček clearly was not in charge of the ExCom, and around this time, as he grew increasingly aware of his impotence, he began considering resignation. He had first considered quitting after the Kiev summit, but was dissuaded by Smrkovský and others who feared the possible consequences.[56] Subsequent talks,

[53] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/6, a.j. 19.
[54] Tigrid, *Why Dubček Fell*, p. 165.
[55] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/6, a.j. 20.
[56] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, pp. 232–3.

however, with Katushev, Kuznetsov, Grechko, and Semenov convinced him that the other communist leaders hated him and relations between Czechoslovakia and its allies would never normalize while he headed the CPCS.[57] He told Černík, who was very pleased, and when Dubček wobbled in his resolve Černík reassured him of 'the correctness of the move'.[58] Since, as we have seen, Svoboda had been eager to get rid of Dubček since August, he too was delighted, and his presidential lodge in the Castle gardens became the nerve-centre of the plot to replace the first secretary.

Dubček wanted Černík to be his successor, as he distrusted Husák. The Slovak leader, however, was already securing his position with a secret visit to Uzhgorod, in Soviet Ruthenia, on 13 April. There he met Brezhnev, who had requested the tryst to register his displeasure with Dubček and to give Husák his blessing.[59] Husák also enjoyed Svoboda's patronage; the president was instrumental in persuading Czech leaders to accept Husák over the more popular Černík, and at the last minute Dubček dropped his resistance.[60]

The full Presidium convened on 17 April at 11 a.m. At the start Dubček announced that as he did not want to damage relations with the Soviets or cause in-fighting, he was tendering his resignation and nominated Husák as his replacement. Černík followed by admitting that 'our decision will not be received with applause and that we shall meet with some resistance', but promised that 'we do not intend to change our party's [reform] course and we want to carry it out more consistently than up to now' as long as 'we have in the leadership a man who will control things all round'.[61] He then gave Husák a glowing recommendation as 'a man who is devoted to Marxism, is widely educated, a man who can conceptualize policy, has his own concept. He knows how to go against people who attack our course . . . our party deserves such a man standing at its head.'

One after another, old reformers greeted Husák's ascendancy as a chance to start over with a clean slate. Šimon promised to get the Prague party organization to accept him since 'our society needs centralized leadership, one that is firm, simple'. Špaček saw Dubček's departure as in the party's best interest: he had done his job, and now they needed a leader who showed 'truthfulness, decisiveness' and could begin the 'renewal of

[57] Andras Sugar, *Dubček Speaks* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), pp. 93–4.
[58] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 87, a.j. 141. [59] Plevza, *Vzostupy a pády*, pp. 123–4.
[60] A KV ČSFR, R1 [KV ČSFR interview with Štrougal, 22 May 1991]; A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on meeting between Kádár and Svoboda in Budapest, 8 July 1971].
[61] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 87, a.j. 141. All details of the meeting are taken from this transcript.

party functions'. Only Slavík, worried that it would signal the end of reforms, opposed Dubček's resignation, but even he, after a scolding from Svoboda, promised to submit.

In accepting, Husák announced that the time had come to lead the country out of crisis and take 'unavoidable measures'. He promised to continue the reforms within realistic limits, but 'everyone today feels that the nation needs calm, needs to strengthen internal conditions'. A political struggle lay ahead and

> In a political struggle there is always an enemy. Everyone must be given the chance not to become an enemy. We cannot sit on our arses in front of whoever is against this struggle. The party must win the struggle . . . We will take the struggle to the end with great tolerance but also with political firmness, which is unavoidable.

Štrougal called a vote on Dubček's resignation: all except Slavík and Kabrna were in favour. Husák was elected first secretary with only the same two abstaining. Husák then proposed the composition of a new Presidium: Svoboda, Černík, himself, Dubček, Erban, Sádovský, Štrougal, Biľak, Poláček, Colotka, and Piller. Smrkovský would not be among them. When Slavík protested that the previous Presidium had included people from the factories, Husák replied that now a 'small operative organ' was needed instead.

In the remaining hours before the plenum opened, a massive persuasion assault was launched to prevent any opposition. The main target were the Central Committee's druids: the writers, philosophers, and scientists most devoted to radical reform. When it emerged that Dubček was to be replaced, a group of thirty to forty members began considering at least a demonstrative walk-out in protest, but they were dissuaded by Milan Hübl, the rector of the party's Higher Political School and a leading reformer. He claimed that he had talked all night with Husák and had come away convinced that there would be no retreat on reforms and that Husák's election might bring some stability. Hübl even used the old argument that under Husák the Soviet troops might leave.[62]

It was not only Hübl's persuasion that succeeded, but, according to Kaplan, a deep and widespread hunger in the Central Committee for order:

> For example when it was April, after the hockey, I think that a large part of the Central Committee members (including those who were for Dubček) wanted an end to the crisis situations . . . The atmosphere during Husák's election was such that a number of people were waiting for a solution which would lead to stability.

[62] A KV ČSFR, R112 [KV ČSFR interview with Vladimír Kolmistr, 19 March 1990], R24 [KV ČSFR interview with Martin Vaculík, 4 May 1990], R51 [KV ČSFR interview with Václav Slavík, 28 March 1990]; Luděk Pachman, *Checkmate in Prague*, trans. Rosemary Brown (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 118.

A lot of people no longer believed that under Dubček stability was possible. And Husák, who had the halo of a man who belonged to January, was considered experienced. He gave speeches to the Central Committee, he could speak without notes, which at that time few could do . . . He wasn't sure whether everyone would be for him . . . He wanted to take over from Dubček with glory. That meant everyone voting for him.[63]

The crisis fatigue of some Party functionaries was captured in a declaration by the presidium of the Plzeň-north district party committee on 3 April, which announced that the hockey crisis 'creates a situation in which, because of an atmosphere of unrest and uncertainty, citizens are distracted from their daily work and from a solution to the problems and tasks which ought to contribute to the further development of socialism in our country'.[64] Similar views were expressed between 2 and 10 April in 1,432 resolutions sent to the Central Committee from party and non-party organizations, 75 per cent of which agreed with the Presidium's 2 April declaration (68.8 per cent in the Czech lands, 95.6 per cent in Slovakia). Extracts from these resolutions were reprinted in *Rudé právo* under headlines like 'Only in a calm atmosphere is it possible to live well' and 'Introduce the necessary calm, certainty, and order'.[65]

In the event that not everyone agreed with these sentiments, measures were also taken to keep order once Dubček's departure was announced. Army units were put on alert, joint patrols with the police were dispatched, a special interior ministry riot unit was assigned to the Prague police, and fifty lorries were set aside for transporting arrested demonstrators. Svoboda and the State Defence Council pre-approved the use of 'unlimited number of forces and means' of the Czechoslovak army should unrest escalate to an unmanageable level.[66] The plenary hall in Prague Castle was sealed off by StB officers, who ripped out the telephones and prevented anyone from leaving once the session began. It was rumoured that the whole security operation was run by the KGB, who were listening to the plenum's proceedings from a room in the Castle.[67]

At 3 p.m. Dubček offered the Central Committee his resignation, explaining it as a contribution to the struggle against 'anti-socialist and rightist opportunist forces', to party unity, and to better relations with the USSR. He condemned the 'displays of anti-Sovietism and vandalism' of

[63] A KV ČSFR, R131 [KV ČSFR interview with Karel Kaplan, 1 March 1991]. See also Karel Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní*, pp. 142–4.

[64] Quoted in Miroslav Vild, 'Analýza událostí let 1967–1970 v okrese Plzeň-sever', unpublished study, 1990, p. V:5. [65] *Rudé právo*, 11, 17, and 18 April 1969.

[66] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 8/a, a.j. 87, str. 281–95; A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2285, č.j. SM-001/M-1969.

[67] A KV ČSFR, R112 [KV ČSFR interview with Vladimír Kolmistr, 19 March 1990].

the March hockey festivities and swore his sincere love for the Soviet Union. He then proposed Husák as his replacement, praising his credentials, and promised that there would be no change in policy.[68] Černík, who was chairing the plenum, then urged all Czech members to vote for Husák, as he would lead the party out of crisis and renew good relations with the allies while not resorting to Stalinism. Štrougal followed by calling for the 'deep analysis' of events that he had not been allowed to present to the plenum; he supported Husák's candidacy but did so less avidly than Černík.

Almost all subsequent speakers thanked Dubček for bowing out and welcomed Husák as the new leader. As chairman, Černík made an obvious effort to limit discussion times and prevent any opposition from coalescing, especially after Slavík, Josef Svoboda (a co-opted member), Karel Kosík, and Marie Miková raised some doubts about what was happening, though they did not oppose Husák outright. When it came to a vote, Dubček was relieved in a show of hands: 150 for, 22 against, 10 abstentions. Husák was then elected by secret ballot: 156 for, 22 against, 4 abstentions.

Husák then proposed the abolition of the ExCom and creation of a new Presidium. Despite complaints that it would not include representatives of key social groups, all candidates proposed by Husák were elected, with Biľak, Štrougal, Piller, and Dubček receiving considerable opposition.[69] After one last salvo from a theatre director, who complained that the Central Committee was being steamrollered into its decisions, Husák closed the plenum by thanking Dubček again and by appealing to the Czech intelligentsia for support. While implying that enduring opposition would result in expulsions, and that the small media 'mafia' would be broken, he reassured the plenum of his devotion to reform: 'Who wants to give up post-January policies, comrades? Who is considering it?'

All the preparations to combat mass unrest proved unnecessary. Except for brief strikes at four universities in Prague and Brno there was no student response. The StB noted that among students 'the tendencies towards passivity and unwillingness for actions are increasing. The number is growing of students who are gradually losing interest in organizing and participation in protest actions.' They also noted that 'no information was acquired from factories which would indicate serious strike actions',[70] and the trade-union leadership endorsed the plenum's

[68] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 17. dubna 1969*, pp. 3–5. All details are from this transcript.
[69] Out of a total 182 possible, Biľak received 64 votes against, Dubček 38, Piller 45, and Štrougal 39. Smrkovský was written in on nine ballots.
[70] A MV ČSR, fond H 3-2, i.j. 46, č.j. N/Z-0079/69.

outcome in the belief that only by ending 'the crisis condition of our society' would it be possible to 'deepen civil freedoms, legal certainties, and create the preconditions for elections'.[71]

This quiescence was in part thanks to Dubček's own constant appeals for order, in particular his 3 April television address (his last as party leader, reprinted in *Rudé právo* under the headline 'Calm and discipline are our fundamental interests'), during which he openly warned of Soviet intervention in the event of another 'anti-Soviet, anti-socialist, or anti-communist' disturbance. His intention had been to deprive the Soviets of any excuse to interfere and allow reforms to resume at the next Central Committee plenum. The unintended consequence of Dubček's efforts, however, was the complete demobilization of the people. Whereas a fortnight earlier half a million turned out to celebrate their hockey team, now only about 300 gathered on Wenceslas Square, and they were easily dispersed by police.[72]

An internal party survey reckoned that the plenum was viewed positively by 50–60 per cent of Czech party functionaries, negatively by 20–5 per cent, with 15–20 per cent undecided. In Slovakia it was accepted overwhelmingly. In party cells there was no open criticism of Husák; as Černík recalls, Czechs were eager to avoid insulting Slovaks and this enabled Husák to be accepted as a potential Kádár.[73]

Most party members, like the public, were simply uncertain about what lay ahead: by mid-May only 5 per cent of party cells had sent an official reaction to the centre, while out of 2,683 resolutions and letters, all but 89 agreed with Dubček's resignation. By late May, 857 of 2488 party cells in South Bohemia had met, and none opposed Dubček's removal, while in West Bohemia 75 per cent of the 2,995 cells had met, of which nine cells rejected the plenum's outcome. Even in more radical Prague, 70 per cent of the 3,022 party cells in Prague had met to discuss the April plenum; only seven rejected the plenum's decisions.[74]

Even the editors of *Reportér*, highly critical of Husák during the Smrkovský affair, now claimed that 'we want with utter sincerity to express support for the new first secretary of the CPCS Central Committee, because great responsibility rests on his shoulders for the fate of our people and our country'.[75] Perhaps the most revealing example of

[71] Pecka, Belda, and Hoppe, *Občanská společnost, 1967–1970*, p. 213.
[72] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; confidential report for Husák from CC department for political-specialized services, 25 April 1969].
[73] Author's interview with Černík, 24 April 1992.
[74] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 29.–30. května 1969*, 2 vols. (Prague: n.p., 1969), vol. II, p. 212.
[75] *Reportér*, 8 May 1969. Originally the weekly had been very supportive of Husák, carrying a long interview with him at the end of June 1968 to establish his reputation in the Czech lands.

the rationalization of Dubček's downfall are remarks by Václav Havel (recorded by the StB) that 'the situation in the state needed a firm hand. Dubček didn't have it, because he is a dreamer and a lyric poet', while Husák was the only person 'who truly has a firm concept and can lead the people out of this crisis situation'.[76]

Ironically, Dubček left his post as Novotný had, publicly thanked and honoured by the faction that was ousting him. The Presidium and then the plenum agreed that he would remain in public life as chairman of the Federal Assembly, just as Novotný had been allowed to remain president. This velvet deposition contributed to attempts to persuade the party and the public that it was all in the interest of reforms and the greater good. The Soviets, after eleven months, more than a dozen high-level meetings, countless conspiratorial contacts and letters of protest, and an attempted *coup d'état* backed by one of the largest military operations in European history, had finally achieved their goal: Dubček had fallen. What brought him down, however, was not so much Moscow's might but internal dynamics: months of persuasion and rationalization, crisis fatigue, ambition, and opportunism. Resorting to Husák was an escape for politicians unable and unwilling to govern an open society.

[76] A MV ČSR, fond H 3-2, i.j. 46, č.j. N/Z – 0079/69. It is not clear whether the remarks were taken out of context, but Václav Černý confirms in his memoirs that he and Havel did originally have a positive impression of Husák. See Černý, *Paměti*, 4 vols. (Brno: Atlantis, 1992), vol. III, pp. 612–17.

8 The security police in the Dubček period

One of the most sensitive areas that a liberalizing coalition has to address is the means of state surveillance. No meaningful reform of institutions can fail to deal with offices directly responsible for many of the regime's worst acts. Since liberalizers contemplate only a limited institutional modification, however, there is no desire to dismantle the machinery of coercion altogether; as Dubček acknowledged to the Soviets in May 1968, the Czechoslovak security police (StB) was 'needed by the party as an apparatus of violence'.[1]

Policy towards the StB exemplifies the limits of the Dubček coalition's intentions. Genuine change was desired, and many officers inside the StB shared that wish, themselves having lobbied for several years for a rethinking of the service's mission. The new freedom that liberalization was to inaugurate would be possible only if society no longer felt at risk of persecution for expressing opinions or establishing new associations in pursuit of solutions to chronic problems. With dismaying speed, however, the Dubček Presidium moved to thwart efforts to rid the country of its despised bureau of guardians.

This chapter will examine the role of the security police under Dubček by first looking at the problems of political and bureaucratic management before 1968 that convinced many officers of the need for reform; I will then analyse radical plans for the transformation of the StB in 1968 and the Dubček coalition's interventions; and I will conclude with a look at the StB in the months between the invasion and Husák's rise to power as a prelude to their revival as a force of political surveillance.

Political management before 1968

A chronic problem of StB management was the imperfect mechanism for subordinating it to the will of party leaders, who needed but feared this parallel power structure. Until 1956 the StB was kept under tenuous

[1] A KV ČSFR, Z/S 2.

party control through a nomenklatura system that reserved unto the central party bodies the right to appoint the top 1,000 commanders.[2] Control was reinforced by a network of personal links. This oversight was prone to failure, especially when Soviet KGB 'advisers' meddled. The StB, housed within the interior ministry, actually strayed farther from the party's reach after 1953 when it fell under Rudolf Barák, a ferociously ambitious young minister with close ties to the KGB. The Central Committee's Eighth Department was unable to interfere as Barák's ministry wildly expanded its purview (taking charge of prisons, archives, transport timetables, and censorship) and established its own small army.

Come 1956, however, and growing criticism of terror tactics, the Central Committee set up its own Military Commission of Defence in February 1957 to discuss all vital defence and security matters of the state, with regional and district branches created two years later to enforce decisions.[3] Novotný's election as president of the republic in 1957 also facilitated party domination of these state organs. The number of people under StB surveillance plunged overnight, from 17,086 in 1956 to 6,261 a year later, while the informer network was shorn from 37,972 to 28,412 in the same period.[4] Two years later, however, possibly on the impetus of a Novotný unsettled by the Hungarian and Polish events, old methods prevailed and Barák told the StB to expand operations; by 1960, when the 'all-people's state' was declared, 12,790 people were under surveillance and an index of 130,000 political enemies ('former people') was created.[5]

In 1961, when Barák was brought down, the party had a chance to achieve lasting, routinized control of the security forces, and did so by installing Štrougal as the new minister. Party apparatchiki assumed other key positions, such as Josef Kudrna as first deputy minister with responsibility for the StB, Miroslav Košňar as head of the Second (counter-intelligence) Directorate, and Miloš Jakeš as a deputy minister. The Central Committee's Eighth Department could now exercise direct influence, especially after a Secretariat decree in January 1963 placed the party networks at the defence and interior ministries under the department's direction. The StB was handled by a special Eighth Department section that decided 78 of the 119 primary nomenklatura functions, and the section's director had the right to attend ministry collegium meetings.[6]

[2] Karel Kaplan (ed.), *Kadrová nomenklatura KSČ, 1948–1956. Sborník dokumentů* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny ČSAV, 1992), pp. 12–14, 24–5, 91–6.

[3] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2342, č.j. ÚKRK-11878/68-Hab.

[4] A FMV, fond IM (1 nam. MV Zamla), k. 74, č.j. SE-0016/01-68.

[5] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/7.

[6] A KV ČSFR, R109 [KV ČSFR interview with Jaroslav Sidlo].

As in other areas, security decisions were made more and more by Novotný alone, acting on advice from the narrowest circle of advisers or ministers. Most of the party leadership was excluded from decision-making: in 1960–7, of thirty-three reports submitted to party leaders on StB operations, only three ever reached the full Presidium.[7] During the 1960s, one analysis later concluded, the StB was 'left completely beyond the influence and control of constitutional organs. It was guided exclusively by party organs, essentially by individual functionaries.'[8]

Bureaucratic problems before 1968

The second type of management problem ensued from the war the StB waged with itself. As an example of bureaucracy, despite its paramilitary command structure, it was neither rational nor routinized: it encompassed many semi-autonomous branches and was racked by countless turf battles so that it rarely produced results commensurate to its expense or expanse. A determined effort to remedy systemic flaws began in 1963 when, under the influence of the new thesis of the 'all-people's state', an ultra-secret 126-page report was produced by the ministry's analytical group, headed by Stanislav Padrůnek.[9] Arguing that with the end of class antagonism there was no further need for broad domestic surveillance, it assumed that the StB should concern itself solely with genuine counter-intelligence. Instead, the study found, StB still followed an operational code set down by Barák in 1954, surveillance operations were lasting longer with fewer results, and prosecutions based on StB information, while decreasing rapidly, were primarily for attempted defections to the West and petty offences, while spies and their accomplices went unexposed.

This gross shortcoming was attributed to the fragmentation of the 7,500-strong officer corps into eleven directorates and divisions, to a preponderance of unneeded commanders and clerks, and to heavy dependence on an inefficient informer network. The number of informers had declined from 27,908 in 1960 to 20,493 by 1963, with about 5,000 leaving the roster annually. In some districts the annual turnover rate of informers could be as high as 60 per cent. As a result, an estimated 100,000 people had served as informers between 1948 and 1963. The report criticized the widespread practice of opening a file as soon as one incident of 'agitation' (grumbling) was detected, then recruiting informers to spy on that person in the unlikely event that the griping would continue to the point where it could be prosecuted. StB officers were also still

[7] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2342, č.j. ÚKRK-11878/68-Hab.
[8] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/7 [the interior ministry's Action Plan, 20 May 1968].
[9] A FMV, Výhledy SAS, kr. 48, č.j. A/16-005/ZD-63.

under pressure from a 1958 directive to recruit eight to ten informers each; as a result, some resorted to invention: one officer in Plzeň fabricated seventeen informers and more than 1,000 reports in 1957–63.[10] Other officers frequently blackmailed unlikely citizens into becoming informers; one officer apparently considered Václav Havel a candidate, but gave up after three months and added Havel to the index of 'hostile persons' in 1965.[11]

In its conclusion the report accepted that enemies still lurked in the 'all-people's state', but recommended a differentiated approach: the truly dangerous had to be rooted out and punished, but the emphasis should shift to intensive, prophylactic measures to prevent the spread of hostile ideologies, especially among the young and the intellectuals. In October 1963, convinced by the report, Štrougal ordered that its recommendations be implemented. Directorates were merged to reduce overlap and to enhance coordination, and eventually a Main Directorate was established to streamline command. The following year Štrougal issued a new guideline focusing the StB on operations against foreign agents. The blanket monitoring of institutions and organizations was replaced by that of select individuals, as the huge data base of 'former people' was replaced by a new index of around 5,000 'hostile people', carefully classified into eight categories.[12] Štrougal also issued an order condemning the fabrication of informers and reports, and forbade the observation of party-state functionaries.[13] The ministry partly demilitarized, abolishing its troops and transferring the border guards to the defence ministry.[14]

Although Štrougal had the support of some commanders, conflicts of opinion among the deputy ministers prevented the sweeping re-orientation away from domestic surveillance. When First Deputy Minister Kudrna replaced Štrougal in 1965, restructuring ceased. As social tension grew, Novotný re-committed the StB to domestic surveillance in July 1966 and instigated the formation of 'operative groups', such as Operation Witness, which framed émigré publisher Pavel Tigrid as the secret director of prominent Prague intellectuals such as Václav Černý, Havel, Sviták, Josef Škvorecký, A. J. Liehm, and Jan Beneš, many of whom were already under surveillance.[15] The operation continued even after the 1967 trial of Beneš and, *in absentia*, Tigrid, with reports filed almost daily on their alleged confederates, especially Černý and Havel.[16]

[10] *Lidové noviny*, 11 March 1992. [11] *Mladá fronta dnes*, 25 May 1992.

[12] František Gebauer, Karel Kaplan, František Koudelka, and Rudolf Vyhnálek, *Soudní perzekuce politické povahy v Československu, 1948–1989. Statistický přehled* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1993), p. 23.

[13] A FMV, fond A13, i.j. 13, č.j. N/Z-0049/1969.

[14] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/7. [15] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2113.

[16] A FMV, fond A7, i.j. 668.

The fabricated success of such show trials, however, only concealed the rot caused by the continuation of trends identified by Padrůnek in 1963. On the eve of Dubček's election, the StB employed 8,950 people, or 20 per cent of all interior ministry staff.[17] One-half of StB officers had only primary schooling, and only 5.3 per cent had complete tertiary education. Mediocrity was rampant in the upper echelons: of the 3,739 commanders, 2,547 actually lacked the requisite qualifications. Of the StB as a whole, 6,114 of 8,930 did not meet qualification standards.[18] Two-thirds had joined the service before 1956 and had been shaped by the era of high Stalinism.

Although the StB had accumulated files on 300,000 people,[19] the thesis of the 'all-people's state' had taken root, in that the number of people under active surveillance began plummeting from 12,790 in 1960, levelled out in 1964, and by the end of 1967 stood at 3,647, of which only 10 per cent were listed in the index of 'hostile persons'.[20] The failure of the StB to expose the spies who, they suspected, abounded, was due largely to Western agencies' practice after 1963 of recruiting Czechoslovak visitors in the West rather than in Czechoslovakia itself, and to the Second (counter-intelligence) Directorate's reluctance to send officers abroad to chaperone tourists for fear of easy unmasking by local police.[21]

Western diplomats, meanwhile, were hardly idle: in 1966 alone almost 6,000 trips to sites outside Prague were detected, but the StB had the resources to tail only thirty-one of them. In the same year 754,200 Westerners visited Czechoslovakia, mostly Austrian and West German tourists, while thirty million items of mail went to or arrived from the West, far too many for the StB to watch. One report in mid-1967 admitted that the StB had almost no information on the whereabouts of CIA or MI6 stations in Western Europe,[22] and they had been unable to recruit a single Western double-agent. A 1968 probe found that in recent years 'the StB has practically no information on the activity against Czechoslovakia of the intelligence services of France, Great Britain, Israel, and the Vatican'.[23] This was largely due to the failure of

[17] A FMV, fond IM (1 nam. MV Zaruba), k. 73, č.j. 0025/01-68.

[18] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/7. [19] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/7.

[20] A FMV, fond IM (1 nam. MV Zaruba), k. 74, č.j. SE-0016/01-68. Those listed as working class may have been dispossessed bourgeoisie who had had to take up manual labour.

[21] One StB section made the following estimate: of 121 employees of the American embassy, 12 were suspected of being intelligence agents; at the UK embassy, 5 out of 62; at the French embassy, 5 out of 41; at the Italian, 5 to 7 of 25, at the Israeli 1 to 2 of 12. See A FMV, fond A7, i.j. 536, č.j. M-00 67/68.

[22] A FMV, fond A7, i.j. 536, č.j. M-00 67/68.

[23] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 20, a.j. 186, str. 20–57.

Czechoslovak surveillance technology: of seventy-eight listening devices planted in Western embassies and diplomatic suites, only half were in use; at the French embassy only four of twenty were operating; none of the sixteen in the Austrian embassy worked; those in the American embassy had been discovered in 1963. The British embassy was impregnable.[24]

The StB was certainly active, monitoring 12,000 people actively in 1964–7, involving an estimated 20,000 days of tailing, but only fourteen were convicted of spying.[25] Of the 6,963 citizens sentenced in 1964–7 for offences covered by the StB, 90 per cent were accused of defecting or trying to defect; most of the rest were indicted for 'agitation' and 'subversion'.[26] The largest social group (34 per cent) among those suspected of anti-state crimes were grumbling manual workers.[27] Turnover of informers continued at a high rate: in 1964–7 the Second Directorate had acquired 8,766 new informers but lost 18,836, and it was now estimated that 120,000 persons had served as informers since 1948.[28] A social analysis of the Second Directorate's informers at the end of 1967 shows that the average StB informer was a middle-aged Czech man with secondary education, working in a district-level administrative job – suited not for cracking Western spy rings but for snooping on ordinary citizens.[29]

Considering these accumulated problems and widespread malaise, it is not surprising that Dubček's election was well-received in the StB.[30] Minister Kudrna privately assured Dubček that his ministry had supported his election and had not been plotting a military crackdown to protect Novotný, as was widely rumoured.[31] As in the party, however, general support for the 'post-January course' quickly gave way to conflict between differing expectations of what liberalization should entail.

The StB under reform rule

Kudrna's close association with Novotný created a power vacuum in the ministry once the latter surrendered the party leadership. The StB was drifting at a time when its past work was coming under severe criticism in the free media, in February and especially March 1968. On 15 March the government suddenly removed Kudrna after an extraordinary expression of no confidence in him by parliament. With the state in chaos, however,

[24] A FMV, fond A 13, i.j. 273. [25] A FMV, fond IM, k. 5, sv. 70/1.
[26] A ÚV KSČ, fond 07/15, sv. 20, a.j. 186, str. 20–57.
[27] A FMV, fond IM (1 nam. MV Zaruba), k. 74, č.j. SE-0016/01-68.
[28] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/7. [29] A FMV, fond A7, i.j. 536, č.j. M-00 67/68.
[30] Jiří Zeiner, 'Postavení bezpečnostních sborů, zejména Státní bezpečnosti, v politickém vývoji, 1967–1970', unpublished study (Prague, 1991), pp. 14–15.
[31] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 123.

no replacement was appointed, forcing the chief of the StB Main Directorate to beg Černík to take action.[32] This was the one portfolio on which Černík and Dubček sought advice when forming the new government, turning to Štrougal, Smrkovský, and Mlynář for nominations. After considering Indra and Oldřich Voleník, the Presidium chose Peter Colotka, the Slovak justice commissioner, on 26 March. After he refused, the job went to Josef Pavel, who had solid credentials both as a Soviet-trained, former deputy minister and as a victim of Stalinism.[33]

Pavel took office on 8 April and immediately began applying reformist concepts of security work. As the Padrůnek report had recommended, the StB was to focus solely on thwarting foreign intelligence. In fact, parts of the StB had already stopped or reduced domestic surveillance on their own initiative.[34] Determined to go even further, on 12 May Pavel overturned fourteen standing orders on domestic surveillance, the most important being Štrougal's guideline from 1964 for the index of 'hostile persons'.[35] At the end of March, 3,764 persons were being actively monitored; within weeks of Pavel's arrival these operations ceased.[36] Pavel also banned the use of listening devices in all instances not involving foreigners, including those most treasured by the StB. Dubček, for example, had been informed of Operation Paris, which had been monitoring Václav Černý since 1966 for suspected links to Tigrid, and authorized its continuation. Pavel, however, countervened him and on 1 May the listening device in Černý's flat was disconnected.[37] In early June, in defiance of Pavel, the Prague regional StB resumed surveillance of Černý and in July sent the government a thick dossier designed to make him appear to be a counter-revolutionary ringleader.[38] There is evidence that Černík and Dubček requested surveillance of KAN, K-231, and SDP but Pavel again intervened; only later in the summer, after an anti-Pavel faction had coalesced, did the StB provide the party with such information.[39]

Pavel had to go beyond issuing orders and produce a document corre-

[32] A FMV, fond A7, i.j. 538, č.j. N/Ka-0110/1968.

[33] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P65/68; A KV ČSFR, R2 [KV ČSFR interview with Černík, 19 January 1990]. Pavel had studied in Moscow in the 1930s, served in the Spanish Civil War, then as head of the Eighth Department in 1947–8, and as deputy interior/national security minister in 1949–50, but was imprisoned in 1951–5. See Karel Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní*, pp. 464–65, and Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, pp. 126–7.

[34] A FMV, fond VKR, A-30, 364.

[35] A FMV, fond IM, k. 5, sv. 70/3, č.j. OS-00294/01-71.

[36] A FMV, fond IM (1 nam. MV Zaruba), k. 74, č.j. SE-0016/01-68.

[37] A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/3, č.j. SM-027/kom-01/1-69, and fond A 13, i.j. 273.

[38] A FMV, fond A7, č.j. 549, 1/2. The bug was reconnected on 6 June but was turned off again five days later by order of the StB Main Directorate.

[39] A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/3, č.j. SM-027/kom-01/1-69. This information comes from an October 1968 report by O. Spelina, who in spring 1968 served as acting commander of the Second Directorate.

sponding to the party's Action Programme to weave this policy of benign security into the very fabric of security operations. Work had already begun before his arrival but the early theses only iterated old complaints about the lack of centralized command and rational division of labour.[40] The first real proposals came from the StB's First Directorate, Czechoslovakia's intelligence service, which was plagued by many of the same problems bedevilling counter-intelligence, especially technological and methodological backwardness and organizational confusion. Compared to colleagues in other StB sections, the 1,200 officers in this sector were well educated (75 per cent spoke one Western language or more),[41] and by mid-April 1968 had already produced a cogent, even dryly witty report outlining a new concept of intelligence organization.

A month later, drawing on some of these ideas, Pavel submitted an Action Plan to the interior ministry's collegium. The plan's aim was to convert the ministry from a labyrinth of competing agencies into a stripped-down, streamlined bureau concerned primarily with local administration, policing, internal and external passports, registering organizations, and elections. The First Directorate would become a separate agency answerable to the prime minister, while the rest of the StB, to be renamed the Czechoslovak Counter-Intelligence Service, would become a highly centralized organization subordinate to the interior minister and concerned solely with foreign espionage. All officers compromised by the Terror would be fired, while many others would be transferred to the regular police (VB); later sources show that Pavel intended draconian shifts, with 2,000 StB officers going to the VB in the first wave, with another 2,000–3,000 to be dismissed in a second wave in the autumn.[42] Most of these changes were to be carried out in the second half of 1968.

If realized, the Action Plan would have left the ministry unrecognizable. Many StB officers feared dismissal or, if transferred to the VB, demotion. Almost all top commanders had played some role in the 1950s Terror and feared retribution.[43] Several of them quickly began lobbying party-state leaders; on 13 May, Dubček and Černík were approached by the discredited chief of the First Directorate, who warned them that the StB was disintegrating. The two politicians were sympathetic and decided quietly to form an alternative ministry leadership.[44] Furtive preparations were begun immediately by the first deputy minister, a relic of the Kudrna years.[45]

[40] A FMV, fond IM, k. 72, č.j. N/Ka-0031/1-1968.
[41] A FMV, fond A 2/3-2140, č.j. A-0022/010-68, A-001/010-68, A-00226/50-68.
[42] A FMV, fond IM, k. 8, sv. 67/6, č.j. SM-00429/69 [letter from Pavel to Černík, 7 August 1968]. [43] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/5.
[44] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Černík's questioning by the Central Control and Audit Commission, 16 June 1970]. [45] A FMV, fond IM, k. 6, sv. 70/5.

Pavel and his shrinking circle of allies now had to battle not only with dinosaurs in the ministry but also the Černík cabinet and the party Presidium. The party leadership struck another blow on 28 May, when it decreed that the entire StB would be removed from the ministry to spare it Pavel's radical reorganization.[46] The intention was to create a KGB-style agency combining intelligence and counter-intelligence, a gross violation of the party's own Action Programme. At the same time, to Pavel's dismay, the Presidium approved Viliam Šalgovič as the new deputy interior minister with responsibility for the StB. A Slovak party functionary and possibly a KGB agent, Šalgovič was persuaded by his good friend Dubček to oversee the creation of the new service and thwart Pavel's purge.[47] In Prague Šalgovič shared a villa with the new deputy minister for the VB, whose mission was also to subvert Pavel. They conspired to install another resident of that villa as the new chief of the StB Main Directorate on 16 July.[48] Meanwhile a special government commission was preparing legislation for the new security agency, which was to be approved by the narrow presidium of the National Assembly during the summer recess.[49]

A race against time began, to purge the StB of as many compromised officers as possible before Pavel lost authority over the outgoing directorates. He submitted his first batch of proposals to the party Presidium on 8 May. They were not discussed for another three weeks, and several changes were rejected, but Pavel was able to install the progressive Padrůnek as the first deputy minister and sweep out three other deputy ministers who were ill or shirking. In subsequent weeks he changed the heads of all the key directorates and shook up particular divisions and regional commands, above all the Prague regional.[50] To the horror of apparatchiki, he made these changes without consulting relevant party organizations. The process, however, was protracted: only on 1 August was Pavel able to appoint a client to head the Second Directorate.[51]

Between Pavel and the Presidium was the Eighth Department, overseen jointly by Mlynář and Dubček and headed since January by General Václav Prchlík. The department's security section head, Jan Večeřa, was sympathetic to Pavel and Padrůnek.[52] Večeřa's downfall came with that of Prchlík after they gave a remarkable press conference on 15 July.

[46] A FMV, fond IM, k. 8, sv. 67/4.
[47] A FMV, fond IM, k. 69, sv. IV; Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, p. 129.
[48] A MV ČSR, fond G/H 3-4, i.j. 274, č.j. VB-0660/02-69. Cf. A FMV, fond IM, k. 41, č.j. IMV-003/ZO-70. The new chief was Josef Hrubý. [49] A FMV, fond IM, k. 8, sv. 67/4.
[50] A FMV, kr. 41, 73/7-8, č.j. IMV 003/ZO-70; fond IM, l. 7, sv. 67/2.
[51] A FMV, kr. 41, 73/7-8, č.j. IMV 003/ZO-70. The new chief was Zdeněk Formánek, an intelligence officer. [52] A FMV, fond IM, k. 5, sv. 70/3, č.j. SM-074/kom-01/6-70.

Although best remembered for his criticism of WTO structure, Prchlík also denounced the StB's style of surveillance, and welcomed the increasing oversight role of the government and parliament.[53] The Soviets were furious and in a diplomatic note on 21 July demanded that Prchlík's department be abolished. With uncharacteristic decisiveness, the CPCS leadership complied four days later.

Reformers at the ministry also had allies in parliament, in particular the new Defence and Security Committee (DSC), the creation of which was announced as early as 14 March and which began work in May. Headed by Leopold Hofman (like Pavel and Kriegel a veteran of the Spanish Civil War), the DSC was intended as the primary organ of public supervision of the security forces, and was entitled to regular briefings and to inspect budget proposals.[54] Such powers of oversight were unthinkable at the time not only in the communist world, but also in most liberal democracies.

On the other hand there were the KGB advisers, who singularly disliked every change Pavel had inaugurated. KGB officers had been attached to the StB since 1949, although it was only in July 1962 that a formal inter-agency agreement was signed by Štrougal and Semichastnyi. The accord specified that the KGB could install nine officers at the StB, for whom the Czechoslovak side would provide housing, transport, and health care.[55] Before 1962 Czechoslovakia had paid all of their expenses, including their salaries. After 1962 the ministry supplied four villas, two fully equipped flats, eight cars, five chauffeurs, four charwomen, and translators, all at a cost to the ministry of more than 400,000 crowns a year.[56] In 1968 there were seven KGB officers, headed by General Kotov. Evgenii Nazarov was the main KGB contact for the StB, and he was regularly visited by Zbyněk Soják, the head of Dubček's personal Secretariat and an Indra client.[57] Two other officers worked specifically with counter-intelligence,[58] and three were assigned to intelligence.[59] They were privy to all information on domestic security, which they would translate into Russian and dispatch to Moscow.[60] The flow of information at the StB was irrationalized for their benefit; from one report on electronic surveillance of Western embassies, it can be deduced that an item of information would be sent first to the StB Main Directorate (and thus to the KGB) before going to the StB team handling the case. As a result

[53] Remington, *Winter in Prague*, pp. 215–17.
[54] A FS, krabice 266 [Branný a bezpečnostní výbor NS, 2.12.68].
[55] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2148. [56] A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/4, č.j. M-00132/68.
[57] Zeiner, 'Postavení bezpečnostních sborů', p. 34.
[58] A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/4, č.j. M-00132/68. They were Beloturkin and Mukhin.
[59] A KV ČSFR, R57 [KV ČSFR interview with Houska]. The three were Litvinov, Slavin, and Shundenko. [60] A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/4, č.j. M-00231/68.

the KGB would know what was going on but by the time the news arrived it was often too late for the StB to act on it.[61]

Although Pavel was able to exclude General Kotov from meetings of the ministry collegium, these officers hectored StB contacts over the need to restore order. The KGB and Poles promised to supply proof of counter-revolution and subversive 'Zionist centres' in Czechoslovakia, but were in fact very reluctant to share information. Compared to previous years, intelligence sharing by the KGB in 1968 declined by a third and by the Stasi by one-half; only the Poles and Hungarians were maintaining normal flows, but their material was trivial, mostly from their agents in the Vatican.[62]

As party leaders decreed anew in June that the StB would be detached from the ministry, Pavel and Padrůnek stalled for time. On 25 June the collegium discussed and rejected the government's bill to create an independent agency consisting of a Foreign Intelligence Directorate and a Defensive Intelligence Directorate.[63] On 8 July the collegium similarly debated Šalgovič's proposal for a similar Central Directorate of Intelligence Service,[64] and decided to postpone StB detachment indefinitely.[65]

In turn, Pavel and Padrůnek lobbied the party leadership to adopt their plans for the StB, using Mlynář and Prchlík as the conduit, but could not get a hearing. Although Pavel submitted a critical survey of the StB to the Presidium on 5 July, it was never discussed. They also tried to assure the country's leaders that there was no counter-revolutionary danger. Testifying before the Defence and Security Committee on 25 July, Padrůnek insisted that the 'internal state-security situation' was completely normal: 'Anyone who has eyes can see that there is calm and peace in our country, which of course does not exclude individual deviations beyond the bounds of legality.'[66] Similar assurances were advanced in a lengthy report sent two days later to the party Presidium on the eve of the Čierná summit, which bluntly reminded them that

> Czechoslovakia is included, especially by the USA, in the USSR's 'sphere of interest', which they consider necessary to respect fully at present. This respect goes so far that, for example, the USA . . . rejects any sort of concrete involvement, even in the event of Soviet interference in Czechoslovakia . . . Such a step [invasion], in the opinion of the US Department of State and the French foreign ministry, is very unlikely and is practically not taken into consideration.[67]

[61] A FMV, fond A/10, č.j. 75. [62] A FMV, fond IM, k. 5, sv. 70/1, č.j. M-00121/68.
[63] A FMV, fond IMV, 01-1/XI, k. 3, str. 72–89; A FMV, fond IM, k. 8, sv. 67/4.
[64] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 131.
[65] A FMV, fond IM, k. 41, č.j. IMV-003/ZO-70. The dates of these collegium meetings and the points at which specific decisions were taken might not be entirely correct, as ministry files are sloppy and often contradictory.
[66] A FMV, fond IM, k. 7, sv. 67/1, č.j. IM-008/50-01/1-72.
[67] A FMV, fond IM, k. 5, sv. 70/1, č.j. M-00121/68.

As the summer passed and party leaders failed to respond, Pavel and Padrůnek resorted to increasingly radical measures. On 27 July the collegium decided to stop jamming foreign radio. On 8 August Pavel disbanded the three divisions of the Second Directorate that conducted political surveillance, and transferred to the VB the authority to investigate crimes of subversion, terror, sabotage, agitation, defamation of the republic, violation of state secrecy, and hard-currency speculation. The StB officers who had previously dealt with these crimes were to be transferred to the VB but only by agreement with local VB commands, and they could no longer use informers.[68] On 14 August Pavel boldly wrote to Černík to recommend that the KGB officers pampered at Czechoslovakia's expense be sent home.[69]

As the first wave of mass transfer and dismissal of StB officers neared, Czechoslovakia was on the verge of a radical change in the role of the state. As with so much in 1968, this would have been achieved despite, rather than because of, the Dubček Presidium's wishes. One of the verbal promises made at Čierná was that the StB would be rescued from Pavel's clutches and entrusted to Šalgovič; as it seemed that this promise was not about to be kept, a faction within the ministry joined the conspiracy to seize the party-state with the help of foreign armies.

In the interior ministry the conspiracy scored a number of early successes, as clients of Pavel were arrested, deposed section heads were reinstated, and dozens of KGB officers arrived to take over an entire wing of the StB's headquarters on Sadová Street, in the Prague suburbs.[70] As chapter 5 showed, however, Šalgovič soon lost his nerve, and mutinies erupted among junior officers, using the party network in the ministry as an alternative hierarchy to the command structure imposed by the conspirators. Throughout the crisis Pavel, hiding in a series of safe houses around the capital and then in the Castle, issued counter-orders to maintain his control of the ministry. When the country's leaders returned from Moscow on 27 August and told Pavel that he had to resign, he conceded graciously and retreated to his dacha on a decent pension.[71]

The StB under Pelnář: normalization begins

The party Presidium quickly installed a new ministry leadership. As in the party, the most radical reformers and those who collaborated with the invasion were both eliminated while a centrist command took charge

[68] A FMV, fond rozkazy MV 1968, kr. 56; A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/7; A FMV, fond IM, k. 5, sv. 70/3, č.j. OS-00294/01-71.
[69] A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/4, č.j. M-00132/68.
[70] A KV ČSFR, R83 [KV ČSFR interview with Vitězslav Hlavaček].
[71] A FMV, fond IM, k. 9, sv. 71/7; A PV ČSSR, fond O. Černík, č.j. 2304/68-kab.pr.vl.

under new minister Jan Pelnář.[72] This leadership, assembled in close consultation with Mlynář as the party secretary directly responsible for the ministry,[73] faced three tasks: revoke Pavel's restructuring plans, enforce public order, and impose central control of all branches of the ministry.

The first task was swiftly fulfilled: within a fortnight Pelnář had overturned all of Pavel's orders to alter ministry structure.[74] The second was also easy: as seen in chapter 6, the discipline of citizens and the self-destruction of KAN, K-231, and the SDP pre-empted most of the StB's work. Had there been unrest, the security services would have been hard-pressed to keep order. The informer network was in disarray, StB officers were not receiving information, and communication had collapsed between the centre, regions, and districts.[75] In coming months informers quit in droves. It was not until October that surveillance resumed of prime suspects such as Václav Černý, and the wave of disturbances that began at the end of that month preoccupied the ministry with peace-keeping during anniversaries.

The third task, by comparison, was more complex and, over the long term, more troubling. By its very nature the StB was a difficult organization to supervise from one centre, be it the ministry collegium or the Central Committee. Party organizations were the only networks operating in the ministry at the end of August. Although they approved surveillance of disbanded organizations and of Šik in exile, party-state leaders had to keep the StB on a tight rein to assure the public that there would be no mass arrests. Factions within the StB were already pressing for resumption of broad surveillance, and intended to use a party *aktiv* on 27 September at the StB Main Directorate to confront Mlynář with demands for recognition of the invasion and a political crackdown.[76] Through a vigorous defence of liberalization and angry rebuke of all who had collaborated with the invasion, Mlynář was able to repel the hardliners until 17 October, when a rally was held at the Prague regional StB attended by Stalinist agitators.

With that event, and post-invasion chaos in ministry personnel selection, the Dubček leadership realized that control had to be re-institutionalized.[77] On 1 November the Presidium approved the creation of a new department for defence and security policy, answerable to Dubček, which

[72] Pavel's clients Padrůnek, Formánek, and Jankrle were detained in the GDR until 9 September, and on their return Padrůnek was transferred to a VB institute, Formánek returned to the First Directorate, and Jankrle was demoted to secrecy-protection division. See A FMV, fond A/26.

[73] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, sv. 80, ar.j. 125; A FMV, fond IM, k. 41, č.j. IMV-003/ZO-70.

[74] Zeiner, 'Postavení bezpečnostních sborů', p. 70.

[75] A FMV, fond A7, č.j. 377.

[76] Zeiner, 'Postavení bezpečnostních sborů', pp. 71–2.

[77] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P103.

began functioning in February 1969. Moreover, the Presidium assigned Černík and Pelnář to take 'preventive measures'

so that in no event can individuals or groupings attempt to misuse the means and instruments of the security services for intervention within the party, in internal party problems, which would necessarily lead to relapses of the 1950s. All security forces must be fully directed against hostile intelligence services and their helpers.[78]

On top of the fierce differentiation taking place among StB officers and the tension of regular public unrest, federalization threw the security forces into structural confusion. In February 1969 Pelnář, Slovak interior minister Egyd Pepich, and Czech interior minister Josef Grösser (a party functionary close to Indra) agreed that independent StB commands would be established in both republics.[79] The distribution of personnel took several months, severely disrupting the chain of command; as one report complained, 'Out of one hitherto unified counter-intelligence were created three independent, not mutually subordinated units.' Soon federal and republic StB were feuding over competences in keeping public order, with commanders trying to unload as much responsibility as possible.[80]

At the same time, a long-running feud resumed between the intelligence and counter-intelligence services. Throughout the 1960s neither had trusted the other to perform its tasks properly, and at various times had set up their own sub-sections to handle matters ostensibly belonging to the other directorate.[81] In January 1969, Second Directorate commanders announced their intention to create their own Foreign Intelligence Directorate (SZZ). The First Directorate would tolerate only very specific SZZ operations in Austria and West Berlin, a constraint the Second bluntly rejected.[82] This rivalry endangered all agents, especially since several defectors (the first ever) after the invasion revealed StB methods to the West.[83]

With the ministry thus in disarray, the StB had very poor information on social developments during the remaining months of Dubček's leadership, and policy remained formally committed to fighting foreign agencies. For example, a November 1968 check found that there had been no tapping of the public telephone network, since the StB simply lacked the

[78] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P4966.
[79] A FS, fond F I/1, šanon 56, spis 145; A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar.j. 6.
[80] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2307, č.j. SM-00175/M-1969.
[81] A FMV, Výhledy SAS, kr. 48, č.j. A/16-005/ZD-63; A FMV, fond A13, i.j. 13, č.j. N/Z-0049/1969.
[82] A FMV, fond A13, i.j. 13, č.j. N/Z-0049/1969.
[83] A FMV, fond A13, i.j. 110, č.j. A-00555/I-69. By 11 August 1969 the First Directorate had lost five officers, and four more defected by 1971. See A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 869, č.j. A-0031/3-Jir.-1971.

people to do it.[84] On 28 December 1968, the Černík cabinet reaffirmed that electronic surveillance could be used only against Western espionage, and on 6 March 1969 Pelnář assured the DSC that no one would be monitored for his political beliefs.[85]

At the same time, however, the nervous breakdown and hospitalization of the reformist head of the Second Directorate, Hlaváček, gave anti-reformers room to operate. The ministry Action Plan was revised in December to permit domestic political surveillance.[86] In January 1969 Indra held a raucous meeting with hardline StB officers,[87] and in February Czech interior minister Grösser tried to generate hysteria by telling party bosses that the StB had exposed armed groups intending to attack the country's leaders.[88] This claim was relayed to Brezhnev, who called Dubček and demanded that such partisans be arrested. Dubček, along with the Presidium and government, knew nothing about these groups and demanded a report from the ministry.[89] When Pelnář responded in early March, it was clear that the 'armed partisans' were clusters ranging from the possibly serious (a group in Olomouc allegedly planning to attack Soviet units on 15 March, the anniversary of the German occupation) to the tragicomic (four teenagers who stole weapons to shoot their way across the West German border) to the bizarre (eight illegally armed members of the Mickey Mouse walkers' club). Altogether the StB could find only ten such cases, none of which warranted the alarm raised by Grösser, whom the ExCom officially rebuked.[90]

The extent of StB efforts to destabilize the country and bring about Dubček's downfall cannot be precisely determined, though they certainly contributed. While some StB officers chased distributors of anti-Soviet leaflets, others circulated the pro-Soviet tabloid *Zprávy*; while some charged crowds of protesters, others might have instigated the demolition of the Aeroflot office. On the night of 1–2 April, after the hockey festivities, the StB Main Directorate went on high alert and an action group of sixty officers formed to prepare arrests and seize radio and television should their leaders command it. When the Presidium's statement of 2 April was reported, these officers were deeply disappointed and in several meetings called for a 'workers' and peasants' regime'.[91] The StB went on alert again on 16 April and prepared control measures for Dubček's

[84] A FMV, fond A/10, č.j. 75. [85] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/6, P5264.
[86] A FS, fond FI/1, šanon 53, č. spisu 130. [87] A KV ČSFR, SIII/45.
[88] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 41/1 [transcript of the meeting of leading secretaries of district and regional party committees, held in Prague Castle on 6 February 1969].
[89] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/6, a.j. 13, b. 7; fond 07/15, sv. 8a, a.j. 87, str. 237/a-237/c.
[90] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/6, a.j. 13, b. 7.
[91] Zeiner, 'Postavení bezpečnostních sborů', pp. 78–9.

resignation, including the seizure of the broadcasting network and identification of possible targets for arrest, most of which proved unnecessary.[92]

The impression given by the StB's internal materials is of an organization that, while protected by liberalizers against radical changes, was in such internal disarray throughout the Dubček period that it was in no position to coerce the public into quiescence. While essential for the maintenance of one-party rule from the summer trials of 1972 until the revolution of 1989, the security police could play only a minor role in the actual restoration of authoritarianism.

[92] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 2285, č.j. SM-001/M-1969; fond A13, i.j. 22.

9 After Dubček

Husák's ascent to the party leadership marked an immediate change in Czechoslovak politics. Even under him, however, normalization was an arduous process, lasting another twenty months, of bringing the media into line, purging the party and state, and resubmitting society to centralized direction. As this period deserves separate, detailed treatment, I will touch only briefly on four noteworthy aspects: the decision to purge the party, the role of members of the original reform coalition in Husák's normalization, the Soviet view, and the general problem of collaboration and resistance.

The purge of the party

Evidence emerges from new materials to suggest that Husák originally did not wish to carry out the thorough, devastating purge with which he is now historically associated. Operating at first through the narrower Secretariat rather than the Presidium,[1] Husák initially tried to apply the experience acquired while serving as party leader in Slovakia after August 1968. The key to his normalization of Slovakia was its legitimation by the Slovak party congress. Although Husák had tried from Moscow to prevent it, and had only limited success in controlling its outcome after his return, the election of a new, uncompromised Slovak Central Committee bestowed enormous authority on his subsequent efforts to control society through persuasion and limited surgical interventions, without a massive purge of institutions or deep censorship.

In his first 100 days as leader of the national party, Husák tried to settle all matters outstanding from the Čierná agreements and the Moscow Protocol (silencing the media, eliminating the leading officials most abhorred by Moscow, and renewing the party's political monopoly) while on the other hand reviving the economy and giving the majority of members of the élite, of the party ranks, and of all society the

[1] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, p. 242.

chance to declare allegiance to the new regime. Quick successes were won in areas such as the media, thanks to immediate measures to ban several periodicals and install new editors in others, plus the endorsement in late April of the Union of Czech Journalists, which called on its members to exercise 'voluntary discipline' in their work, an appeal supported even by *Reportér* before it was abolished.[2] By September 1969 self-censorship obtained and there was no further need for institutionalized surveillance.

As a result of the annulment of the Vysočany congress and his anti-Smrkovský campaign, however, Husák discovered that he lacked the authority to apply the Slovak strategy to Czech conditions. While the media were pacified, they were hardly zealous in promoting his efforts to win over the majority. Trade unions, intellectuals, academics, and students continued quietly to resist the party's hegemony. By summer 1969 it was clear that a more ruthless approach was required.

As with most drastic policies of persecution, it is impossible to pinpoint when and why the change of strategy occurred. In particular, it is not clear whether it was prompted by Soviet pressure. All available materials suggest that Moscow expected the party apparatus to be vetted down to the district level, but there is no record yet of them calling for a purge of the rank and file. Černík claimed in 1992 that during the Moscow summit of communist parties in mid-June 1969 Soviet leaders did make such a demand,[3] but Černík is an unreliable witness, as he did not attend the summit and he lied frequently in his recollections. Husák vacationed in the Crimea in early August 1969, but Štrougal, who was also there, claimed in 1991 that the Soviets demanded the departure only of top functionaries and a stop to the rehabilitation of victims of the 1950s. Instead, Štrougal stated that the decision for the mass purge came from within.[4] Císař, who was still in élite politics at the time, agrees that 'Moscow did not give the instruction for the cadre massacre that took place.'[5]

One detail that indicates that Czechoslovak leaders arrived at the decision on their own initiative is the systematic, methodical nature of the purge. It was to be conducted not on the basis of random denunciations, but through the established practice of renewing party membership. Periodic screenings (*prověrky*) were a standard feature of Leninist organization, and were conducted regularly in pre-1937 USSR to remove the corrupt, opportunistic, and unmotivated, to eliminate members of

[2] *Reportér*, 18 May 1969. [3] Author's interview with Černík, 24 April 1992.
[4] A KV ČSFR, R1 [KV ČSFR interview with Štrougal, 23 May 1991].
[5] A KV ČSFR, R43 [KV ČSFR interview with Císař, 29 March 1990].

non-proletarian background or, under Stalin, the followers of disgraced rivals. Screenings were aimed at reducing dissent and streamlining the apparatus; they did not involve the security services and, as Tucker notes, 'expulsions were not the prelude to arrest'.[6] With Gottwald's Bolshevization of the CPCS, such screenings were conducted with routine rigour: after 1929 party membership was shorn from 99,000 to 28,000 and throughout the 1930s held at around 40,000. Because of the influx of new members after the war, *prověrky* were held in 1946, 1948–9, and 1950, altogether expelling around 600,000 members.[7]

Screenings were held again in 1955 and 1960 but then ceased during the Novotný stagnation, when the party's class structure changed markedly; between 1949 and 1957 it lost about one million members, most of them from the working class, so in 1958–63 admission of new members was regulated to stem the influx of white-collar members, who were joining mostly because job placement or promotion required it.[8] None the less workers [*dělníci*], who in 1946 constituted 57.7 per cent of the membership, by 1966 made up only 30 per cent. Perhaps because of this trend, it was decided in late 1967 to hold a *prověrka* in the second half of 1969.[9]

At first Presidium members chose not to proceed with this planned screening, fearing that it would probably disrupt the June summit of communist parties in Moscow.[10] Instead, Soviet instructions to put the party apparatus in order only would be followed. In mid-May Husák informed Kádár that he hoped the regional and district apparatus would be cleansed of 'rightists' within a month, and over the next seven months uneasy 'realist'-conservative coalitions indeed ousted reformers from all regional committees and from 56 per cent of all district committees (74 per cent in the Czech lands but only 17 per cent in Slovakia). Of the seventy-six Czech districts that had been purged, 62 per cent had been hit more than once, often because of disputes within the normalizing coalition. In October, Bil'ak could tell the East Germans that only 10 of 130 district committees still needed to be put 'in order'.[11] By spring 1970, 40

[6] Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), p. 287.

[7] Gordon Wightman and A. H. Brown, 'Changes in the Levels of the Membership and Social Composition of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 1945–1973', *Soviet Studies* 27 (1975), p. 405.

[8] A KV ČSFR, SIII/3 [information from Kašpar to Secretariat, 24 June 1969].

[9] *Rudé právo*, 4 January 1968.

[10] In a meeting of the communist club of the Federal Assembly on 25 June, Dubček mentioned that the Presidium had rejected the idea. See A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; 'Záznam z porady vedení Klubu poslanců KSČ konané dne 25. června 1969']. See also Bil'ak's July 1970 speech to the Slovak Central Committee in A ÚV KSS, fond 02, ar.j. 193.

[11] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44.

per cent of all central functionaries, one-quarter of regional functionaries, and one-third of district functionaries had been dismissed.[12]

During that May 1969 meeting with Kádár, Husák still dismissed calls for a mass screening as 'one of the signs of the impatience' of dogmatists. Kádár agreed that for now such a measure would be unnecessary, and should coincide later with the party congress or a routine renewal of membership cards.[13] Husák reported this advice to regional party committee chairmen at the end of July, telling them that most party members could be won over, so there was still no need for a 'mass cleansing or re-registration'.[14]

There are several reasons why it is conceivable that, even without explicit Soviet pressure, normalizers at some point in August changed policy and decided to proceed with this screening. The most compelling reason is that, in a planned economy, active party members were essential to ensuring that enterprises met production targets, either by being zealous workers, or *khoziastvenniki* who moved heaven and earth to arrange all the necessary supplies and deliveries, or the apparatchiki who maintained political pressure. Economic data in July 1969 revealed enormous consumer dissatisfaction, with acute shortages of meat (because of extra slaughtering to quench panic buying after the invasion), eggs (an estimated 90–100 million were needed), and potatoes (about 150,000 tons were lacking). Shortages of coal reduced output from electricity generators, which in turn reduced production in bakeries. The Central Committee's economic department warned that unless the situation improved soon, the country would have to buy goods from the West in hard currency.[15]

From the very start, the purge was linked to economic revival: the former was deemed essential to achieve the latter. Moreover, this linkage allowed Husák to portray himself and his leadership as purifying the reforms through the exchange of party cards. Because the screening would take place by interviewing every member to assess his or her worthiness, Husák could portray the *prověrka* as a way to involve everyone in the life of the party, to overcome years of stagnation wrought by Novotný, and to enhance the economic performance of local factories and offices.[16]

[12] RFE situation report no. 109 (30 December 1969); *Zápis ze zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa 25. až 26. června 1970* (Prague: n.p., 1970), p. 7.

[13] A KV ČSFR, Z/M 27.

[14] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; text of meeting of leading secretaries of regional party committees, 31 July 1969].

[15] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6004/32.

[16] This linkage is explicit in Husák's keynote address to the September 1969 plenum of the Central Committee. See *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 25.–26. září 1969.*

These problems could have been attributed in part to the dormancy of party activists. Reports from the annual members' meetings held in spring 1969 to elect new cell committees showed that half the party was essentially passive and not paying dues, that participation rates were worse than they had been in 1967, and that thousands of members, half of them working-class, were quitting the party out of disgust or apathy. In 1968, 22,046 members had quit or been expelled, the largest loss in fifteen years, while in the first half of 1969 another 20,270 resigned. The average intake of about 1,000 new members per month did not compensate even for mortality rates; despite the new popularity of the CPCS in 1968, it had attracted only 36,640 new members (4,200 fewer than in 1967), and the intake of new members in the first quarter of 1969 was the smallest since 1952. In sum, during Dubček's sixteen months in power the party shrank by 2.4 per cent. In the Czech lands, the number of members in workplaces had declined since 1965 by 6.5 per cent while membership in residential areas had increased by 31 per cent, which reflected the growing presence of pensioners in the party.[17] The second reason for a purge, therefore, was that while a reduction in the ranks was desired, it could not be allowed to continue spontaneously, without sieves to retain workers whose departure only embarrassed the party.[18]

Another possible reason for the purge is that normalizers attributed the reform movement to the growing presence of white-collar intelligentsia in the party under Novotný. A related reason was that there was a certain logic to the total purge; as one early proposal stated, 'It is impossible to be satisfied with the fact that we are carrying out cadre changes in leading places but we are leaving carriers of rightist-opportunist views and manner of work in the party and thus permitting the possibility of their activity.'[19]

There are therefore a number of purely domestic reasons why the purge was launched: to eliminate a portion of the white-collar membership, to stanch the outflow of workers, and to reanimate the paralysed local party organizations vital to the economy's system of supply and delivery. The multiple causes of the purge are captured in a report submitted to the Presidium, probably in early September when the decision was actually taken, which recommended a *prověrka* for the 'complete routing of the

[17] On 1 January 1968, the CPCS had 1,690,977 members; a year later, it was 1,671,637, a decline of 1.1 per cent; and by 1 April 1969 membership stood at 1,650,587. This drop took place exclusively in the Czech lands; Slovak party organizations registered a net gain. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P5660; A KV ČSFR, SIII/3 [information from Kašpar to Secretariat, 24 June 1969]; Wightman and Brown, 'Changes in the Levels of the Membership and Social Composition of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia', pp. 412–13. [18] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44 [Biľak to Hermann Axen, 9 October 1969].

[19] A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar. 56.

rightists and other counter-revolutionary elements'. It argued that society had to be led out of 'crisis and chaos' soon, because the

> urgency of political consolidation is time-limited by the fact that the party must in the shortest possible time arrange a turnabout in the development of the economy, so that citizens have enough certainty that their vital needs will be smoothly and without interruptions safely satisfied . . . Development in the recent period has shown that the party is not able to solve positively the pressing questions of the further development of socialism in our republic without the consistent exposing of the representatives of rightist opportunism, its organizational centres, and connection to counter-revolutionary elements. The struggle with the right is binding the party's hands, saps its needed strength, and limits its action-capability.[20]

Pressure from within the party leadership and apparatus, from neighbours, and from unrelentingly grim economic data was pushing Husák towards the mass purge he had said would not take place.

The purge itself was executed with enormous difficulty: though the decision to screen the ranks had been taken by mid-September, the earliest available paperwork on how to conduct it dates from November, and only in mid-December did the Presidium begin formulating a decree. Disputes may have hinged on the very process of conducting the card exchange: most of the Presidium and Secretariat members and probably many functionaries in the political-organizational department and the Central Control and Audit Commission (CCAC) had not been involved in previous screenings. Husák revealed in April 1970 that, because of this lack of expertise, Brezhnev had sent a dossier on 'Soviet experiences, from which lessons can be drawn, on how the party cleansed itself in the Lenin years, in the Stalin years, as now during the card exchange of 1954'.[21]

By late autumn 1969 the party cupola had decided that the purge would be conducted through *pohovory* (interviews), during which each member would have the chance to explain his or her views, past actions, and, if considered reliable, would be assigned local-level tasks, primarily in the economy. The *pohovor* was envisioned not as a tribunal but as an agreement between each member and a committee of three to five peers. The purge would thus eliminate the reformers while getting the rest back to work. It was also to be a selective expulsion, aimed only against those members who displayed sustained reformist thinking; individual acts

[20] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6125. This report was attached to an account of the August 1969 events presented to the Presidium on 1 September 1969 by Černík and Interior Minister Pelnář, but it is not clear if they were the authors of this recommendation.

[21] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018 [uncatalogued; Husák's speech to meeting of regional and district leading secretaries, 17 April 1970].

were not to be the basis for judgement and 'people's departure cannot be reason for repressions'.[22] To distinguish between degrees of reformism, a member could be expelled (the most severe punishment, often entailing dismissal from professional employment into manual labour) or simply not be issued a new card and thus be deleted from the register, a milder fate that might be followed by demotion rather than discharge from work.

The purge was also facilitated by the continuous haemorrhage of rank-and-file reformers before the *prověrka* began. By 1 January 1970, party membership stood at 1,535,537, down by 136,100 (8 per cent) on the year before. Of these departures, 96,823 had quit or been expelled, and almost all of them were Czechs. The party had thus already shrunk by almost 10 per cent since January 1968.[23] By the end of March 1970, still before the purge had started to affect the lower ranks, a total of around 150,000 members had quit since January 1968.[24] A large percentage of those leaving were workers disagreeing with policy or simply uninterested in party life.[25]

The purge took place in concentric circles beginning with the party's core: the Presidium, Secretariat, Central Committee, and its apparatus, whose members were then dispatched to oversee the screening of regional and district organizations. Since these institutions had already been purged in 1969, most of their members were reissued party cards. It was at this point that problems arose: local cells were supposed to meet in February to appoint their own purge commissions, but local stasis threw the process off schedule, while in some regions (such as South Bohemia and South Moravia) 'healthy' party members were shirking election to commissions or receiving anonymous threats. Since involvement in the commissions would take up a lot of time, pensioners were the most eligible members but also the least dynamic and effective.

The pol-org department noted two trends: either functionaries wanted to slow down the process to conduct thorough fact-finding, or were rushing through the motions and neglecting requisite paperwork. Interviews held in guinea-pig cells showed that working-class members

[22] A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar. 56; A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6715.

[23] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on changes in level of party membership, 31 March 1970].

[24] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1970 [Husák to conference of regional leading secretaries, 10 June 1970]. Jakeš confirms that over 155,000 left the party before the *prověrka* reached the local level. See A KV ČSFR, 'Miloš Jakeš: K otázkám vztahujícím se k roku 1968'.

[25] In Central Bohemia, for example, 5,038 of the 7,891 members who quit or were expelled were workers, as were half of the 10,000 who left in South Moravia. See A ÚV KSČ, fond 018 [transcript of meeting of leading secretaries of regional party committees, 12 March 1970, remarks by Central Bohemia boss Červenka], and *Zápis ze zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa 25. až 26. června 1970*, p. 41.

tended to speak frankly about their support for reform, since they were unlikely to lose their jobs in an economy that already lacked about 100,000 workers; white-collar members, however, who did run the risk of demotion, would deny or minimize their past actions.[26] There was a danger, therefore, that workers would convict themselves and be expelled, whereas the managers would dig in their heels and the party's class structure would tilt even further in their favour. Early data on local purges confirmed that almost all members were being approved for new cards, with only a handful dropped from the lists, usually for not paying dues or attending meetings.[27]

To improve supervision of the purge the Presidium decided to dispatch its members again to individual regions.[28] By the end of March hard data on the purge's progress were available, and the results were discouraging. As expected, the interviews at the regional level (of committee members and nomenklatura) had resulted in few changes: 4,131 out of 4,195 were to get new cards, and only three were to be expelled outright. Similar results came from the district level: 56,247 out of 56,813 members would remain, seventy-eight would not be issued a new card, twenty were expelled.[29] Initial results from interviews in basic cells showed a similar trend. In total, by the end of March, of the 125,742 members interviewed, only 1,317 were to leave the party.[30] Almost all of these losses were categorized under the milder 'cancellation of membership', and at the local level in Slovakia no one had been expelled.

A pol-org department situation report on 27 March claimed that the main problems were a 'liberal, indulgent and unprincipled approach to evaluating party members', and ignorance of the Central Committee letter among members of the purge commissions. Reformers in education, health, cultural, and scientific circles were closing ranks, while workers were quitting the party in disgust. In response, the centre ordered local officials to include more pre-war members and functionaries from large factories in the screening commissions, as it was believed that they would be tough on white-collar professionals and lenient on workers.[31] This recommendation was elaborated on 14 April in a decree issued by the Presidium, entitled 'On the further approach to the exchange of party cards', printed and distributed as a confidential internal guideline. In barely coded terms, it ordered local commissions to retain working-class members and get them to work harder, while completing the expulsion of reformers by late June.

[26] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7071. [27] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7121.
[28] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P7135. [29] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7222.
[30] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on changes in level of party membership, 31.3.1970]. [31] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7222.

The vital links were the district committees, empowered to conduct purges in local cells and dissolve entire reform-dominated organizations, especially in culture, education, and the sciences. The 'healthy' minority from these cells would then apply to found a new organization or be transferred to another, while the majority would lose their party memberships (with a limited right of appeal). To enforce this tougher policy, members of the Presidium, Secretariat, Czech bureau, and CCAC were again dispatched to oversee each region.[32] When Husák was asked several days at a conference of district and regional party officials how many should be expelled, he vaguely suggested 10–20 per cent (150,000 to 300,000 members), 'maybe more, maybe less'.[33]

The guideline issued on 14 April eventually pushed the purge towards the desired outcome. As June and July passed, the number of expulsions and cancellations of memberships rose, primarily because regional committees imposed quotas on their districts. Quotas were not an explicit article of official policy, although in March regional bosses already reported that they intended to eliminate about 15–20 per cent for, as one noted, reformism, passivity, 'for girls, for drinking, and everything possible'.[34] On 14 May, historian Viliam Plevza, Husák's confidant and later his Boswell, wrote to complain that district committees were receiving precise quotas from the regional level on how many people to throw out per social group, regardless of actual local conditions.[35] The district committees, whose task it was to approve all decisions made by the local purge commissions, ordered that some interviews be repeated and decisions altered to meet the desired final social profile.[36]

The final purge tallies available in internal documents correspond to those published after the December 1970 Central Committee plenum: 78.3 per cent were to stay in the party, 16.9 per cent would be cancelled, and 4.8 per cent would suffer expulsion.[37] Nothing has emerged to support peculiar claims later made by Biľak implying that the total was in fact higher.[38] Several aspects of the numbers, however, merit attention. There was no difference between the Czech lands and Slovakia in expulsion rates, but considerably more were cancelled in the former (18.5 per cent) than in the latter (13 per cent). Per region the highest combined cancellation and expulsion rates were in East Bohemia and South and North Moravia, where about one-quarter of all members were affected, while the lowest were in Central Bohemia, Bratislava, and West Slovakia

[32] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P7276, 7293.
[33] Komisia vlady SR and Politologický kabinet SAV, *Slovenská spoločnosť*, vol. III, p. 181.
[34] A ÚV KSČ, fond 018, 1970 [Hejna to regional secretaries conference, 12 March 1970].
[35] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued].
[36] A ÚV KSS, Zap.-Banská Bystrica, krabice 181.
[37] *Zápis ze zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa 10.–11. prosince 1970* (Prague: n.p., 1970), pp. 7–8. [38] Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77*, p. 86.

(16–18 per cent). The district committees used their authority to conduct the purge directly in 5,469 pro-reform cells, which included more than 220,000 members, about one-third of whom were cancelled or expelled. Another 900 cells were abolished outright, almost all of them in the Czech lands in education, science, health, and culture, affecting more than 15,000 members.[39]

Although the purge undoubtedly served to devastate Czechoslovak society politically, it did not reach many of its objectives. As so many workers quit the party in disgust, the purge failed to shift party demographics towards its proletarian membership. On 1 January 1970, 26.1 per cent of party members were manual workers; on 1 October, 26.4 per cent. Even though manual workers and their families made up almost 60 per cent of the population, only 9.5 per cent of them were in the party that claimed to represent them. In sectors such as heavy engineering and consumer goods manufacturing, only 6 to 8 per cent were in the party.[40]

White-collar (professional, intellectual) representation had slipped but not drastically, from 33.1 per cent to 30.9 per cent of the total membership. Although they accounted for more than half of the members who were being expelled, about 41 per cent of all members who were losing their cards, and, although one in four party members working in white-collar fields did not survive the *prověrka*, the party permeated these professions more deeply than it did the working class: as of 1 October 1970, 29.5 per cent of technicians, engineers, and managers were in the party, as were 17.5 per cent of 'humanities intelligentsia', and 16.3 per cent of office workers.[41] Moreover, because of the discontinuities in social stratification after 1948, Slovak data show that when categorized according to *original* profession, about half of all purge victims were initially from the working class. The purge thus punished most severely those members who had enjoyed post-war social mobility to move from manual to administrative positions.[42]

Instead of promoting manual workers into a more prominent position within the party ranks, the purge reinforced a secular trend of the increasing presence of pensioners. Whereas in 1966 the party contained 1,335,766 economically active members (78.7 per cent of the total) and 362,236 inactive (21.3 per cent), after the purge the numbers were 879,507 (73.1 per cent) and 323,294 (26.9 per cent) respectively. At the same time, normalization policies had made party membership ever more unattractive to the young; while there were almost two million citizens

[39] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P8157.
[40] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P8558. The rate was higher, around 12 per cent, in metallurgy.
[41] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P8558.
[42] A ÚV KSS, Útvar politických informacií ÚV KSS [reports on the purge at local levels, dated 13 July and 21 September 1970].

aged between eighteen and twenty-five, only 49,416 (2.5 per cent) of them were in the party. Moreover, it was predicted that in the coming decade up to 300,000 more members would retire, so unless the party attracted young blood, half the membership would soon consist of pensioners.[43] From 1971 to 1978 the party did admit around 450,000 new members, 65 per cent of whom were workers and most of whom were under the age of thirty-five.[44] The resultant, rather freakish age profile of the party was highly polarized, with a missing middle generation.

In concluding, there are a number of points worth making about the purge. First, what is perhaps most remarkable is not that so many fell victim to the purges, but that more did not. When we consider the opinion polls conducted in 1968 and early 1969 that showed 85–90 per cent support for the reform course and nearly unanimous condemnation of the invasion, it is significant that three-quarters of party members were reissued party cards at the end of the purge.

Second, the purge was deemed a success because so many people had quit the party before the *prověrka* had even begun, and because armies of willing inquisitors could be mustered to question those who remained. The purge would not have been possible without the active help of 70,000 screening commissions staffed by more than 235,000 party members, one-third of whom were workers and peasants.[45] The ratio of those who purged to those who were purged was 1:1.4.

Third, Husák had conducted his purge without arbitrary violence, yet he was still confronted by a sullen public that ignored his unrelenting hectoring and exhortations to heroic labour. The reason for both of these phenomena was already identified by a writer in *Listy* in November 1968: whatever might happen, she predicted, there was no danger of a real return to the 1950s because the atrocities of that era had been committed and accepted out of a naïve faith in the party and Stalin, whereas after the invasion such unquestioning belief could not exist.[46] In 1970 cynicism guaranteed that the purge would not lead to bloodshed, but it also precluded the cheerful, disciplined devotion in the workplace that the country's leaders demanded. There would be no Ezhovs, but also no Stakhanovs.

The remnants of the reform coalition

One of the obstacles to a swift purge was the presence in high offices of leading members of the original reform coalition. The Husák team was

[43] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P8558.
[44] Gitelman, 'The Politics of Socialist Restoration in Hungary and Czechoslovakia', p. 194.
[45] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P8558.
[46] Vladimira Juranková, 'Dnes už víme', *Listy*, 28 November 1968.

determined not to make martyrs out of these celebrity reformers by subjecting them to severe punishment; as Biľak told an East German visitor in October 1969, 'because of the events of past years, no trials are intended'.[47] We know from later documents that this was a strategy that Husák had agreed with Brezhnev.[48] The problem arose, however, that district and local functionaries assigned to purge colleagues or subordinates sympathetic to reform found their task complicated by the presence of these leading liberalizers in the Central Committee, government, Presidium, or, if they were demoted, in comfortable ambassadorships. The precedent of relative tolerance at the top was being invoked by local supporters of reform to defy their inquisitors.

The Presidium's response to this dilemma was unsystematic and improvised, but normalizers could always count on the willingness of popular liberalizers to put devotion to the party before all other concerns. The service rendered to normalization by Černík, one of the central founding members of the reform coalition, was tremendous beyond estimation. In mid-July 1969 he established a working group within his government to prepare measures against the expected demonstrations on the first anniversary of the invasion and to saturate the country with propaganda vilifying 'rightists' and purported counter-revolutionaries while glorifying the new leadership and the instruments of state violence.[49] Černík's team eventually mobilized 28,000 policemen, 22,000 soldiers, and the 17th Czechoslovak tank regiment to crush crowds in Prague, Brno, and other major cities with unwarranted brutality. By 24 August, 2,478 people had been arrested, most of them aged between eighteen and twenty-five and from the working class; in Prague alone, 1,538 were arrested, 919 of whom were young blue-collar workers. Altogether at least five people were killed (mostly teenagers) and thirty-three injured, although the real numbers of wounded were probably higher.[50]

Černík was delighted. When his working group met on 22 August to assess the results, he declared a 'political victory for the new party leadership in the struggle with rightist and anti-socialist forces', and now 'the political struggle that has been taken up in the battle against rightist and anti-socialist forces, in the battle against hazardism, will be taken to the end'.[51] On his recommendation, members of the army and police who had distinguished themselves were rewarded with citations, cash, and

[47] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44. [48] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, ar.j. 223.
[49] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6004/32.
[50] A MV ČSR, fond G/H 3-4, i.j. 5, č.j. VB-0067/01-69.
[51] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák, [uncatalogued; transcript of the meeting of the prime minister's operational group on maintaining peace, public order, and security on 21 August 1969]. Radio Free Europe analysts noted that Černík was the only leader who publicly denounced 'counter-revolution' while others stuck to the milder terms 'anti-socialist' and 'rightist'. See RFE situation report no. 73 (25 August 1969).

domestic appliances. The 27,437 People's Militiamen who participated (3,530 of which helped crush protests in Prague) were also honoured: on 18 September Černík instructed the finance minister to transfer 400,000 crowns from federal government reserves into the militia's bank account to pay for 'the bestowal of substantial gifts and monetary rewards on select members and collectives who helped to secure peace and public order'.[52]

As in autumn 1968, so in August 1969 Černík was a driving force to secure passage of new restrictive legislation. On 22 August Černík delivered a bill to the presidium of the Federal Assembly (still chaired by Dubček, and authorized to pass laws during the summer recess) that granted the state sweeping authority, because, he said, 'we must intervene energetically against the thousands of people who systematically violate order in Czechoslovakia, we must let them know, literally, to the letter, what political power, socialist power, means'.[53] Though somewhat alarmed by the bill's provisions, the Federal Assembly presidium enacted it that day as law 99. It allowed for:

Jail sentences and heavy fines for disturbing the peace.

An increase in the maximum sentences for loosely defined political offences such as sedition and defamation of the republic.

The initiation of court proceedings on the basis of a police warrant alone. District judges could pass sentence without a jury and defence attorneys were excluded from investigations. Police were authorized to detain suspects for up to three weeks.

The re-introduction of an article of the Labour Code that allowed dismissals for 'lack of confidence'. The law specifically permitted the firing of university lecturers and the expulsion of students.

The suspension of any organization for up to three months or outright dissolution.

Many problems arose in the implementation of this law, largely because judges found it so distasteful. Almost half of 730 cases brought to trial under law 99 by the end of September did not end in conviction, as the evidence submitted by the StB was often ruled inadequate even though they occasionally tried to beat confessions out of detainees.[54] A concerted

[52] A PV ČSSR, fond O. Černík, PV 2090a/69. The state secretary at the finance ministry wrote to Černík to confirm that on 22 September the sum was deposited in State Bank account no. 405-126, belonging to the militia's general staff.

[53] Quoted in Jindřich Madry, 'Stupňování normalizačních opatření po srpnu 1969 v Československu a jeho armádě (1969–1971)', *Historie a vojenství* 42 (1993), p. 72.

[54] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6308 and P6309/32.

campaign by the Czech education minister to use law 99 for the dismissal of revisionist lecturers and expulsion of students failed dramatically.[55] As a result, much of law 99, which was meant to be temporary, was incorporated into laws 149 and 150, passed on 18 December, which also facilitated the removal of uncooperative judges. Even under law 150, relatively few people were convicted in 1970 and 1971 (seventy-six and eighty-two citizens respectively).[56]

Law 99, however, did have an immediate symbolic effect, in that it was signed by Dubček, President Svoboda, and Premier Černík. Although Dubček signed it reluctantly, cajoled by Husák's argument that there would never be true normalization unless further protests and bloodshed were averted,[57] it was yet another blow to public morale that three of the men who most embodied 1968 had, in a pen stroke, outlawed much of what 1968 had represented.[58]

In the run-up to the September 1969 Central Committee plenum, hardliners in district party committees pressed for Černík's expulsion from the Presidium, an idea rejected by Husák, Biľak, Štrougal, Indra, and the Soviets.[59] Černík, however, was wavering in his resolve, and agreed to form his third government in September (a shake-up was needed to centralize power and to make Vice-Premier Václav Hůla economy supremo) only after three conversations with Chervonenko between the 4th and 14th of that month. There followed a one-day visit to Moscow on the 16th, during which Brezhnev and Kosygin persuaded him to continue to support Husák and help repair the economy.[60] Chervonenko, who thought the visit successful, indicated to Biľak that Černík would eventually have to resign but that, for now, he could serve as a wedge to split up the old reformist leadership, as his hypocrisy was devastating the already demoralized Dubček.[61]

At the Central Committee plenum at the end of September Černík recanted his vote in favour of the Presidium's 1968 condemnation of the invasion ('I deeply regret my part in this political mistake') and declared

[55] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6620.

[56] Gebauer, Kaplan, Koudelka, and Vyhnálek, *Soudní perzekuce politické povahy v Československu 1948–1989*, pp. 213–19. In 1972 the total dropped to eight. Altogether in 1970–89, 527 citizens were sentenced under law 150, of which sixty-eight were in 1989 alone.

[57] Dubček, *Hope Dies Last*, pp. 244–6; A KV ČSFR, R43 [KV ČSFR interview with Císař, 29 March 1990].

[58] Prečan, 'Lid, veřejnost, občanská společnost jako aktér Pražského jara, 1968', p. 26.

[59] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 42 [Štrougal to GDR Ambassador Krolikowski, 14 September 1969], and Z/N 44 [Biľak to Hermann Axen, 9 October 1969].

[60] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 42.

[61] Madry, 'Stupňování normalizačních opatření po srpnu 1969 v Československu a jeho armádě (1969–1971)', pp. 80–1. See also A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44 for Biľak's approval of this tactic.

his full agreement with the outcomes of the April and May 1969 plena, as 'I am convinced that the new party leadership is the guarantee that there will gradually come a time when passions and general mistrust will cease to be our guide and such necessary calm, mutual trust, and demanding qualified work for socialism will be introduced.' Only now, he said, 'we shall carry out an honest but principled policy which in practice gives our work the right direction so that we can fulfil the meaning of January 1968 in new conditions'.[62]

So, although he was falling into depression himself, Černík remained active: he contributed heavily to propaganda against 'rightists', was at the centre of crucial trade talks with the Soviets in October, and on 8–10 January 1970 led a very successful delegation to Warsaw. The Poles received him so warmly that Gomułka, contrary to habit, even attended a reception at the Czechoslovak embassy.[63] While Černík was away, however, his Presidium colleagues concluded that with the *prověrka* approaching they could no longer ignore the complaints of middle-level functionaries that the purge would be impeded by the presence of celebrity reformers in leading posts. On 13 January, after Černík's return from Warsaw, the Presidium first discussed the possibility of his resignation, which he tendered two weeks later.[64]

Thinking always of propaganda purposes, the Presidium asked Černík to write a formal letter to be presented to the next plenum. Two days later he submitted a forlorn self-critique, confessing to co-responsibility for economic crisis, weak leadership, and deviation from the 'honest intentions' of January 1968 and to underestimating the 'covert attempts of rightist opportunist and anti-socialist forces to acquire power positions'. He wanted to resign, he said, to free the party leadership's hands, and promised that 'If you give me the chance I will actively help the party in the branch to which I will be entrusted, so that we master this very difficult period.'[65] He was given a minor portfolio under the new federal premier, Štrougal.

In June 1970 it was decided that Černík's presence in the federal government was still setting a bad precedent, and he was subjected to questioning by a special commission under Miloš Jakeš. Although he was

[62] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 25.–26. září 1969.*

[63] For the very positive coverage in the Polish press of Černík's visit, see in particular *Trybuna Ludu*, 8–10 January 1970.

[64] A small diplomatic crisis erupted with the Poles on 14 January, when Gomułka learned that Černík's dismissal was being discussed and was outraged that he had extended such courtesy to a man about to be demoted. It took a special secret visit by Biľak to mend the damage. See A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Kapek's account of meeting with Gomułka, 19 January 1970, and Biľak's account of meeting with Gomułka, 24 January 1970].

[65] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6883.

characteristically willing to confess to every error of which he was accused, to denounce former colleagues, including Kriegel, the 'matador of the rightists', to deny that he had ever regarded Dubček as a friend, and to claim that the Soviet-led invasion had been completely warranted,[66] Jakeš recommended to the Presidium on 19 June that Černík resign from all remaining positions and that his party membership be suspended.[67] Despite another searingly self-critical letter to Jakeš, in which he described the Presidium's 1968 condemnation of the invasion as the 'culmination of the opportunist line of this organ', Černík was expelled from the party and relegated to a research institute.[68] All his attempts at political self-preservation had failed and with good reason he admitted in private, 'I have shat away my position and my honour.'[69]

In his own peculiar way, Dubček was far less willing to cooperate, but also refrained from using his great authority against the cause of normalization. In September the Presidium pressured him to perform self-criticism at the upcoming plenum, and his stubborn refusal forced postponement of that session several times. Černík complained to the East German ambassador that 'Dubček does not want to understand that he behaved incorrectly in the post-January policy, that after the April–May 1969 plenum [*sic*] he has not supported the party but damaged it.'[70]

At the plenum Dubček started his one-hour address with a heartfelt defence of the reforms, but also declared at great length his allegiance to the Husák regime and asked that his own contribution to normalization be remembered. Although he declared himself 'one of the creators' of the April and May 1969 plena, he reminded them that 'it is not an objective claim that normalization began only after 17 April . . . Before April it was also necessary to overcome complicated tasks for normalization', specifically recalling his efforts to invalidate the Vysočany congress in August and then arrange the stationing of Soviet forces by treaty. He revealed that he had offered to participate in pre-anniversary propaganda to deter any 'illegal actions' and to denounce publicly the 'violence and vandalism' of protesters during the anniversary, but that the Presidium had prevented him. Agreeing that a deep analysis should be conducted of 1968's 'negative tendencies', he asked the plenum not to misrank him among the 'rightists'; on the contrary, he wanted to continue as a top party functionary, serving socialism and alliance with the Soviet Union. He finished by repeating that 'I clearly stand by and support the conclusions of the April

[66] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; Černík's questioning by the Central Control and Audit Commission, 16 June 1970]. [67] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7722.
[68] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P183/70. [69] Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu*, p. 269.
[70] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 43.

and May plena of the party's Central Committee.'[71] Distraught and ill, he had to leave the hall to be treated by a doctor.

By decision of that plenum, Dubček was removed as chairman of parliament and talks began between him, Biľak, and Svoboda to agree on an ambassadorial posting. He was offered Mongolia or North Korea; he counter-proposed Romania. In November the Presidium gave Turkey as its final offer, and Dubček accepted.[72] On 5 January 1970 the Presidium decided that Biľak and Štrougal should question Dubček again about his 'passivity' in supporting party policy, and a week later postponed his departure for Ankara.[73] They wanted him out of the Central Committee and out of the country before the next plenum, so they duped him into resigning on 19 January from the CPCS Central Committee in return for an assured seat in the Slovak Central Committee. The CPS leaders, however, balked at the prospect of his return to Bratislava. On 23 January Dubček wrote to the Slovak Presidium, asking them to reconsider, 'for I have not belonged to any opposition but have been defending the party's post-January policy against various phenomena that contradict the intentions of the Presidium and Central Committee plena'. He even offered not to attend plena as long as his membership was upheld. In concluding, however, he pledged that if denied a place in the Central Committee he would publicly claim to have resigned it, as he did not wish to 'complicate the situation in the CPS Central Committee and in the party'.[74] His plea fell on deaf ears, and he left for Turkey on the eve of the next CPCS Central Committee plenum knowing that he was about to lose his last toe-hold in the party hierarchy.

By late spring the Presidium realized that Dubček's reasonably comfortable position as an ambassador to a NATO country was aiding local reformers to resist the *prověrka* and adding grist to the mill of super-normalizers who were accusing Husák of softness. Recalled from Ankara on 30 May, Dubček was shown the findings of the investigation (also headed by Jakeš) into his actions as first secretary.[75] Interviews were then held with him on 2, 3, and 8 June. In a rambling, at times emotional soliloquy, he refused to renounce reform but deeply resented being placed in the same 'rightist-opportunist', 'anti-socialist', and anti-Soviet category as KAN, K-231, Sviták and Ludvík Vaculík, with whom he said he had nothing in common. He recounted all he had done for normalization, and pointed out that as ambassador he had caused the regime no embarrassment and had proved his fidelity to the USSR. Although he protested his

[71] *Zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa dne 25.–26. září 1969.*
[72] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, č.j. P6492; A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44.
[73] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P157/70. [74] A ÚV KSS, fond 03, ar.j. 61.
[75] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7659; Tigrid, *Why Dučec Fell*, pp. 191–2.

likely expulsion, he promised that he would work honestly wherever sent so that 'if in some future time it is considered correct . . . I would like to deserve regular membership in the party'.[76]

The Presidium was unmoved and on 12 June decided that he would be expelled from the party, lose his seat in parliament, and not return to the embassy in Ankara.[77] After several months the Slovak authorities found him an obscure job at a forestry administration on the edge of Bratislava, where he worked quietly until retiring into a even quieter life as a pensioner, all the while waiting patiently for the call to return.

Also indicative of liberalizers' attitudes is the behaviour of Císař. Throughout 1969 he had managed to retain his place as chairman of the Czech parliament (CNC). As early as October 1968, informants were telling the Soviet embassy that Císař 'is looking for a way to the Soviet side'.[78] In July 1969 Chervonenko offered Císař political protection in return for a public statement approving of the invasion. Císař rejected the deal and timed his holiday to coincide with the anniversary. In early September, Biľak informed him that because of cadre agreements made with Brezhnev in the Crimea in August, Císař could no longer chair the Czech parliament. Since, as Biľak told the East Germans, Císař 'now tells the truth and helps a lot to communicate the tasks of the conspiracy by rightist forces in the Presidium', he would be compensated with a diplomatic posting in Paris or Brussels.[79] Císař capitulated, although he was not replaced by Erban until the end of November when fifty-three CNC deputies resigned and nine others were removed, almost one-third of the total.[80]

Císař, however, would not get the ambassadorship he had been promised in return for his resignation from the Czech parliament. On 5 January, apparently fearing that he would make contact with émigrés, the Presidium decided to give him a posting within the socialist bloc instead.[81] Biľak had confronted Císař with the text of his speech to the Vysočany Central Committee on 27 August 1968, in which he had roundly condemned the invasion and those who had invited it. Eager to repent, Císař immediately grovelled in a letter to Husák that his Vysočany words now seemed 'unpleasant and alien'. He pointed out that, during the actual congress, he had hidden outside the capital, and regretted using terms like 'occupation'. He enumerated his contributions to normalization and the anti-'rightist' struggle after April 1969. 'Excuse

[76] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7659. [77] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7659.
[78] ATsK KPSS, r. 9757, f. 5, op. 60, d. 301, ll. 211–17 (copy in author's possession).
[79] A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44; A KV ČSFR, R43 [KV ČSFR interview with Císař, 29 March 1990]. [80] RFE situation report no. 101 (27 November 1969).
[81] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P156/70.

me, comrade Husák', he ventured, 'I also recall my meeting with you in Bratislava before April 1969 when I clearly expressed to you my opinion that a change in the party leadership was necessary. I spoke similarly with comrades L. Svoboda, L. Štrougal, and others. After August 1968 I was outside the party leadership but I felt the untenability of the state of crisis.'

Císař admitted that he was no political novice and that he had to pay for his mistakes, but he asked that the punishment fit the sins, 'so that we do not want all people to be supermen who can know everything and foresee everything'. He said he wanted to help the new course and would have done more in 1969 except for illness, but like Dubček he promised to submit to whatever the Presidium decreed.[82] They considered posting him to a consulate in Poland, then scrapped the whole idea of dispatching him abroad. Although officially on the foreign ministry payroll, he sat at home.[83] Unlike Černík or Dubček, he would later become active in the Renewal movement of the late 1980s that tried to liaise between the party leadership and '68ers.

The behaviour of these three prominent figures is not unique to them but indicative of the general reaction of members of the reform coalition who refused to or were unable to save themselves by becoming 'realists'. Such conduct, though understandable under the circumstances, served to generate still greater frustration in society as all remaining prospects for meaningful reform faded.

Soviet approval

During the first half of 1970 Husák's Presidium was plagued by demands from supernormalizers for a Stalinist settling of accounts. Nothing released from the archives or in post-1989 testimonies corroborates the stories reported in the West in the summer of 1970 of ultra-leftist conspiracies to overthrow Husák and unleash a reign of terror. Pockets of Stalinists, however, certainly existed, and were able to get their views into the media, especially Švestka's weekly *tribuna*. Assemblies of 200–300 party members were still being held here and there, denouncing the official line as too soft and demanding trials. Some of them, such as Professor Jaromir Lang of the Prague National Front committee, were buoyed by the partial rehabilitation of Stalin in December 1969, believing that Soviet 'politics is heading towards a definite re-Stalinization'.[84]

[82] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; letter from Císař to Husák, 6 January 1970].
[83] A KV ČSFR, R43 [KV ČSFR interview with Císař, 29 March 1990].
[84] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on Lang's talk at Charles University's Philosophy Faculty, 17 November 1970].

As spring moved into summer almost every district was reporting incidents of Stalinist demands, with a hive of leftist opposition to Husák forming in the People's Chamber of the Federal Assembly, presided over by Soňa Pennigerová. She had replaced Smrkovský as speaker of the chamber in October 1969 because of her purist record, and behind her stood the grey eminence of the hard left, Jaroslav Trojan. Unnerving though their words were, a character sketch of them provided for Husák by Dalibor Hanes, the chairman of parliament, shows that they were a motley, feckless crew. The 41-year-old Pennigerová lacked any organizational skills and was prone to tirades. She and Trojan tried to use a parliamentary debate on criminality to demand political trials, but they were thwarted by Štrougal. The head of the party club in parliament, Oldřich Voleník, flirted with the hard left to secure his political future but was less confrontational because of his ties to Kempný and was debilitated by a tendency to show up drunk at meetings and throw himself on women.[85]

What Husák needed was a show of clear support from Moscow. Since his first trip after his election he had met with Soviet leaders in June, July, August, October, and December 1969; what little we know of these meetings indicates that the Soviets showed an immediate interest in better relations but still awaited a shift in Czechoslovak rhetoric to validate the invasion. Husák held out for several months, insisting that the Czechoslovak state had not needed outside help, until he claimed on 29 August 1969 that the intervention had been the only way to prevent counter-revolution. Thus vindicated, and pleased by the brutal treatment of demonstrators (Brezhnev called Svoboda on 25 August to praise the president and Husák for showing 'decisiveness and courage, which will be highly valued in history. It will be written about in school textbooks'),[86] the Soviets signalled their good will by sending delegations whose purpose was not to harangue but to help the CPCS restore Soviet-type institutions. In November 1969, for example, on the eve of the founding session of the new centralized youth committee, Moscow dispatched a group of rising functionaries which included the chairman of the Supreme Soviet's youth affairs committee, Egor Ligachev, and a promising secretary from the Stavropol' region, Mikhail Gorbachev.[87]

In October the two states began drawing up a new treaty of friendship and cooperation, which Gromyko came to Prague to initial in March

[85] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; notes to Husák from Hanes on Federal Assembly functionaries, 30 August 1971].

[86] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; notes of conversation between Brezhnev and Svoboda].

[87] *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 18 and 23 November 1969. For Gorbachev's account of his visit, see his *Zhizn' i reformy* (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), book I, pp. 157–9.

1970. By his very presence Gromyko was signalling Soviet satisfaction with the Husák regime, and he disclosed that 'he had been entrusted to convey to Czechoslovak representatives the full trust of the CPSU Central Committee and Soviet government in the policy of the new CPCS leadership and Czechoslovak government'. The main task now, he said, was to 'keep firmly and decisively in hand the direction of society and uncompromisingly enforce the jointly agreed Marxist-Leninist political course'.[88]

Ambassador Chervonenko also communicated Soviet pleasure with the Presidium's performance; on 6 February he told Kempný that Moscow saw the January plenum as proof that the CPCS was making steady progress on a Leninist course, and approved highly of Husák's speech, though he warned them to mend the economy.[89] He also reported Moscow's approval of the plenum's cadre decisions, including Štrougal as premier and the election of Kapek, Korčák, and Lenárt to the Presidium. As the purge progressed, however, Chervonenko urged them to intensify their propaganda and to indicate that all 'alien elements' would be expelled.[90]

Though clearly supportive of the Husák leadership, the Soviet embassy continued to meddle by holding provocative receptions (such as for the ninety-nine signatories of the July 1968 Autopraga letter), and inviting delegations of unionists, youth functionaries, and intellectuals. Husák knew that rivals, including some regional and district party bosses, were frequenting the embassy and the Soviet military command at Milovice.[91] Inside the Presidium itself, Husák seems to have enjoyed the support of all of his colleagues, but the departure of Černík, Poláček, and Sádovský at the January 1970 plenum and their replacement by Kapek, Korčák, and Lenárt, with Indra becoming a candidate member, meant that Biľak was no longer the only member to have collaborated actively with the invasion. Whether this shift weakened Husák's position is unclear, but it certainly created tension. Štrougal claims that Husák, upon becoming party leader, had wanted to eliminate Biľak and the hard-left faction, but that the two set aside their differences after a heated conversation in the party's hotel in May 1969.[92] Biľak always made sure to sing Husák's praises, telling the East Germans in October 1969 that he was 'the best

[88] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P7226.

[89] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; report on Kempný's meeting with Chervonenko, 6 February 1970].

[90] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; report on meeting between Chervonenko and V. Moravec of the Czechoslovak foreign ministry on 18 February 1970].

[91] Plevza, *Vzostupy a pády*, p. 129.

[92] A KV ČSFR, R1 [KV ČSFR interview with Štrougal, 23 May 1991].

and only [man] for the function of party first secretary. He is very capable, theoretically incomparably stronger than Novotný or Hendrych. Above all he is honest. He is what he says he is.'[93] Husák claimed on his deathbed that such support was feigned, 'he was drinking my blood the whole time'.[94]

Although Husák and Biľak probably disliked each other intensely and were constantly manoeuvring through client networks, Moscow preferred to keep the conflict to a minimum. In early 1971 rumours circulated in the West that Biľak, while chairing the December 1970 Central Committee plenum, had launched an attack on Husák and all who had not signed the letter of invitation, which was simultaneously circulated in the hall.[95] The transcript of that plenum shows that these rumours were completely false. The Politburo, via Katushev, had signalled in the autumn of 1970 that they wanted the issue of who did and did not invite the invasion to be forgotten, and it is unthinkable that Biľak, whatever his true feelings for Husák, would have disobeyed Soviet orders.[96]

To silence the more aggressive critics in the People's Chamber, however, Husák still needed a display of Brezhnev's satisfaction. This gesture came during the ceremonial signing of the Czechoslovak–Soviet treaty on 5–6 May 1970. For the first time since the 1968 Bratislava conference, Brezhnev and Kosygin travelled to Czechoslovakia, and the transcripts of meetings between them, Husák, and Biľak indicate that relations were now completely normal. The Soviet leaders focused on bloc security matters, the Soviet economy (of which they spoke rather frankly, admitting that consumer demand was unsatisfied and that 'an ideal condition will probably never be achieved'), and only commented on Czechoslovakia after hearing Husák's account of problems with the *prověrka*. Brezhnev recalled Lenin's battle against the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries and the Hungarian experience, and stressed that the party must be rid of factions and populated by workers. He was pleased with the current Presidium's composition, and urged them to try to stabilize leading cadres.[97] Privately, Husák told Brezhnev that he was fed up with pockets of opposition from Stalinists who had Moscow's protection; Brezhnev agreed to intervene, but in return insisted that the CPCS produce the promised analysis justifying the invasion.[98]

93 A KV ČSFR, Z/N 44. 94 Plevza, *Vzostupy a pády*, p. 138.
95 'Wir haben die Russen eingeladen', *Der Spiegel*, 4 January 1971.
96 A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; report from Chňoupek on meeting with Katushev, 4 November 1970].
97 A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on meetings between the party and government delegations of the CSSR and USSR, 5–6 May 1970].
98 A KV ČSFR, V6.

Husák immediately used this Soviet show of support in the Presidium on 15 May, crowing that the whole visit had been a great success. Štrougal reported that the Soviets were very pleased but had stressed the need for unity in the Presidium and government, and he asked everyone to ponder the Soviets' disapproval of any deviations from the official line. Kapek, one of the main offenders, declared that 'I greatly respect that [the Soviets] spoke about unity. I announce that I will support it . . . It is necessary to respect the function of the first secretary, he needs support in the interest of the party.'[99]

Criticisms still found outlets, but they were limited in influence and were quickly nipped in the bud by Husák, who used the June Central Committee plenum as an opportunity to communicate Soviet satisfaction with his performance.[100] Another blow to Husák's critics was the death of Trojan in August in a car crash in southern Bohemia, caused, Štrougal asserted in 1991, by the binge-drinking parliamentarian's passing out at the wheel.[101] Without her mentor Pennigerová became completely isolated and neglected the quotidian business of lawmaking. She continued her intrigues, trying vainly in October to persuade Kolder to oppose Husák. In December new deputies were co-opted into the assembly, which weakened her power base further.[102] Voleník, the party faction chairman, drank himself into the grave, as did Kolder.

The Soviets were delighted with the outcome of 1970, in particular the adoption in December of the *Lessons from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the XIII CPCS Congress*, the long-promised pseudo-analysis of the roots of reformism that exonerated the invasion and committed the Husák Presidium to avoiding any repetition of liberalization. As Husák told the Presidium on 20 November, 'The Politburo values highly the results of the work in our country . . . it sees a high degree of political consolidation.'[103] Although Chervonenko continued to com-

[99] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, ar.j. 202.

[100] *Zápis ze zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa 25. až 26. června 1970.*

[101] A KV ČSFR, R1 [KV ČSFR interview with Štrougal, 23 May 1991]. In the West it was reported that after the accident Trojan's safe was opened and a letter to Brezhnev was found, signed by eighty hardliners complaining about Husák's 'liberalism' in conducting the purge. Štrougal confirms that 'things' were found in the safe, but these appear to have been compromising materials about party and state leaders. At the December 1970 plenum the federal interior minister, Radko Kaska, vigorously denied that there was any truth to these Western reports, which, as he pointed out, were never able to name more than three or four (Trojan, Rytíř, Grösser, and Jodas) of these alleged eighty conspirators/signatories. See *Zápis ze zasedání ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa 10.–11. prosince 1970.*

[102] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; memorandum to Husák from Hanes, 30 August 1971]. [103] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, ar.j. 223.

plain in 1971 about the poor quality of the Czechoslovak media's reportage, especially of their tepid propaganda in defence of the invasion,[104] the stability of the Presidium's composition for the next fifteen years attests to Moscow's satisfaction.

Patterns of conformity and resistance in society

The broader normalization of society, like many forms of authoritarian control, required not an unrelenting terror but the retransformation of autonomous interest groups into monopolistic structures of mobilization, which Kasza calls administered mass organizations (AMOs).[105] AMOs help to thwart opposition to dictatorship by channelling most citizens' energies into activities (often ritualized or diversionary) staged by official associations for youth, workers, professionals, women, national minorities, and intellectuals. Through these AMOs, time is consumed, ideology is transmitted, rewards are bestowed, an illusion of participation is created, and material dependency on the state is imposed.

In communist Czechoslovakia the AMOs were directed via party networks, such as Central Committee functionaries liaising with activists. Consequently, once party control slackened, these organizations acquired their own identities, and it was only after the coalition of 'realists' and conservatives had prevailed in the party that the broader society could again be channelled into monopolistic mobilizational structures. As in the party, resistance to the normalization of these AMOs was broken down incrementally through enticements, threats, and appeals to 'reason'.

During this period Czechoslovak society seemed outwardly docile, willing again to perform hollow public rituals. On May Day 1969, 40,000 people dutifully attended an official indoor rally in Prague while only a few hundred protested on Wenceslas Square or gathered at the Macha statue on Petřín hill before being violently dispersed.[106] On 21 August most citizens chose to mark the first anniversary by following a ten-point appeal for passive resistance circulated by intellectuals, workers, and students in the months before the anniversary: shops and transport were boycotted, work and traffic came to a symbolic halt at noon for five or ten

[104] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; memo from Jan Riško to Husák, 18 February 1971].

[105] Gregory L. Kasza, 'Weapons of the Strong: Organization and Terror', in H. E. Chehabi and Alfred Stepan (eds.), *Politics, Society, and Democracy: Comparative Studies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 217–18.

[106] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P126/69; A MeV KSČ Praha (Archive of the Prague City Committee of the Communist Party), fond 02/2, ar.j. 771, sv. 40.

minutes, after which young workers sang the national anthem, factory sirens sounded, and black flags flew. Work in vital sectors, however, did not abate; as during the invasion, workers actually tried to increase output for the national good. There were no stoppages at mines or gas works, and that day saw the highest output of coal production for all of August, surpassing the daily norm by 22,331 tons. Short stoppages occurred in machine-tools engineering (KOVO's territory), but all attempts at mass strikes in East, West, and Central Bohemia failed. Transport flowed normally, with only minor stoppages in Prague, Brno, and Liberec.[107]

In 1969 as a whole, 1.25 million citizens attended 8,763 events staged by a particularly despised AMO, the Union for Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship, which had 250,000 members by the following year.[108] The main anniversaries in 1970 passed without unrest; on 21 August there were no boycotts akin to those of the year before, and only in individual cases did workers wear black or scrawl graffiti. Instead, in some areas district party committees and factory activists even offered to hold ceremonies to thank the Soviet Union for the 'second liberation' of 1968.[109]

Limited outbursts of anger certainly occurred. When the university students' union (UUS) was informed on 20 June 1969 by the Czech interior ministry that it could no longer operate, it tried to retaliate by invoking the December 1968 pact with the metalworkers' union, KOVO. Three days later, trade unionists at the huge ČKD plant threatened to call a general strike if the KOVO leader, Vlastimil Toman, was not given a satisfactory reason for the ban.[110] Toman, however, was a 'realist', and found excuses to persuade his subordinates to rescind their ultimatum. He also enlisted the help of party committees in working-class areas of Prague. Fifteen-minute stoppages took place on 24 June in five ČKD factories, but many workers abstained and the chairmen of the trade union and party committees opposed the strikes or remained neutral.[111] In early July Toman was similarly able to prevent an angry KOVO central committee from taking action on students' behalf.

Apart from these brief strikes, the August anniversary protests, and the anger of about 500 debris-hurling workers who blocked access to the AVIA factory in Prague when Moscow party boss V. V. Grishin visited on

[107] A ÚV KSČ, fond 02/1, P6125.

[108] Pecka, Belda, and Hoppe, *Občanská společnost, 1967–1970*, pp. 268–9.

[109] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; survey of the current political situation from pol-org department, 12 August 1970].

[110] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; undated report on measures against UUS].

[111] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information from Prague municipal party committee, 24 June 1969, 1300 hours]. When the employees of one ČKD factory voted on whether to strike, only 60 per cent cast their ballots in favour.

29 July,[112] disaffection was hidden or registered discreetly. One incident in Kladno, where RTUM officials gathered to protest Kriegel's expulsion from the party, serves as an example of quiet resistance. On 4 June 1969, the text of Kriegel's Central Committee speech appeared in the RTUM display case at the hospital, where it was eagerly read by employees and patients. Soon the district StB office was notified and it ordered the RTUM committee at the hospital to remove the speech. The unionists replied that they would obey only a writ (which the StB could not produce because there was no appropriate law) or the command of a higher RTUM body. The party cell at the hospital defied an order from the district party committee to pressure the trade unionists into compliance. Eventually the matter was referred to the very top leadership of the health-care workers' union, which dispatched a representative to Kladno, and only then did the offending item vanish.[113]

The behaviour of trade unionists and students, the two most important groups in the months after the invasion, reveals both the reluctance to engage in direct confrontation but also the superficiality of the public's compliance. Among university students the ban on their union provoked no outcry. One party report from spring 1969 based on informers in Charles University, noting the 'passivity of the mass of students, hectic activity of radical and extremist groups, uncertainty among teachers', claimed that 'there is appearing among intellectuals, including students, an attempt to distance themselves from politics as much as possible'. Students were more interested in exams or travel abroad and inclined to

> political non-involvement, political non-politicalness. They are basically anti-Soviet but cautious, they assess the situation relatively realistically and are not willing to take risks without hope of tangible success. Fear of the bugbear of pre-January conditions partially prevails in this group, a bugbear which to a large extent they themselves have created. Among them are most of those who long for nothing other than for a satisfied, materially secured life, an idol to which they are willing to sacrifice everything, if not today then tomorrow.[114]

Students despised Husák, Dubček, and Černík for selling out to conservatives and the Soviets, criticized Smrkovský for giving in too easily, and disagreed with but respected Biľak and Indra for being consistently dogmatic. They identified most closely with Kriegel, but the report claimed that in some cases this sympathy was feigned 'because announcing

[112] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information from Czech bureau, 29 July 1969 at 1500 hours].

[113] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information from Czech bureau, 12 June 1969].

[114] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on students in the Czech Socialist Republic, 10 July 1969].

oneself to be for the party's new course, for Dr Husák . . . is taken as a sign of careerism and thus as betrayal'. The report recommended that the party continue its policy of differentiation, as it would isolate the vocal minority from the passive majority.

Czech universities after September 1969 came under attack from a new minister of education, Jaromír Hrbek, an unreconstructed Stalinist. Students initially opposed his campaign to fire revisionist lecturers, and when he held his first meeting with Prague students on 4 November he was frequently interrupted by shouts, clapping, and whistling. Most of the several hundred participants scorned the puppet student union set up by the Czech Bureau, condemned Černík and Štrougal as turncoats, and called for protests on 17 November.[115] The threat of law 99, however, deterred any repetition of the strike of the year before, and an attempt in March 1970 to mobilize Prague students to boycott lessons for one day in solidarity with lecturers who were being fired elicited no response.[116]

Instead, students sought to avoid enlistment in the new all-encompassing youth union, the creation of which had been decreed by the Presidium on 17 November 1969. This new conglomerate was assembled out of the federal Czechoslovak Centre of University Students, the Slovak Students' Union, the quisling Czech university students' union (which in March 1970 had only 163 members), the Association of Child and Youth Organizations (known in Czech by its unfortunate acronym, SODM), and a cluster of militant young Marxists. An StB report in September 1971 found that the students who agreed to join the new Union of Socialist Youth (USY) were motivated largely by 'ambitious and existential aims', believing that membership was a prerequisite for a good job. Only 6 per cent of university students were USY members, and at Charles University's Philosophy Faculty the figure was a mere 1.8 per cent. Only in September 1972 was the USY able to convene a congress.

The StB also noted that Marxism-Leninism courses were boycotted or attended only formally, with lectures often interrupted by invectives. Western culture remained popular. Even though working-class pupils were granted easier access to higher education in the belief that they would alter the universities' middle-class character, model students (often from respectable nomenklatura families) on visits to the invading states would utter 'anti-socialist statements' with embarrassing frequency.[117]

Among intellectuals and academics, resistance was hardly more articu-

[115] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on Hrbek's meeting with students in Strahov, 4 November 1969].

[116] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued; information on flyers appearing on 18 March 1970]. [117] A FMV, fond A 2/3, i.j. 371, č.j. OS-00320/01-71.

late or systematic. Although several intellectuals, trade unionists, and students signed and circulated a leaflet in mid-1969 entitled 'We cannot remain silent', denouncing the new censorship as worse than anything perpetrated by Novotný and comparable only to Nazi measures after 1939,[118] many chose withdrawal as the only alternative to collaboration. This strategy was exemplified by the decision of the coordinating committee linking all creative unions to cease operations and to issue a final denunciation on 22 May of the suspension of civil freedoms and party interference in culture.[119] Most Czech writers resisted efforts by the culture ministry to win their support, and only in November 1971 were ninety-six scribblers culled together to form a new union.[120] Similar problems were encountered in most other areas of the arts in Bohemia and Moravia, and vicious purges decimated cultural unions in Slovakia.[121]

In concluding, even a cursory glance at patterns of compliance, strategies selected by the reform coalition's members, and Soviet interference suggests that responsibility for the death of liberalization is borne, to varying degrees, both by those who actively ended it and by those who, passively or unwittingly, allowed it be killed. The complexity of this dynamic is best captured in a statement issued by students at Charles University's Philosophy Faculty in response to Jan Palach's immolation. While addressing the precise circumstances of the time, this statement stands as a threefold indictment of the entire process of normalization and of mass compliance until 1989, when a different generation of students arrived:

> We blame the Soviet leadership, that because of its policy another person, perhaps not the last, has joined the victims of 21 August.
>
> We blame the political leadership of Czechoslovakia, that in the name of so-called political realism, by the pettiness of its policies and betrayal of once-proclaimed ideals, it has dragged the people of Czechoslovakia into this situation.
>
> We blame ourselves, that until now we have not found in ourselves enough strength and resolve for actions that would force the political leadership to become true representatives of the opinion of the people.[122]

[118] A ÚV KSČ, fond G. Husák [uncatalogued].
[119] Jechová, 'K historii koordinačního výboru tvůrčích svazů 1968–1969', p. 113.
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