

Czechoslovakia: 'The Prague Spring', 1968





Prague is the
capital city of
Czechoslovakia

1968 Prague Spring: Origins



- **What came before:**
- **February 1948
communist take-over**
- **Polarisation of society:
stalin version of
communism was never
popular neither
communist party**

1968 Prague Spring: origins

Show trial of May 1950

Milada Horakova

Accused of treason and
espionage to the West

Slansky trial (Nov 1952)



1968 Prague Spring

- President, CP leader
Antonín Novotný
(1957-1968)
- Took part in 1950s
persecution
- Delayed rehabilitation,
economic reform
- Tried to please both
conservatives and
reformers □ hated by
both groups



Background: Economic

- Sovietization of Czech economy disastrous
- Before Soviets took over, Czechoslovakia had been among the wealthiest of Eastern European states
- In 60's, commodities in decline, standard of living lower, caused discontent
- Industry grossly maladjusted in terms of its home and foreign markets
- Citizens upset over the lower living standards, the collapsing industries, scarcity (implementations of meatless Thursdays etc.)

1968 Prague Spring: origins

- The 1960s:
disillusionment of the
thirty-year-olds
- Increasing role of the
literature and the arts
- Film, theatre, pop
music, radio



1968 Prague Spring: origins

- Role of culture in creating freedom:
- Miloš Forman, Fireman's Ball
- Milan Kundera, The Joke
- Pavel Kohout's Living Room Theatre



1968 Prague Spring: Preparation



- **June 1967:
Congress of
Czechoslovak
Writers**
- Milan Kundera: "The
existence of the
Czech nation is not
self-evident"
- Ludvík Vaculík Party's
role is exaggerated

1968 Prague Spring: Preparation

***31st October 1967: student demonstration
(Strahov Hall of Residence: "We want
light!")***

***while the Communist Party Central
committee in session, discussing the
Writers' Congress***

police brutality - criticism

A Run Up to 1968 Prague Spring:



- Dramatic debates in CzCP Central Committee:
- Russian leader Brezhnev arrived in December 1967:
- "Eto vashe delo"
- ("It's your own business")

Prague Spring 1968



- CzCP Central Committee's session interrupted for Xmas 1967, "comradesses needed to bake Xmas baking".
- Slovak CP leader Alexander Dubček elected Head of CzCP on 5th Jan 1968

Socialism with human face

Dubcek's policies included:

- allowing Czechs to travel to the West
- ending press censorship so that non-communist papers could be published
- the election of a new parliament in which communists would share power with non-communist parties
- freeing of political (anti-communist) prisoners

1968 Prague Spring

- Political cartoons:
- Reform debate was totally driven by the media. Cartoonists were beginning to attack Dubček's arbitrary attempt to curtail it



1968 Prague Spring



- President Novotný resigned end of March 1968, replaced by General Ludvík Svoboda
- CP Action Programme
- "party to become democratic", to retain its "leading role"

1968 Prague Spring



- Increasing pressure from the Allies came to dominate the media agenda, troops
- Pressure especially from the East German party leader Walter Ulbricht – "fear of the third world war"

Reaction of the USSR

- Brezhnev (who had replaced Khrushchev in October '64) was alarmed by what was happening
- Soviet's held military manoeuvres near Czech border
- Warsaw pact countries held military exercises inside Czechoslovakia
- Dubcek met with Brezhnev and other communist leaders, promising that the Communists would remain in control, they would remain in the Warsaw pact and that the Czech press would not criticise the USSR

21st August, 1968

- Warsaw Pact Invasion
- CP leadership kidnapped to Russia
- Vital role of 24 hour media, mostly radio
- Euphoria of a unified nation





1968 Russian invasion

- Cartoons in the street:



1968 Russian Invasion

- Political posters which covered the streets



1968 Russian Invasion

- Front page of a picture weekly, one of many periodicals which came out every day and were distributed from moving vans for free in the Prague streets



‘The Camera doesn’t lie...’?



The top photo was taken in April 1968. It shows Dubcek, 2nd from the left of the four men standing. The bottom photo is the 1969 version but with Dubcek airbrushed out. In this way, Dubcek became a ‘non-person’. This method of doctoring photos was common under Stalin, so remember this the next time you write ‘photos are always reliable evidence.’ Dubcek died in 1992 – once again a popular figure in a free Czech Republic.



A Czech looks at the remains of a burnt-out Soviet tank. There was some violent resistance but it was minor compared to 1956. Most protest was non-violent. Many of the Soviet troops were from Soviet Asia. Why?

- The crushing of the Prague Spring did not seriously damage East-West relations. Czechoslovakia, like Hungary before it, belonged to the Soviet zone and could not be helped.
- Brezhnev developed the Soviet version of the Truman Doctrine. **The Brezhnev Doctrine declared that**
- *Communist countries had the right to defend fellow communist states from western attempts to make them capitalist*
- *loyal communist states had to remain in the Warsaw Pact and*
- *maintain a one-party system with only the Communist Party allowed.*

1. Why do you think the Soviet Union used troops from other communist states in the invasion?
2. What evidence is there that the Czechs had learnt two lessons from the events in Hungary?
3. What evidence is there that the Soviet reaction was not as repressive as it was in 1956?
4. In 1968 Albania left the Warsaw Pact because it claimed that the USSR was 'not communist enough' but Brezhnev did nothing. Can you suggest why?

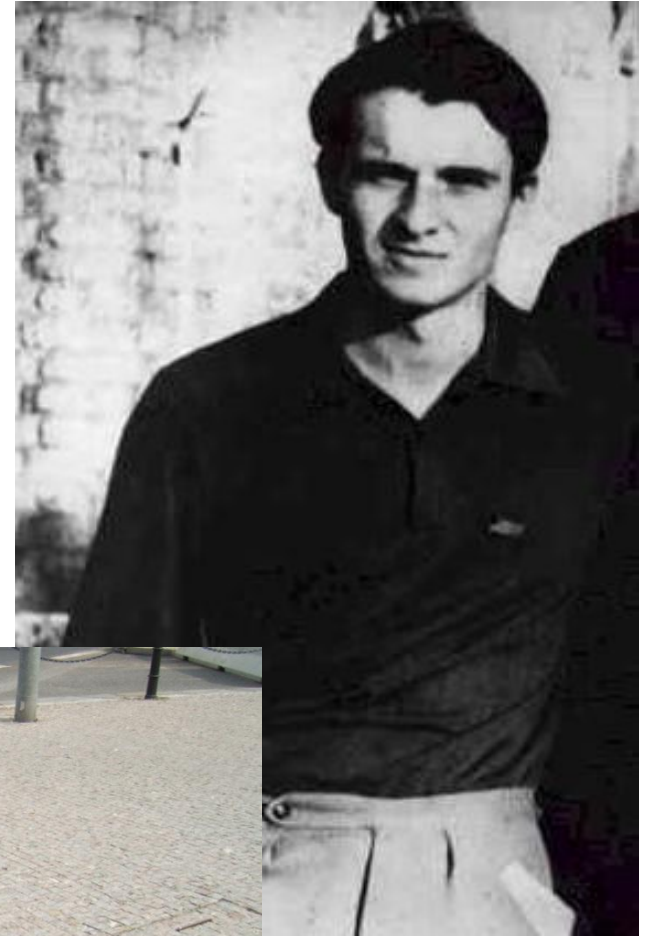
The Aftermath

Spontaneous resistance of the public saved the
CP leaders lives

They returned on 27th August, having signed a
secret protocol on defeat

Jan Palach

- Jan Palach
- Burn himself as protest against demoralization of Czech's society following WP intervention



Clampdown



- Brezhnev came back and threatened second invasion
- Dubček was deposed and replaced by Gustáv Husák, who presided over the whole "normalisation" period (as Party chief until 1987)

Consequences: Social and Economic

Immediate

- After the invasion, people soon became apathetic and indifferent [1]
- About 150 000 Czechs and Slovaks fled, yet many stayed to continue their protests
- Eastern Bloc troops remained in Czechoslovakia to ensure counter-revolutionary forces were quelled and stability was achieved[2]

Long Term

- During the “normalization” much construction focused on building pre-fabricating housing districts on outskirts of cities.

Consequences: Political

Immediate

- Leader such as Dubcek were apprehended and taken to Moscow at the end of the August invasion. Dubcek would be 'banned' for 20 years[1]
- Soviets issued a protocol to ban all organizations which they saw to "violate socialist principles"[2]
- Many political purges of occurred in 1969-1970, removing thousands from their jobs[4]

Long Term

- New Communist Government during the period of "normalization" (1970s and 80s) was one of the most repressive of all satellite states[1]
- Opposition to Soviet Rule is pushed underground
- Charter 77 (1977) signed. Opposition to the "normalization" occurring.]
- Communists were ousted on November 24, 1989: Dubcek became the chairman of the new administration of Czechoslovakia in what is known as the "Velvet Revolution"[3]
