Events that led to the Czechoslovakian Prague Spring and its immediate aftermath

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Events that led to the Czechoslovakian Prague Spring and its immediate aftermath

Senior thesis towards Russian major

Natalie Babjukova
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The invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union on August 21\textsuperscript{st} 1968 dramatically changed not only Czech domestic, as well as international politics, but also the lives of every single person in the country. It was an intrusion of the Soviet Union into Czechoslovakia that no one had expected. There were many events that led to the aggressive action of the Soviets that could be dated way back, events that preceded the Prague Spring. Even though it is a very recent topic, the Cold War made it hard for people outside the Soviet Union to understand what the regime was about and what exactly was wrong about it. Things that leaked out of the country were mostly positive and that is why the rest of the world did not feel the need to interfere. Even within the country, many incidents were explained using excuses and lies just so citizens would not want to revolt. Throughout the years of the communist regime people started realizing the lies they were being told, but even then they could not oppose it. Criticizing the regime would mean risking their employment, or other consequences, for instance the possibility for their children to finish their studies. The official version presented to the outside world of how life in the Soviet Union was a fairy tale was miles away from reality. It is very hard to imagine what life had to be like for people who have never lived under a communist regime and have only experienced democracy. Plus, Czechoslovakian people lived in it for forty years and realized only after the return of democracy how absurd some of the things they were forced to do were. They had no comparison with the democratic world and so some of the things seemed completely normal to them.

Because this thesis is going to talk about the time of "Prague Spring", it is necessary to first explain what the term means before describing events that preceded it, as well as its immediate consequences. Prague Spring was a period of time between January 1968 until the Soviet invasion on August 21\textsuperscript{st} 1968. During that time the country had been under the supremacy of the Communist Party for twenty years, and it is important to mention that all decisions that were made by the Communist party had to be previously authorized by the
Soviet Union. Being under such domination meant a lot of restrictions in culture (literature, media, etc.), travel or speech. There was an attempt to limit this absolute control of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union under the reformist Alexander Dubcek, who was elected the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on January 5th, 1968. His intention was not to overrule the Communist Party, but to liberate the regime and provide more freedom to the Czechoslovakian citizens. His reforms were supposed to democratize the system and open up the economy. Most importantly he tried to decentralize the power and distance the country from the Soviet Union. This, of course, was not in the favor of the Soviet Union, as they were sensing a possible loss of a territory and political supremacy that had made them such a powerful empire. They decided to regain the control through invading the country in August, 1968 with hundreds of tanks. There was nothing that Czechoslovakia could have done at that moment, and any kind of physical defense would have been pointless because they were outnumbered. The Soviet Union obviously could not claim that the reason to invade the country was to regain power. Their official statement, explained in the Brezhnev Doctrine, was that the situation in Czechoslovakia threatened Russian security. That was a very vague explanation but the rest of the world did not react to it. Because of the Cold War, very little information from the Soviet Union leaked out to the Western world. However, it is very debatable whether those planned reforms would have really come into effect if the Soviet Union had not invaded the Czechoslovakian territory.

Events that preceded the August invasion could be dated to the end of the World War II in 1945. The Communist party was slowly gaining power since the end of the Second World War and eventually seized absolute power in 1948. People were relieved that the war was over and enthusiastic about any kind of change. The majority of people accepted the Communist party without giving their promises many thoughts. The process of Stalinization took over soon after the victorious elections, which had the goal of gaining absolute control in
not only the political life but also in private lives of all citizens. Anyone who had any kind of ties with the Western world was persecuted. The Soviet Union was scared of any kind of opposition which was reinforced after Josip Tito introduced his doctrine of resisting the Soviet Union, and as a result Yugoslavia never became a member of the Warsaw Pact. In 1952, fourteen members of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party were accused of being supporters of this theory and most of them were hanged. The most famous figure of those fourteen people was Rudolf Slansky, and the process became known as the Slansky trial. Nowadays, it is well known that it was an anti-Semitic purge in which the Communist party sacrificed Rudolf Slansky and other members just to stay on good terms with the Soviet Union and threaten those who might have agreed with Tito’s policy. This was only one of the first terrible incidents that made people realize that the promises of the Communist Party were lies that spread fear and uncertainty across the country. The economic situation was stagnating, and people were expecting a monetary reform at any moment. The Hungarian revolution in 1956 certainly inspired the Czechoslovakian nation and sparked some hope for a short period of time. However, the eventual failure of the Hungarian revolution to distance itself from the Soviet Union made Czechoslovaks very cautious about their steps to liberalize the political system. Some liberation came in the early 1960’s, which was significantly reinforced after the election of Alexander Dubcek in 1967. People started feeling hopeful and cheerful and freer to express themselves. A new model of socialism was introduced that was supposed to be more national and democratic. For a short period of time, there was no censorship and thanks to that, culture flourished. Unfortunately, that was soon to be changed as the country was threatened and eventually invaded by the countries of the Warsaw Pact in 1968. Even though it was a sad part of Czechoslovakian history, it played a significant role in the Velvet Revolution in 1989. It was something that brought the nation together which eventually proved to be a main contribution to their victory in 1989.
The beloved Alexander Dubček was replaced by Gustav Husak in 1969, and all previous reforms were overturned. A period of normalization, or, in other words – bringing back the Soviet rules - had swept the country. Soon after that, student protests began around the world that inspired young people in Czechoslovakia, who also started showing their disagreement with the political situation. When it comes to the student protests, it is absolutely necessary to emphasize the story of Jan Palach, a young student of philosophy, who set himself on fire on January 16th 1969 as a protest against the communist regime. His story is not only heroic and serves as something that people like to praise and that made the nation come together, but it also shows how absolutely ridiculously the Communist Party dealt with it. Many people fell into depression and gave up on the country. Many authors were publishing about Czechoslovakia from abroad. Those who decided to stay and fight for the country, such as musician Karel Kryl or literary author and future president of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel, really helped the country overcome those unfortunate years and became strong figures of the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

World War II officially ended on May 8th 1945, and Czechoslovakia suffered about 345 000 casualties. People tried to quickly forget about the horrific events and move on to the next chapter of their lives. Everyone was cheerful and happy that the "grey" days were over. They believed that anything would be better than war which, unfortunately, was not the case for everyone. The Communist Party came in at the right place at the right time. According to Heda Kovaly: "Many people turned to Communism not so much in revolt against the existing political system, but out of sheer despair over human nature which showed itself at its very worst during the war" (53). It is important to point out that it was the Soviet Union that came to liberate the country in 1945. The Communist party took extreme advantage of this fact and tried to emphasize it as much as possible. They were spreading around that it was the Western capitalists who sold them out to Hitler and his Nazi Germany, and that it was the Russian Red
Army that saved them. The Communist party made the nation feel obligated to the Soviet Union. The fact that the American army came to liberate the country as well, only slightly later than the Red Army, was never emphasized by the Communist Party.

Rumors started going around about how life in the Soviet Union was heavenly, how the Party cared deeply about their citizens and did not distinguish between races or nationalities. People wanted to believe it because they were still hurting from their losses in the World War II, and they were tired of thinking negatively and feeling suspicious about what was offered to them. Heda Kovaly continues: "The most eagerly embraced belief of the time was no national or racial oppression could exist under communism. Factual evidence of the contrary was hard to come by, and more persuasive than any piece of propaganda were the fairy tales of life in the Soviet Union spread by Czech Communists"(61). The Soviet Union knew well that the postwar Czechoslovakia was very weak. The country was unable to run its own government without the Soviet help – they were forced to believe in socialism and to follow the totalitarian model. Heda Kovaly points out: "Communism was the eternal ideal of humanity, we could not doubt the ideal, only ourselves"(63). That is exactly how it was understood – life under communism was a happy life, the system was the complete opposite of Nazism – all those "nursery rhymes" were repeated over and over again until people started believing it. It was a very convincing process that worked very well.

The Czechoslovakian parliamentary elections in 1946 were won by the Communist Party. Milan Svec states: "In free elections to the Constitutional National Assembly on May 26, 1946, the Communist Party won 38 percent of the votes and became the strongest political party in the republic"(982). The offer of an economic reform that would finally overcome the crisis that still prevailed since the 1930’s was very appealing to the nation. People were still disappointed by the Munich agreement in 1938, where the Western countries agreed that the Czechoslovakian areas on the borders with Germany called Sudetenland would be given to
Germany. People felt betrayed by the Western countries, and naturally preferred to support the Communist Party that collaborated with the Soviet Union. However, soon after people realized that living under a communist regime was not going to be as amazing as people had claimed. People were opposing collectivization and many factories complained about the communist insistence on larger production without earning more money. Kieran Williams mentions: "The communist seizure of power had demolished the urban and rural middle classes, as indicated by the decline in the number of privately owned shops and craftsmen’s studios from almost 250,000 in 1948 to 6,553 by 1958"(5). Many people also lost their land in favor of the Communist Party and were not compensated for it.

People also started realizing that the Soviet Union used Czechoslovakia for production. The majority of the products produced in Czechoslovakia were going to the Soviet Union without the Soviets ever paying for it. Simply, the Czechoslovakian country quickly became a vassal of the Soviet Union. They took advantage of the mineral resources Czechoslovakia had such as uranium and used most of it for their own benefit. Tomas Prokop states: "The price of uranium was rigidly fixed in the years 1959-1965 and had a downward trend. The price was decreased by 25% in 1959. Between 1959 and 1960 the Soviet Union paid 100% of the geological survey but since 1. 1. 1961 the USSR only contributed 50% to the extent comparable with the year 1958"(4). This data shows that the Soviet Union kept paying less and less for the production of uranium despite the fact that they were using the majority of it. Matthew Ouimet points out: "There is little further evidence that Moscow ever tried to play the economic card with Prague. However, the Czechoslovaks could have responded with countersanctions of their own, cutting off deliveries of uranium and other productions"(25).

The Communist Party started fearing that the elections in 1948 would not be victorious for them anymore because of the declining public support, and decided to create a
coup d’etat with an absolute support of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party started organizing protests and riots, as well as expelling other political parties from the government. As it is stated in history.com: "On February 25, Benes gave in to communist demands and handed his cabinet over to the party. Rigged elections were held in May to validate the communist victory"(1). The following elections in February in 1948 called the "Victorious February" was more of a formality rather than properly held elections. The government was ousted and replaced by a more ‘Soviet oriented’ one.

The elections preceded some other suspicious incidents. The Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak government Jan Masaryk was found dead in the street under the window of his office. Throughout his eight years in the office, he managed to establish great relations with the western allies, and his speeches were often broadcasted by the BBC. The investigation was obviously resolved in a suicide but no one believed it. Despite the lack of evidence, it is very likely that it was a murder arranged by the Communist Party. Soon after the communist victory, the Party started appointing ‘their’ people to the government. People were offered different positions, and even if they had wanted to refuse to accept it, the dismissal would have been rejected. Heda Kovaly emphasizes: "The Party had officially ordered certain people to accept"(78).

For the first couple of years their main goal was transforming the society into one that would understand the communist values and entirely comply with them. The Communist Party focused on disposing of anyone who was collaborating with the Western resistance during the war. For instance, the Czechoslovakian aviation units working for the British Royal Air Force during the World War II were terribly persecuted despite their heroic work during the war. Many of them were arrested and imprisoned, their families were kicked out of their houses, and their children were not allowed to study. The Communist Party was certainly doing a great job with convincing the big majority of the nation. People started to envy each
other and feel suspicious towards their friends or neighbors. People stopped helping each other or even showing any positive emotions. Heda Kovaly continues: "When ideology takes front seat, human relations are pushed aside. When every action and thought is geared to the building of a new society, there is little room left for feelings"(81). The Communist regime brought up grey days for the Czechoslovakian citizens. All of a sudden, there was nothing that made the nation really come together and fight as a united group. People were willing to give up their good relations and turn against their true friends for a better job and more comfortable life. People were asked to join the Communist Party and whoever rejected it lost their job and had a hard time finding a different one. To not be a member of the Party was not really an option for people, many of them accepted it because they were scared.

The Party’s explanation behind why so many people tried to emigrate and why people were not allowed to travel freely was utterly laughable. Heda Kovaly states a comrade of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "For many people, the decision to leave is rash. They don’t understand the situation and are prone to an entirely unjustified panic. Once they realize they have nothing to be afraid of, they’ll be glad they stayed. Then we’ll open the borders up again and people will travel anywhere they want"(85). In reality, they just did not want to lose more labor force and they knew very well that if they had opened up the borders, a significant number of people would have left and never had come back. They never planned to open up the borders - that was simply a lie.

Rudolf Margolius was the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade. He was appointed soon after the Victorious February. His focus was on foreign trade with the western countries, and thanks to his great diplomatic skills he managed to negotiate some convenient economic agreements. One might think that he would be praised for such achievements of making the foreign trade flourish but that was not the case. His Jewish origin was not in favor of the Communist Party. The Soviet Union did not want to shed a good light on the Western
countries – they did not want people to think that the trade with those countries would be beneficial and would bring more money and prosperity into Czechoslovakia. The Western world simply became a forbidden topic. Heda Kovaly points out: "The few books by Western authors that were being translated at the time gave such a grim picture of life in the West that we could only conclude that the Party was right, that the West had reached the terminal stages of moral and economic decay. Very few people listened to foreign broadcasts such as the BBC, partly out of fear, but mainly because the broadcasts were so effectively jammed that it was almost impossible to understand what was being said" (94). That way, the Communist Party was keeping everyone under its control.

Within just a couple of years, the enthusiasm from the end of the war was all gone. The atmosphere was just as fearful as it was during the World War II. Parents were scared to say anything negative about the Communist Party in front of their children because they were frightened that the next day they would say that to their teachers in kindergartens or anyone else who could pass it on to the Communist Party. No one knew who was a communist spy and who was not. It was hard to tell because the agents of the state security (STB) - would act and be dressed normally. It was not until after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 that the documents with all the names of the communist informers were open to anyone in public archives. Nowadays, anyone who is older than 18 years old can file a request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to go to those archives and look up information. People were getting arrested on a regular basis. Heda Kovaly continues: "By 1951, the atmosphere in Prague was almost as bad as it had been during the war. No one dared to speak out loud, and hardly a week passed without news of someone’s arrest" (101). Rumors about a new currency devaluation spread and people went in the streets to buy anything possible before their lifelong savings would be completely lost. People had to form lines that were often stretching along the streets just to get inside a grocery store and buy every-day necessities.
In November 1951, Rudolf Slansky – the secretary general of the Party, was arrested. The secret police seemed to intensify their search for people who were opposing the system. Eventually, it was Rudolf Slansky and 13 other members of the government who were taken in custody within just a couple of weeks. Rudolf Margolius was amongst them. After each arrest, the secret police would search their houses in detail and confiscate anything that would look just a little suspicious. Any savings would be taken away. Their families got no explanation, but rather very scornful looks and almost an immediate loss of their jobs. No one would hire them as employers were banned to employ any political opponents. Questions of families of all those who were arrested would be completely ignored, their phone calls would not be picked up, and they would be told that the person they are looking for is not in the office. They would wonder why their loved ones were arrested when they were in fact doing their best in their jobs, officially supporting the Party and attending all necessary Party meetings and events only to find out that their home phones were bugged. The Party was able to listen to their private conversations at any moment, and despite their official attitude towards the Party, they would of course now and then utter a word of some kind of disapproval with the communist regime. It was only human to do so. Heda Kovaly, Rudolf Margolius’s wife, remembers: "When Rudolf was appointed Deputy Minister, a "hot line" that connected our home to various offices had been installed in addition to our regular telephone"(115). People were not suspicious and would have not expected their phones to be bugged just yet.

The nation knew about those trials but it did not cause a lot of public outrage. Everyone was fairly apathetic towards what was happening. People had enough problems on their own and instead chose not to react to the situation. No one had looked deeper into the problem to know whether the trials were justified or not. However, the Party decided to force people to sign petitions so that the detainees would be executed. My grandpa mentions:
"Those petitions were mostly going around factories where workers did not have much choice – whether to sign it or be fired". The disappearances of people also completely changed the dynamics of the nation. People tried to avoid being seen in the streets or at social events just so that they would not draw attention. They would not talk to anyone. People would be happy to wake up in their own beds every morning, thanking God they survived another night without getting arrested. People were fighting for themselves and not for anyone else, not for the nation. It took many years for people to realize that they had to come together as a nation, support each other and not look at each other suspiciously to beat the regime.

Families of those who were arrested did not even know where their loved ones were kept and what was happening to them. But that was not the only worry they had, as they were struggling financially with the loss of their jobs. They had to find a way to receive at least a minimum wage to provide themselves and their children food and other life necessities. Heda Kovaly explains: "The loss of my job meant not only being unable to support myself and my child. It also provided the police with an excuse to arrest me as a "parasite," an individual who refused to contribute to the building of socialist society. In Czechoslovakia, as in all the Communist countries of Europe at the time, being unemployed was not merely unfortunate; it was illegal. But in a country where all jobs had become government jobs, who would employ an outcast like myself?"(120). For the outside world it looked as if all the unemployed people were those who refused to work, but in reality the regime made sure that they would not get hired by anyone. The explanation made sense and no one from the outside world would try to look deeper into it.

The trial with Rudolf Slansky, Rudolf Margolius and twelve other members of the government started about a year after they got arrested – on November 20th 1952. Eleven out of those fourteen were of Jewish origin. They were accused of anti-state conspiracy. According to Helaine Blumenthal: "The absurdity of the charges levied against Slansky and
his co-conspirators – that they, the most devoted of communists, had organized and carried out a Zionist-backed plot to overthrow the Czechoslovak government – signaled to many Jews that the real crime was not cosmopolitanism nor bourgeois-nationalism, but Jewishness alone"(16). All of them admitted their collaboration and their betrayal of the Communist Party despite the fact that that never happened. They were tortured and blackmailed in prison for about a year – and that is a long time to stay strong and keep opposing it. Michal Frankl points out: "They were forced to confess to being part of a Zionist conspiracy, with Zionism understood as a proxy for Western imperialism. The anti-Jewish character of the Slánský trial was part and parcel of the late Stalinist turn toward antisemitism and was introduced into the case by Soviet advisers, who encouraged Czech investigators to stress the dangers of a purported world Zionist conspiracy"(2). It was just a matter of time for them to break down and give up and say whatever the Party ordered them to say in the official statement. Heda Kovaly paraphrased her husband’s words: "He had joined the Party only in order to betray it. He had devoted his energies to nothing but espionage and sabotage. He had enriched himself by taking bribes, and, as a mercenary in the employ of the imperialists, he had plotted far-reaching conspiracies against the Republic and its people"(141). Nothing of that was true, and he was forced to such a testimony. They all just happened to be the scapegoats of the system. It was a targeted purge to remove people of Jewish origin from the government.

All of them were accused of collaborating with Josip Tito and his policies. Tito served as a President of Yugoslavia for almost thirty years. He agreed with the communist policies, but he wanted the government in Yugoslavia to be ruled independently – without the absolute control of the Soviet Union. Joseph Stalin of course could never agree with it, and the whole problem happened to be the first major split between the Communist states. The Soviet Union feared that other countries within the Soviet Bloc would follow Tito’s footsteps and prefer his policies over the ones set by the Warsaw Pact. They needed to show the other Soviet Union
countries that choosing "titoism", as Tito’s policies became officially known, was not going to be a safe option. They needed to threaten people with something, and so they created such a purge. Eleven of them were hanged and three were sentenced to a life imprisonment on December 3rd 1952.

As much as the lives of their families were already quite miserable, it got even worse after the trial finished. Their relatives would not be accepted for a treatment in hospitals even if their health conditions were critical and their lives were in danger. Their wives could not change their statuses to "widowed" for the next two years because that is the amount of time it took them to issue a death certificate. They did not know where they were buried and they got to know the outcome from the radio and the newspaper. Their families would be kicked out of their houses and apartments and most of their stuff would be confiscated. Heda Kovaly points out: "The Comrade Inspectors from the National Committee in my own neighborhood came and announced that they would return shortly to remove the property they had inventoried for confiscation. After I file a petition, I was allowed to keep a bed, a table, two chairs, cups, plates and cutlery for two people"(156). The Communist Party made sure that the lives of the relatives would turn into a complete misery.

Very little people would ever believe that the Communist Party would get away with such a lie, but they did without much notice of the Western world. Similar purges took place in Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria. Czechoslovakian citizens either believed it or pretended to believe it, because they feared they would be hanged as well if they expressed any kind of suspicion about it. And that was only the first major incident that happened under the communist regime, many more were about to come and the Czechoslovakian citizens would be under an absolute control of the Soviet Union for the next thirty seven years.

The currency reform that people feared for a long time came on June 1st 1953, completely unexpectedly. President Antonin Zapotocky assured everyone on the night of May
31st that there was not going to be any kind of reform, however, the following day proved that he lied. Evzen Sknouril claims: "Antonín Zápotocký said: "Our currency is strong and monetary reform will not take place, the class enemies only spread rumors about it." The day after, it became clear that the president lied and that the Czechoslovakian currency was not that strong. The Soviet Union was already in advance printing the new bills"(4). The Communist Party claimed that it was going to help the economic crisis. At that time, the purchasing power was greater than the supply. People had enough money to keep buying luxuries and look for a bigger choice of products in grocery stores. However, the Communist Party did not want to offer a lot of choice and give people the opportunity to be spending money. After the monetary reform, people were struggling to even buy every-day necessities because the devaluation took a rate of fifty to one. If people had savings of 50 000 Kcs (The Czechoslovakian koruna), that meant that they only had a 1000 Kcs after the currency reform.

Whatever savings people managed to keep over the years lost all its value within a day. Sknouril continues: "Population suffered significant losses. People lost their lifelong savings. Tradesmen, shopkeepers and small businessmen lost their working capital"(4). The old bills were only valid until the end of June. Everyone had to go to the bank and give them all the money they had and pick up the new bills. That way the purchasing power severely lowered. There was a suspected money fraud and it is very likely that the Communist Party managed to steal a lot of money thanks to the currency reform. According to Sknouril: "The reform gained over four billion crowns in the new currency for the State economy. The Soviet Union sent a bill amounting to over 27 million crowns for the production of the new money"(5). Many people went in the streets and protested, but without any result. People panicked and fell into depression. The gloomy atmosphere in the country continued and even worsened. Heda Kovaly emphasizes: "Lying and play acting became a way of life; indifference and apathy became its essence. Even small children knew not to repeat in school
what had been said at home; they learned not to display interest in anything, to become involved with nothing"(166).

Some hope for a better time came after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. He was replaced by Nikita Khrushchev, who revealed all Stalin’s terrible crimes in the so-called ‘Secret Speech’ in 1956. Thanks to that, the Soviet Union had enough to deal with and gave the other Soviet countries a little more space. In spring of 1963 – ten years after the Slansky trial - the Party finally admitted that all those executions happened to be a mistake. The fourteen members of the government were proclaimed to be innocent. The Party met with their relatives, apologized and offered some kind of financial compensation. However, there was no official statement, no article in the news, not even a letter to their relatives officially apologizing and explaining what had happened. They tried to keep everything a secret. A couple months later, a short article was published that mentioned that all the men receiving a death penalty were rehabilitated. That was it. They did not officially apologize and they did not claim that they were innocent. The torturers from the prison where those fourteen men were kept before sentenced to death were sent to prison but, surprisingly, they were set free one year after that. Heda Kovaly mentions: "Two of the most notorious torturers from the Ruzyn prison were given short prison sentences. One year later, they were granted amnesty and placed in good, well-paying jobs"(177).

However, even the fact that the Communist Party tried to compensate for the mistake they made sparked some hope for the nation. People had a dream in their minds of being free, and it seemed as if it was slowly coming true. Part of the government tried to come up with a way how to change the whole regime into something a little more democratic but at that time the idea still had a lot of opponents. Nevertheless, the tendency to establish socialism with a human face was becoming stronger, and people started slowly believing that it really might come true. An important milestone for the upcoming Prague Spring was the Congress of the
Union of Czechoslovak Writers in July 1967. A number of writers gave speeches in which they were criticizing the situation. They demanded that culture should follow the pattern of the Western European countries – mainly freedom to publish anything they wanted without any kind of censorship. Writers such as Milan Kundera, Ludvik Vaculik, Ivan Klima, Vaclav Havel, and Pavel Kohout took a very strong stance and were ready to face the consequences. Speeches of all those powerful writers were calling for reforms. Milan Kundera expressed: "The whole course of our nation’s history, torn between democracy, fascist enslavement, Stalinism and socialism, and further complicated by its unique nationality problem, features every important issue that has made our twentieth century what it is … Our nation then has experienced, I daresay, more than many others have in this century and, if its genius has been alert, it will now know more than the others" (Sabatos, 1830). Ludvik Vaculik published a manifesto in which he was encouraging people to fight for freedom of the press. Jan Rychlik emphasizes: "He (Vaculik) called upon citizens to accelerate the process of democratization, that is, to stand up openly against the leadership of the Communist Party" (43). Charles Sabatos points out: "Havel called for simple (but radical) political action, simply by criticizing the existing state of affairs. 'Self-criticism', in which Party members who were seen to have deviated from orthodox ideology were forced to apologize for their 'mistakes', was a common method of social control under the communists. Havel took this concept further, suggesting that the Communist Party needed to undertake the process of self-criticism as a whole" (1831). The delegation of the Communist Party that had to be present at this Congress left early, and most of the writers who expressed their disapproval with the situation were expelled from the Party. Michael Zantovsky expresses: "Even when Jiri Hendrych, the secretary of the Central Committee in charge of ideology, angrily left the Congress with the words "You have gambled away everything", the invectives continued" (98). That is how strongly they were convinced that they might make a difference with their speeches.
Some reforms were already discussed in 1967, but at that time there were as many supporters as opponents of the whole "democratic" change. There were three main areas that needed to be reformed and those included the economy, the cultural environment, and the Czech-Slovak relations. The situation in 1968 was one of the first occasions that showed how Czech and Slovak views differed. Daniela Ptackova mentions: "While in the Czech lands the main focus was on the democratization process, the Slovaks cared more about their position of Slovakia in Czechoslovakia"(50). The problem remained perpetual as the Slovaks and Czechs never fully integrated. The Slovak’s priority was to have equality between the two nations, however, that was not a priority for the Czechs. The attempt to establish a federation was mentioned only marginally by the Czech government. Ptackova continues: "Balancing economic and budget issues became major subjects of disagreement between the Czech and Slovak ideas of the future federation"(51). However, it was not only the economic differences between the two parts, but also diverse cultural traditions that made the two areas eventually dissolve in 1993.

The economic situation in Czechoslovakia was sharply deteriorating in the 1960’s due to many reasons and urgently needed a reform. As Kieran Williams states: "The crisis was triggered by a confluence of exogenous factors (the loss of trade with China, and the Berlin and Cuban missile crisis), chronic irrationality in investment policy, half-hearted reforms in 1958 (which had actually increased monopolization and bureaucracy), and a series of poor harvests"(21). This, accompanied by very low exports and the exploitation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union that was using the territory for raw materials, resulted in a very poor economic situation. Williams continues: "The grand result was a decline in GNP of more than 2 percent in 1963"(21). The economic sector was certainly calling for reforms.

The economic reform called the New Economic Mechanism was launched in 1967 by Ota Sik. According to Kenneth Skoug: "Deputy Premier Ota Sik struggled to promote an
economic reform seemingly impossible to start. He was trying to revitalize the New Economic Mechanism which he had fathered, seeking to inform and arouse public opinion to overcome resistance to its implementation"(113). It was supposed to give more freedom to the buyers as well as producers to choose between imports and domestic goods. It mainly focused on promoting private enterprises. The intention was certainly good, but the economic differences between the Slovak and Czech industries were too big at that moment. According to Alexander Dubcek: "Wider application was not possible without negative consequences for Slovakia because of the continuing imbalance in economic development"(112). Slovakian economy has always lagged behind the Czech one and did even more so in the 1960’s. The transition into a more privately focused economy would have not been accepted well in Slovakia, as they were lacking private investments. Nevertheless, the New Economic Mechanism certainly inspired the latter reforms introduced during the Prague Spring, as well as impressed other Eastern Bloc countries. Miklos Kun points out: "The aims of the Czechoslovak "new economic mechanism" agreed in numerous ways with the identically named Hungarian economic policy introduced in January 1968"(219).

It was obvious that Antonin Novotny’s presidential authority was declining as many of his proposals were criticized and rejected. The opposition that was in favor of the new reforms was getting stronger, and it was just a matter of time before Novotny would be overpowered. Novotny’s last attempt to resist the opposition was his invitation of Brezhnev to Prague on December 8th 1967. Dubcek writes: "Brezhnev came with a list of five people he wanted to talk to – Novotny, Hedrych, Lenart, Dolansky, and me"(121). Those five people expressed the problems Czechoslovakia was dealing with and the fact that Novotny was incapable of solving them, as well as their willingness to replace Novotny in his office. Novotny was obviously looking for some kind of support from Brezhnev but he never received much of it. The Soviet leader decided to leave it up to Czechoslovakia to deal with it.
Novotny was asked to resign on January 4th 1968 during the Central Committee session and Alexander Dubcek was elected on the following day – January 5th. Dubcek continues: "The Central Committee also decided to enlarge the Presidium by four, so Jan Piller, Josef Boruvka, Emil Rigo, and Josef Spacek were elected to the newly created positions. This was an important step: none of those elected was a Stalinist hard-liner"(126). Those January events were very positive and created another milestone for the upcoming Prague Spring.

People were enthusiastic and they were anxiously awaiting Dubcek’s reforms to take place. All of a sudden, people were not grumpy, they were not arguing in the streets, not frowning at each other but smiling instead. Everyone was out in the streets, chatting and laughing with their friends – something so trivial in today’s world, but at that time it rarely happened. It was the first time in a while that people felt like belonging together. Culture flourished at that time. The amount of significant literary works, theater performances or movies that were created in the 1960’s and that will be famous for many years, if not forever, was much bigger than at any other moment in Czechoslovakian history. Theater called Semafor, established in 1959 and associated with names such as Jiri Slitr, Jiri Suchy, Miroslav Simek or Jiri Grossmann, produced some unforgettable performances that are even nowadays still being played on television. The film Closely Watched Trains, by director Jiri Menzel, who has produced many memorable films, was released in 1966 and won an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 1968. Songs like "Bratřičku, zavírej vrátku" by Karel Kryl are still being sung by people not only around the campfire. Literary authors such as Bohumil Hrabal, who is often referred to as one of the best authors of the 20th century, was writing his famous literary pieces such as: I served the King of England, Cutting it Short, and Snowdrop Festival. Ota Pavel and his books Smrt krasnych srncu and Jak jsem potkal ryby, that were written in the late 1960’s are still read today even by the young generation. There was no other time in Czechoslovakian history that would be richer in cultural production of any kind.
Meanwhile, soon after Alexander Dubcek’s appointment, the new First Secretary tried to move fast to push those previously planned reforms. He was hoping to have the support of most of his colleagues, but he was mistaken. Alexander Dubcek claims: "The failure of some of my previous allies to support me was disturbing and even mystifying until I deduced that the Soviets were putting pressure on people like Kolder and Bilak. One can assume that the Soviets launched their lobbying sometime at the beginning of February 1968"(129). Both of them (Kolder and Bilak who were members of Dubcek’s government) were approached by Brezhnev’s people and suggested not to support Dubcek’s reforms.

The set of reforms that Dubcek was trying to launch as soon as possible was called Action Programme, and it was supposed to be the milestone of the Prague Spring. The program suggested a complete freedom of speech, and no censorship was going to be set. It also included freedom of movement. People were able to travel anywhere in the world and stay there for as long as they wished – even permanently. The economic sector was supposed to focus more on consumers rather than producers. It supported small-scale private enterprises and their independence within the market. In other words, the program was fairly open to capitalism. The constant clashes between the Czech and Slovak authorities were supposed to be calmed down through a proposed federalization, which promised to offer a fairer situation to the Slovak lands. The Slovak nation felt as if their autonomy was being abolished and they wanted to change that. And most importantly the program suggested that Czechoslovakia should not just simply follow the Soviet Union, but make their own decisions and establish their own socialism. Jiri Hochman continues: "The essence of this document was to provide a strict definition of the role of the Party and its administrative apparatus, curtailing its power to dictate, and increasing its ability to respond directly to people’s needs"(130). It needed to be first approved by the Party Presidium which ended up taking much longer than expected.

Leonid Brezhnev invited Alexander Dubcek to Moscow at the end of January to
discuss the new steps Czechoslovakia was going to take under the new leadership. Dubcek was trying to be careful about what to tell Brezhnev, especially about the new reforms. He thought it would be convenient to compare the situation with Hungary or Poland as he was hoping they would take a similar path of distancing themselves from the Soviet Union and that way the reforms in Czechoslovakia would not draw as much attention. It would have also been easier to have an ally in another country and form a strong opposition so that the Soviet Union would not be able to break that easily. Conveniently, the then leader of Hungary, Janos Kadar, suggested an informal meeting between them, and Dubcek happily agreed. Janos Kadar had a bitter history with Stalin – he was accused of collaborating with Rudolf Slansky and was imprisoned for three years. Soon after the unsuccessful Hungarian revolution, he was still able to push through some reforms that slightly liberated the system. One might think that he would be the right person to go talk to about the reforms, and Dubcek believed that he would agree and cooperate with him. They met on January 20\textsuperscript{th}, and Dubcek was fairly honest with him. Kadar, however, seemed very reserved about the whole situation. He never expressed his opinion or his plans and mostly just listened to Dubcek’s ideas. Alexander Dubcek admits: "Later on, he disappointed me profoundly, because he lacked the courage to challenge the Russians by supporting reform in my country. And that disappointment turned into bitterness when I learned, after August 1968, that, immediately after meeting me, Kadar had called Brezhnev and informed him in great detail about our discussion"(133). Kadar was simply a puppet in the hands of the Soviet Union, but Alexander Dubcek could have never known that at that moment.

The trip to Moscow went ok for Alexander Dubcek. He carefully explained to Brezhnev and his government what his plans were. He made sure he would not mention words such as reform that could trigger more serious disagreements, but instead used words such as renewal that would sound more appealing to the Soviet Union. Dubcek emphasized
that nothing they were doing was aiming to be against the Soviet Union, and asked for their understanding. Kurt Treptow points out: "The Czechoslovak Communist Party’s reform program had no intention of abandoning or slowing down socialist development, but rather sought to foster it by enlisting the full support of the Czechoslovak people in building socialist society"(36). He mentioned that the country needed to put things in order first before cooperating more with the Warsaw Pact again. Alexander Dubcek states: "They (meaning Brezhnev and his Cabinet) did not say much, but I could sense that what I had told them was not what they would have liked to hear. Yet, there was no sign of open disagreement"(135).

The trip to Moscow was quickly followed up with a meeting with Jonas Kadar again, as well as with Wladyslaw Gomulka – the First Secretary of Poland. This time, the meeting with Kadar was official and he was asking more specific questions about the reforms. Wladyslaw Gomulka had a similar past as Janos Kadar – also suffered a false accusation of supporting Tito’s policies. Alexander Dubcek was convinced that Gomulka would understand and support him and felt comfortable talking about everything very honestly. Dubcek remembers: "I told him (Gomulka) that, from shortly after the moment the Communist Party had assumed power in Czechoslovakia, we had been burdened with excessive repression. Horrible injustices had been committed and never redressed"(135). What he said was certainly true but the Soviets could never know that that was what he actually believed. There is no evidence of whether Gomulka also informed Brezhnev about what had been said during the meeting, but it is very likely that it happened. Despite the unfortunate past, Gomulka turned out to be a big conspirator who launched an anti-Zionist campaign in Poland in March, 1968. According to Dariusz Stola: "In a few weeks the nationwide purge of Jews from the party and their positions had got under way and was descending from government officials and editors-in-chief through university professors to bookkeepers in cooperatives, foremen, and workers"(2). Dubcek seemed to trust both Kadar and Gomulka and that was a mistake.
This is a perfect example of how wicked the Communist Party was and how no one could trust each other.

The twentieth anniversary of the Communist governance came in February, and with it came a big celebration to which all the big Communist leaders were invited. Alexander Dubcek saw it as a good opportunity to reiterate to Brezhnev that the planned reforms were not against the Soviet Union. However, he did not get the possibility to talk to Brezhnev or to express his thoughts about the reforms. The Soviet Union was sensing the growing strength in the opposition of Czechoslovakia and reinforced their control. Alexander Dubcek was supposed to meet them again on March 23rd in Dresden. This time he was supposed to come with the entire Czechoslovakian delegation to talk about the economic cooperation with all the Eastern European countries. But that was a deception. Alexander Dubcek remembers: "Instead of talking about the five-year plan and other perennial themes, Walter Ulbricht opened the conference by saying that at issue was the situation in Czechoslovakia"(141). Each one of the top communist leaders, including Kadar and Gomulka, criticized the situation in Czechoslovakia and expressed their worries. A couple times they referred to the situation as if it was threatening the socialist world, which was an exaggeration. When it was Dubcek’s turn to speak, he explained that giving complete freedom of speech was not going to interfere with the country’s political agenda. He reinforced that Czechoslovakia remained a very faithful member of the Soviet Union with established socialistic norms that were only being slightly democratically adjusted. Dubcek continues: "Back home I did not allow the Dresden remonstrations to inhibit our reforms. My colleagues and I felt that, as long as we met our external obligations, we could continue to insist on our right to make our own domestic decisions"(143). Alexander Dubcek kept doing his best to push all previously discussed reforms. The Party Presidium was changed, and Novotny’s people were replaced by members who strongly supported the reforms. Thanks to those changes, the main obstacle for putting
all those reforms into effect was gone. The Action Programme was officially installed.

As much as it might seem like a trivial document from today’s perspective, it was the first time a Soviet country took a different approach and created a thoroughly elaborated document about it. It was the highlight of the Prague Spring. Dubcek points out: "No other Communist Party anywhere had prepared such a comprehensive and principled program of departure from the theory and practice of Leninism-Stalinism" (147). It was a program based on historic experiences of the Czechoslovakia and not on the Soviet example that had been the ultimate formula. It is not much of a surprise that all other countries of the Soviet bloc tried to avoid any kind of reference about it and never officially publicized it. But even though the Action Programme was installed, about four months (from the installation until August 21st) was too short of a time for the reforms to actually take place. The only one that came into effect was the abolishment of censorship.

May 1st – the Communist International Workers Day had always been celebrated in big fashion in Czechoslovakia. People had to march through the town and greet the leaders, and it was always accompanied with a military parade. People looked cheerful, and the crowds were enormous. To the rest of the world it looked as if the nation went happily in the streets to thank their leaders and appreciate the communist regime. But in reality, people were forced to go. Teachers were controlling whether their pupils were present. Employees were often controlled by their bosses. People did not want to draw attention and get in trouble so they pretended to look happy and marched through the city with slogans such as: "Se Sovětským svazem na věčné časy a nikdy jinak!" meaning "Forever with the Soviet Union and never otherwise!". My grandmother expressed: "Those slogans were completely ridiculous and we felt embarrassed but there was no way out of it. We always had to go and tried to sneak away as soon as possible". May 1st, 1968 was the first and only time that people were actually not forced to go. Alexander Dubcek mentions: "No one herded people into
columns marching under centrally designed and fabricated catchwords. This time people came on their own, carrying their own banners with their slogans, some cheerful, some critical, some just humorous"(150). The atmosphere was relaxed and cheerful.

People were also free to form different organizations that were not fully in agreement with the ideology of the Communist Party. Zantovsky points out: "The Prague Spring saw the emergence of new organizations like K-231 (a club of former political prisoners), KAN (a club of non-Communist activists) and Circle of Independent Writers, which first met in Havel’s apartment and elected him as its president on 6 June"(102). Besides enabling people to travel and publish whatever they wished, Alexander Dubcek was also planning to give people the possibility to form different political parties. During the whole Communist regime there was only one option of who to vote for, and that was obviously the Communist Party. People had to come to every single election and cast their ballot. If they had not made an appearance, they would have had problems at work and put their families at risk. The Communist Party loved to claim to the rest of the world that they have almost a 100% support of the nation. Every election, there would be assigned members of the Party whose task would be to go to immobile people’s houses and pick up their ballots, just so they could really emphasize the high percentage support. After the ‘Victorious February’, most political parties were forced to join the Communist Party. Soon after the reforms were launched, Alexander Dubcek received a call from the members of the Social Democrats expressing their hope to soon form a legitimate political party again. Dubcek mentions: "I did not see how we could possibly satisfy the Social Democrats without provoking our opponents both at home and in Moscow to attack us. However, I took no administrative measures to discourage the Social Democrats from trying to organize themselves, though I did try to persuade them to wait for a more favorable moment"(153). It was too early and there was already too much tension coming from the Soviet Union to allow other political parties to come in. Such a thing would
have most likely triggered a more serious action of the Warsaw Pact than just constant calls, meetings and permanent expressions of disapproval.

The Soviets certainly continued to step up their game. They ordered a large-scale military parade to be held on the Czechoslovakian territory, and they insisted on having it in June instead of September, which was previously planned. It was a tactically planned deterrence. Dubcek continues: "While I did not seriously imagine that they would invade the country, I was cognizant of their attempts to intimidate us by indirect military and other threats" (156). The military parade was intentionally moved to June, and it is more than clear now that the invasion was then already planned. The Soviet Union brought 27,000 soldiers for this parade – an alarming and exaggerated number. The purpose of the parade was not only to threaten the country with the amount of tanks and other military equipment the Soviet Union possessed, but also to slowly bring tanks and soldiers to the Czechoslovakian territory and to prepare for the invasion. Some suspicious incidents support the fact that the invasion was thoroughly prepared months in advance. About twenty guns were found by a civilian hidden under grass. When the Soviet Union discovered that those weapons were found, they claimed that they were sent by the US to equip the Czechoslovakian counterrevolution. Dubcek points out: "Our minister of the interior, Josef Pavel, later told me that examination revealed that the guns’ packing grease was of Soviet origin; his people figured that the weapons had been stored in Soviet Army stockpiles before being planted by Soviet agents" (166). Even though the parade only lasted for a couple of days, the tanks and troops did not leave immediately after. Their slow departure was extremely suspicious, and despite the appeal of Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union to withdraw their tanks, some of them stayed until the invasion in August.

The pressure of the Soviet Union grew stronger in July, when all the Soviet countries except Czechoslovakia met in Warsaw on July 14th. Until then, Brezhnev and his colleagues
had listened to Dubcek and to what he had to say about the situation. They were not happy about his ideas, but they never stated an explicit disapproval. This time in Warsaw they came up with a letter to the Czechoslovakian committee in which they harshly criticized the situation, and even called it a counterrevolution. Dubcek’s response and one of his last tries to convince the Soviet Union about the rightness of those reforms was to show that the Communist Party was gaining popularity. Dubcek states: "A poll showed that our reform policy was supported by as many as 78 percent of the people, with only 7 percent against"(163). People genuinely loved the idea of bigger freedom and were openly showing it. However, nothing was going to convince the Soviet Union. By then, the preparations to invade Czechoslovakia were in full swing.

The meeting of all the countries of the Warsaw Pact in Cierna on July 29th 1968 was approaching. The nation knew that the country’s independence was at risk. Heda Kovaly states: "A printed declaration appeared on little tables on street corners and in arcades. People by the thousands stopped to sign their names to this declaration of loyalty to a socialism that did not murder or intimidate or lie, to a socialism that did not bestow social equality and economic security upon those who were willing to silence their consciences and to renounce human dignity"(182). That was the socialism that people dreamed about and hoped for, and it did look like it was going to come true in 1968. The meeting was again full of disputes and disagreements. Both sides were only stating their opinions without finding a compromise. On the third day, Brezhnev and Dubcek seemed to find a solution. Because Dubcek did not want to accept the Warsaw letter, he suggested to present an entirely new document and to meet with all the countries of the Warsaw Pact two days later in Bratislava. Brezhnev agreed. The meeting ended with a compromise that did not entirely satisfy Czechoslovakia nor the Soviet Union, but people were still feeling very hopeful about the liberalization of the whole regime. The document was very moderate, as there was no harsh criticism of the situation in
Czechoslovakia and nothing that would somehow suggest the coming invasion. However, Dubcek claims: "Some time later, Soviet propagandists quoted another phrase from the jargon in the preamble of the declaration, which, in their opinion, justified the invasion of Czechoslovakia: that "support, protection, and strengthening" of achievements of nations of the bloc were the "joint international duty" of all" (170). The atmosphere got a little more relaxed again, and Dubcek and his government believed that the Soviet Union would finally leave Czechoslovakia alone without constant interference.

No one had imagined that the Soviets would invade the country in just a couple of days. However, on August 21st, people woke up to hundreds of tanks in the streets and to the strange noise coming out of the radio broadcast about the Russian invasion. Dubcek continues: "The morning of August 20th was uneventful. That Russian tanks might start rolling in on us in a few hours was inconceivable"(173). That day marked the end of all hopes, happiness and enthusiasm. The idea of just slightly dismantling the system brought an army of 600,000 men and 7,000 tanks from all sides. The Polish and German army entered from the north, the Hungarian from the south, and the Soviets, accompanied by the Bulgarians, entered from the east. There was never going to be any kind of liberalization, freedom of speech or of travel. The Soviets showed it clearly. There was never any letter that would warn Czechoslovakia of the invasion, despite the Soviet claim that they did send out a warning the day before. Dubcek points out: "A letter from Brezhnev was delivered to me on Monday night and in spite of the unusual timing of the delivery, there was nothing urgent in the letter. Some leading spokesman of the "normalization" era later claimed that this letter contained an explicit ultimatum, a clear-cut warning that the invasion was imminent. Such claims are entirely false"(176). There was no legal justification of the invasion even though the Soviet Union managed to make it somehow look reasonable.

Even the government did not predict the invasion. It was not until shortly before
midnight on the 20th when Dubcek and his colleagues, who happened to be working until late that night, received a phone call that the Soviets and four other countries of the Warsaw Pact had invaded. It created confusion and chaos. The Central Committee was wondering how it was possible to get so terribly betrayed and stabbed in the back. Dubcek admits: "Until the last moment, I did not believe the Soviet leaders would launch a military attack on us. To me, that was simply unthinkable. It ran contrary to my deepest idea of the value system I thought governed the relationships between socialist countries. It took the drastic, practical experience of the coming days and months for me to understand that I was in fact dealing with gangsters" (178). The Presidium was aware that they only had a couple of hours before the Soviet troops would storm inside the governmental building. They knew that there was nothing they could do to stop the Soviet tanks from entering the country. The least they could do was present a letter towards the nation that would condemn the invasion, but also avoid people from trying to physically resist it. The draft of the letter was approved by the majority of the Presidium, and those who voted against publishing it were those who secretly collaborated with the Soviet Union. Dubcek continues: "As we later learned, the Soviets had informed these men (those members of the Presidium who opposed the letter) about the invasion several days earlier, and they had agreed to provide a "legal" justification for it. In that, they failed completely"(181). Close to 9am on the 21st the power went off and a number of Soviet officers burst into the office. To claim that the Czechoslovakian Presidium was treated as if they had just robbed a bank would not be an understatement. Dubcek remembers: "We were sitting around a table – each of us had a tommy gun pointed at the back of his head"(183). Soon after they were put in one of the tanks and driven away without being told what the final destination was. In a couple of hours they found themselves at the Ruzyne airport and were placed on a plane. Dubcek and his delegation flew to Poland and then later to Moscow to ‘negotiate’ with Brezhnev and his government in the Kremlin. In reality, however, there were
no negotiations as the Czechoslovakian delegation was forced to sign the Moscow protocol.

Dubcek was treated like a prisoner and denied the right to re-unite with members of the Czechoslovakian Presidium—he was even denied the ability to take a shower after the long journey. Dubcek remembers: "I think the fact that they did not let me wash up beforehand was deliberate. They wanted me to feel humiliated and defeated, but, somehow, I did not. I wasn’t, after all, the one who should have been ashamed"(187). The whole time he was addressed with the Russian Ty, which is an informal way of speaking. People do not use that unless they agree on addressing each other by their first names, which never happened between Dubcek and Brezhnev. It was just another way of humiliation. Dubcek refused to cooperate with the Soviets unless the majority of members of the Party leadership would be flown to Moscow as well. The Soviets eventually agreed and about twenty members of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party met in Moscow. Some of those twenty members proved to be the conspirators and only the minority of them kept their word and stood strongly on Dubcek’s side.

What Brezhnev and his Presidium needed from the Czechoslovakian delegation was some kind of justification of the invasion and an acceptance of further demands. Ouimet cites Brezhnev’s words towards Dubcek: "Your borders are our borders as well. Because you do not listen to us, we feel threatened. In the name of the dead in World War Two who laid down their lives for your freedom as well, we are therefore fully justified in sending our soldiers into your country, so that we may feel truly secure within our common borders”(48). Brezhnev again pointed out the imaginary ‘debt’ that the Czechoslovaks owed to the Soviet Union for liberating the country from the Germans. However, there was no threat to the Soviet Union. After two days, they presented a document that later became known as the Moscow protocol. Dubcek points out: "This ‘proposal’ restated the Soviet demand that we acknowledge the existence of counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia and the legitimacy of the
invasion. It pointedly ignored any reference to the withdrawal of their army from Czechoslovakia. Further, they demanded we declare the Fourteenth Party Congress invalid, reinstitute censorship, and replace the current managers of radio and television. They also required that we ask the U.N. Security Council to withdraw from its agenda the question of Warsaw Pact aggression against Czechoslovakia"(208).

Despite the rejection of the Czechoslovak delegation to sign such a document and their pleas to change at least certain points of it, the document remained almost the same except a small revision. The Soviets really did not give the Czechoslovaks many options. Ouimet mentions: "Dubcek faced threats of torture and violent repression of civilians demonstrations if he did not sign an agreement that seriously circumscribed his reform program. Indeed, the discussions even broached the possibility of a war in Eastern Europe"(47). There was no other way besides agreeing to it. Right before signing it, as Dubcek could not say nothing to it, he uttered a few words about how the Czechoslovakian nation would never forget about the invasion and how people might remain hostile towards the Soviets for a very long time. He was right, the old generation still shivers with disgust when hearing Russian in the streets of Czech Republic. Dubcek continues: "We were about to sign an act of surrender packed with falsehood and pretense, and it was being imposed upon us by brute force and threats. I was sad, tired, and humiliated. These feelings were strongest when they brought the redrafted and retyped document for signature and let in a crowd of television cameramen and photographers"(213). The fact that this arrest of the leaders of the Czechoslovakian country was referred to as a "comradely visit" and "comradely discussion" is completely false and so was the official statement in the Soviet Union. Milan Svec emphasizes: "Moscow explained its action at home and to the world in the TASS statement of August 21, 1968, which claimed that "party and state leaders of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic have requested the Soviet Union and other allied states to give the fraternal Czechoslovak people immediate assistance,"
including assistance with armed forces"(984). There was never such a request from Czechoslovakia.

A certain parallel can be seen between the Czechoslovakian invasion and the Hungarian revolution in 1956. Even though both countries had the same intention and that was to slightly dismantle the system, the Hungarians took a much more aggressive way. Czechoslovakia tried to learn from the mistakes the Hungarian leaders made and be more cautious about what they were telling the Soviet Union. Hungary took advantage of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization and the instability that it created in the Soviet Bloc. According to Matthew Ouimet: "Nowhere were the consequences of de-Stalinization more evident than in Hungary"(9). The attempt to liberalize socialism in the neighboring Poland around the same time certainly inspired the Hungarians who went in the streets and started protesting on October 23\textsuperscript{nd}. Ouimet continues: "They gathered at the monument to Poland’s nineteenth century general Jozef Bem and proclaimed their solidarity with the Polish stand against Moscow. By evening, the number of people at the statue had increased to two hundred thousand"(11). The protests tried to be calmed down by the government but unsuccessfully. The Soviets interfered with a small army that was overpowered and withdrew only a couple days after, which boosted the confidence of Imre Nagy who was reelected to the position of prime minister. Nagy announced his very sharp ideas that certainly triggered the Soviet invasion with a much bigger army. Ouimet writes: "Nagy revealed the composition of his newly formed government, which included members of the National Smallholders Party, Social Democratic Party, and National Peasant Party. He also announced that soon he would be starting negotiations on Hungary’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact"(14). Rejecting the participation in the Warsaw Pact was a very sharp decision that the Soviet Union could have never passed over.

The Soviet army started invading Hungary on November 1\textsuperscript{st}, and this time the
Hungarian army seemed completely powerless. They reached out to the United Nations for help but they never interfered due to a document that was signed between the United States and the Soviet Union. Ouimet continues: "The declassification of formerly secret documents in the United States now reveals that in July 1956 the U.S. National Security Council had adopted a policy paper in which "the United States government disavowed any political and military intervention in the Soviet satellites"(15). This document was also the reason why the United Nations did not make much effort to interfere in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. That was the end of the Hungarian attempt to liberalize the system and obtain more freedom for its citizens. The sequence of events was much faster than in Czechoslovakia and the way the Hungarian government faced the Soviet Union was much more straightforward than it was in Czechoslovakia. However, neither one of the paths happened to be successful. Ouimet gives it a comparison: "The extreme nature of the Hungarian case provided the Czechoslovak leader with little guidance for implementing more measured reform of socialism. Dubcek simply trusted that he could persuade the Soviets in a comradely fashion"(19). And he later continues looking at it from the Soviet point of view: "Since there was no armed insurrection and no bloodshed in Czechoslovakia, it was argued, there was no counterrevolution. But by August 13th, Dubcek’s admission that the Prague government had no intention of instituting the political controls outlined in Bratislava confirmed Soviet fears that a counterrevolution was indeed under way"(37).

Despite the sadness of the situation, the amount of togetherness that people felt in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968 got even stronger throughout the first days of the occupation. Heda Kovaly emphasizes: "During the night of the invasion, when we lost everything, we found something that people in our world hardly dare to hope for; ourselves and each other. In all those faces, in all those eyes, I saw that we all thought and felt alike, that we all strove for the same things"(188). All of a sudden, it was not the Soviet Union
against a couple of individuals, it was the Soviet Union against the whole nation who worked together. People in Prague gathered on Wenceslas square to express their disapproval. Ouimet writes: "By the end of the first week, according to the Soviet figures, 75 to 90 percent of Czechoslovakians condemned what they saw as a Soviet occupation of their country"(50). My grandfather decided to join the protests: "I remember seeing a young boy who climbed a construction crane and placed a Czech flag on top of it. People were supporting him, cheering him up as he was climbing up". There were many broken trams and cars. Russian soldiers were trying to calm down the crowds – often physically which resulted in a number of casualties. For the next couple of days following the invasion no one went to their jobs, no stores were open, public transportation did not work according to the schedule. People were confused and did not know what to expect but they stayed united. According to Zantovsky: "Only when everything appeared to be lost did the people truly unite and let their genuine feelings be known. For the next week it did not matter whether one was a Communist reformer, a principled opponent of Communism or an aggrieved patriot. One recognizes when one is being raped, regardless of one’s political persuasion"(115).

Everyone stood up to the Soviet soldiers who were everywhere in the streets. People were pretending that they did not speak Russian when the soldiers asked for water or directions. Many people purposely covered or took away street signs, and sometimes they would shift them to a different direction to make the soldiers confused. Dubcek emphasizes: "The Soviets were apparently unable to silence the radio, and dozens of free newspapers continued to be published and distributed under the noses of the occupation forces"(202). What was absurd about the situation is that the Russian soldiers often did not even know why they were in Czechoslovakia, they had no idea about the political situation. A big majority of the soldiers came from Siberia or other less educated parts of Russia and they simply followed what they were being told without trying to understand. Josef Koudelka explains: "At the
beginning the Russian soldiers were completely confused. They didn’t know where they were. They were surprised that the Czechoslovaks didn’t want them there” (130). But not only did they not know why they were in Czechoslovakia, they also lacked proper manners such as basic sanitation. Soldiers would pee in the streets or sometimes even inside buildings. My grandmother remembers: "My uncle worked at the radio which was one of the first places that got invaded as the soldiers were ordered to go inside the buildings and physically disable any kind of broadcasting. He told me he was disgusted by their manners. Not only did they stink terribly but also they would be peeing on the floors not knowing they could be using the bathrooms".

The moments of the invasion were captured very well by photographer Josef Koudelka. Just by looking at his pictures, everyone can feel the emotions that people felt on that fateful day. Anna Farova points out: "The event, which had the weight of a sudden catastrophe and has played a leading role in recent Czech history was captured by Koudelka better than anybody else: intensively, expressively and extensively. He took photos of it all, documenting not only the intense situation of the people, but also the slogans on posters and banners" (11). He was afraid of publishing them because that would have meant getting into trouble with the communist authorities. However, some of the pictures managed to get abroad and were published by Magnum agency as pictures from an anonymous Czech photographer. His name was not associated with them until after the Velvet revolution in 1989. Josef Koudelka explains: "What was happening in Czechoslovakia concerned my life directly. It was my country. That’s what made the difference between me and other photographers who came here from abroad. I took these photographs for myself, not for a magazine. It was only by chance that they were published" (Josef Koudelka, 129). Soon after the invasion, Koudelka left for London and did not come back until 1990 because of fear that the police would track him down. He continues: "The main reason for not returning was fear. Fear that the police
would find out that it was me, "the Anonymous Czech photographer," who had taken the photographs of the Russian invasion. I had no desire to go to jail. So I decided to accept what had happened, not to return, and do what I was unable to do in Czechoslovakia: see the world"(132).
There is no wonder that Czechoslovakian people were expressing their hatred and
disgust towards the Russian soldiers who were absolutely clueless. Ouimet describes a
situation: "We are here at the request of your government," shouts one Soviet political officer
in his account. "Then name even one of the members of the government who invited you to
interfere in our affairs," the crowd responds. "Comrades!!!" cries the officer, appealing to
socialist unity. "We are not your comrades!" comes the reply from Czechs"(43). People were
writing words of disapproval on the walls and posters. The "empty-headed" soldiers naturally
became the targets of many jokes. The most famous slogan became: "Běž domů, Ivane čeká tě
Nataša. Běž domů, Ivane, a víc se nevracej!" In English it means: "Go home, Ivan, Natasha is
waiting for you. Go home, Ivan, and don’t come back again!". Ivan is referring to a Russian
soldier, and together with Natasha those were the most traditional Russian names. Within a
couple of hours this slogan could be seen in many places around Prague, and people kept
repeating it. It later became a song by Jaromir Vomacka.

Alexander Dubcek returned from Moscow on the 27th, and that was the first time he
was able to talk to the citizens. Heda Kovaly remembers: "On the seventh day, the voice of
Dubcek, the only man we trusted, came over the radio. It was a voice heavy with helplessness
and defeat. We listened to the long pauses between the words and the barely audible sighs that
told us more than the words"(190). In his speech he stated that the main goal is for the Soviet
troops to leave the country as soon as possible. That was the most he could have said as the
Soviets were watching. Dubcek remembers: "I found it extremely difficult to control my
emotions, especially when reading the parts of my speech in which I knew it would be
apparent I was not telling the whole truth. Two or three times, I had to pause and fight back
tears"(217). Even though the invasion meant no further democratic reforms, it took the
Soviets approximately eight months before they seized absolute control again and establish
the so-called normalization. The reformers were slowly replaced by people who were
collaborating with the Soviets. However, Dubcek still remained in the office and fought hard to keep at least the already passed reforms still alive. Dubcek claims: "I had no doubt that their (the Soviets) intention was to put the lid on completely as soon as conditions permitted. We were determined to resist the encroachment as long as we could"(215). The resistance could have not lasted more than a couple of months as the Soviets were putting enormous pressure on the remaining supporters of the reforms. Dubcek remained to be the First Secretary until April 1969 when he was forced to resign and succeeded by Gustav Husak who was, surprisingly, complying with everything Brezhnev had said for a very long time. Dubcek’s figure will always be remembered as a symbol of democracy and a symbol of freedom. Zantovsky explains: "The sincerity and human appeal of Alexander Dubcek had won him genuine popularity. The relaxation of controls on the freedom of expression, assembly and association met with an almost universal support"(101). Later on, he became a big supporter of the Velvet revolution in 1989.

Even though Alexander Dubcek was one of the figures who received the most credit for fighting for more freedom and for the so-called socialism with a human face, there were other important personages who also contributed to it with a lot of effort. One of them was Vaclav Havel. According to Thomas Crump: "1968 was the year of the ‘Prague Spring’, where, led by men such as Vaclav Havel, the people of Czechoslovakia were on the way to establishing 'democracy, including freedom of expression and abolition of censorship, reform of the economic and social system and curbs on the power of the security forces'"(110). Vaclav Havel was a famous writer and a very influential political figure who later went on to become the first President of the Czech Republic. He is by far the most world known and respectable person from the Czech Republic. His essay about the Prague Spring was translated to English and spread to the Western world. Havel states: "The Prague Spring is usually understood as a clash between two groups on the level of real power: those who
wanted to maintain the system as it was and those who wanted to reform it. It is frequently forgotten, however, that this encounter was merely the final act and the inevitable consequence of a long drama originally played out chiefly in the theatre of the spirit and the conscience of society. And that somewhere in the beginning of this drama, there were individuals who were willing to live within the truth, even when things were at their worst…

One thing, however, seems clear: the attempt at political reform was not the cause of society’s reawakening, but rather the final outcome of that reawakening" (Sabatos, 1833). This essay made people outside the Soviet Union aware of what was happening in Czechoslovakia from a non-Russian perspective. He was never a member of the Communist Party and became politically active only after he was banned to publish his literary works. Zantovsky writes: "Havel took a back seat to more outspoken reformist intellectuals" (102). He participated in the already mentioned Congress of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers in July 1967. During the invasion, he strongly contributed to the opposition by providing a radio broadcast which became one of the strongest ways of resistance. Zantovsky emphasizes: "Radio and TV studios were moved to unmarked locations, and the broadcasts used back-up frequencies to make interference more difficult. Whenever a studio or a broadcasting antenna was located and secured by the occupation forces, a new improvised operation sprang into action within hours. For days, the Soviets seemed to be completely baffled" (116). He also remained a close friend with Alexander Dubcek despite the fact that he was never particularly convinced that he was a successful politician. Havel was not the only one who did not entirely support Dubcek’s politics. Milan Svec expresses: "Czechoslovak Prime Minister Lubomir Strougal: "I am personally convinced that it was a fundamental error to put Dubcek at the head in January 1968. He was a weak man for that kind of period" (997).

Havel quickly connected his excellent literary talent and his political motives and created a humorous manual of how to behave during the invasion. He was encouraging people
to resist, however, not physically. Zantovsky cites Havel’s manual: "Approach the presence of the foreign troops as you would approach, for example, a natural disaster: do not negotiate with them – just as you would not negotiate with torrential rain – but deal with them and escape them just as you would escape rain: use your wits, your intelligence and your fantasy. It seems that the enemy is just as powerless against these weapons, as the rain is powerless against an umbrella" (117). Havel’s main political career only started after the 1968 invasion, and people will always be thankful for his actions in 1989 that earned the country its political freedom.

Even though the invasion and further occupation was condemned internationally, no other country ever interfered. The Soviets smartly suggested an exchange between a removal of their troops for a plea made by Czechoslovakia to the United Nations to withdraw the issue from their agenda. The Soviet Union had a very advantageous position in the 1960’s and 1970’s thanks to the Cold War. The United States had a lot on their own agenda such as fighting the Vietnam War or supporting the anti-communist leaders in Latin America. They were too occupied with becoming the most powerful country in the world to be actually controlling whether the action of the Soviet Union was not violating any laws. As long as it was not directly interfering with the politics of the United States, they had no reason to meddle. Nowadays, the entire world knows that Czechoslovakia was invaded in 1968 and occupied by the Soviet Union for twenty one years. That is what every book and encyclopedia says when it refers to Prague Spring, that is what children around the world are being taught. However, throughout the Russian occupation, people had to claim that the Soviet Union came to help to solve the Czechoslovakian crisis. My mother remembers: "One of my classmates accidentally said that the Russians invaded us and she had to go talk to the professor privately and was invited to the director’s office to clarify the statement". Students would have risked their expulsion if they had ever claimed that Czechoslovakia was invaded – that was a
forbidden statement despite the fact that it was true.

The situation was slowly returning to the pre-Prague Spring days when no one was cheerful, enthusiastic or hopeful. People knew that there would not be any democratic changes for a very long time. In this heated atmosphere a young student of Philosophy, Jan Palach, poured flammable liquid over his body and set himself on fire on Wenceslas square on January 16th to show his disapproval of the Soviet occupation. His act was tried to be muted and his political motives concealed and that is exactly what made him such a hero. Even though he did not share his plans with anyone and no one knows what his real source of inspiration was, there were things that influenced him. One of them was certainly the student strikes that started in the fall of 1968. According to Kurt Treptow: "The fall of 1968 witnessed the beginnings of student activism in Czechoslovakia. On 31 October 1968 students residing at the Strahov hostel of the Prague Technological Institute began a peaceful candlelight march through Prague to protest the living conditions at the hostel. The police used brute force to break up the demonstration, and proceeded to invade the dormitory where they beat up many students who had not even participated in the march"(31). Unfortunately, the strike did not accomplish anything. Treptow emphasizes: "The spring of hope became the winter of despair"(39). The nation (especially the young generation) felt depressed about the failure of the Prague Spring and was desperate about the return to the Soviet-type regime. According to Jiri Lederer: "The mood among students was deteriorating. Skepticism was growing because students knew that their strike did not reach any tangible results. And Jan pronounced his fear that all the efforts will go to waste"(63). Jan Palach actively participated in the strike, attended all talks and was very interested in the topic. It is likely that this was the first impulse towards his latter action.

Jan Palach was born in Vsetaty but studied in Prague at a University of Philosophy. He was raised by his mother who he visited every weekend and remained very close with. His
mother found out about his act on the next day, January 17th, in a very peculiar way. She was on the way to Prague to visit Jan, took a very early train and sat opposite of a gentleman who was reading a newspaper. On the reverse side of the newspaper was a picture of her son and an article written about his action. Lederer continues: "The newspaper suddenly drew her attention. It seemed to her that on that page she saw a photo of her son. Against the rules of polite behavior, she leaned over and read in the immediate vicinity of the newspaper. She was terrified, snatched the newspaper from the guy’s hands and ran through the wagon. Her heart was swarmed in a terrible pain. Suddenly she fell and started crying loudly" (86). At that moment, Jan was still alive and was taken care of in a hospital. Jan’s mother let her older son, Jiri, know, and together they hurried to see him. They were told that Jan suffered third-degree burns on 85 percent of the body surface and that his life remained in danger. He died two days later on January 19th. Kyndrova mentions: "Students wrapped his body in the Czechoslovak flag and, after his transfer to the Institute of Forensic Medicine, the sculptor Olbram Zoubek made his death mask. A plaster cast of the mask was immediately placed at the fountain in front of the National Museum" (19).

Jan Palach left a letter stating his demands:

"Because our nations are on the brink of despair and resignation, we have decided to express our protest and wake up the people of this land. Our group consists of volunteers who are determined to burn themselves for our cause. It was my honor to draw lot number one and thus I acquired the privilege of writing the first letter and starting as the first torch. Our demands are: 1) immediate elimination of censorship, 2) prohibition of the distribution of "Zpravy" (note: newspaper of the occupation forces). If our demands are not fulfilled within five days by January 21, 1969, and if the people do not support us sufficiently through a strike of indefinite duration, more torches will burn. Remember August. In international politics a place was made for Czechoslovakia. Let us use it."
Torch Number One

P.S. I believe that our nation will not need more light"(Treptow, 40).

The immediate investigation never managed to find out whether there was an actual group of volunteers who were willing to sacrifice themselves. And if there had been one, they never came forward. His action certainly inspired other people even in other countries to commit similar acts in the following days. However, those actions were tried to be silenced and kept under the radar. What is striking about his action is the statement that was given by the Communist Party. To say the truth about his disapproval of the political situation was unthinkable and could have further created more riots. Therefore, the Communist party came out with a complete lie that made Jan Palach look like a fool. Lederer states: "According to the announcement, Palach was a member of the group of "five death" that was criticizing the communist regime. Politician Vilem Novy reported that Palach drew the first torch. He refused to participate, but got convinced only after the other members of the group told him that they would use chemicals that would only produce a harmless non-burning flame called 'cold flame.' Not a sufficient amount of this chemical was added to the mixture that caused Palach fatal burns. He did not intend to kill himself"(128). The information was completely twisted around. Palach’s funeral was held on January 25th. Treptow points out: "Hundreds of thousands of people attend the funeral to commemorate Jan Palach, and to express their sympathy with his demands. Funeral vigils continued into the night as the nation expressed its grief and suffering"(43).

Palach’s story became internationally famous and despite the official, false statement of the Communist Party, the real reason why Jan Palach committed a suicide spread across the country. Treptow states: "Alexander Dubcek and President Svoboda wrote to Palach’s mother admitting, "We know well that he was led to this by his genuine and honest love of this country"(41). He was buried in the cemetery called Olsany in the center of Prague and people
were worshipping his memory by coming to his grave and lighting up candles. His tomb became a place of pilgrimage where people were putting flowers not just on his grave but along the path that led to the grave. Soon after, Palach’s family was approached by the State Security police and asked to transfer his remains to his hometown Vsetaty. Their argument was that it caused difficulties and big crowds of people coming to his grave were disrupting the peace of the cemetery. Palach’s family refused and argued to let Jan rest in peace. Lederer writes: "Palach's grave disappeared one night. Unknown offenders took it away and, naturally, no one ever found out what happened to it because it was the State Security Police who did it. Palach’s mother complained but in vain"(132). In the next couple of days, someone else was buried on the site of Palach’s grave. Palach’s mother also later decided to sue Vilem Novy for making such a false report and insulting Palach’s memory. Despite the truthful arguments made by Palach’s attorney at the court, Vilem Novy won the case by threatening the judge.

Palach’s true intention was not to make other people set themselves on fire but to show how important it is to fight for things they believe in. He wanted people to fight for their values, for their belief in democracy. His famous slogan says: "You must fight the evil you are equal to"(Kyndrova, 7). His suicidal act was supposed to draw attention as he believed that that was the only way and his act has never been forgotten. After 1989 many places not only in Prague have been named after him to preserve his memory. Treptow writes: "The Czechoslovak people received Palach as a national hero for his act of self-sacrifice. His act, in protest of this country’s diminishing freedom, has imbued the Czech people (if not the Slovaks) with a new sense of purpose"(42). He continues: "His suicide came to represent not only his personal protest over the course of events in Czechoslovakia since the invasion of August, 1968, but the protest and suffering of the entire nation"(45). People kept gathering at the national monument in front of the National museum for many days after Palach’s action. Surprisingly, on January 28th, the area around the monument was ordered to be remade and
plants and flowers were planted on all sides of the monument to avoid people from putting candles, flowers or anything that was supposed to honor Palach’s memory.

The nation felt a lot of bitterness towards the Soviets. When the Czechoslovakian ice-hockey team defeated the Soviet team in the final of the World Championship in March 1969, it was like a national holiday. Dubcek points out: "It was much more than ice-hockey, of course. It was a replay of a lost war, and I was ecstatic when we defeated the Soviets 2-0. Thousands of people took to the streets to celebrate"(236). Many of those celebrations turned into massive demonstrations. The office of the Soviet airlines, Aeroflot, in the center of Prague was set on fire. People were slowly losing their trust in Alexander Dubcek and that was exactly what the Soviet Union was waiting for. He had no longer the same control over the country as he had before, during the popular Prague Spring. There was a crucial split in between the nation and the party. No unity was present anymore. Treptow points out: "The Soviets realized that Dubcek and the reformists no longer retain control over the nation. Within two weeks after the ice-hockey crisis, Gustav Husak replaced Alexander Dubcek as First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party"(46).

Dubcek’s attempt to liberate the system and create the so-called socialism with a human face failed. But was it possible to create such a system? Would it ever be possible to make a communist regime a little more democratic? Vladimir Tismaneanu mentions: "Articles in the Czech news media argued that leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1968, including First Secretary Alexander Dubcek, were naïve to think that they could sustain "socialism with a human face"(168). On the other hand, it is always easy to criticize something that was not eventually successful. Dubcek must have faced a lot of criticism after August 1968, but would anyone else have prevented the Soviets from invading the country?. Would the reforms have really been put in action if the Warsaw Pact had not invaded Czechoslovakia? No one will ever provide an answer to that, however, a fairly good
comparison can be made with Gorbachev’s Perestroika. Perestroika was a movement that tried to restructure the communist regime – mainly its political and economical system under Gorbachev’s reign in 1980’s. Many people claim that it was the reason behind the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Jan Rychlik states: "Would the communist system in Czechoslovakia have really developed into a new model of socialism, or would it have collapsed? The Czech and Slovak archives do not provide an answer and we cannot say for sure. However, the failure of "perestroika" in the USSR under Mikhail Gorbachev and development in Eastern Europe in 1989-1991 proved that reforming the communist system was impossible"(52). Combining socialism with democracy is like combining two complete opposites.

When I asked my grandparents whether they ever believed that those reforms would have really been applied, they said that they did in the moment because everyone did. Everyone got carried away a little and the hope that people gained made everyone blind. They mentioned to me that when they think about the situation now – forty seven years later, they know it could have never come true. When talking about the Prague Spring they remember it being a happy time, and a highlight of the forty communist years. However, they emphasized that now when they have the comparison with living in freedom, in complete democracy, they do not see the era of Prague Spring as anything amazing. People were a little freer but it was still pure socialism and nothing was going to change that. Kieran Williams suggests: "Even today we cannot know how far moderate reformers would actually have allowed the changes to go: how thorough a turnover of the political class would they have permitted? Would they have allowed the unobstructed election of non-communists to representative bodies?"(10). Alexander Dubcek had great intentions and the nation loved the idea of socialism with a human face, but the Soviet Union was too strong and had too much control over its satellites at that moment. People had to wait another 21 years to accomplish what they had started in 1968. The Brezhnev doctrine stated that: "When forces that are hostile to socialism try to turn
the development of some socialist country towards capitalism, it becomes not only a problem of the country concerned, but a common problem and concern of all socialist countries"(Ouimet, 5). Even though in 1968 the Soviet Union showed its strength and gave Czechoslovakia no option, it also showed how heavily it depended on armed forces. It never actually solved the political problem, in fact it never even aimed to solve it. Ouimet concludes: "As the bottom line to socialist legitimacy in the bloc, the Brezhnev Doctrine had a very distinct Achilles’ heel. The experience of 1968 had shown that the intrinsic weakness of the doctrine was reliance on force and stealth to solve political problems"(62). This problem became crucial and later led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. When Gorbachev decided to govern without military force, there was nothing that the Soviet Union could rely on anymore. According to Gunter Bischof: "Soon after Mikhail Gorbachev came along and was no longer willing to use military force in Eastern Europe, the whole Soviet Bloc collapsed. Because of the legacy of 1968, all the East European regimes still lacked the legitimacy they would have needed to sustain themselves without Soviet military backing"(36).

In conclusion, the Prague Spring is a very important chapter of Czechoslovakian history that should never be forgotten. Whether those planned reforms would have actually taken place is a debatable topic that no one will ever clarify. However, the efforts made by Alexander Dubcek and his government that were supported by the nation clearly inspired the latter successful Velvet Revolution in 1989. Therefore, it is safe to claim that despite its failure, the Prague Spring was not entirely vain.
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