

Notes

- ¹ Quoted in Josef Korb, *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia 1938-1948* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 233, 87.
- ² Printed in Josefa Slanska, *Report on My Husband* (London, 1969), p. 35.
- ³ Zdenek Mlynar, *Night Frost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism* (London, 1980), pp. 31, 36.

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1968

Prague Spring and the Soviet Invasion

In 1968 spring began in Czechoslovakia in January, with Novotny's replacement as first secretary by Alexander Dubcek. 'Prague Spring' is the term given to the reform movement that followed this brief tussle for power. The name was probably inspired by the Prague Spring music festival, first held in 1946, before the Communist coup. Attempts have been made to depict the Prague Spring of 1968 as simply a quarrel between Communists rather than a struggle for democracy. The reality is, of course, much more complex. True, the process of change was initiated by an inner-party power struggle; but this was both preceded and accompanied by popular protest and demands for reform.

The dead hand of Novotny was particularly heavy on the economy. Combined with his accumulation of offices, his arrogance, and his contempt especially for the Slovaks, this indicated to Communists and non-Communists alike that change was vital. Economic reform was the priority; and soon it became evident that this could only be accomplished if there were also political reform.

The economy had reached its crisis in 1962, thanks largely to the stranglehold of the command structure. This was over-centralised (just like politics in Czechoslovakia), and it stifled both local and national initiative. Radical reform was proposed by Ota Sik, an economics professor and a member of the central committee of the party. He suggested drastic decentralisation of the economy, with minimal government intervention. Prices should correspond to market forces of supply and demand. Factory managers should be given a wide scope for individual initiative, and there should be incentives for both management and work force. Sik even asserted that there was a place for private enterprise in a socialist economy. Naturally such sensible proposals, the antithesis of Stalinism, were resisted by the Novotny regime. By early 1967, however, the economic crisis had become so acute that Sik's reforms were adopted over Novotny's objections.

Zdenek Mlynar, in his memoir *Night Frost in Prague*, gave an insider's view of the ideological and political struggles within the party during

Novotný's last years in power. In particular he charts the development of 'reform Communism', of which he was himself a proponent. This was based on two fundamental principles: that decisions concerning the economy and society should be based on qualified expertise; and that society itself should be able to express opinions on what its true interests were. Thus specialists and technical experts, rather than ideologically acceptable party functionaries, should be employed, while freedom of expression of the various interest groups in society should be guaranteed by law. The 'leading role' of the party should not be taken for granted, as it had to be earned and re-earned through tackling changed conditions. Moreover, the party should remember that it was the conductor, not the orchestra, and should not try to usurp the powers of the state and social organisations. According to Mlynar, only the fact that these ideas and principles were circulating among party members and functionaries in the years before 1968 made the Prague Spring possible; though he did also admit the role played by popular protest.

Perhaps there is an element of special pleading in all this. Certainly, Mlynar denied that Novotný was an outright Stalinist, but rather depicted him as a supporter of Khrushchev. Novotný in this view was a 'genuine leftover from the Stalinist period', an old guard Communist rather than a follower of Stalin. Nor was his period in power the bleak Stalinist night which Western commentators have depicted. It must be realised, though, that Mlynar was quite bitterly comparing the Novotný era with the 'black light' of the Husak period of 'normalisation' which followed the experiment of 1968. Yet he was right to identify reform Communism as one of the two motors of Prague Spring. Without the willingness of the party leadership to consider reform, no such reform would have been possible.

Political as well as cultural discontent surfaced in June 1967, when the writers' union held its congress. Speakers here made unprecedented attacks on Novotný's policies at home and abroad; a particular target was the censorship. The authorities responded with some expulsions from the union and from the editorial board of its journal, *Literární listy* ('Literary Leaves'). The paper itself was banned that autumn. Plainly, Novotný believed that this minor purge would be enough to stifle any future dissent. At the end of October, however, came a student demonstration in the Strahov district of Prague. Ostensibly this was to protest at the inadequate electricity supplies in the hostels, and the students marched holding lighted candles. The symbolism of their demand for light was not lost on the authorities, and the peaceful protest was broken up brutally by riot police. The significance of this violent incident in the prelude to Prague Spring is shown by the fact that, early in 1968, both the chief of police and the Minister of the Interior made public

apologies to the students. Thus from the beginning the reform movement was propelled by popular discontent as well as by elite politics.

In the highest echelons of the Czechoslovak Communist Party a deadly struggle took place from October 1967 to January 1968. Its seriousness can be gauged from the fact that Novotný accused his future supplanter Dubček of 'bourgeois (Slovak) nationalism'; a charge which, as has been seen, could result at the least in a long prison sentence. The Novotnýites were opposed by a disparate group of 'liberals', made up of economists and other experts as well as disaffected Slovaks. These had political grievances, as well as resentment at the continued economic backwardness of Slovakia. In 1960 the board of trustees, set up in 1945, had been dissolved. A few token individual trustees remained, but these had few independent powers and were answerable in any case to the Slovak national council. This body had now no more than a formal existence, with no legislative powers. In short, everything was subordinated to the over-centralised government in Prague. Meanwhile some Slovaks were calling for a return to the post-war 'asymmetric model', with the national council as a legislative body, a reinstated board of trustees, and also representation in the national government and assembly in Prague. Increasingly, though, there were calls for some sort of federation.

Novotný evidently hoped to invoke the might of the Kremlin in the struggle with his opponents, and in December 1967 Leonid Brezhnev visited Prague at his invitation. Brezhnev was actually preoccupied with his own power struggle within the Soviet politburo; moreover, he seems to have suspected Novotný of favouring other Soviet figures and factions than his own. At any rate, he declined to intervene in the conflict within the Czechoslovak party with the famous words, 'it's your business'. Thus he publicly abandoned the man who was so thought to be a subservient tool of the Soviets that a popular rhyme went, 'I'm Antonín Novotný, I'll do what you want of me'.

Indeed, Mlynar believed that this was more than just simple desertion. Rather, Brezhnev was happy to sacrifice Novotný so long as there was a strong pro-Soviet faction within the Czechoslovak leadership. Indeed, Mlynar discerns Brezhnev's hand behind the promotion within the party and the government of such unlikely 'reform Communists' as Alois Indra, Vasil Bilak, Milos Jakes and Oldřich Pavlovský. In effect, these former Novotnýites were to be the wolves within the sheepfold. Certainly, all were active in the August plot in 1968 to replace the reform Communist leaders with a revolutionary government and tribunal.

There were several heated meetings of the presidium of the central committee; on 19 December, for example, uproar broke out when Ota Sik announced that the economy was in crisis and called for Novotný's resignation. Novotný

was persuaded to resign as first secretary in January 1968; he would be relieved of the presidency in March. The old guard was not about to let go of power easily, however. It emerged in February that Generals Janko and Sejna had actively plotted a military coup in December to keep Novotný in both his offices. Largely because he feared he would face charges of financial corruption, Sejna fled to Italy and, with the aid of the CIA, defected to the United States on his patron's resignation of the more important of his two posts. Janko committed suicide.

The presidency would be entrusted to the apparently safe hands of the elderly General Ludvík Svoboda, the 'non-party' minister of defence from 1945 to 1950, when he was purged from the government. In view of developments in 1968 it is most interesting that his surname means 'freedom' in Czech. Certainly, the Communists were looking for a neutral, elder-statesman type of president, and one, moreover, who would be acceptable to both Czechs and Slovaks. Most Czechs favoured Josef Smrkovsky, while Cestmír Cisar was the darling of the Czech students. The Slovaks preferred either Husák or his co-defendant in the trial of 'Slovak bourgeois nationalists', the poet Ladislav Novomeský. Obviously a candidate acceptable to both Czechs and Slovaks was necessary, and Svoboda was the choice. It is perhaps significant that immediately after his election Svoboda laid a wreath on the grave of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the President Liberator. Such a gesture had not been made since the Communist seizure of power.

The question of who would be first secretary was even more problematic. After intense negotiations within the party a compromise candidate, Alexander Dubček, was chosen. He was reluctant to take up the post, but he was the only candidate who could achieve the necessary majority of votes in the central committee. His right-hand men were Drahomír Kolder, the highly conservative secretary to the central committee, and Oldřich Černík, a reform-minded economist who was soon to be prime minister. Dubček's appointment was approved by Leonid Brezhnev in a telephone call, and later that month the new Czechoslovak leader visited Moscow to receive the Communist equivalent of a papal blessing. For his part, Dubček took the opportunity to reassure the Soviet leadership of Czechoslovakia's adherence to socialism and loyalty to the Soviet Union.

Ominously in view of later events, both the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact neighbours demanded repeated reassurance. At a Warsaw pact summit in early March concern was expressed at the appearance of 'anti-socialist' elements in Czechoslovakia. At the Dresden summit later that month, Dubček and the other Czechoslovak leaders faced trenchant criticism of their policy from Brezhnev, Ulbricht and other neighbourly politicians. Their fear was that the Czechoslovak Communists were losing control of the situation, and this

fear, shared by some elements of the Czechoslovak party leadership, would culminate in the invasion of August.

But this is to anticipate events. What was the character and background of the new first secretary who emerged in January 1968? Dubček was a Slovak, unusually young for such high Communist office (46), and with surprisingly clean hands. Born and bred a Communist, he had spent his childhood in the Soviet Union where his idealistic parents had volunteered to join a 'help project'. Dubček himself became a Communist party member in 1939 and later joined the partisans. In 1944 he participated in the Slovak national uprising against the Nazis and the Tiso puppet-state. He was wounded twice; his brother Julius was killed. In the 1950s Dubček trained at the party higher school in Moscow, and thereafter rose unspectacularly through the ranks of the Slovak party.

When considering the causes and consequences of Prague Spring it is essential not to underestimate Dubček's sincere commitment to Communism and to the Soviet Union. He was, it is true, profoundly shocked and grief-stricken by the atrocities uncovered by investigations into the purges and show trials; but what appalled him was the fact that Communists, of all people, should have been guilty of such crimes. As is shown by the action programme of April 1968 which is associated with his name, he and his allies did not envisage a pluralistic democracy for Czechoslovakia; indeed, the superiority of democratic socialism over its bourgeois or liberal counterpart was asserted more than once. Morally convinced that Communism was the best of all possible systems, he acknowledged the errors of the past and sought reform of the party as well as the state.

Dubček was the first and last genuinely popular Communist leader of Czechoslovakia. The slogan 'socialism with a human face' was coined for him by Radovan Richta, a researcher and speech writer in the party apparatus. Yet his ready smile made it easy to identify Dubček with the concept. Mlynar was of the opinion that Dubček's popularity was largely based on the fact that he believed in his own words and policies, and accordingly the people trusted him for his sincerity.

The spirit of change passed swiftly beyond the walls of party and government offices. On 14 February 1968 the first public political discussion since the Communist seizure of power took place in Prague. Also in that month Novotný's ban on the writers' union newspaper was lifted; this was the beginning of the end of censorship. In March there was a student demonstration at the grave of Jan Masaryk, who was popularly regarded as a martyr for democracy. This took place on the twentieth anniversary of his demise, and in April student demands led to the establishment of a commission of inquiry into

Masaryk's death. Cautious steps were taken towards first the relaxation, then the suspension, of the censorship; it was formally outlawed in June. In March the Deputy Minister of the Interior, fearful of what past misdemeanours might come to light, committed suicide. The hitherto tame national assembly demanded the rehabilitation of former political prisoners, living and dead, those surviving formed Klub 231 to press for justice. This organisation revealed that some 62,000 people had been wrongfully prosecuted and punished from 1948 to 1968; statistics which caused no small amount of shock and grief to Dubcek.

Each month of spring brought fresh, previously unimaginable developments. In April a commission was formed to investigate the show trials of the 1950s, and the widows of two of the most prominent victims, Rudolf Slansky and Otto Sling, prepared to write and publish accounts of their husbands' and their own ordeals. An even earlier victim of the Communist distortion of history was also allowed, posthumously, to speak for himself. Edward Benes' account of the crisis of 1938 was finally published in Prague as *The Days of Munich*.

Also in April the first mass meeting of students and workers took place (thus overturning Novotny's policy of dividing the intelligentsia from the proletariat, the better to rule them both); and the club of independent writers and the discussion group KAN (for committed non-party members) were founded. Such developments, however, were not to every Communist's liking, and concern was expressed at demands for political pluralism. The intellectuals Vaclav Havel and Ivan Svitak argued respectively for the formation of an opposition party and for a three-party system. It was feared that popular demands for reform would soon outstrip what the Communist Party was willing or even able to concede. Under pressure from conservatives like Indra and Kolder restrictions were placed on the formation of new organisations, and revival of the Sokol gymnastic movement was forbidden.

On the political front a new government dominated by reform Communists was formed on 6 April, with Oldrich Cernik as Prime Minister, Ota Sik and Gustav Husak as deputy premiers, and Josef Pavel as Minister of the Interior. It is possible to discern three trends in political thinking among the party leadership. First, there were radicals like Sik and Frantisek Kriegel, appointed chairman of the national front. Second, there were conservatives such as Blak, Kolder and Indra who favoured some limited reform that would set the economy to rights and consolidate their own positions. Finally, there were the moderate reformers, led by Dubcek and including Cernik, Mlynar, Spacak and Smrkovsky.

Meanwhile the immensely popular Smrkovsky became chairman (speaker) of the national assembly. Smrkovsky's life forms a kind of summary

of the history of idealistic Communism in Czechoslovakia. He joined the party in 1933, was active in the underground resistance in World War II and was one of the leaders of the Prague uprising of May 1945. During the Communist coup of February 1948 he was most effective in organising the workers' militia. After holding several party and governmental posts he was suddenly arrested in 1951 and illegally sentenced to life imprisonment. Conditionally released in 1955, he was a forestry worker until his rehabilitation in 1963.

Even more momentous for the political future of the country than the placing of reform Communists in high office was the publication of the action programme and its approval by the central committee of the party on 5 April. This plan was the work of a team of reform Communists and technical experts. Among these were Zdenek Mlynar, Radovan Richta, Bohumil Simon, Ota Sik and other economists, as well as the historian Karel Kaplan, who was also active on the commission formed to investigate the show trials. A speech which Dubcek made to the plenary session of the central committee on 1 April shows that it has been rightly identified with his name and intended policies.

While expressing his commitment to Communism Dubcek emphasised that this should be a humane form of socialism, respecting the rights and dignity of the working people and gaining their cooperation in all spheres of activity. He wanted to create a system which would combine socialism with democracy in order to solve the problems of the economy and society. He boasted that freedom of speech and of the press were no longer demands, but realities. However free discussion between Communists and non-Communists was not the same as democratic pluralism; there were to be no new political parties, and no contested elections.

Turning to the action programme itself, it was clear that it addressed both the troubled Communist past and the economic, social, political and ethnic problems of the present. The cult of personality imposed by Gottwald and Novotny was denounced. Four current characteristics of the Czechoslovak state were described. These were a lack of antagonism based on class (thus class warfare was now redundant); an outdated economic system in need of reform; the need to prepare to join the scientific and technological revolution; and a broad opportunity for social initiative, free discussion and democratisation of the social and economic system. The command economy with its inefficiency and inequity was condemned outright; there would be an end to centralised decision-making. There was also to be a de-levering of wages and salaries in order to encourage initiative, competition and increased performance. The rights of the national minorities were asserted, and the problems faced by women were viewed sympathetically.

Unequivocally, the Communist party would not renounce its 'leading role' (or more accurately, monopoly of power), but it would seek to reassess this. The party should serve society rather than rule it, and should win the voluntary support of the population by its efforts. Freedom of association, assembly and expression were to be safeguarded. Victims of past political injustice were to have their cases reopened, and the Ministry of the Interior and the secret police were to be reformed and to have their powers curtailed. There were to be reforms in the fields of social welfare, education, housing and the health service. All these, together with improvements to agriculture, industry and trade, would enhance the quality of life of the ordinary Czechoslovak and increase the country's international standing. This regenerated economy and society would serve as both a reproach and a stimulus to bourgeois democracy abroad, which was limited in comparison with Czechoslovak socialist democracy. Indeed, an Austrian commentator had remarked that the Czechoslovak experiment posed more of an ideological threat to the West than to the Communist bloc.

Two final points are of significance. First, the constitution would be redrafted to redress the grievances of the Slovaks by introducing a federal arrangement. Decentralisation was to be the key here, too; the Slovak national council would become a legislative body, and the Slovak council of ministers would become an executive one. Control of the Slovak budget would pass to Slovak national organisations; there would be no possibility in a political or a constitutional sense of the Slovak nation being outvoted by the Czech, and the principle of equal rights of the two nations was asserted. Finally, in terms of foreign policy the existing alignment of Czechoslovakia within the Warsaw treaty organisation and the Comecon (Committee for Mutual Economic Assistance) was confirmed. Though peaceful coexistence with capitalist states was desired, loyalty to the Soviet Union was quite literally underlined in the typescript of the action programme.

Despite such protestations the action programme met with a mixed reception in the Soviet politburo. While some members found it unobjectionable Brezhnev denounced it violently, saying that it could lead to the restoration of capitalism in Czechoslovakia. It was natural although ominous that the Soviet leadership should take a close interest in developments in Czechoslovakia. In late May Kosygin went to Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad), ostensibly to take the water cure at the spa on a private visit. However Dubcek was summoned to see him, and an agreement of sorts was negotiated. It was confirmed that the Communist party would retain its 'leading role', but that the economic reforms would proceed; that Warsaw Pact manoeuvres would be held in Czechoslovakia, but that an extraordinary party congress (necessary in view

of Dubcek's many opponents in the party presidium and apparatus) could be held.

The month of May 1968 seemed to show the leadership, party and people in hopeful union. The spontaneous rally of youth at the Jan Hus monument in Prague's Old Town Square seemed to be a prelude to the astounding spectacle of the May Day parade. Traditionally this was a stony, solemn and well-orchestrated affair. In 1968 legionaries from World War I and veterans of the Spanish civil war – both previously victims of Communist persecution – joined the procession. In contrast to his grim-faced predecessors mechanically reviewing the achievements of actually existing socialism, Dubcek smiled and waved at the marchers and onlookers who reciprocated quite spontaneously. On that day Dubcek seemed to embody his own slogan of 'socialism with a human face'.

All seemed well on the surface, but both before and after the euphoria of May Day popular demands and expressions of feeling often outstripped what Dubcek and the government and party leadership might grant with safety, or even desire to grant. The philosopher Ivan Sviták drew the contrast between democracy and mere democratisation. Surveys of public opinion in the press reveal a variety of political responses. In July the Socialist Party newspaper *Svobodné Slovo* ('Word of Freedom') revealed that nine out of ten readers questioned favoured the creation of a strong, independent opposition party rather than the continued existence of the cosmetic national front. (Earlier, in March, this journal had published an open letter to Dubcek demanding that a multi-party democracy be established.) The Prague evening paper revealed that 87 per cent of those surveyed were happy with the present government, though only 53 per cent thought they were more confident in the government than in January; and that 89 per cent wanted to continue on the path of socialism with a human face, while just 5 per cent wanted a return to capitalism.

On 27 June the manifesto *2000 Words* was published. Its author was the novelist Ludvík Vaculík, and it was signed by 70 writers and other public figures. The manifesto condemned the Communists for their past monopoly of power and corruption. However, it also stated that construction of a democratic system would be impossible without the participation of the reform Communists, and expressed support for the Dubcek leadership. It also alluded to the possibility of foreign intervention in Czechoslovakia, and it was this as much as its criticism of past errors which probably made it offensive to the Soviet and Eastern European authorities. The official Czechoslovak party central committee's resolution on Vaculík's manifesto thus stressed that all Communists must be united behind the action programme; *2000 Words* was not to be an alternative policy document.

Indeed, Dubcek himself was afraid that democratisation was evolving at too fast a rate, particularly for the neighbours in the Soviet bloc. In May and June he held meetings with journalists where he begged them to behave with moderation so as not to jeopardise the achievements of Prague Spring. He was visibly and audibly distressed when he discovered that many of them wanted to go further in the direction of reform than did the reform Communists. Yet independent opinion polls conducted in the spring and early summer revealed that 70 per cent of the population expressed support for the Communist Party's policies, about 25 per cent of them without reservation.

The Czechoslovak government and party were moving with caution and moderation, but even so, alarm bells were ringing in most of the Warsaw pact capitals. The socialist neighbours were afraid that Dubcek was losing control of the situation and of public opinion, and that this could spell the end of the party's 'leading role'. In addition, foreign leaders like Wladislaw Gomułka of Poland, Todor Zhivkov of Bulgaria and 'Frozen Walter' Ulbricht of East Germany were concerned that the Czechoslovaks' taste of freedom might unsettle their own subjects and lead to similar demands being voiced. Not that they had any intention of satisfying any such demands. Mlynar, who had the chance to observe them at close quarters, characterised Ulbricht and Gomułka as vain, self-satisfied, hostile and senile, and as quite intoxicated with their own power; Zhivkov he thought to be merely incredibly stupid. Be that as it may, it is unquestionable that these politicians believed that the Czechoslovaks must be brought into line lest the cataleptic calm of the Soviet bloc be disturbed.

At the end of May the commanders of the Warsaw pact armed forces arrived in Czechoslovakia to prepare for military manoeuvres. Although the Czechoslovaks had agreed to this there was more than an implied threat in the heavy military presence on Czechoslovak soil. Unese was increased when the visitors showed no hurry to leave; indeed, the last of the Soviet troops left on 3 August, long after the manoeuvres were over.

Unese also pervaded the highest echelons of Communist power abroad. The leaders of the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Bulgaria and Hungary met in summit in Warsaw, whence on 15 July they despatched the 'Warsaw letter' to Prague. (The Czechoslovak leadership had been invited to the meeting, but Dubcek had prevaricated.) The letter contained a stiff rebuke to Dubcek, and the demand that he halt the reforms of Prague Spring. Dubcek's response was to appear on national television to ask the Czechoslovak population for its support, and to send a moderate though unrepentant reply to the Warsaw missive.

This statement of the presidium of the central committee of the Czechoslovak party affirmed the leading role of the party and Czechoslovakia's

foreign policy orientation within the Soviet bloc. It denied the charge of counter-revolution and defended the abolition of the censorship. It complained that Czechoslovakia, a fraternal nation, had been judged and condemned without being represented at the summit, and demanded bilateral talks with its critical allies. Czechoslovakia, it stated, would continue on the road to democratic socialism.

Bilateral talks (that is, discussions between the Czechoslovaks and all the Warsaw pact leaders) were the last thing that the Soviet Union wanted. Accordingly, at the end of July the Soviet leadership arrived in the border town of Cierna nad Tisou for negotiations with its Czechoslovak counterpart. The tension of the atmosphere was heightened by the mundane fact that Soviet trains ran on different gauges to Czechoslovak ones, so that each night Brezhnev and his entourage marched out of Czechoslovak territory, apparently in displeasure and suspicion. The negotiations were indeed difficult, and only concluded in Bratislava on 3 August with a summit meeting between the Czechoslovak leaders and the five powers who had signed the Warsaw letter. Nonetheless, all seemed well when Brezhnev publicly embraced Dubcek. In reality, this was the kiss of Judas.

While Dubcek and the reform leadership enjoyed widespread public support, many of the conservative Communists on the central committee had reservations about the reforms of Prague Spring. More dangerously, there was a small band of old guard Communists who deeply disapproved. The chief malcontents were the Czechs Drahomir Kolder, Alois Indra and Milos Jakes and the leader of the Slovak Communist Party, Vasil Blak. These happily lent themselves to intrigue with the Kremlin. The plot was to depose the current government and party leadership and replace it with a puppet administration, a 'revolutionary government of workers and peasants', to be led by themselves. A 'revolutionary tribunal' would also be established, to try and condemn the Dubcek leadership. The coup would take place under cover of an invasion, and thus be reinforced by troops from the Soviet Union, and from the fraternal allied states whose leaders had signed the 'Warsaw letter'.

The pretext for both coup and invasion would be the charge that the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was being threatened with 'counter-revolution'. Indeed, some time later Blak mendaciously told the West German newspaper *Der Spiegel* that he, together with Dubcek, Smrkovsky and others, had signed a 'letter of invitation' to the fraternal allies. This was alleged to have occurred at the Bratislava summit on 3 August 1968, and the letter was supposed to have stated that Czechoslovakia was threatened with a counter-revolutionary coup. Although Dubcek later denied having signed the letter, and it is unthinkable that Smrkovsky would have done so, it is perfectly

possible that Bilak and his allies did put their signatures to such a document to ask the Soviet Union for assistance on the pretext of counter-revolution.

Accordingly on the night of 20–21 August 1968 men and tanks from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, East Germany and Hungary poured over the Czechoslovak frontiers. The presidium of the central committee was in session. Its chief business was to discuss the projected extraordinary party congress. However, the plotters were meant to force a divided vote in that body over a critical report on the state of the country by Kolder and Indra. The lack of unanimous support for the government and party leadership could then be used to justify the armed 'fraternal assistance' from the Warsaw pact five. First Secretary Dubcek and premier Cernik were arrested at gunpoint, as were Josef Smrkovsky, speaker of the national assembly, and three reforming members of the presidium, Frantisek Kriegel, Josef Spacek and Bohumil Simon. They were spirited away to an unknown destination, and it seems that there were plans to execute them immediately. According to Dubcek's later account they were taken to Poland, then to Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia (formerly part of Czechoslovakia, now in the Soviet Union). It seemed to Dubcek that his captors were uncertain how to treat him. By 23 August he and the rest of the kidnapped Czechoslovak leaders were in Moscow. The plot had somehow gone wrong. Indeed, armed intervention and native treachery had been thwarted by the unexpected resistance of the Czechoslovak people.

The authorities appealed for calm and the avoidance of armed resistance.

On the whole this was respected, and the Czechoslovak armed forces were not put on alert. This would later give rise to the popular lament that 'three times we had an excellent army, three times we were not allowed to use it: 1938, 1948, 1968'. More than 20 years later Dubcek would repeatedly justify this passivity on the not unreasonable grounds that it was the only way to avoid a blood bath. This was the view of the whole reform leadership, who had practical military matters to consider.

Of first importance was the fact that the Czechoslovak army was far from independent. Like all the Warsaw pact armies it was ultimately under Soviet control, since red army officers occupied key positions in the command and its codes and communications systems were well known to them. In addition, the loyalty of many Czechoslovak officers was suspect, and it was by no means uncertain that they would defect to the Soviet side should there be a confrontation. Finally, armed resistance by the civilian population would lend colour to the accusations of counter-revolution and evoke the memory of the Hungarian uprising of 1956. For all these reasons, as well as the moral one of not inflicting violence on the aggressors, passive resistance was the only type permitted to the Czechoslovaks.

None the less the Czechoslovak public did not submit passively to the occupation. During Prague Spring the term *hydepark* had been coined, meaning an informal open-air meeting for discussion. Now in Prague and other towns dozens if not hundreds of *hydeparky* would congregate round the tanks of the invaders. These last were bewildered. Some of them had believed that they were rendering 'fraternal assistance' against 'counter-revolution', and had expected to be welcomed as liberators. Others thought they were on manoeuvres. None or at least few of them seem to have realised they were in Czechoslovakia; some thought that they were in Israel; and one group of Ukrainian troops had even been told that they were going to Nazi Germany!

Besides serious argument from the students and other members of the Czechoslovak public who gathered round their tanks, the bewildered invaders met with hostile and derisory graffiti; much of this has been recorded by Alan Levy in his eyewitness account of Prague Spring and the invasion, *So Many Heroes*. Some of these were purely insulting: 'RUSSIAN CIRCUS IN TOWN! DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS'; 'THE BIGGER THE TANK THE SMALLER THE BRAIN'. Another invoked the famous heart surgeon: 'CALLING DR BARNARD! HELP!! DR BREZHNEV HAS TRANSPLANTED THE HEART OF EUROPE INTO THE BEHIND OF RUSSIA'. Others were more serious, demanding the return of Dubcek and the withdrawal of foreign troops. Still others were tactical: 'DO NOT HARM ONE HAIR ON THEIR HEADS, BUT DO NOT GIVE THEM ONE DROP OF WATER'. Indeed, the invaders found it hard to get water in any part of the country.

One piece of graffiti recorded by Levy was a bitterly ironic comment on the 'revolutionary government of workers and peasants' which the renegades hoped to set up. 'HELP WANTED: ONE PUPPET PRIME MINISTER, ONE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER, ONE FIRST SECRETARY, ONE NATIONAL FRONT CHAIRMAN. ONLY TRAITORS NEED APPLY. CONTACT SOVIET EMBASSY'. Thus there was general awareness of the traitors in the camp, and general contempt for them. Indeed, the announcement on 22 August that Dubcek's post of first secretary would be held jointly by Kolder, Indra and Bilak met with such loud and widespread derision that it was never repeated.

Despite the invaders' best efforts a free press was still functioning. The newspaper *Lidove Noviny* (People's News) published a number of cartoons during or immediately after the crisis. One such was a grotesque caricature of Ulbricht as the barebreasted figure of Marianne from Delacroix's famous painting of *Liberty Leading the People*. This bizarre creature promised the Czechoslovaks 'Liberte! Egalite! Freundschaft!' The omission of *Fraternite* was a bitter comment on the 'fraternal assistance' so generously offered by Ulbricht and his colleagues. Another cartoon depicts Brezhnev in the guise of

a gigantic Baroque statue of St Florian. This saint was traditionally invoked against fire, and was shown dressed as a Roman legionary and pouring water from a bucket onto a burning house. In this version a diminutive Dubcek stands by the house and shouts up at the huge Brezhnev, 'But there is no fire!'

The invaders were finding little evidence of counter-revolution, so they resorted to provocations. One of these was the 'discovery' of a cache of 'American' weapons in Western Bohemia. Another was a demonstration in the centre of Prague in support of a petition demanding that the people's militia be disbanded. Had this been genuine it would have constituted evidence of anti-Communist activity; but a later investigation found that more than 50 security police were among the protesting crowd.

Besides their general call for passive rather than armed resistance, the legal Czechoslovak authorities were not idle in organising a response to the invasion and to the renegades who had plotted with the Soviets. The emergency session of the presidium of the central committee continued to sit until the early hours of 21 August, when it was rudely interrupted by news of the invasion. Before their arrest and kidnapping the leaders managed to compose and to smuggle out to the radio station a refutation of the invaders' and traitors' claims that 'fraternal assistance' against 'counter-revolution' had been requested by the party leadership and government of Czechoslovakia. Troops of the 'five' had crossed the borders of the country without the knowledge of President Svoboda, Speaker Smrkovsky, Prime Minister Cernik or First Secretary Dubcek.

As this statement was being read out on the radio all the transmitters suddenly went dead. This was the result of a plot by powerful Soviet sympathisers: Karel Hoffman, Minister of communications; Viliam Salgovic, head of the Soviet network in the state security police; and Josef Sulek, head of the Czechoslovak news agency. The statement was finally broadcast thanks to action by Smrkovsky and the initiative of the radio operators, who arranged for alternative means of transmission.

This statement was broadcast some hours before one by TASS, the Soviet news agency, which declared the absolute opposite to be true. The population, however, was not fooled, and even Dubcek's conservative opponents on the central committee demanded an account from the traitors and in particular the names of those who had presumed to request 'fraternal assistance'.

One incident reveals both popular revulsion against those who had invited the invaders in, and the fear the culprits had of popular vengeance. On the morning of 22 August members of the remaining party leadership were summoned to the Soviet embassy in Prague. Unlike the rest of their colleagues, Indra and Blahk had accepted the offer of transport in a Soviet armoured car.

This vehicle crossed the river over a bridge on which lay a tram which had collided with some Soviet military vehicles. The armoured car was unable to move either backwards or forwards. An interested crowd gathered, and Blahk and Indra were so terrified of being recognised that they endured the sweltering heat of their armour-plated prison for nearly an hour before it could move again.

The chief item on the agenda of that meeting of the remnants of the party presidium was the convention of the fourteenth party congress, scheduled for 9 September. This was something that the occupiers and their collaborators were anxious to prevent. Once more, however, their objective was foiled by the solidarity of party and nation behind the reformist leadership. The congress actually convened secretly on 22 August at the giant CKD engineering works in the Vysocany district of Prague. ('Dummy' or decoy congresses were set up in other areas in order to fool the invaders.) Despite the unavoidable absence of Dubcek, Smrkovsky and other members of the leadership, and despite the fact that the majority of the Slovak delegates were forcibly prevented from reaching Prague, the congress was extremely active. An open letter of unequivocal support was sent to Dubcek, who was also confirmed as first secretary. A new central committee and a new presidium were elected. The traitors were excluded, while liberals and reformers were promoted. The congress protested at the detention of the country's and party's leaders, and threatened a general strike.

Control of the mass media by loyal Czechoslovaks was also a vital ingredient in the failure of the Soviets and their native stooges to present their view of events. Both radio and television managed to keep broadcasting for almost a week by dint of moving from one clandestine studio to another every few hours. While the occupiers and their collaborators produced an 'official' edition of the party paper *Rude Pravo* ('Red Right') every day, the loyal staff of the real newspaper produced and distributed their own versions.

Similarly, the invaders had taken over the Prague radio station building immediately. The people of Prague had set up a barricade of buses and lorries in front of the entrance to the building; the tanks of the invaders simply drove through them and into the crowd. This horror infuriated rather than cowed the population, and for the week of the invasion clandestine radio stations operated throughout the country.

The tactics of the populations of Prague and other towns in face of the occupiers constituted a return to the 'policy of pin-pricks' employed during the Nazi occupation. (Indeed, in graffiti the two middle initials of the USSR were often rendered as the lightning flashes of the Nazi SS, while the hammer and sickle symbol was turned into a swastika.) Street signs and direction posts

were altered or put in the wrong places. People politely gave the wrong directions to the invaders, and helpfully warned troops seeking water that wells or stand-pipes had been poisoned by the 'counter-revolutionaries'. By and large the Czechoslovaks were obedient to the government order not to offer armed resistance; but some of the invaders were either nervous or trigger-happy, and it is estimated that 77 civilians were killed and about 1000 wounded. One of the most emotive symbols of the invasion was the sight of people carrying flags dipped in the blood of the martyred.

Meanwhile in Moscow the 'negotiations' between the Soviet leaders and their Czechoslovak captives were not going smoothly; in truth, their plot having been foiled, the former had no idea what to do with the latter. Dubcek and the other leaders were adamant in their refusal to abandon the reforms of Prague Spring. Stalemate seemed to have been reached even before President Svoboda's arrival in Moscow with what remained of the Czechoslovak party leadership on 23 August.

Svoboda had not exactly been invited to the talks, but while he intended that his personal intervention would save his government and party leadership the Soviets for their part were hopeful that he could persuade the prisoners to see reason. The depth of the Soviets' desperation can be seen in Brezhnev's threat to Svoboda, that if the Czechoslovaks did not cooperate then their country would once more be dismantled. Bohemia and Moravia would become a protectorate, this time under Soviet rather than German auspices, while Slovakia would become a republic of the Soviet Union. Svoboda is said to have threatened Brezhnev with the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in the event of the leaders' not returning home.

Svoboda's position was not that of a reform Communist, but was rather more straightforward. He was, first and foremost, a soldier and a patriot. His concern was to get his country's political leaders home unscathed and then deal with the crisis in Czechoslovakia. Because of this attitude, he helped the Soviets to persuade the Czechoslovak delegation to sign the Moscow protocol.

The Czechoslovaks were put under immense psychological and physical pressure, were isolated from news of outside events and even from each other. Dubcek was under sedation for much of the time, his colleagues alternately bullied and cosseted. Eventually, and not without heated discussion and protest, Dubcek and the rest of the delegation signed the Moscow protocol on 26 August.

The only Czechoslovak who refused utterly to sign was Frantisek Kriegel, allegedly abused by Kosygin as a 'filthy little Galician Jew'. Brezhnev planned to keep him in Moscow, virtually as a hostage. He would not have been able to return to Czechoslovakia but for the fact that his colleagues refused to board

their plane without him. This was one of the last acts of courageous solidarity achieved by the founders of Prague Spring.

In the Moscow protocol the Czechoslovaks had to make a number of concessions. The fourteenth party congress at Vysocany was declared invalid. The traitors who had colluded with the Soviets were to be protected from reprisals, while members of the government who had made protests abroad during the invasion would have their activities reviewed. A degree of censorship of the media would have to be reimposed, though Dubcek and some of his colleagues were privately optimistic that this could be both retarded and limited. This optimism was misplaced, as was their trust in the declaration that a phased withdrawal of all occupying troops would begin as soon as the 'threat to socialism' in Czechoslovakia had disappeared.

What can have induced the reform Communists in the delegation to put their signatures to a document which Mlynar (who signed it) later described as the 'death sentence' of the Prague Spring? They wavered from day to day, even hour to hour, about whether or not to sign, but ultimately the psychological pressure exerted on them persuaded the Czechoslovaks that acceptance of the Moscow protocol was their only hope of salvaging some of the reforms. All of them but Dubcek, who had been kept in isolation, had reached this position by 26 August. Most dramatically, at the last moment Dubcek refused to sign, but was persuaded by his colleagues that this was the only way. In retrospect, Mlynar admitted that this was 'Dubcek's most clear-headed moment'; but the majority opinion prevailed, and he appended his signature to the rest.

What was most sinister in the Moscow protocol was the use of the word 'normalisation'. This was a piece of Soviet jargon, meaning reimposition of Communist control and of Soviet influence. Ultimately, it would mean nothing less than the complete negation of Prague Spring. Although its full significance as a term would only become apparent in the following months and years, many in Czechoslovakia were already aware of the danger and absurdity of the term. Indeed, the clandestine Catholic newspaper *Lidove Demokraticke* ('Peoples Democracy') entitled an article, 'Normalisation? Kafka Lives!'

On his return to Prague a highly emotional Dubcek explained matters to the Czechoslovak population on television, once more requesting the public's understanding and cooperation. His own immense popularity and the almost universal contempt in which Kolder, Bilak and Indra were held meant that he would not be disposed of immediately; indeed, the Moscow protocol had confirmed him in office as first secretary. Yet it was not mercy, but rather a finely calculated piece of cruelty that determined that Dubcek should preside over the beginning of the end of Prague Spring.

This started with the Moscow treaty of October 1968, signed for the Czechoslovaks by Dubcek, Cernik and Husak. Contrary to the promise of the Moscow protocol, this accepted the presence of about 100,000 Soviet troops on Czechoslovak soil for an unspecified period. (The occupation was in fact to last until May 1991.) It also noted the Soviet view of the action programme as incorrect, and agreed to postpone the calling of a Czechoslovak party congress, again for an indefinite period.

The significance of the Czechoslovak experiment for the whole of Eastern Europe was, in the immediate future at least, negative. The Brezhnev doctrine, first announced to the Poles in November 1968, was merely a reiteration of the mendacious TASS statement of 21 August; spelt out simply, it meant that any attempt at independent policy in any sovereign state would meet with armed intervention from the fraternal neighbours. While for the most part these same neighbours settled back in the sleep of the dead, Czechoslovakia woke from its brief dream of relative freedom to the long grey day of normalisation.

7 Normalisation and Dissent

1968-1988

More than 20 years after Prague Spring and its appalling repression Alexander Dubcek's autobiography would be published posthumously under the title *Hope Dies Last*. This summed up his philosophy in the face of adversity. However, in the winter of 1968-69 there seemed little reason for hope. True, Dubcek himself remained as first secretary until 17 April 1969, when he was succeeded in that post by the veteran Slovak Communist, Gustav Husak. As a sop which deceived no one, he was accorded the meaningless title of chairman of the new federal assembly; meaningless, because the assembly had no freedom to vote, and the position was largely a ceremonial one. In January 1970 he was demoted to be ambassador to Turkey. In Ankara he was blatantly and contemptuously under the eye of the Czechoslovak and Soviet secret police, and on his recall within a few months he was ejected from the party. Before that, in a particularly vicious twist to the Kremlin's policy, he was forced to preside over the abortion of his own reform movement.

Piece by piece, the reforms of Prague Spring were removed, and all the old repressions were put back in place. The decisions of the Vysocany congress of August were declared null and void. Largely at the behest of the Soviets organisations like K 231 and KAN were outlawed, thus putting an end to any form of political pluralism. Informal and unofficial pressure on individual publications was followed by the repeal of the law abolishing censorship in September 1969. Naturally the Czechoslovak population did not simply acquiesce in the destruction of freedoms so recently won; but there were hard lessons to be learned by those who dissented.

On 16 January 1969 a most shocking demonstration took place in Prague; Jan Palach, a student at Charles University, set himself on fire in Wenceslas Square in protest at the process of normalisation. He died in agony some days later, and was widely regarded as a martyr for Prague Spring. Indeed, almost immediately he was compared with the medieval Czech hero Jan Hus. Huge demonstrations followed his self-sacrifice. The authorities were able to prevent equal publicity for a second victim of self-immolation, Jan Zajic. Perhaps it was Communist efficiency; on the other hand it may be that, just as with Nazi atrocities in wartime Czechoslovakia the village of Lidice is remembered

but that of Ležáky largely forgotten, so it was that Palach rather than Zajíc came to symbolise protest at normalisation.

In March came the famous 'ice hockey riots'. The Czechoslovak national side won two resounding victories over the Soviet team at the world ice hockey championships in Stockholm. The first match, on 21 March, resulted in a score of 2-0. Czechoslovak spectators in Stockholm could be heard chanting Dubeck's name, while in Prague the crowd poured onto the streets. There were spontaneous demonstrations of joy in Wenceslas Square, and the offending score was daubed on the windows of the Soviet airline offices. Clearly, the population was delighted that, though humiliated in politics, it was unbeaten in sport. The return match on 28 March produced a score of 4-3, and clearly incited the Czechoslovaks. This time the Soviet airline offices were reduced to rubble by the mob, and mayhem generally ruled for a few hours. The whole incident was used by both the Soviet authorities and hard-liners among the Czechoslovak Communists to suggest that Dubeck was losing control of the country. His resignation as first secretary the following month was not unconnected with the ice hockey demonstrations.

The first anniversary of the August invasion was bound to be an emotional one, and it was used by the Husak regime to provoke and crush 'counter-revolutionary riots'. From the night of 19 August tear gas and police charges were used against peaceful demonstrators in Prague. On 21 August 1969 – the exact anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion – the population marked its grief by a boycott of public transport and places of entertainment. Thousands of Czechoslovaks simply walked to work. Such a mild and dignified form of protest unnerved the native Communists and their Soviet masters, and violent suppression was used once more against unarmed civilians. The violence inflicted by the Czechoslovak authorities themselves was used as the pretext to pass emergency laws. These draconian measures carried severe penalties of imprisonment or removal from Prague for anyone who protested.

Individuals, too, suffered for actions deemed to be displeasing to Moscow. Take the case of Marta Kubisova, the pop singer retrospectively known as 'the voice of 1968'. In August she recorded 'Marta's Prayer', actually a version of the famous prayer for Czech freedom composed by Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) in his enforced exile after the battle of White Mountain in the seventeenth century. This version of the prayer was particularly pointed and poignant in view of the August invasion:

May there be peace in this land;
May malice, envy, fear, and conflict go away;
May the direction of your affairs be returned
Into thy hands again, O Czech people!¹

Such seventeenth-century subversion probably would have been enough to make Kubisova a target for the post-August regime and its Soviet masters; but she offended them further.

She waited to meet Dubeck – still a party dignitary though no longer first secretary – as he arrived for an official meeting. So overwhelmed was she at seeing him that she impulsively kissed him as she handed over a small personal gift. Her punishment was that she was forbidden to work in the music industry and instead was consigned to employment in a factory which made polythene bags. Naturally, she was forbidden to sing in public. This prohibition was to endure until the velvet revolution of 1989.

Manual labour was, in fact, usually the sentence for those students and intellectuals who had been vocal or visible either during Prague Spring or during the Warsaw pact occupation. The universities, research institutes and the professions were thoroughly purged of those who had been active in Prague Spring or who had even shown sympathy with the reforms. A total of 21 academic institutions were closed, and 900 university teachers lost their posts. Students were prevented from completing their studies, and quite often their own children were barred from higher education. University professors became tram drivers; eminent lawyers went to work as stokers.

The two years from the end of Prague Spring in August 1968 were officially designated as a period of 'normalisation'; this dreary term can actually be applied to the following two decades. In their study of the velvet revolution Bernard Wheaton and Zdenek Kavan identify three bases of normalisation. The first was a purge of all major economic and political organisations, including the Communist party itself. Indeed, half a million Communists (one-third of the total party membership) were purged. The second was a strict censorship, thus allowing the party to control access to information and ideas. One aspect of the censorship was the reimposition of restriction on travel abroad, particularly necessary (from the Communist point of view) because of the increasing numbers who chose permanent emigration from Czechoslovakia. The third and final element was the reinstallation of centralised control over the economy, in other words the reimposition of the old command structure with all its stultifying effects.

Presiding over the death of Czechoslovak freedom was Dubeck's successor, the experienced Slovak Communist Gustav Husak. He became first secretary on 17 April 1969 and, in a manner reminiscent of Novotný, also became president of the country in May 1975. (Svoboda was increasingly marginalised, and resigned the presidency on grounds of ill health.) Held to be of dubious and questionable memory in the Czech lands, he commanded some respect in Slovakia for ratifying the federal constitution of 1969. By this new arrange-

republican cabinet. The old national assembly was replaced by a federal body representing both parts of the country.

Husak had been preparing for power since August 1968, when he was a member of the Czechoslovak delegation summoned to the Kremlin to 'negotiate' the Moscow protocol. Although not identified overtly with either the reform Communists and the Dubcek leadership or the pro-Soviet faction of the party, he contrived to make a good impression on the Soviet leaders. Alexei Kosygin remarked to Zdenek Mlynar, 'Comrade Husak is such a competent comrade and a wonderful Communist. We didn't know him personally before, but he quite impressed us here.'²

Husak became the most powerful man in Czechoslovakia at Moscow's behest, and swiftly he exposed his Stalinist credentials. Take the case of Milan Hubl, historian and rector of the party academy. An adherent of reform Communism, Hubl persuaded the remnants of that wing of the party to vote for Husak as Dubcek's replacement, having been deceived into thinking that some elements of Prague Spring would be best preserved under Husak's leadership. His ungrateful candidate had him imprisoned in 1972 for six and a half years on the usual normalising charge of 'subversion of the state'; Hubl was released in 1976, and thereafter found work as a janitor.

Husak and his Soviet masters went to work swiftly to implement normalisation. Naturally the party leadership and government ministers from 1968 had to be either expelled or neutralised. Jiri Hajek, the Foreign Minister, was deprived of his post under Soviet pressure in August 1968 and expelled from the party in the first great purge of 1970. A similar fate befell Josef Pavel, Minister of the Interior. Zdenek Mlynar voluntarily resigned all his party posts in November 1968, was expelled from the central committee in September 1969 and from the party in March 1970. Josef Smrkovsky was deprived of his post as speaker of the national assembly by Soviet displeasure which was largely articulated through Husak. Later he was likewise expelled from both the central committee and the party. Unique among the architects of Prague Spring in daring to voice criticism of the normalisation process, he was persecuted by the regime even beyond his death in 1974. Mlynar recounts how the urn containing Smrkovsky's ashes was stolen from the family vault in Prague and 'planted' by security agents in the lavatory of a train bound for Vienna. The story was given out that Smrkovsky's remains were to be reburied in Vienna as a 'provocation' to the Czechoslovak regime.

As was described in the last chapter, the members of the Czechoslovak delegation who were reform Communists signed the Moscow protocol in the hope that something of Prague Spring might be salvaged. All of them were to be quite swiftly disillusioned. Oldrich Cernik managed to retain the post of

prime minister until January 1970, when he was demoted to hold the office of minister for culture and reconstruction. He was succeeded as premier by Lubomir Strougal. Cernik was the only one of those reform Communists whom it had been planned to try before the 'revolutionary tribunal' in August 1968 to denounce the Prague Spring and his own role in the reform process. In spring 1970, however, he was expelled from the party and stripped of all party functions. Later, though, he was deputy director of the office for normalisation.

Josef Spacek lost all his party functions in 1969 and his party membership in 1970; eventually he was employed on a road construction project. Dubcek himself ended his working life in the forestry commission in Slovakia, having moved from a job as unskilled labour to a minor management position.

Similarly, Bohumil Simon was stripped of both his party functions and his party card, and found employment as an economist in the institute for the restoration of monuments in Prague. Later he was joined on that body by Cestmir Cisar, who had lain low during the August invasion, but even so was deprived of all party functions in 1969. Frantisek Kriegl was forced into retirement. The economist Ota Silk, deputy prime minister in 1968, was stripped of all functions and expelled from the party in 1969. Wisely, he chose to remain in emigration in Switzerland, where the events of August 1968 had caught him. Eduard Goldstuecker, chairman of the Czechoslovak union of writers in 1968, chose exile in England in 1969.

Perhaps the most abject and cowardly case was that of Radovan Richta, the party functionary who coined the phrase 'socialism with a human face' for Alexander Dubcek. Deciding to hunt with the hounds rather than run with the hare, Richta became an adherent of normalisation. After 1970, as director of the philosophical institute and member of its ruling body, he undertook the job of purging the social sciences in Czechoslovakia. His reward was to be named an academician and a regular member of the academy of sciences in 1977. Stefan Sadvovsky, who attempted to join the normalisers, was not so fortunate. For a time he was Prime Minister of the Slovak republic, then First Secretary of the central committee of the Czechoslovak party. In 1971, however, he was stripped of all party functions and later relegated to industrial management.

Naturally a number of opportunists as well as opponents of reform within the party hoped to make good during normalisation. Among the most successful were Josef Lenart, Cernik's predecessor as prime minister, and Milos Jakes, who had been party to the Soviet plot to proclaim a revolutionary government in August 1968 and proved to be an enthusiastic upholder of normalisation, particularly distinguishing himself in the great party purge of

1970. Lubomir Strougal, deputy prime minister in 1968, took to normalisation like a duck to water and was rewarded with the post of premier, in succession to Cernik, in 1970. Karel Hoffman, who had collaborated with the invaders by printing misinformation in August 1968, when he had some access to the party press, became an active normaliser, chairman of the central council of trade unions and a presidium member of the Communist Party. Less successful was Jan Pilier, an unwilling adherent of normalisation after August 1968. Though he held several party functions he was stripped of these in 1971 and obliged to work as a government employee.

The two chief plotters of 1968, who had tried to establish the revolutionary government and tribunal to assist the invaders' claims of counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia and to lend some credence to the claim that they had been invited to render 'fraternal assistance', did tolerably well. Vasil Bilak and Alois Indra became the representatives of Soviet commands and neo-Stalinism in the party, Indra being appointed to the now meaningless post of speaker of the federal assembly. Even they, however, were forced to realise that Husak meant to reinstate one-man rule.

The purge of the universities and strict censorship led to Czechoslovakia becoming what its dissidents later termed a 'cultural wilderness'; the French writer Louis Aragon described it as a 'Biafra of the soul', while native dissidents later called it 'Absurdistan'. As was noted above, students and schoolchildren were especial targets of the regime. In a particularly malevolent policy they were held as hostages for their parents' good behaviour; any deviation from the norm meant that their chances of study would disappear. In any case, the Communist authorities did not want a well-educated subject population. In 1990 Jan Urban wrote that Czechoslovakia had less post-secondary school provision per head of population than had Nepal, while Vaclav Havel in that same year said that Czechoslovakia ranked only 72nd in the world in terms of government spending on education.

The cultural policy of the Husak regime also had a pernicious effect on science and the economy. Two out of every three members of the writers' union lost their posts. Between 1969 and 1971 no literary journal was published in the Czech lands, for the first time since 1821. Writers who wished to be published, or wished their published works to remain in public libraries, were constrained to make a statement disavowing the reforms of Prague Spring. (This was also an obligatory condition for membership of the writers' union.) Other unions – those of the students, journalists, and film and television workers, as well as the coordinating committee of art unions – were simply dissolved and their funds confiscated by the state, or rather, the Communists.

There were also press campaigns against eminent figures associated with Prague Spring, which were usually the prelude to forcing them out of office or employment. Thus Dubcek's Foreign Minister, Jiri Hajek, was labelled a 'Gestapo agent' by the Soviet news agency TASS, which also hinted that he was a Jew by saying that his real name was Karpelès. Hajek responded by stating that his name had always been Hajek, and that he had spent the whole of the war in a Nazi concentration camp as an anti-fascist. TASS did not publish this refutation, and shortly thereafter Hajek resigned his ministerial post.

Equally insulting was the treatment accorded to Jiri Pelikan, director of Czechoslovak television and chairman of the parliamentary foreign affairs committee. On 31 August 1968 the Soviet party paper *Pravda* claimed that Pelikan had given an interview in which he expressed pro-western and anti-Communist sentiments in a Lebanese newspaper – which was proved to have no existence. The story about the imaginary interview was broadcast repeatedly by the Soviet-controlled radio, while Pelikan was dismissed from his television post. That autumn a Bulgarian newspaper claimed that pornographic literature and a bust of Hitler had been found in Pelikan's office, and within a year a Moravian newspaper deduced that he must have been a Gestapo agent, as he had managed to survive one year's imprisonment and three years in the underground resistance during the war. All this was contemptible stuff, meant to discredit the man who had controlled Czechoslovak television during Prague Spring and the August invasion.

Many intellectuals as well as ordinary citizens chose the option of emigration: 170,000 had fled the country by 1971, a figure that would rise to 244,000 by the time of the velvet revolution in November 1989. Among the more eminent exiles were the writers Josef Skvorecky and Milan Kundera and the film director Milos Forman. From the world of sport Martina Navratilova, the tennis-player, defected to the West in 1975; she was to be followed by Ivan Lendl. By contrast the runner Emil Zatopek chose to stay in Czechoslovakia, though his association with the Dubcek reforms resulted in his being stripped of his army rank of colonel.

Exile is never an easy option, and in the case of the Czechoslovak emigration the misery was compounded by the knowledge that reprisals would be taken against relatives left at home. These took the form of petty persecution rather than imprisonment or torture, for example, being moved to a less desirable flat or facing demotion at work. Nonetheless it was effective as a means of encouragement to conformity.

While many of the exiles kept silence about home affairs, a number of writers did work to keep Czechoslovakia in the forefront of the public consciousness. Milan Kundera settled in France in 1975, and his melancholy yet

humorous novels evoked the absurdity and cruelty of Communist rule. (See in particular *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.) The married writers Josef Skvorecky and Zdena Salivarova emigrated to Canada. Skvorecky already had a more than suspect past in the eyes of the 'normalising' regime. In 1956 his first novel *End of the Nylon Age* was suppressed by the censor before publication. In 1958 he caused a literary scandal with *The Cowards*. Written ten years previously, this novel set in a small town in Bohemia (Skvorecky's native Nachod, thinly disguised as 'Kostelec'), presented an unheroic and satirical picture of Czech resistance during the Nazi occupation. The book was banned and used as an excuse for a thorough purge of Czechoslovak writers. Deeply distrusted and closely watched, Skvorecky continued to write his disrespectful and often hilarious satires. *The Republic of Whores*, an account of Czechoslovak military conscripts in the early 1950s whose behaviour was somewhat less than valiant, was banned by the censor prior to publication in 1966. Publication was permitted in 1969 but the book was again proscribed in 1970. Skvorecky and Salivarova settled in Toronto, where in 1971 they founded Sixty Eight Publishing, a Czech language press which published writings both from the emigration and from banned writers still in Czechoslovakia. Skvorecky himself continued to write stories and novels, among the most notable being *The Engineer of Human Souls* (the phrase is adapted from Stalin's description of the writer and his function) and *Miracle Game*.

A number of outstanding intellectual figures chose to stay in Czechoslovakia rather than flee abroad. One such was the novelist Ivan Klima. As editor of the journal of the Czech writers' union during Prague Spring he was suspect in the eyes of the regime. In 1969 he was visiting professor of literature at the university of Michigan, but he returned to Prague after a year. He was obliged to earn his living by manual labour, and his books could only be published abroad. Another was the philosopher, playwright and poet Vaclav Havel, who was to prove a real thorn in the side of the normalised regime. On 21 August 1969 – the first anniversary of the invasion – he was one of ten signatories of a document called 'Ten Points' which condemned normalisation and was addressed to the government, federal assembly and central committee of the Communist Party. Havel and his co-signatories were charged with subverting the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, though their trial, planned for the following autumn, never did take place.

From then on Havel was blacklisted, his works banned from libraries. In May 1972 the new 'normalised' writers' association attacked Havel and other proscribed authors, who were naturally excluded from this new organisation. (It must have been especially irritating to both the authorities and the 'official'

writers that Havel had received American and Austrian literary prizes.) The following December he signed a petition by Czech writers to President Svoboda, asking for an amnesty for political prisoners. Naturally this request was not granted. In common with other writers who were forbidden to practise their craft Havel was permitted to work only in a manual occupation. He spent most of 1974 working in a brewery in the provincial town of Trutnov, an experience which gave him material for his one-act play *Audience*.

Although this was largely a dismal, uneventful period in the history of Czechoslovakia, there were compensations for conformity. As early as 1972 the western press was reporting that obesity threatened to become a national problem in Czechoslovakia. This was because the shops were relatively well-stocked with foodstuffs as the price of compliance. By comparison with Poland in the 1970s, which was poorly provisioned but marked by protest, Czechoslovakia presented an abject if well-fed picture, something which was reflected in the following joke:

A Polish dog and a Czechoslovak dog meet on the border between their respective countries and eye each other suspiciously. 'You,' says the Czechoslovak dog, 'Why on earth do you want to go to Czechoslovakia?' 'Because I want to eat meat,' the Polish dog replies. 'And you, why do you want to go to Poland?' 'Because I want to bark.'

Similarly, guaranteed full employment and low wages under the command economy led to the export to Czechoslovakia of the Soviet joke, 'We pretend to work and you pretend to pay us'.

An example of the authorities' cynicism in bribing the population is the country cottage phenomenon. Czechoslovaks who lived in towns and cities were permitted to build themselves weekend homes, partly as compensation for the cramped living conditions in urban apartment-house complexes. (These ugly conurbations of 'panel houses' or tower blocks can still be seen on the outskirts of all towns in the Czech and Slovak Republics.) With equal cynicism employees would pilfer building materials from the workplace and steal time from working hours to build their cottages; the authorities would obligingly turn a blind eye to such petty larceny, while the workers coined the slogan, 'If you don't steal from the state you rob your own family'.

Indeed, the ordinary citizen coped with life under 'actually existing socialism' (to use the government's slogan) by what was known at the time as 'inner emigration'. The home and family became a refuge from the world outside, most aptly symbolised by the Czechoslovak habit, shared with the denizens of

other Communist countries, of taking their shoes off on the threshold or in the hall of the home. In practical terms this was to avoid transferring the dirt from the polluted street into the domestic space; but its emblematic meaning is also evident.

While the bulk of the population complied at least outwardly with the regulations of normalisation there was both individual and organised dissent. Many proscribed or dissident authors 'wrote for the drawer'. As in the Soviet Union itself such work was sometimes circulated in *samizdat*, that is, hand-typed copies, though to pass such works to another person became a criminal offence. In April 1975 Vaclav Havel went a large step beyond *samizdat* when he sent an open letter to Husak which protested at the measures of normalisation. Havel exposed the outward conformity of the population as being insincere and inspired by fear. 'Dear Dr Husak' only circulated privately in Czechoslovakia, but news of it was quickly picked up by foreign radio broadcasts and it was published in translation in several countries of Western Europe. Whether Husak actually read it must remain a matter of conjecture, since the letter was returned to its author by the president's office with a note explaining that as he had revealed it to hostile press agencies he had exposed himself as an enemy of his country. Much later, after the foundation of Charter 77, the open letter would be used to charge Havel with subversion of the Republic and thus provide one of the pretexts for his trial and imprisonment.

Even more effective than 'Dear Dr Husak' in showing the hollowness of conformity under normalisation is Havel's famous image of the greengrocer in 'Power of the Powerless'. (This essay was written in 1978 and dedicated to the memory of Jan Patocka, a fellow dissident and philosopher who died under police questioning in 1977.) The greengrocer decorates his shop window with the slogan 'Workers of the World, Unite!' It means nothing to him, indeed, he has largely forgotten that it is there. But what would happen, asked Havel, if he removes the slogan?

Let us now imagine that one day something in our greengrocer snaps and he stops putting up the slogans merely to ingratiate himself. He stops voting in elections he knows are a farce. He begins to say what he really thinks at political meetings. And he even finds the strength within himself to express solidarity with those whom his conscience commands him to support. In this revolt the greengrocer steps out of living within the lie. He rejects the ritual and breaks the rules of the game. He discovers once more his

suppressed identity and dignity. He gives his freedom a concrete significance. His revolt is an attempt to *live within the truth*.³

Havel recognised, however, that such courageous behaviour would be rare, as 'The bill is not long in coming'. The greengrocer would be demoted from his position as manager, would have to take a pay cut, would lose his chance of a foreign holiday within the Communist world, and would find that his children's chances of university education were threatened. Indeed, it was by such petty acts of persecution that the normalised Husak regime kept a hold on the population. As Havel had stated in his open letter, the country was peaceful and calm, but so was a morgue.

Given the repression of any sign of dissent at home, it seems extraordinary that the Czechoslovak authorities should sign the Helsinki final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in the summer of 1975. Extraordinary, in that the human rights provisions of the final act automatically entered Czechoslovak law and in theory bound the regime to upholding them. The duplicity, cynicism or overconfidence of the authorities was shown just over a year later with the notorious 'rock stars' trial.

The psychedelic 'underground' group Plastic People of the Universe had been performing semi-legally for the past five years when suddenly its members were arrested and charged with 'disturbing the peace', which, along with 'hooliganism', was official-speak for nonconformity. Despite the attempts of official propaganda to portray the musicians simply as long-haired, anti-social drug addicts, their imprisonment was seen as over-harsh, and shocked and alienated many in Czechoslovakia as well as abroad. After all, these young people were not discredited old Communists or even overtly political opponents of the regime, and their detention was seen, quite rightly, as the outcome of the totalitarian reaction to any form of self-expression, any deviation from the officially-approved 'norm'. Seven Czechoslovak writers, Havel and the renowned poet Jaroslav Seifert among them, signed an open letter to the eminent German novelist Heinrich Böll asking for international artistic solidarity with the imprisoned musicians. The letter eventually became a sizeable petition, with more than 70 signatures. The indefatigable Havel also wrote an article about the trial which gave their cause widespread publicity.

The severe treatment of the Plastic People undoubtedly acted as a catalyst to the discussions which led to the formation of Charter 77 on 1 January 1977, the beginning of political prisoners' year. The earliest Chartists were men of diverse background and convictions: the Communist politicians Zdenek Mlynar and Jiri Hajek, both ranked among Dubcek's reform Communists

in 1968; the veteran democratic politician Prokop Drtina; intellectuals like the writers Pavel Kohout and Vaclav Havel. The Charter itself protested at the violation of the Helsinki final act by the Czechoslovak government. It stated that the citizens of the state were denied freedom of expression and of religious confession, freedom from fear, the right to study and to have access to information. It also enumerated other breaches of civil rights. The first round of canvassing attracted 243 signatures, a number which rose to about 1200 by 1987. The original signatories appointed as their spokesmen the philosopher Professor Jan Patocka, Vaclav Havel, and former Foreign Minister Jiri Hajek.

Charter 77 was neither a political party nor even a closely-knit organisation. Rather, it was a pressure group concerned with drawing attention to human rights abuses. Its membership was broadly based, and included Catholics (such as Vaclav Benda) and reform Communists, liberals and Social Democrats. The Chartists made contact with similar groups in Poland and Hungary and, thanks to its interest in the Helsinki final act and its concern with environmental issues, with groups and individuals in the West. Since it merely asked that the Czechoslovak government respect its own laws, it can be described as legalistic opposition.

Quite in contravention of its adherence to the Helsinki agreement, the Czechoslovak government moved swiftly against the Chartists. Together with the writer Ludvik Vaculik (author in 1968 of the manifesto *2000 Words*) and the actor and playwright Pavel Landovsky, Havel tried on 6 January to deliver copies of the Charter with a list of its signatories to the federal assembly, government and official press agency. Immediately they were detained and subject to repeated interrogation, house searches and surveillance, though the Charter itself was published in a leading West German newspaper. Havel was held in detention from 14 January until 20 May and eventually charged with subversion as one of the organisers of Charter 77 and as the author of 'Dear Dr Husak'. As a gesture of solidarity Josef Skvorecky's Toronto press Sixty Eight Publishers issued a collected edition of Havel's plays that August.

Other Chartists were harassed by house searches and interrogation. Among these was Zdenek Mlynar, who was dismissed from his post at the national museum and departed for exile in Vienna in the summer of 1977. So thorough were the security forces in investigating his nefarious past – he had joined the party in 1946, when he was almost 16 – that they even extracted from the police files a letter he had written in 1950. As a naive young Communist he had been one of thousands to send letters to the authorities denouncing those accused in the show trials, in his case, Sling and Svernova. On 1 March 1977 *Rude Pravo*, the Communist party paper, published extracts from this letter to demonstrate Mlynar's opportunism and disregard for

human rights so as to discredit his signature of the Charter. Such was the cynicism of the Husak regime.

Meanwhile on 13 March 1977 Jan Patocka died of a massive brain haemorrhage while in police custody. The 69-year-old philosopher, a friend of Edmund Husserl, had been repeatedly questioned by the police since January. Neither his academic and intellectual eminence nor his age were respected.

Eventually, in October, came the trial of Havel and three other Chartists. Havel was found guilty of attempting to damage the interests of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and received a prison sentence of 14 months, conditionally suspended for three years. In December he was among the signatories of an open letter from Czech writers to their foreign colleagues asking them to demand from the Belgrade meeting of the Helsinki signatories an explicit declaration on the right to free exchange of information and on the right to publish proscribed works. On 28 January 1978 he was arrested with some friends and charged with 'disturbing the peace' again, being held in custody until 13 March. Criminal proceedings against these dissidents were halted in April 1979.

Unabashed by all the attention they were receiving from the security forces, members of Charter 77 met with representatives of a Polish dissident group. The Committee for Workers' Defence (KOR) had been established in 1976 as an organisation to facilitate cooperation between workers and intellectuals; among its founders were such luminaries of Polish dissent as Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik. In August and September 1978 the two groups held two meetings, quite illegally, on the Polish-Czechoslovak border. On 1 October a third meeting was raided by the Polish and Czechoslovak police, and broken up.

Meanwhile a new dissident venture had been launched, on 27 April 1978. This was the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted, known by its Czech acronym of VONS. This group of 18 (once more including Havel and other Chartists) was an outgrowth from Charter 77 and was concerned with specific cases of injustice and abuse of human rights. It disseminated information about individual cases, and also gave legal advice. VONS circulated roughly 155 reports in typescript to both the general public and to official institutions.

The security police now concentrated their attention on VONS. In May 1979 fifteen of the committee members were arrested and their houses searched. Ten of them were charged with criminal subversion of the Republic; of these, six were put on trial in October, while the other four were released without charge in December. The six who were convicted and sentenced to prison were Otka Bednarova, Vaclav Benda, Jiri Dienstbier, Vaclav Havel, Dana Nemcova and Petr Uhl.

On 23 October the 'six' were convicted, as members of both VONS and Charter 77, for disseminating 'indicible' material both in Czechoslovakia and abroad. Nemcova, a child psychologist, received a suspended sentence of two years. Bednarova, a former television journalist, received a sentence of three years which she served in Opava women's prison. Dientsbier and Benda received three and four years respectively; Havel four and a half; while Petr Uhl, a revolutionary Trotskyist who was no stranger to the prisons of the regime, received five years, which he was to serve in a maximum security prison.

The plight of the VONS defendants attracted considerable international attention. A dramatic reconstruction of the trial of the six was performed at theatres in Paris, Munich and New York, and was shown on Austrian, German and Swiss television. In 1981 plays by Havel were performed in Paris and Warsaw, while in June a resolution of the European parliament called for the release of Czechoslovak political prisoners. Havel in particular became a cause célèbre. In February 1982 the International Committee for the Defence of Charter 77 awarded him the Jan Palach prize for both his literary work and his defence of human rights. In June he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from York University, Toronto, the University of Toulouse conferring a second honorary doctorate on him in August. In July the Avignon International Theatre Festival honoured and commemorated him with a 'Night for Vaclav Havel'.

All this was doubtless galling to the Czechoslovak authorities; but they had learned from their Soviet masters that one way to deal with dissidents was to let them go abroad; once such turbulent people were in the free world, foreign media interest in them dwindled. While under interrogation in August Havel had been told of an invitation to spend a year in New York as a theatrical adviser. Knowing that if he left it would be impossible to return to Czechoslovakia, he refused to consider doing so. Vaclav Benda, a prominent Catholic layman, was repeatedly offered his freedom if he agreed to leave the country; he consistently refused, and was not released until 1983. Similar offers were made to Jiri Dientsbier. Pavel Kohout, novelist, playwright, poet and founder and signatory of Charter 77, became an involuntary exile. After spending a year in Austria he was stripped of his citizenship, and was therefore unable to return to Czechoslovakia.

Despite harassment and outright persecution many dissidents in Czechoslovakia proved irrepressible. Take the case of Rudolf Battěk, one of the founders of KAN in 1968 and a deputy in the Czech assembly. After writing a letter to the federal assembly demanding an official investigation into the invasion of August, he was dismissed from his post as a sociologist in the

academy of sciences and imprisoned. This was to be the first of four sentences he would serve. He was one of the first signatories of Charter 77 and one of the founders of VONS. In 1978 he was also one of the founders of the Independent Socialists, a social democratic group with no connection with the official party, which had been forcibly merged with the Communists after 1948. In 1980 he began a five-year prison sentence, but appeared again as one of the founders of the Movement for Civil Liberties in 1988.

Another Charist was Pavel Bratinka, a physicist who lost his job at the academy of sciences when he was caught distributing literature about the Charter. He worked as a caretaker, then as a stoker on the metro railway in Prague. He also worked underground in another sense, in that he gave lectures to other dissidents and was involved in Havel's underground press. He, too, helped found the Movement for Civil Liberties in 1988.

In January 1980 Havel, Dientsbier and Benda were transferred from prison in Prague to the labour camp at Hermanice, near the town and mines of Ostrava, where they worked as welders. This area was one of the most notoriously polluted in Communist Czechoslovakia, and not surprisingly Havel fell ill, and had to spend a week in the prison hospital in July 1981. After this he was transferred to the prison at Plzen-Bory, where he was assigned slightly lighter work in the laundry. In January 1983 he was suddenly admitted to the Pankrac prison hospital in Prague suffering from high fever and severe pneumonia. Once the fever had abated Havel managed to send a detailed letter to his wife Olga Havlova about his illness. She made the news known to friends and sympathisers at home and abroad, and soon there were many public appeals for his release. Possibly the authorities were embarrassed by this; more likely they were afraid Havel would die in prison. In any event in February his sentence was suspended on the grounds of ill health, and he was transferred to an ordinary hospital in Prague, whence he was allowed to go home. His sentence was only abrogated in September 1985, as part of a general amnesty of political prisoners.

As the authorities very well knew, the worst punishment for intellectual dissidents is not to be able to use their minds professionally. Just as in the aftermath of Prague Spring purged artists and academics had had to find unskilled manual jobs, so it was for the Charists. Dientsbier had been a television journalist, and one of those who had continued to broadcast during the Warsaw pact invasion. For this 'illegal' activity he lost both his job and his Communist Party membership. After his release from prison in 1982 he had to work as a night watchman and stoker, a job he held up to and during the velvet revolution of November 1989. Even so, he managed to publish extensively in the underground *samizdat* press, and produced a book of essays on

international relations which was also published abroad. Petr Pithart, a professor of law, also lost his post for supporting the Dubcek reforms. He had to work at manual jobs both before and after he became a signatory of Charter 77. He, too, wrote for the underground press; his works included *Sixty Eight*, a reassessment of Prague Spring.

Jan Urban's case shows that persecution was transmitted across the generations. His father had been a Communist partisan in World War II, held a senior post in the central committee of the party but lost it for criticism of the Novotny regime's lack of reform. Urban senior died of a heart attack following three police interrogations in 1988. Jan Urban lost his teaching post in a secondary school in 1977 when he refused to sign a statement condemning Charter 77, of which he became a signatory. It was this experience, of being asked to condemn something he had not read and then losing his teaching post, that turned Urban into an active dissident. He held a variety of jobs, including bookbinder and building labourer, and in 1985 qualified as a skilled bricklayer.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable works of *samizdat* literature to be created in the era of normalisation was Havel's *Letters to Olga*. While in prison following the VONS trial a weekly four-page letter to his wife was the only form of writing permitted to Havel. Accordingly he decided to use this as a form of literary and philosophical expression. In all, between 4 June 1979 and 4 September 1982 he wrote 144 letters to Olga. Naturally there was strict censorship at Hermanice and Pízen-Bory; some of the letters were mutilated by the prison censor, a number did not reach their destination at all.

Even those citizens who were not outright dissidents suffered from the oppressive, dreary yet fearful atmosphere of the years of normalisation. The plight of ordinary people punished for the crimes of relatives who had made an 'illegal exit to the West'; corruption in high places to protect Communists from the consequences of non-political crimes; the ubiquitous presence of the secret police and informers; all these facets of existence are shown in *The End of Lieutenant Boruvka*. This was a book of connected short stories by the exiled Czech writer Josef Skvorecky first published in Toronto in 1975. Boruvka is an honest and melancholy officer in the criminal police, who both despises and fears the 'other police'. He is constantly thwarted in his work of bringing miscreants to justice by official 'cover-ups', and is forced to disavow the 'deformations of the Dubcek era' in which he had briefly rejoiced. Boruvka finally breaks the law in obedience to his conscience as he helps a small girl to escape from Czechoslovakia to join her parents abroad. The consequences of his attempt to 'live in truth' (to revert to Havel's phrase) are terrible for all concerned. Boruvka himself, the girl's aunt and aged grandparents are all

imprisoned; his wife has a stroke under the shock of his arrest and dies; his daughter, married to an American Czech, is forbidden to join her husband in the United States. Skvorecky claimed that the five cases with which Boruvka deals were all loosely based on real incidents. Although Boruvka ends on a note of personal redemption in his prison cell, this only emphasises the horrors of normalisation.

In retrospect 1985 was a momentous year for the Soviet bloc, since it saw the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. For the Chartists little changed in terms of police harassment. Havel was interrogated by the police three times that year. In January he was held for 48 hours and questioned about the nomination of new Charter 77 spokesmen; he was questioned twice in August, this time over the drafting of a Chartist statement on the Warsaw pact invasion.

It is not remarkable that the neo-Stalinist regimes of the Soviet bloc, Czechoslovakia's among them, should not have felt great enthusiasm for the new broom sweeping the Kremlin. In March 1986 the XVII Congress of the Czechoslovak party paid lip service to *perestroika* and *glasnost* and even promised increased economic and social reform. In January 1987 the normalising prime minister Lubomir Strougal spoke of rehabilitating some of the Dubcek reforms (though not Dubcek and the reformers of 1968, his own colleagues until he rushed to the aid of the victors). The opposition was encouraged by Gorbachev's visit to Prague in March, but the Soviet leader went no further than denying Brezhnev's dictum that the Soviet party had a monopoly on truth. Indeed, Gorbachev had plenty of domestic problems of his own without encouraging dissent, and therefore instability, in the Communist bloc.

Perhaps it was the security engendered by this knowledge, or perhaps it was merely customary arrogance that made the Communist authorities act against a particularly irksome source of nonconformity. The Jazz Section of the official Musicians' Union had since the late 1970s been promoting jazz through staging concerts for Czechoslovak and foreign groups and by publishing books and magazines. Just over a decade after the arrest and trial of the Plastic People of the Universe the Jazz Section was suppressed and its leaders imprisoned.

Even so, 1987 proved to be an active year for the opponents of normalisation. A group of Moravian workers demanded the resignation of President Husak, who blithely and stubbornly ignored both this and increasing hints from Moscow that some lessening of constraints and economic reform might not come amiss. In September an unofficial, liberal-democratic organisation, Democratic Initiative, was formed to encourage public discussion of reform.

In October the Slovak green movement published the first of a number of reports called 'Bratislava Aloud'. Based on official data, these sounded severe warnings about the region's dire environmental condition. In November Dubcek broke his silence on public affairs by sending a telegram to Gorbachev wishing him luck with his reforms.

Another matter which must have irritated the regime was the increasing international profile of Czechoslovak dissidents. After six years of secret existence the Friends of Czechoslovak-Polish Solidarity was officially established. Jan Urban attended the seminar on international human rights held in Moscow by Press Club Glasnost. There he met Andrei Sakharov and other prominent victims of Soviet repression. Urban was also one of the founders of the Eastern European Information Agency, which publicised material about dissent and its opponents throughout the Soviet bloc.

All this brought about a token change. At the end of the year Husak resigned as first secretary, though he kept the position of president. He was replaced by Milos Jakes, a pro-Soviet survivor from the party leadership of 1968, who proved to be as hardline a normaliser as his predecessor. Let Moscow do as it pleased; Prague, like East Berlin, would remain frozen and inert in Brezhnev's age of sclerosis. (Or so their leaders fondly imagined.)

The year 1988 saw the growth of dissent from a number of quarters and on several issues in Czechoslovakia. Religious liberty became a rallying cry. Since the days of Gottwald the fiction of freedom of worship had been cynically maintained by the authorities; despite the fact that clergy were persecuted for subversion and espionage and the laity found themselves penalised if they attended church services too frequently and noticeably. In March 1988 there were Catholic demonstrations in both Prague and Bratislava, this last involving 2000 protesting believers, elderly women in the main.

More than 600,000 people signed the petition formulated by Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek, archbishop of Prague. Entitled 'Suggestions of Catholics for the Solution of the Problems of the Faithful', this document protested at the state's treatment of worshippers and declared itself in favour of increased religious freedom. Tomasek also issued a clarion call to Catholics in his Easter address, 'Spiritual renewal of the nation', made at the start of preparations for the millennial anniversary of the early medieval bishop, missionary and martyr St Vojtech. Massive pilgrimages took place in Slovakia; more than 280,000 went to the shrine of Levoca in July, while 60,000 were pilgrims to Sasin in September. In early December about one thousand Moravian Catholics demonstrated in Olomouc.

Political discontent was also manifest. The twentieth anniversary of the Warsaw pact invasion on 21 August was marked by massive demonstrations in

Prague and other cities. In Prague 10,000 demonstrators conducted a peaceful march through the city centre. In Wenceslas Square a petition was read out by members of the Independent Peace Association which condemned the invasion of 1968 and called for a public enquiry about it, together with abolition of censorship, free and democratic elections and rehabilitation of political victims of the regime. The security forces reacted with great brutality, using water cannon and tear gas on the civilian crowds.

Nonetheless, human rights continued to be defended by dissenters. The Movement for Civil Liberties was founded on 15 October. This was an umbrella organisation for all kinds of clubs and associations which rejected the 'leading role' of the Communist Party and published a manifesto, 'Democracy for All'. Largely in response to growing public restiveness, the authorities announced that 28 October, the anniversary of the foundation of the First Republic, would once more be celebrated as Czechoslovak national day. By making the occasion a public holiday they hoped to lessen the turnout at unofficial demonstrations. Even so, they were obliged to try to prevent independent demonstrations in Prague by arresting nearly 200 of the organisers the night before. Despite these precautions a demonstration of 5000 people took place in Wenceslas Square, which was broken up by the usual brutality on the part of the security forces. On 10 December, which was international human rights day, Charter 77 and other organisations organised a mass demonstration in Prague, calling for freedom of association, the press, religion and travel, and for an amnesty of political prisoners. This demonstration alone was officially sanctioned, not least because of the state visit of Francois Mitterand, the French president, to Czechoslovakia and his announced intention of raising the question of human rights.

Any idea that change was in the air was, however, brutally quashed by the authorities. In January 1989 the twentieth anniversary of Jan Palach's suicide was marked by a week ('Palach week') of huge and spontaneous demonstrations. The protesters voiced demands for democracy over six days. Once more the police responded with tear gas, water cannon, beatings and arrests. Among those taken into custody were well-known dissidents, including Havel, who had committed the crime of trying to lay flowers on the site of Palach's self-sacrifice. There were international protests. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was meeting in Vienna, Czechoslovakia having sent delegates to the debates on an agreement on human rights. The American representative denounced Czechoslovakia for infringement of the Helsinki agreement of which it was a signatory. Such a condemnation by the major imperialist power might seem easy to dismiss. Less comfortable was the criticism of the Czechoslovak regime's handling of the protests which appeared in

Pravda, the newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party. Yet the Czechoslovak hardliners were obdurate. At least outwardly, it seemed that normalisation would carry on, and the hold of the hardliners seemed unbreakable.

Notes

- ¹ Quoted in Alan Levy, *So Many Heroes* (2nd ed., Sagaponack, New York 1980), p. 313.
- ² Zdenek Mlynar, *Night Frost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism* (London, 1980), p. 221.
- ³ Jan Vladislav, ed. *Vaclav Havel Living in Truth* (London and Boston, 1989), p. 55.

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The Velvet Revolution

On 20 August the Viennese newspaper *Die Presse* carried a small item on its front page about Czechoslovakia. Demonstrations were expected in Prague and other cities on the twenty-first anniversary of the Soviet-led invasion. Riot police and troops had been put on standby; but the regime was confident of its ability to handle any protests. No doubt its confidence was largely based on the 13,000 troops, 790 officers and 155 tanks at its disposal. In the event, the mass demonstration which took place in Prague was broken up by the armed forces and police with the usual brutality.

Even further down the front page was an article about East German tourist-refugees. Holidaymakers in significant numbers were abandoning their Trabant and Wartburg cars and seeking asylum in West German embassies in Warsaw pact capitals. The West German constitution recognised all Germans as citizens of the Federal Republic, with rights of residence and employment. The East Germans were not only claiming these rights, but were also voting with their feet against Communism.

At the time there seemed little to connect the two articles, but within months democratic revolution would have raced like wildfire through the Soviet bloc. Within Czechoslovakia itself there had been patent signs of discontent ever since the demonstrations on the anniversary of Jan Palach's death in January. The following month a political club called *Obroda* ('Revival') was formed by former Communist officials from 1968. These reform Communists supported Gorbachev's policies in the Soviet Union and demanded similar reforms for Czechoslovakia. In a separate development in April, Dubcek himself gave an interview to the Hungarian television journalist Andras Sugar. Over the course of three hours he reviewed and defended Prague Spring, condemned the Warsaw pact invasion, and exonerated his own conduct in Moscow and after his return to Prague.

Naturally enough this astonishing and revelatory account provoked protest and denunciation from the Czechoslovak authorities. Another blow was dealt to the Communists in May, however, when the hitherto tame Socialist Party demanded greater freedom for non-Communist parties.

All this did not prevent the Husak regime from loudly approving the Chinese suppression of peaceful student demonstrators in Beijing in June.

In that same month, however, a petition appeared called 'A Few Sentences'. This was signed by writers and artists (eventually it bore more than 40,000 signatures), and it demanded democratic reform. The petition complained that, although the Czechoslovak authorities paid lip service to *perestroika* and democratisation, they used coercion and violence against their own citizens. It saw social and democratic reform as the necessary prelude to dealing with economic problems, and made some specific demands. These included: an immediate amnesty for political prisoners; the lifting of restrictions on freedom of assembly and of discussion; the end of censorship of the mass media and cultural life; freedom to express religious belief; public consultation on environmental matters; and free discussion of the events of the 1950s, Prague Spring, the 1968 invasion and normalisation.

The confidence of the Czechoslovak authorities was seriously misplaced, given the chronic state of the economy. In the time of the First Republic Czechoslovakia had been ranked seventh among the industrialised states of the world; by the 1980s it had fallen shockingly to seventieth place. In 1988 the Czechoslovak Institute for Economic Forecasting had produced an ominous report about the economy and social problems; it called for drastic reform and some degree of democratisation. The report was taken up by the then Prime Minister, Lubomir Strougal, who had supported the Dubcek reforms in 1968 but had then joined the winning, normalising side. In 1988 he used the report to advocate reform; but this would have involved major social changes, with large-scale redundancies in industries such as metallurgy and engineering, and so the recommendations of the report were not implemented.

Early in 1989 the government declared more than 100 major enterprises bankrupt but announced that it would continue to support them. In late August, however, the Czechoslovak State Planning Agency announced that 30 per cent of the country's enterprises were unprofitable and recommended that they be closed. The only profitable manufactured product seems to have been Semtex, a plastic explosive made near Pardubice and exported in large quantities to terrorists and repressive governments the world over.

If the Czechoslovak economy was in trouble, environmental damage was one of the major problems facing the country. The chief source of fuel was brown coal (lignite), which was neither economical nor environmentally friendly. Brown coal gives off sulphur dioxide, the pollutant which is the main cause of acid rain. In 1990 Misha Glenny reported that Czechoslovak industry produced about 18 million tonnes of sulphur dioxide per square kilometre a year, three quarters of it from Northern Bohemia, which also produced about

60 per cent of the country's electricity supply. Glenny discovered a number of disturbing facts. Life expectancy in the 'black belt' of Northern Bohemia was three to four years lower than in other parts of Czechoslovakia. Infant mortality was at least 12 per cent higher there than elsewhere in the country. Furthermore, during the winter 'temperature inversion' meant that pollution was trapped by hot air so that a choking smog lay over the region.

At one of the demonstrations on Letna Plain in November 1989 the economist Milos Zeman announced even more shocking statistics. He declared that Czechoslovakia was a third world country in terms of economic growth and further education, and that the Republic had the highest level of pollution and the second highest mortality rate in the whole of Europe.

As well as Northern Bohemia, Northern Moravia, Western Bohemia, Prague itself and Bratislava and Eastern Slovakia were all officially designated as 'ecological disaster zones'. The acid rain generated by sulphur dioxide had completely destroyed 30 per cent of the forests, while of the rest 50 per cent had suffered partial destruction. Official organisations such as the Czechoslovak Union of Environmentalists sounded warnings about ecological damage. 'Clean water, clean air, clean government' demanded one street slogan in November. Concern with the environment and the growth of independent green movements like the group Brontosaurus were undoubtedly major contributory factors to the Czechoslovak revolution of 1989.

Though there were specific national grievances, the revolution which developed in Czechoslovakia was not unaffected by events elsewhere in Eastern Europe; specifically in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and the Soviet Union itself. Poland took the lead in the process of democratisation. In August 1988, following a massive wave of industrial strikes, the Polish authorities declared themselves willing to negotiate with the banned trade union Solidarity, which had spearheaded the dissident movement. There began round-table talks (that is, discussions between equals) between the Communists and the opposition. These culminated in the legalisation of Solidarity and in some constitutional changes in the spring of 1989. An executive presidency would be created, along with a second parliamentary chamber, the senate; its seats would be filled through 'semi-free' elections for both chambers of the parliament or *Sejm*. For the first time since the Communist seizure of power independent candidates would be allowed to stand for parliament, albeit only for a proportion of the seats.

The elections took place in June, and the independents won all the seats they contested. At the same time the Communist General Wojciech Jaruzelski was elected president of Poland; a sign that the struggle for democracy was not over yet. However the desertion of the previously compliant minor parties

in the 'popular front' with the Communists to the side of the opposition meant that it was impossible for the Communists to get enough votes to form a government. Consequently in August a new government was formed by Solidarity with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as the first non-Communist prime minister since 1947; so overcome was he that he fainted when he stood up in the *Sejm* to make his inaugural speech.

There should have been warning signs for the Czechoslovak Communists in the developments in Poland. In July 1989 the former dissidents Adam Michnik and Zbigniew Bujak visited Prague as parliamentary representatives and made contact with the leaders of Czechoslovak dissent. As Ian Urban later recalled with some glee, the secret police could do nothing but film the meetings. On 11 August the Polish senate unanimously denounced the Warsaw pact invasion of 1968 and apologised to the Czechoslovak people for the participation of Polish troops.

If events in Hungary were less dramatic than in Poland, economic reform and a movement towards political democratisation were bound to have an effect on public opinion in Czechoslovakia. After the bloody repression which followed the Hungarian uprising of 1956 Janos Kadar had slowly and almost imperceptibly moved towards liberalisation of the economy and some social reforms. Indeed, Hungarian participation in the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia had been an unpleasant surprise, as Dubcek had considered Kadar to be a kindred spirit and his political programme for Hungary to be not unlike the reforms of Prague Spring.

Despite the relative liberalism of the Hungarian regime (liberal, that is, in relation to the hard line governments of Czechoslovakia and East Germany), popular discontent fuelled by economic and ecological problems prompted Kadar's fall. In May 1988 he was deposed and replaced by a collective leadership, which proceeded to implement 'goulash Communism'. This was a peculiarly Hungarian mixture of old-fashioned 'democratic centralism' and a new form of 'socialist pluralism' which allowed the expression of opinion but did not affect the 'leading role of the party'.

In the event the Hungarian opposition organised itself into groups and clubs, and in January 1989 came legislation which inaugurated political pluralism, in that in principle it allowed the formation of independent political parties. The Hungarian Democratic Forum achieved victory in the by-elections of August 1989. In October the Communist Party congress enacted a significant measure of restructuring, and the party renamed itself the Hungarian Socialist Party. A schism developed later in the year, with the old guard renaming itself the Communist Party. All this was quite academic, however, as it was plain that the Communists had lost control of Hungary.

Back in January an official reassessment of the events of 1956 had concluded that these did not constitute a counter-revolution, but a popular uprising. Kadar died on 15 June; the next day, in a highly symbolic gesture Imre Nagy and other Communist leaders from 1956 were ceremonially reburied with full state honours.

The German Democratic Republic, like Czechoslovakia, was ruled by hard-line Communists, and the survival of each regime was to an extent dependent on the other. The GDR was ruled by Erich Honecker, spiritual heir to 'Frozen Walter' Ulbricht who had intervened in Czechoslovak affairs with such enthusiasm in 1968. Honecker's inability either to stem the flow of refugees to West Germany or to still the calls for reform within East Germany obviously had an effect on neighbouring Czechoslovakia. More than 11,000 East Germans took refuge in the West German embassy in Prague in September 1989. They came so suddenly and in such numbers that tents and blankets had to be conveyed by lorry from Bavaria for those camping out in the embassy compound. The citizens of Prague helped them in practical ways, according to reminiscences of those autumn days, and cheered the busloads of East Germans bound for the West and gave them the 'v for victory' sign; possibly the first time that gesture had been used since 1945.

Honecker reacted to events with the arrogance born of long years of repression and unopposed government. He threatened the protesters in the GDR with a 'Chinese' solution (thus recalling the recent massacre of students in Beijing), and he hoped to use a visit by Gorbachev in October to bolster his own position and authority. In the event Gorbachev neither reproved nor encouraged the dissidents, thus indicating by his silence that he would do nothing to save the East German Communist regime. (In fact, he gave an oblique warning to Honecker that governments which did not respond to the popular will put themselves in grave danger.) Later that month Honecker was deposed as party secretary. In November the Berlin wall was breached; the GDR opened its borders officially and the entire government and East German politburo resigned. The last blows to Communist power came in December, when the Communist leadership resigned and renounced the 'leading role' of the party. By that time the Czechoslovak revolution was virtually over.

A final factor which encouraged the 'velvet revolutionaries' was a development in the Soviet Union itself. It became known in Czechoslovak dissident circles that the central committee of the Soviet party had set up a working party to reassess the invasion of 1968. Its findings were reported finally on 4 December, at a Warsaw pact meeting in Moscow.

The events which unfolded rapidly in Czechoslovakia late in 1989 were immediately called the 'velvet revolution' because, apart from one violent

incident provoked by the police, protest was peaceful and, in retrospect at least, Communism apparently died an easeful death. The revolutionaries were doubtless encouraged by the mass demonstrations for democracy in the GDR in September, and the denunciation of the 1968 invasion by the Hungarian parliament. On 14 October the People's Party (the Catholic party once led by Jan Šrámek, but since 1948 a partner of the Communists in the bogus national front) showed signs of opposition. A group was formed called 'Stream of Rebirth' which denounced the party leadership for betraying its Catholic principles.

Meanwhile, and despite the ominous omen of Honecker's resignation on 18 October, the authorities continued to persecute signatories of the petition 'A Few Sentences'. In protest at this official journalists and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, led by Václav Neumann, initiated a boycott of state television on 25 October. On 13 November a new political party, Democratic Initiative, applied for registration as an independent party, the first since the Communist coup of 1948. At roughly the same time there were demonstrations against ecological damage and the regime's environmental policy in both Prague and Western Bohemia.

The velvet revolution proper is commonly held to have begun on 17 November, with the only violent incident in its course. Students gathered in Prague to commemorate – with official permission – the fiftieth anniversary of the funeral of Jan Opletal. This, it will be recalled, had ended in anti-Nazi demonstrations, violence against the students of the day, and the closure by the Protectorate authorities on Nazi orders of all Czech universities and institutes of higher education. The commemoration attracted an estimated crowd of about 100,000, and it became a pro-democracy demonstration.

Student discontent and dissent had been growing in a subdued manner throughout the year. The monopoly of student organisation enjoyed by the Socialist Union of Youth patently infringed the higher education law of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe). Accordingly tentative steps were taken to form an independent students' organisation. This new union, together with the reform wing of the Socialist Union of Youth and other student bodies which derived from it planned the commemoration of Opletal's death to be something more than an anti-fascist demonstration.

In place of the 2000–4000 expected demonstrators about 15,000 assembled for the start of the march, and were joined by thousands more in due course. Many carried candles and flowers, others bore banners with political slogans. Among these was what was to become the watchword of the students during the velvet revolution: 'If not us, who? If not now, when?' Another *leitmotif* of the revolution first appeared here, in that the students rattled their keys

at their 'jailors', the police. The protesters sang songs, among them the Czech national anthem, 'Where is my Home?', the anti-militarist Western protest song, 'Where have all the Flowers Gone?', and the favourite song of T.G. Masaryk, 'My Son, my Son'.

As the procession marched up National Avenue towards Wenceslas Square it was attacked by riot police and by special troops known as red berets. One of the most striking photographic images of the velvet revolution was the sight of the students holding out their hands, palms open, to the police to show that they were unarmed. This did not prevent hundreds of them being severely beaten up. Many ended up in hospital, and there was a rumour (later proved to be untrue, and to have been spread by the Communist authorities in order to discredit the veracity of the protestors) that one student had been killed. A monument to the victims, consisting of open and empty hands, now stands on National Avenue at the scene of the atrocity.

This typically brutal police action served as the catalyst for the velvet revolution. The following day the students went on strike (apparently on the initiative of the drama students) and occupied university buildings; they pleaded for a sign of popular solidarity by participation in a general strike, planned for 27 November. Although police appeared outside some of the occupied premises they did not attempt to enter. The students were soon joined in their protest by the actors of Prague, who effectively went on strike and occupied the theatres for political discussions. More to the point, actors from the provinces arrived in Prague within hours, so that strike notices appeared in many cities beyond the capital. This concerted action was vital in transmitting news of the police violence against the students and the concomitant strike from Prague to the provinces. Furthermore, the alliance of students and actors would be crucial in enabling the message to be conveyed to the industrial workers, who formed a large part of theatre audiences. In this way the authorities' distortion of the events of 17 November, which tried to depict the students as spoil and idle troublemakers, could be corrected in the next few days and weeks.

On 19 November (such was the pace of events) Civic Forum (*Občanské Forum*, *OF*) was formed in Prague as an umbrella organisation for the opposition. Like Charter 77, it embraced all forms of opposition. The proclamation of foundation listed the participating bodies. These were Charter 77 and VONS (many Chartists were prominent in the Forum, Jiří Dienstbier and Václav Havel among them); the Club of Independent Intellectuals; Artforum and Revival (*Obrodí*); the Independent Students; the Czechoslovak Democratic Initiative; the Independent Peace Association; Open Dialogue; and the Czechoslovak Centre of the PEN Club. Civic Forum also included members of the Socialist and People's Parties, former Communists and current reform

Communists, Catholics like Vaclav Benda and Vaclav Malý, and Thatcherite economists and free marketers like Vaclav Klaus. On 20 November a parallel organisation was founded in Slovakia by the actor Milan Kňažko. This was called the Public Against Violence (*Veřejnost Proti Násilíu, VPV*). Like the Czech organisation it drew support from a wide constituency.

The founding document of Civic Forum linked the crimes of 1968 with the more recent outrage of 17 November. It demanded the immediate resignation of those high ranking Communists who were directly implicated in the 'invitation' to the Warsaw pact armies to intervene in Czechoslovak affairs, and who were responsible for the long dreary years of normalisation. Specifically it named, among others, Gustav Husák, Miloš Jakes, Karel Hoffmann, and Alois Indra. It also demanded the resignations of Miroslav Štěpán, first secretary of Prague city council, and František Kinský, Federal Minister of the Interior, as being responsible for the police action against the students on 17 November; and an official enquiry into the events of that night. Finally, it called for the immediate release of all 'prisoners of conscience'.

Also on that and the following day there was a mass demonstration in Prague of between 150,000 and 200,000 people calling for democratic reforms. The vast majority of the crowd was made up of university and high school students. As they marched past newspaper offices on Wenceslas Square they taunted the journalists for writing lies and demanded an end to censorship. There were protests in other Czech and Slovak cities, including Brno, Olomouc, Ostrava and Bratislava. In response the Czech and Slovak republican governments threatened to 'restore order'.

The velvet revolutionaries now faced a fundamental difficulty. For years the dissident intellectuals who led Civic Forum had been depicted by official propaganda as indolent troublemakers and enemies of the working class. The Forum itself did not have any prominent working class members until the recruitment to the leadership of Petr Miller, an engineering worker, and a miner, Milan Hruška. The revolution could not become more general unless the intellectuals and students attracted the support of the workers. If they failed in this there was a real threat of a 'Chinese solution' in Czechoslovakia. The previous June the Chinese Communist leadership had successfully used an army of peasant and working class conscripts against their own students by propaganda which declared them to be idle drones who were trying to subvert the peasants' and workers' revolution. The Czechoslovak Communist authorities still kept control of television in the provinces, and they were able to prevent the delivery of non-Communist newspapers outside the capital. This effective grip on censorship prevented most urban workers and country people outside Prague from receiving news of the true state of affairs.

Accordingly, from 22 November student agitators were despatched to factories and farms throughout Czechoslovakia to plead for support for their cause. A 'student' delegation was typically made up of one student, one teacher and one actor, though later students went into factories in twos and threes. Naturally enough the management of industrial concerns placed obstacles in the way of the delegations' addressing the workforce, and many workers themselves, while not necessarily hostile to the student demands, were initially reluctant to pledge themselves to strike. Most crucially, however, the majority of factories and other enterprises in the capital decided to join in the general strike on 27 November. Indeed, on 23 November a delegation of 10,000 workers from the gigantic CKD engineering plant joined in a mass demonstration in Prague.

Working-class suspicion of the students was harder to combat in the provinces than in the capital. Student delegations might be arrested by the regional police, held without charge for a number of hours and have their leaflets and other materials confiscated. The authorities were assisted by the widespread assumption that the students were spoilt and privileged loafers who preferred striking to studying. There was also fear of the economic disruption a general strike might entail. Much of this suspicion was allayed when the students, beginning on 23 November, offered to work an eight-hour shift without payment at any enterprise which would take them.

The workers were also reassured by Civic Forum's definition of the general strike. The aim was not economic disruption, but political protest; it would last a mere two hours, to minimise loss of production; and there was nothing to prevent the conscientious from working overtime to make good the loss in production. (In the event, many workers did precisely that.)

Public opinion surveys conducted in November and December 1989 are most illuminating of the concerns of ordinary citizens. (The opinion polls are summarised by Wheaton and Kavan in their study of the velvet revolution.) One set of surveys canvassed views throughout Czechoslovakia on what would most benefit or damage the situation: 88 per cent of those questioned thought that personnel changes in the Communist leadership would benefit the situation; 85 per cent were for working properly and continuing with *perestroika*; 84 per cent for calm and discretion; 81 per cent for negotiation between the authorities and the opposition; and 55 per cent for demonstrating against past policies. On the debit side, 58 per cent thought that strikes would be damaging, 74 per cent thought that crushing the opposition would be harmful, and (interestingly) 59 per cent believed that demonstrating in support of past policies would have a negative effect.

Another survey of a sample of 401 people conducted between 20 and 22 November concerned areas of major social problems. These were ranked

as the environment (a staggering 98 per cent), the economy (92 per cent), the health system (90 per cent), the political system (88 per cent), the quality of senior management (78 per cent), education (76 per cent), public morality (70 per cent), social security (63 per cent), and human rights (58 per cent). Only 47 per cent saw culture as a problematic area, while 49 per cent voted for access to foreign travel and a mere 29 per cent found religious freedom to be an area of major problems.

There were several interesting developments, political and otherwise, before the strike took place. The centre of Prague and other towns was transformed by huge crowds of demonstrators and candles lit in memory of the victims of Communism; a shrine to Jan Palach was created in Wenceslas Square, and old photographs of Dubcek and the Masaryks appeared in shop windows and on the plinths of public monuments. Just as during the invasion of 1968, graffiti and posters abounded. As Jan Urban, who had emerged as a leading spokesman for Civic Forum, told *The New York Times*, 'It's a war on walls'. The street is the voice of the people; proclaimed one slogan. A hand-painted poster in Prague proclaimed, 'The heart of Europe beats again'; 'The truncheon – the beating heart of the Communist party' proclaimed another, while a graffiti in English on a kiosk in Wenceslas Square later declared 'It's Over Czechs Are Free!'. In Bratislava the velvet revolution was as orderly, pacific and dignified as in Prague. At one demonstration a crowd of 80,000 people was orchestrated from the speakers' podium to move back a few paces gently; a woman who lost her purse containing a large sum of money recouped the sum through a spontaneous collection from the crowd. An attempt was made to intimidate the student body of Komensky university when a deputation of four students was summoned to appear before the faculty of 200 staff. The intention was thwarted when the entire faculty applauded the student representatives.

At a rally in Bratislava on 22 November Dubcek made his first public speech in Czechoslovakia in 20 years. The 80,000-strong crowd acclaimed him with great joy as the living embodiment of 'socialism with a human face' and as an outstanding victim of the repression of normalisation. Soon he was on the bus to Prague, to consult with the leaders of Civic Forum. Dubcek embodied the conscious connection people were making between Prague Spring and the velvet revolution. One popular poster showed the number 89 to be merely 68 turned upside down. When a journalist asked Eduard Shevardnadze, Gorbachev's spokesman for foreign affairs, what the difference was between Prague Spring and *perestroika*, he replied 'Twenty years'. On the same day as the Bratislava rally Czechoslovak television workers protested at the biased nature of the reportage of the protests; as a result the censorship broke down, and coverage of the demonstrations was shown.

The Slovak Communist Party was unnerved by the protests. At the demonstration in Bratislava on 22 November news came that the Catholic dissident Jan Carnogursky, who had been held in custody charged with publishing an unofficial journal, had been released without charge. The Slovak party also showed itself willing to negotiate with students at various universities throughout Slovakia.

The release of Carnogursky shows how far and how quickly the world had changed. A defence lawyer since 1970, who dealt mainly with religious and political cases, he lost his right to practice law in 1981 after defending a dissident who had committed the crime of circulating *samizdat* publications. After 1987 he was unable to find employment, in 1988 he joined the Movement for Civil Liberties, and was involved in the cooperative efforts of Czechoslovak and Polish dissidents. Immediately on his release he joined the leadership of Public Against Violence, becoming a spokesman of major stature.

Dubcek made his first public speech in Prague since 1969 on 24 November. Civic Forum had by now taken over the balcony of the *Stobodne Slovo* ('Word of Freedom') newspaper building which looked out on Wenceslas Square. (Presumably the Socialist Party, whose paper *Stobodne Slovo* was, expected to make a little political capital out of this.) Dubcek and Havel both stepped out onto the balcony, receiving a rapturous reception from the crowd below. There was another face – or rather, voice – from 1968. Before the speeches Maria Kubisova, the most memorable singer from Prague Spring, appeared on the balcony and sang, 'The Times They Are A-Changin!'.

That same night the Communist authorities decided to make some changes in official positions. Milos Jakes and the entire presidium of the politburo resigned, or rather, were dismissed by the central committee of the party. Jakes released the reins of power only reluctantly, and not before attempting to fob off party and public opinion by suggesting that only Husak, Alois Indra and Karel Hoffman should have to resign. The personnel changes were not propitious for reform, however. Karel Urbanek, a headline 'normaliser', was appointed general secretary of the party, while Miroslav Stepan, the official who had ordered the police brutality of 17 November, kept his post.

On 25 November the demonstrations had a religious and nationalist flavour. Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek, the Archbishop of Prague, said mass to celebrate the official canonisation of Anezka (Agnes of Bohemia), a medieval Premyslid princess, Franciscan nun and correspondent of Clare of Assisi, who had long been regarded as one of the patron saints of Bohemia. The canonisation had taken place in Rome on 12 November. In an attempt to win the support of Czechoslovak Catholics the Communists sought to associate themselves with this great patriotic event. The canonisation proceedings

and mass in Rome were broadcast on state television, and thousands of Czechoslovak Catholics were allowed to travel to the Eternal City. Miroslav Štepan went so far as to praise Tomasek for his role in the canonisation, evidently hoping to persuade the Cardinal-Archbishop to use his influence with Catholic students and dissidents to avert the general strike. As Štepan was widely and accurately held to be responsible for the police attack on the student demonstrators of 17 November, and as Tomasek was somewhat seasoned in opposition to the regime, these efforts came to naught.

On 25 November tens of thousands of people took part in the Prague celebrations, while millions more saw the mass broadcast on television. Many Catholics from the provinces were in the cathedral in Prague. Afterwards there was a rally of nearly three quarters of a million people on Letná Plain in Prague. Dubcek and Havel were among the speakers. They denounced the recent official changes as cosmetic, and asked their audience to put pressure on the government to accede to the opposition's demands. Urbanek announced that the government was prepared to negotiate with the opposition, while Štepan and other hardline Communists resigned their posts.

Next day government representatives led by Ladislav Adamec, the prime minister, held a meeting with a delegation from Civic Forum led by Havel. They met on ostensibly neutral territory at the municipal house (*obecní dům*), where the document declaring Czechoslovak independence had been signed in 1918. It was almost as if the clocks were running backwards. As recently as September Adamec had referred to Havel as an 'absolute zero'; the irony of their changed circumstances cannot have been lost on at least one of them. Further talks were promised, and both parties addressed the crowd of 500,000 gathered on Letná. Mistrustful of government promises, Civic Forum and Public Against Violence carried on with preparations for the general strike.

That same day, 26 November, Civic Forum also published its manifesto. Entitled 'What We Want', this demanded radical change in the spheres of law, the political system, foreign policy, the economy, social justice, the environment and culture. A new constitution guaranteeing the rights of citizens was called for, along with an independent judiciary. The stifling Communist monopoly of power should be replaced by a fully democratic system, with a plurality of parties having equal rights and standing. Czechoslovakia would remain a federation, but one where both Czechs and Slovaks and the national minorities would have equal rights. In foreign policy Gorbachev's concept of a 'common European home' should take precedence over membership of the Warsaw pact and Comecon. The command economy should be swept away and replaced by a market economy, though the state would still have a role to play. In terms of social justice there should exist a safety net of benefits for

those who needed help, though such a welfare system was predicated on a healthy, growing economy. The environment and the country's natural resources should be protected and cherished, and the structure and aims of industry must be adapted to lower the consumption of raw materials and energy. Finally art, literature and education must be democratised, with full freedom of expression and access to information available to all citizens.

Two days earlier the opposition in Slovakia had published the demands of the Citizens' Initiatives, Public Against Violence and the coordinating committee of Slovak universities. Among their twelve demands were free elections to the Slovak national council or regional parliament and the abolition of the 'leading role' of the Communist Party. They also called for full civil liberties, including freedom of expression, association, assembly, movement and conscience; and the removal of ideology from the educational system and the independence of culture from state control. There were also calls for legal reforms, independent trades unions and an independent student organisation, legalisation of all forms of ownership and the complete separation of church and state. Absolute guarantees were demanded of the right to a healthy environment. Czechoslovakia should be a truly democratic and equal federation, and everyone should have an equal chance both in the elections and in future life.

The general strike took place on Monday, 27 November, between twelve noon and two o'clock. It has been estimated that four-fifths of the population stopped work. Some 38 per cent were on strike for the full two hours; 9 per cent for a shorter time; while 24 per cent showed support for the strike in several ways, such as street demonstrations. Given the widespread fears about the economic impact of the strike, many of its supporters were scrupulous enough to work overtime that evening so as not to lose the two hours' productivity. In towns throughout the land church bells rang, motor horns were sounded, sirens wailed and people rattled their keys to add to the noise. The authorities should have been unnerved, but the confidence engendered by a 40-year monopoly of power was hard to dent. The Communists thought that popular displeasure could be appeased by gestures such as the release of books and films previously suppressed by the censorship.

In reality the Communist Party itself was being undermined by disunity and outright schism. The reform group *Obroda* (Revival) was gaining increasing support, as against the old guard. In addition, a breakaway group of younger members called themselves the Democratic Forum of Communists, their name a transparent attempt to steal Civic Forum's thunder. They demanded a number of basic reforms in their proclamation of 27 November, the very day of the general strike. These included the abolition of the 'leading

role' of the party, the complete political rehabilitation of the victims of normalisation and the formulation of an action programme for the party. Rather belatedly, they condemned the Warsaw pact invasion of 1968.

The Communists generally had lost a valuable weapon against the protesters, in the form of the people's militia. From the early days of the velvet revolution the militia had been something of an uncertain quantity, with militiamen in Prague and Brno effectively ignoring Štěpán's order to mobilise and disperse the students by force. The end came for the militia when law students publicised the fact that, as it had no legal or constitutional standing, individual members could be accountable for their actions before the courts. Thereafter various units of the militia began to dissolve themselves.

Despite all this the party hierarchy thought that the leaders of the protest even now could be bought off with concessions. On 28 November representatives of the government and of Civic Forum met again for discussions. Adamec promised to amend the constitution so as to abolish the 'leading role' of the party by 29 November. A coalition government would be formed by the following Sunday, 3 December. Some concessions were made to the dissidents, but not enough to satisfy them. There were public calls for Husák's resignation as president.

On 29 November Urbanek, the hardline General Secretary, told the central committee of the party that the Communists could no longer hold their monopoly of power. The constitution was debated in the federal assembly. There was an official questioning of the events of 1968, and a commission was formed to investigate the violence of 17 November. The Communist Defence Minister gave a guarantee that there would be no coup by the armed forces, and Adamec proposed negotiations with the Kremlin over the withdrawal of Soviet tanks and troops from Czechoslovak territory. Most chillingly, however, came the revelation that the Communist old guard had considered implementing a 'military solution' against the protesters as late as the previous Friday, 24 November. It was the Minister of Defence, Milan Václavík, who had proposed the use of force in the plenum of the central committee. The proposal was debated and narrowly defeated. Fortunately, too, for the protesters, the chief of staff, General Miroslav Váček, did not exercise the military option. This was all the more important as members of the armed forces took an oath of allegiance, not to the Czechoslovak Republic or to the constitution, but to the Communist Party.

All the manoeuvrings of the Communist authorities were to no avail, however, a true revolution had taken place in political and cultural terms. Wheaton and Kavan in their study of the velvet revolution observe that in the week following the general strike the three main bases of Communist power

had been destroyed. The article of the constitution guaranteeing the 'leading role' of the party had been abrogated by 29 November. The basic party organisations in the workplace were soon dissolved; and Marxism-Leninism was rejected as the official ideology of the Czechoslovak state and as the basis for educational and cultural activity.

The last day of November saw some significant developments. In Prague, representatives of Civic Forum negotiated directly with the Communist Party (in the person of Vasil Mohorita, secretary of the central committee) for the first time. Mohorita was something of an opportunist. As chairman of the Socialist Union of Youth his had been among the first voices to condemn the police violence of 17 November; curiously, he had expressed support for police violence against demonstrators the previous January during 'Palach week'. He had enjoyed substantial popularity during the early days of the student strike, when his official student body was able to give the independent students access to materials and facilities. Suspicion grew, however, that he was planning to use his popular base among the young to further his own ambitions within the party. Indeed, he abandoned the Socialist Union of Youth when it proved to be redundant to the changed situation, and on 26 November was voted one of the new central committee members who replaced Jakes and his associates.

On that same day 30 November, in Bratislava, a delegation from Public Against Violence met with members of the Slovak republican government to discuss leadership changes. It was also announced that the fence along the border between neutral Austria and Communist Czechoslovakia would be dismantled. This frontier and the one with West Germany were actually opened respectively on 17 and 23 December. In a highly symbolic gesture the barbed wire between the states was cut by Jiří Dienstbier, the new non-Communist Foreign Minister, and his Austrian and German counterparts.

Indeed, by the beginning of December it was questionable how long Czechoslovakia would remain Communist. A public opinion survey conducted between 29 November and 1 December concerned the 'leading role of the party'. In the country as a whole only 2 per cent thought that this was very necessary, with 59 per cent finding it unnecessary. In the city of Prague the proportions were respectively 1 per cent and 71 per cent.

In a desperate attempt to gain some credibility, the Czechoslovak Communist party met on 1 December to denounce the invasion of 1968. In a press communiqué Mohorita declared that 'the entry onto our territory of five armies of the Warsaw pact in 1968 was not justified, and the decision to do so was wrong'. At the same time Gorbachev admitted that the Prague Spring had grown out of a yearning for democracy, and three days later the Soviet Union

and its allies in the 1968 invasion condemned their own actions at a Warsaw pact meeting in Moscow attended by Adamec and Urbanek.

Meanwhile on the weekend of 2-3 December the Malta summit took place, with Gorbachev holding talks with the United States President George Bush. Change was patently in the international air; yet the Czechoslovak politburo thought it could still cling to power by making a few minor concessions to the opposition. On Sunday 3 December the politburo announced the formation of a new provisional government for Czechoslovakia, with a mere five out of 20 ministerial posts being allotted to non-Communists. This was quite unacceptable to Civic Forum, who called for demonstrations for the next day and a general strike on the following Monday. President Husak refused to resign his office, though later that same day hinted that he might.

On Monday 4 December demonstrations took place in Prague and other towns, and Czechoslovakia quite literally roared its anger at the inadequacy of the proposed governmental changes. It was felt to be outrageous that 1.6 million Communists in the country should be represented by 15 ministers while the remaining 14.5 million of the population had to make do with five. (Times, indeed, had changed rapidly.) 'Five new ministers, 15 merry old men, quipped one poster, while another derisively quoted Lenin in 1917, 'No support for the provisional government! Hundreds of thousands of citizens joined in a rally on Wenceslas Square. Here Civic Forum demanded the dismissal of all compromised parliamentary deputies, including Vasil Bilak and Alois Indra, who had 'invited' the 'fraternal assistance' of the Warsaw pact armies in 1968, and Vaclav David, Novotny's former foreign minister. ('Send them to work!' chanted the crowd.) The Forum also demanded the formation of a more representative government, and free elections by June 1990.

The very next day there was a cabinet reshuffle, which resulted in the Communist ministers being outnumbered 9:8. Negotiations took place between Adamec, the Prime Minister, and a number of opposition groups, including Civic Forum, Public Against Violence, 'Revival' (*Obrada*) and the parties formerly in the national front with the Communists. Adamec was given an ultimatum to form a new government by next Sunday, or face the threatened general strike on Monday; the eminent economist Valtr Komarek, a prominent member of Civic Forum and shortly to be a deputy prime minister, observed that the government needed a higher IQ. Meanwhile the commission investigating the police violence of 17 November recommended that both Stepan and Jakes be ejected from the federal assembly, and thus lose their parliamentary immunity from prosecution. The Czechoslovak Communist Party also announced that rehabilitation proceedings would take place for the half a million party members purged in the wake of the Warsaw

pact invasion. These were somewhat desperate measures, as that same day Civic Forum submitted a new draft constitution.

The next few days saw the momentum of the velvet revolution increase. On 6 December the trade unions announced their political independence from the old Communist Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, and a congress of independent unionists was planned for January 1990. On the same day a reshuffle of the cabinet of the Czech republic put the non-Communists in a majority. On 7 December Adamec resigned, to be replaced by the deputy premier Marian Calfa, a Slovak Communist. Negotiations between the government and Civic Forum continued through the night, and on 8 December it was announced that half the ministerial posts in the new Czechoslovak government would be filled by non-Communists. President Husak, already contemplating retirement, announced an amnesty for political prisoners; possibly this was intended to sweeten his memory once he had departed from power.

Indeed, increasing pressure was put on Husak to resign the presidency, and Vaclav Havel expressed a reluctant willingness to succeed him. Husak announced his decision to resign on 9 December. The new president was to be elected by the federal assembly, and Civic Forum put forward Havel as its candidate.

Husak finally resigned as president on Sunday 10 December, immediately after swearing in the new Czechoslovak government. His feelings can be imagined; he had to accord government posts to despised dissidents, some of them fresh from prison. Be that as it may, this 'government of national understanding' contained a decided minority of Communists, (ten out of 21 ministers), though Calfa was reappointed prime minister; he and two other government members, Valtr Komarek and Vladimir Dlouhy, would soon leave the party.

Of the non-Communist ministers there were two members of the People's (Catholic) Party, two Czech Socialists, and seven without party affiliation. The new deputy premier was Jan Carnogursky, the Slovak Catholic dissident and campaigner for human rights, while Komarek was one of three ministers in charge of internal affairs. Jiri Dienstbier, longstanding dissident and Chartist, became Foreign Minister; the look on his face at the swearing-in ceremony was one of delighted and disbelieving wonder, though immediately afterwards he rushed back to his boiler-stoker's job. (After all, the economy was still in crisis, and the velvet revolutionaries were anxious to avoid the impairment of productivity.) There was a huge and triumphant rally in Wenceslas Square. The next day throughout the country there was a five-minute demonstration of popular satisfaction; church bells were rung, motor horns sounded, and there was the by now familiar key-jangling.

The political struggle now centred on the presidency of Czechoslovakia. On Tuesday 12 December the Communist party proposed an amendment

to the constitution which would provide for the election of the president by nationwide ballot. Apparently and despite all the recent changes the Communists thought they could still command a majority in the country as a whole, as they assumed that outside Prague dissidents like Havel were little known and not at all trusted. That same day, however, the Czechoslovak Public Opinion Institute published the results of a poll. This showed that Civic Forum had the trust of 75 per cent of those questioned, while the Communist Party only retained the trust of 16 per cent. As far as the presidency went, Havel had 18 per cent of popular support, far more than any other candidate. It seemed that by Wednesday 13 December the matter of the presidency had been settled. All parties agreed that the election should take place before the end of January, and that the new incumbent would be a Czech and not a Communist. The following day, however, negotiations between Civic Forum and the Communists were in chaos, as the right wing of the party denounced the previous day's decision as invalid and requiring the ratification of the party congress, scheduled to meet in a week's time.

There were a number of potential presidential candidates besides Havel. The Communists fielded Ladislav Adamec, so lately prime minister, while the moribund Socialist Union of Youth nominated Cestmír Cisar, a reform Communist in Dubček's government and one of the students' heroes in 1968. Alexander Dubček himself was the candidate of the central committee of the national front of the Slovak republic.

There had been popular cries of 'Dubček to the castle!' (the seat of the president) on his first reappearance in Prague, and it seems highly probable that the father of Prague Spring himself entertained presidential ambitions. Certainly, the Communists hoped to exploit differences within the opposition to ensure the election of one of their own. Dubček, however, played an important role in preserving the national unity of Czechs and Slovaks. Even during the velvet revolution there was suspicion in Slovakia of the intentions of Prague. The leaders of Civic Forum were unknown to Slovaks and suspected as opportunists and troublemakers. This is why it was crucial that Dubček should go to Prague to appear with the Forum's leaders and to represent the Slovaks in their counsels.

By 16 December Dubček and Havel had come to an arrangement, and it was announced that Havel would stand for president with Dubček 'at his side'. Acutely aware of Slovak grievances, Havel declared that he would only stand for president on condition that no attempt was made to divide either himself from Dubček or Czechs from Slovaks when it came to the election. At the same time Civic Forum demanded that the election take place before Christmas, and that the ballot should be televised.

All in all, the writing was on the wall for Communist parties throughout the former Soviet bloc. On 18 December the first incredible news trickled through of protests and riots in Rumania; this was the prelude to the fall of Ceausescu. That same day it was announced that Ceaușescu and Dăncuș would go to Moscow to negotiate the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovak soil. On 19 December Ceaușescu announced fundamental changes in government policy; the security forces were to be disbanded, and Czechoslovakia would join the world economy once more. In other words, the failed command economy was to be abandoned, and free market policies adopted. Ceaușescu also announced that Havel was the only possible future president, and that his candidature had the government's endorsement.

On 20 December 50,000 people demonstrated against Ceausescu in Timisoara, and the Lithuanian Communists severed their links with the Soviet party. In Prague, the Communist Party congress went ahead, and desperately tried to cope with the revolutionary situation by tinkering with the party structure. The office of general secretary was abolished and replaced by two 'new' posts, Adamec was elected as party chairman and Mohorita as first secretary. People murmured about old wine in new wineskins.

The final events of the velvet revolution unfolded with scant reference to the old normalising Czechoslovak Communists. On 28 December the hitherto compliant federal assembly was reconstituted, with a number of deputies being compelled to resign and members of the opposition being co-opted to take their places. That such a reform was necessary was shown by television broadcasts and still photographs of the constitutional debate on the 'leading role' of the party. Many of the deputies looked nervous or bewildered, while some of the more eminent members of the party hierarchy actually slept through it all; a fitting metaphor for the Communists' loss of power, initiative and even sense of reality. Alexander Dubček was elected chairman of the federal assembly by that body (now a body with rather more teeth than the one he had chaired back in 1969), and was awarded the Andrei Sakharov prize for human rights by the European parliament.

The following day Vaclav Havel became the first democratic, non-Communist president of Czechoslovakia since the death of Edvard Beneš in 1948. He was elected unanimously by the 323 deputies of the federal assembly. He made a short, dignified speech to a crowd assembled outside Prague castle in which he promised not to betray the people's confidence and to lead the country to free elections. His own electoral victory was marked by a *Te Deum* and mass celebrated by Cardinal Tomášek. After all the vicissitudes of Czechoslovak history it seemed that truth had at last prevailed.

Epilogue: 1992 The Velvet Divorce

In December 1989 Czechoslovakia was swept by an understandable wave of euphoria. Communism had collapsed and, as in the days of Masaryk, a philosopher was once more president of the Republic. Yet at midnight on 31 December 1992 the country divided into its constituent parts, the Czech lands and Slovakia. The reasons for this 'velvet divorce' were ethnic, economic and political.

As president, Vaclav Havel deliberately modelled himself on Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, as a figure of high moral authority who embodied the democratic ideals and traditions of Czechoslovakia. (He even went to the lengths of taking riding lessons, so as to be able to imitate the dignified figure of the President Liberator on horseback.) Havel enjoyed enormous personal popularity. Opinion polls conducted in February and in April-May 1990 into public confidence showed that a staggering 88 per cent of respondents expressed their trust in him.

In terms of foreign policy orientation Havel and his Foreign Minister Dienstbier promoted a 'return to Europe'. What this actually meant was a return to Edvard Benes' vision of Czechoslovakia as a bridge between East and West. It was noteworthy that the new president did not visit Moscow until February 1990, when he also went to Washington. His earliest journeys abroad had been to Poland, Hungary, and both East and West Germany. While in Moscow he negotiated the treaty for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia; this was achieved by May 1991.

The 'government of national understanding' which had taken office on 10 December 1989 at the climax of the velvet revolution was to stay in place until parliamentary elections could be held, in June 1990. Not having been democratically elected, it was a provisional or 'caretaker' government. Its provisional character was shared by the federal assembly and by the republican governments of the Czech lands and Slovakia. Even so, these new executive and legislative authorities could be said to govern by popular mandate, since

opinion polls held in late January 1990 showed a high level of satisfaction with developments (86 per cent) and of support for the proposed social and economic reforms (84 per cent).

The new government and legislature faced a plethora of economic, social and political problems inherited from the corrupt and inept Communist regime. Chief among these was the environment which, as has been noted, was regarded by many Czechoslovak citizens as a more pressing problem than even the economy. In the first six months of non-Communist government considerable attempts were made to tackle all these issues.

A mass of legislation was passed to rectify the wrongs of the Communist era and to regulate positions of state. Laws which legalised freedom of assembly, the press and of petition effectively brought an end to censorship, and the death penalty was abolished. The need for educational reform was addressed. New laws increased the autonomy of universities and the authority of student organisations. Postgraduate studies were reformed along Western lines, and restrictions on foreign travel were lifted.

Legislation was also passed to regulate political life. The electoral law greatly reduced the number of parties that had mushroomed after the velvet revolution by stipulating that parties could only participate in elections if they had 10,000 members. Parties would only gain seats in parliament if they polled 5 per cent of the vote in one of the two republics.

Economic reform was obviously high on the list of priorities of the 'government of national understanding'. The team of experts which had to consider these issues was led by Valtr Komarek, a deputy prime minister and former head of the Institute for Economic Forecasting; Vladimir Dlouhy, also a deputy prime minister and head of the State Planning Commission; and Vaclav Klaus, the Minister of Finance. All these were agreed on the desirability of a transition to a market economy; where they disagreed was on the speed of the proposed reforms. Klaus, a neo-liberal and admirer of Margaret Thatcher, favoured a rapid transition, the 'cold sharp shock' treatment of the economy. Komarek, on the other hand, felt that too swift a change would result in 'economic agony'. The issue was muddled by the fact that many Czechoslovaks (and indeed, former denizens of Communist Europe generally) believed that a completely free market was compatible with guaranteed full employment. By the time of the June elections, however, it was clear that Klaus and the radicals had won the economic argument.

Privatisation of state property would take place in two stages. Small businesses such as restaurants would be sold to private owners first. Larger state enterprises would be disposed of by a system of vouchers, chiefly distributed to their employees, which could be used to buy shares. The budget of March

1990 successfully turned a huge deficit into a surplus. It reduced subsidies to state enterprises by 10 per cent, cut defence spending by 12.5 per cent, and price and wage subsidies by 14 per cent. In addition, Czechoslovakia withdrew from Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance).

The legacy of mistrust bequeathed by the Communists to Czechoslovakia was the most harmful, and is discussed below; but there were some other dark bequests, too. Under Communism there had been comparatively little non-political crime; not because of any innate virtue in the authoritarian system, but simply because, as many Czechoslovaks felt, the entire country was a prison. Naturally enough, when the fear and restrictions imposed by the Husak regime were lifted, incidences of crime increased markedly. This was particularly so in Prague, which experienced a huge influx of foreign visitors from December 1989. These tourists and other travellers, being blessed with hard currency, were comparatively wealthy and so naturally a temptation to petty criminals, from pickpockets to money-changers and other fraudsters.

In the eyes of the Czechoslovak public, however, there were two sources of blame for the perceived 'crime wave'. One was President Havel, who by his amnesty for about 25,000 prisoners had emptied the gaols, not just of prisoners of conscience, but of common criminals. (That such a perception was false, or at least exaggerated, goes without saying.) The other chief fount of criminality was felt to be the Roma (Gypsy) community.

This brings us to another pernicious aspect of the Communist legacy. Far from seriously attempting to inculcate transnational proletarian brotherhood and thus obviate ethnic conflict, the Communist regime had merely suppressed all manifestations of tension. The Roma were and are a small but highly visible minority, less than 1 per cent of the population. The Communists had made little effort to integrate them into the national community and had allowed them to remain under-educated. They were obvious targets for an emergent racism, and scapegoats for the increase in crime. Otherwise intelligent and well-educated people would state in all seriousness that the Roma were responsible for between 90 and 99 per cent of all crime. In reality, they were responsible for 7.5 per cent of crime over all, and about 15 per cent of street crime.

Another target for racism was the foreign guest workers and students, chiefly Vietnamese, who had been invited by the Communists to reside in Czechoslovakia in the interests of international proletarian comradeship and cheap labour. Individuals now openly became victims of racial attack and abuse, while a large-scale race riot, mainly involving working class skinheads, erupted in Prague in May 1990. This was directed against both guest workers

and Roma, and was a source of shame and embarrassment to the authorities. Plainly, the work of creating a civil society would not be an easy task.

Military reform and reductions in defence expenditure were essential if Havel was to implement his foreign policy of a 'return to Europe'. The army was no longer to be called the 'people's army', and military service was reduced from two years to 18 months. Conscientious objectors now had the option of civilian service, and women were no longer to be conscripted in peacetime, though they might volunteer for military service. The army was no longer to be used in agriculture and industry, and political activity within the armed forces was prohibited. Finally, the role of the armed forces in internal security was to be limited.

Indeed, one of the most pernicious aspects of the Communist legacy to Czechoslovakia was paradoxically a lack of security and mistrust. The StB or state security police was abolished at the end of January 1990, but its end was not clean and in fact stirred up a lot of mud. Though the secret police had only numbered some 8000 members, still it had been assisted and supported by a mass of paid informants from all walks of life and all regions of the Republic. It seems probable that as many as 140,000 out of a population of 15 million informed for the security police. The StB had infiltrated all official organisations and even some dissident circles, and after its abolition something of a witch-hunt began. The first political scandal of post-Communist Czechoslovakia was known as 'Sachergate'.

Richard Sacher, a Catholic and member of the People's Party, was Minister of the Interior and charged with abolishing the StB and investigating the past actions of its members. There was a public outcry when it was discovered that officers dismissed from state security were to be paid for a further six months. (The argument that these men were guaranteed severance pay by law was received with some scepticism.) Suspicion grew that Sacher was dragging his feet in the matter of the secret police and in the purge of his own ministry.

The Sachergate scandal really broke in April, with the first stage of *lustrace*. This 'lustration' or cleansing originally involved screening the past careers of officials and candidates to ensure that they were not tainted by any dealings with the secret police. Information was leaked by some of Sacher's subordinates about a Civic Forum official who was critical of Sacher and his doings. It was alleged that this man, Oldrich Hromadko, had worked as a guard at the notorious uranium mines in the 1950s. The Forum observed that such accusations had been made against Hromadko in the 1960s but had not been proved.

Suspicion grew that the 'exposure' of Hromadko was nothing more than a political tactic intended to discredit the Forum before the parliamentary elections. The People's Party, though lately made respectable again, had for

decades been one of the Communists' partners in the bogus national front; it was suspected that Šachar would be glad to create a little dust about members of the government and federal assembly in order to cover his own and his party's tracks. In the event a compromise was reached, by which Šachar would remain in office until the elections in June.

In April 1990 the Sokol affair showed that the Communist Party itself was still widely distrusted, and that fears continued that it would seek to destroy the newly reclaimed Czechoslovak democracy. Tomáš Sokol, the Prague state prosecutor, sent a letter to the central committee of the party which was soon after reported in the press. In this letter Sokol warned the Communists that their affairs would be subject to strict investigation under the article of the penal code that prohibited all activities which aimed to propagate fascism. He argued that in its suppression of political and personal liberties and inability to tolerate any opposition once in power, the Communist Party was anti-democratic and indeed, closely resembled a fascist organisation.

Sokol's attack on the Communists received widespread press and public support, and there were calls for the abolition of the party, confiscation of its property and investigation of its personnel. On the other hand, the state prosecutor's office distanced itself from what it took to be Sokol's personal view, and Civic Forum was equivocal in its reaction. While the leadership supported Sokol's right to interpret the law as he saw fit, they chose to believe that he was warning the Communists about future acts of illegality rather than threatening the party with dissolution. At the grass roots level, however, many local branches of the Forum espoused Sokol's viewpoint. On 11 April 1990 there was a general strike to demand the confiscation of Communist Party property which received a significant level of public support.

Perhaps surprisingly, the former dissidents who had suffered under the Communist regime were more forgiving about the past than the man and woman in the street. Jan Urban spoke of the compromises which every citizen had had to make in the Communist era. President Havel himself said that all Czechoslovak citizens, dissidents and conformists alike, were guilty of colluding in their own oppression simply by having existed under Communism. His generosity in associating himself with the collective 'guilt' did not, however, find an echo in public opinion.

In the event, the Communist Party survived to participate in the first free elections in June 1990. The party adopted as its new emblem a pair of cherries; opposition election propaganda depicted these as outwardly sound and sweet, but rotten inside.

The elections resulted in indisputable victory for Civic Forum in the Czech lands and Public Against Violence in Slovakia. Over 96 per cent of the

electorate turned out; 53.15 per cent of Czechs voted for Civic Forum, and 32.4% of Slovaks for Public Against Violence. Surprisingly, the Communists emerged as the second strongest party, gaining more than 13 per cent in both the republics. In Slovakia, the Christian Democratic Union came third in the elections, while the Slovak National Party gained 10 per cent of the vote.

The Czechs and Slovaks, unlike the peoples of the former Yugoslavia, had no history of violent conflict or atrocities committed against each other. True, residual bitterness existed among Czechs about Slovak behaviour during World War II, though this was in part offset by the heroism of the Slovak national uprising of 1944. Each nation, however, had perceptions about itself and the other which were causes of disagreement, and even grievance.

Part of this goes back to the very concept of 'Czechoslovakism' as propagated by T.G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and other luminaries of the First Republic. In theory, and according to the constitution, there was one Czechoslovak nation, and the official language of the state was Czechoslovak. Although the Slovaks had been led to expect some form of autonomy within the Republic, their political inexperience and the comparative backwardness of their region had made this impractical.

In their negotiations with President Beneš during and after the war Slovak politicians tried to advance the notion of two nations, Czech and Slovak, and to use this as a basis for arguing for autonomy or federation. Such a theory fitted neither with Beneš' profound and pragmatic Czechoslovakism, nor, later, with the Communists' centralising policy.

Nonetheless, one of the few enduring reforms of the Prague Spring was the federalisation of the Republic, effective from January 1969. On paper at least, this new constitution delegated a fair amount of power to the Czech and Slovak republican governments, though amendments introduced in 1971, particularly in the economic sphere, tended to reduce their freedom of action. Besides the governments of the two republics, there was a federal assembly for the whole state. This was bicameral, composed of a chamber of the people with 200 members and a chamber of the nations with 150 deputies. The members of the former chamber were chosen on the basis of population, those of the latter divided equally between Czechs and Slovaks. This apparent fairness was largely cosmetic, however. The federal assembly was largely symbolic in nature, meeting infrequently to approve decisions already taken by the Communist party and government.

Very soon after the velvet revolution Slovak grievances surfaced in the so-called 'hyphen debate'. In his new year speech for 1990 President Havel proposed changing the name of the country to remove the word 'Socialist' from between 'Czechoslovak' and 'Republic'. Immediately this triggered a debate

among Slovak politicians and public about the 'visibility' of Slovakia. This tended to be obscured by the hybrid name of the country, and indeed, many foreigners said 'Czech' when they meant 'Czechoslovak'. It was therefore proposed that the name of the country be hyphenated, to become 'Czechoslovakia'.

This caused an outcry from the Czechs. Not only could they not see what was so upsetting to the Slovaks: the proposed hyphenation of the country brought back bitter memories of that other 'Czechoslovakia', the truncated Second Republic which had led a pitiful existence between the Munich agreement and the dismemberment of the country in March 1939. After much heated discussion a somewhat ungainly compromise was reached. Both names would be legal, and the Republic was called 'Czechoslovakia' by Czechs and 'Czechoslovakia' by Slovaks.

After the elections of June 1990 both Civic Forum and Public Against Violence, originally formed as umbrella organisations for various kinds of dissent, began to break down into their constituent parts. In October 1990 Vaclav Klaus was elected chairman of Civic Forum, and differences between his conservative group and the more liberal wing associated with Havel, Dientsbier and other former dissidents deepened. In February 1991 there was a formal separation between the Civic Movement and Klaus' Civic Democratic Party, though the two were still loosely united by a coordinating body.

At roughly the same time, divisions within Public Against Violence resulted in a schism. Conflict between supporters of Fedor Gal, head of the organisation, and Vladimir Meciar, the Slovak Prime Minister, resulted in the latter breaking away to form the Movement for Democratic Slovakia in March 1991. The following month Meciar and some of his supporters were removed from the Slovak government after allegations of dubious actions while Minister of the Interior, including military talks with the red army. Meciar was replaced as premier by the Christian Democrat Jan Carnogursky.

Both parts of the country were increasingly plagued by disunity and perceived national grievance. For the Czechs, the chairman of the federal assembly, Jan Kalvoda, was outspoken about the economic benefits of a 'divorce' from the Slovaks. Separatism even loomed in Moravia-Silesia, whose political representatives seemed uncertain whether they wanted autonomy or outright independence.

For the Slovaks, there were two main concerns, *lustrace* and the pace of economic change. In Slovakia the reforms of 1968 were valued: in the Czech republic they were increasingly depicted as the result of a quarrel between Communists. Dubcek himself, the father of Prague Spring, was denounced by Czech deputies in the federal assembly for his Communist past. (Interestingly,

Marian Calfa, who had been a Communist during the Brezhnev era and beyond, was not.) In economic terms the Slovaks were concerned that the 'sharp shock' treatment advocated by Klaus and the radicals would result in social injustice, with the more vulnerable members of society left unprotected from the cold blast of free market forces.

As far as Czechs and Slovaks were concerned, old attitudes persisted; the Czechs thought that they were still 'paying for Slovakia', as they had done since the days of the First Republic; the Slovaks felt that their country was still exploited and 'invisible'. Even so, opinion polls from 1991-92 show that there was little public support for an outright 'divorce'. Sovereignty was debated and rejected in Slovakia on four occasions between 1990 and 1992. Part of the problem lay in the use of terminology; for many nationalists and politicians, 'sovereignty' meant the same as 'autonomy', while the word 'federalisation' had multiple meanings.

The divorce between Czechs and Slovaks was brought about and negotiated by the politicians, chiefly (though not exclusively) Klaus and Meciar, whose parties had emerged as the victors in the 1992 elections in their respective parts of the country. Klaus saw Slovakia as an impediment to his plans for rapid and radical economic reform; Meciar's contradictory rhetoric makes it hard to discern what his aims were, though personal ambition seems to have been his main motor. Whatever the case, it seems that in the increasingly confrontational negotiations Meciar threatened Klaus with secession, and Klaus called his bluff.

Masaryk's Czechoslovakia came to an end at the stroke of midnight on 31 December 1992. Both of the new Republics, Czech and Slovak, would continue to struggle with economic and environmental problems, as well as social issues such as the rise of racism. Both, too, would have to confront and deal with the Communist past. Yet Masaryk's legacy of humanitarian democracy is perhaps reflected in the very nature of the demise of his state. For Czechs and Slovaks there would be no fratricidal war, as in Yugoslavia, but a velvet and quite amicable divorce. In that sense, perhaps the motto of Jan Hus and of the First Republic had proved veracious.