14 The Gray Years

As a purely military exercise, Operation Danube was a resounding success. If armed force is supposed to be deployed for political ends, however, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia was at best only a qualified success, and only in the long run. In the short run it was a political disaster. The invasion masqueraded as "fraternal assistance" to Czechoslovak party officials who had appealed to the Soviet Union, with the support of the "healthy elements of the working masses." In fact, in a breathtaking display of national unity and resolve, ordinary Czechs and Slovaks met the invasion with nonviolent resistance on a scale that excited admiration the world over. In the days after August 21, none of the signers of the secret letter of invitation was willing publicly to assume the role of a Czechoslovak Kádár, and plans to install a new government had to be dropped. Instead, the Soviet leaders found themselves negotiating with the people they had invaded the country to overthrow. Eventually Dubček's team returned to their posts, but under military occupation and Soviet pressure there was little they could do to prevent the destruction of the Czechoslovak experiment in "socialism with a human face."

THE ONSET OF NORMALIZATION

The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia was the largest military operation in Europe since World War II, involving more than half a million soldiers, over 6,000 tanks, 800 airplanes, and some 2,000 artillery pieces, double the force used to crush the Hungarian revolution of 1956.[1] Entering the country by land and air, the invaders quickly neutralized the Czechoslovak army—which had received orders not to resist in any case—and seized their major objectives.[2] By the end of August 21, Czechoslovakia was in Soviet hands.

The Failure of Force

The invasion was planned to coincide with the usual KSČ Presidium meeting, scheduled for August 20. Bil'ak's hardline group planned to introduce a resolution of no-confidence in Dubček. If everything had gone as planned, the Presidium would have approved the intervention and announced a ''Revolutionary Government of Workers and Peasants.'' Dubček stuck with the prepared agenda, however, which left Bil'ak's motion for later discussion. As a result, when news began to reach the Presidium about the invasion late on the night of August 20, heated arguments were still raging. Instead of approving Bil'ak's motion, the Presidium adopted a statement condemning the intervention as a contravention of ''all principles governing relations between socialist states,'' and a violation of ''the fundamental provisions of international law.''[3]

Czechoslovak Radio broadcast the Presidium's statement, and it was published the next day. A flood of denunciations of the invasion followed, from such institutions as the National Assembly, the trade union organization, the Academy of Sciences, the Czechoslovak Union of Journalists, the Prague city organization of the KSČ, and others. The Soviet news agency countered with a statement (broadcast by the occupiers on their station, Radio Vltava) claiming that Czechoslovak ''party and government figures'' had asked the USSR and its allies for ''immediate fraternal assistance,'' against ''counter-revolutionary forces'' and ''external powers hostile to socialism.''[4] The Czechoslovak declarations reinforced public opposition and gave the lie to the Soviet proclamation.

Bil'ak's failure on August 20–21 complicated the political progress of the invasion. The Soviets rounded up Dubček, Smrkovský, Černík,

and František Kriegel, and spirited them out of the country. Fearing the attitude of the Czechoslovak people, the party hardliners hesitated to organize a collaborationist government. In mass demonstrations, as well as in spontaneous acts of wit and will, removing street names, house numbers, telephone books, or anything else that could help the occupiers locate their targets or control communications, the people expressed support for Dubček and his team. After their initial outrage, the public avoided all contact with the invaders, as expressed in the new-style Ten Commandments: "I don't know, I'm not acquainted, I won't tell, I don't have, I don't know how, I won't give, I cannot, I won't sell, I won't show, I won't do."[5] Czechs and Slovaks put their compulsory Russian study to use, arguing with the occupation soldiers and covering Prague and other towns with inscriptions and posters in Russian. Some reports claimed that the front-line troops had to be withdrawn and replaced with more reliable elements after a few days of such psychological warfare.[6]

The media, especially radio, supported the public's nonviolent but far from passive resistance. After the Soviets seized Czechoslovak Ra-

Soviet soldiers listen to Czech protests on Prague's streets, August 21, 1968. (ČTK photo)

dio's headquarters, broadcasters went underground, using regional broadcasting networks and systems prepared for civil defense. Underground newspapers also sprang up to challenge the occupiers' *Zprávy* (News). The free media played a key role in encouraging the people, publicizing foreign and domestic reactions to the invasion, calling for calm or summoning people to specific protest actions as necessary.[7]

A culminating act of defiance was the hasty convoking, under the nose of the occupying forces, of the Extraordinary Fourteenth Party Congress, which gathered in the ČKD works in Vysočany the day after the invasion. The Prague party organization summoned the delegates via clandestine radio broadcasts, and over 1,200 (more than half of the full complement) arrived. The Congress repudiated the ''fraternal assistance'' and demanded the immediate release of the interned government and party leaders. It called for a one-hour general strike the next day, and appealed to the world's communist parties for their support. Delegates elected a new, reformist Central Committee, with Dubček unanimously returned as party First Secretary.[8]

The total failure of the plan for a collaborationist government emerged during meetings called by Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko at the Soviet Embassy in Prague on August 22. The pro-Moscow leaders held a second meeting in the president's office in the Castle late that evening, at which Svoboda declared his willingness to go to Moscow to negotiate the return of the detained Czechoslovak leaders. Svoboda defended this as a tactical move, pointing out that Dubček and his supporters could be dismissed after they returned.[9] The Soviets had no acceptable alternative to discussions with the very leadership they had set out to remove.

Dubček Dismantles His Own Reform

After the invasion, Dubček and the other captured leaders were held incommunicado by the KGB, first in Poland and then in Ukraine. They reached Moscow on August 23, unaware that Svoboda's group had also arrived. Brezhnev and Kosygin tried to convince Dubček to accept the intervention, but he refused.[10] Dubček did not speak with the Soviet leaders again until August 26, but already on August 23 the Soviets held talks with Svoboda's delegation. They accepted Svoboda's demand that Dubček's team be returned, but insisted on repudiating the Fourteenth Party Congress. Kosygin spoke ominously of a ''civil war'' for which

Dubček and the other Czechoslovak leaders would be solely responsible.[11] Talks continued on August 26, this time including the imprisoned reformers (except Kriegel, who refused to participate) and more newly arrived Czechoslovak leaders, most of them hardliners. Angrily Brezhnev and Kosygin dismissed Dubček's and Černík's criticism of the invasion, and insisted on an agreement.

The Moscow Protocol was eventually signed on August 26, 1968, after negotiations in which the Soviets held every trump. The Czechoslovak side won some verbal concessions, but the fifteen-point document annulled the Extraordinary Fourteenth Party Congress, it promised to reimpose censorship and purge the party and state offices, it promised that there would be no reprisals against supporters of the invasion, and most significantly it made no mention of a timetable for troop withdrawals. Thus, although Dubček and his allies returned to their positions, the Moscow Protocol established a basis for achieving the political aim of the intervention: removing Dubček and dismantling the reform program.[12]

As they returned to Czechoslovakia on August 27, the party leaders stressed the need for unity and order. They presented the Moscow agreement in the best possible light, while keeping the full text secret. Dubček and Svoboda addressed the nation on the radio on the day of their return. President Svoboda spoke briefly, admitting that the last few days "have not been easy either for us or for you," and calling on the people to recognize the "political reality" of the occupation forces until conditions had become "normalized."[13] Dubček spoke several hours later, to an expectant audience. His words were heartfelt, broken by long pauses while he wrestled with his emotions, but his message was not reassuring. What Czechoslovakia needed, he said, was rapid "consolidation and normalization of conditions," a prerequisite for any change in the occupation. Dubček called on the people to show realism, "even if we have to carry out some temporary measures, limiting the degree of democracy and the freedom of speech that we have already achieved."[14] This was a call for the people to continue trusting their leaders, while also accepting the loss—temporarily, they were assured—of key aspects of the reforms.

Over the next two days, Černík and Smrkovský also addressed the public. Both emphasized order, discipline, and realism. Smrkovský in particular spoke plainly about the negotiations, called the "fraternal assistance" an occupation, and drew historical parallels: "Such things have happened more than once in Czech and Slovak history, and actually this

is the second time it has happened in this century.'' The comparison to the Nazi occupation was obvious.[15]

In spite of this bitter pill, the population stayed remarkably united behind its leaders. Public opinion polls from September 1968 showed more than 90 percent of the people affirming their ''complete confidence'' in Svoboda, Dubček, Černík, and Smrkovský. They also supported preserving the Action Program and the post-January policies, expecting only minor changes. Even in Slovakia over 90 percent of the people rejected a return to the situation under Novotný.[16] However reluctantly, most Czechs and Slovaks conceded that there was little alternative to the results of Moscow. Hoping that Dubček and the other leaders would honor their people's trust in them, they ended their week of nonviolent resistance.

The immediate sacrifices paid for the leaders' return seemed bearable: KAN and K231 were closed down, control over the media tightened, and the Fourteenth Party Congress, which had concluded its work in one dramatic day, August 22, was declared invalid. Considering the conditions, it truly was ''extraordinary,'' but it was—unavoidably—attended mostly by delegates from the Czech lands. Thus the separate congress of the Slovak party, scheduled for August 26, assumed great importance. It began the day before the delegation returned from Moscow, and at first approved the actions of the congress in Prague. Then Husák arrived. While calling the previous eight months ''a great and bright period in the development of our party and our peoples,'' Husák insisted that the Vysočany congress could not be recognized because it lacked Slovak representation. In the end, the Slovak congress confirmed Husák as KSS secretary-general and disavowed the Fourteenth Party Congress. Nevertheless, Husák reaffirmed his support for Dubček, saying ''either I will back him, or I will leave.''[17]

In Prague on August 31, the plenum of the Central Committee of the KSČ ''postponed'' the Fourteenth Party Congress, leaving a final decision on a new date to the Presidium. It also approved several changes in the makeup of the top party organs and the government, changes that seemed to leave the reformers strengthened. The plenum itself had been enlarged by coopting many of the delegates to the Fourteenth Congress. The new presidium and secretariat sacrificed the most prominent reformists; Hájek, Šik, and others left the government; and the heads of Czechoslovak Radio and Television were also dropped. Yet the dogmatic hardliners saw their representation shrink too, while the

Presidium included thirteen members, and the Central Committee forty-eight, who had been elected to the same posts by the Vysočany congress.[18]

This qualified collaboration incensed the Soviets, but they pursued a long-term strategy spelled out in a meeting of the ''Five'' in Moscow on August 27. Their priority was to ''break the resistance of Dubček'' to normalization. A steady barrage of hostile press criticism focused on Dubček and Černík, accompanied by frequent demands that the most high profile reformists should be dropped. Meanwhile the Soviets searched for ''realists'' who would abandon the attempt to save the ''post-January course.'' The Soviets counted on the influence of their occupying armies, so ensuring a permanent Soviet military presence was a key Soviet goal, one that simultaneously further undermined Dubček.[19]

At the beginning of October, the Soviet leaders met in Moscow with Dubček, Černík, and Husák, to discuss the ''temporary'' stationing of Soviet armed forces in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovaks were forced to accept a treaty stationing approximately 80,000 Soviet soldiers on their soil, signed by Kosygin and Černík in Moscow on October 16. The agreement was kept secret until just before its ratification by the National Assembly, where only four delegates voted against it (ten abstained and sixty were absent).[20] The treaty was valid ''for the duration of the temporary deployment of Soviet forces on Czechoslovak territory,'' and could only be changed with the agreement of both parties, so it formally ratified a permanent Soviet military presence.[21]

This outcome was a bitter blow for the public as well as for the leaders. Repeated compromises had been accepted to ensure the withdrawal of the invading armies, and now they were ''temporarily'' going to stay. Not everything that had been accomplished during the reform months had yet died, however. On October 28, 1968–-the fiftieth anniversary of Czechoslovak independence—the federalization law was passed, to take effect on January 1, 1969.[22] Debates continued on legal reforms, the rehabilitation of purge victims, and economic policy. The press, though subject to censorship, urged maintaining the Action Program, and several journals published critical articles. The mass organizations, trade unions, the Academy of Sciences (whose Historical Institute prepared a documentary collection cited here), and party organizations still reflected the Prague Spring's quickening of intellectual and civic life. University students led a three-day occupation strike of their faculties in late November to demand the continuation of reforms. The trade

unions, especially the Metalworkers' Union, supported the strikes. General discontent filled the streets on the October 28 and November 7 anniversaries.

The Central Committee's plenum meeting from November 14 to 17 created a new eight-man Presidium executive committee, of whom only Dubček and Smrkovský were reformists. It also set up a Bureau for the Direction of Party Work in the Czech Lands, headed by Lubomír Štrougal, an emerging realist. Štrougal's authority resembled Husák's position in the Slovak party, and with realists in these two key posts Dubček grew correspondingly weaker. The plenum also appointed Bil'ak to the secretariat, returning him to the top echelons of the party.

After the November plenum Dubček's position continued to weaken. The next crisis arose in December, after another meeting with the Soviets in Kiev on December 7–8.[23] On his return, Husák used federalization to attack Smrkovský, chairman of the National, soon to become Federal, Assembly. Husák demanded that the chairman be a Slovak, since the president and prime minister, like Smrkovský, were Czechs. In the Czech lands, Smrkovský was still regarded as the people's tribune, and the trade unions, students, creative intelligentsia, and press rallied to support him, even talking of a general strike. With Husák threatening to resign and organize a campaign in Slovakia for Smrkovský's dismissal, Dubček did not use this public support to defend the last reformist in the top leadership. The Presidium and Smrkovský himself condemned the strike threat, and finally, on January 7, 1969, Smrkovský resigned.[24]

Hard on the heels of Smrkovský's fall came the news, in the middle of a Central Committee meeting on January 16, 1969, that a young man had set himself ablaze on Wenceslas Square. Jan Palach died three days later, sparking mass demonstrations for the first time since August 1968. Over the next few months a handful of followers took the route of self-immolation, but Palach's hopes of defending freedom of expression (his suicide note demanded the lifting of censorship and the suspension of *Zprávy*) were not realized. Palach joined the ranks of Czech martyrs, but his imitators died without general public reaction.[25]

The next explosion proved to be more than Dubček could survive. During March the world ice hockey championships pitted the Czechoslovak national team against a field that included the Soviet Union. The Czechoslovak team won both encounters with the Soviets, on March 21 and 28, and the public reacted with spontaneous celebrations at which

they chanted anti-Soviet slogans. On the second weekend, more than 500,000 demonstrated across the country. In Prague several thousand people attacked the offices of the Soviet airline Aeroflot, possibly in a secret police provocation. This ''ice-hockey crisis'' gave Dubček's opponents their chance. The Soviet Politburo sent a delegation including Marshal Andrei Grechko to Prague to demand the immediate restoration of order and Dubček's ouster. Grechko openly threatened another invasion.[26] Finally, at the Central Committee plenum on April 17, Dubček resigned, proposing that Husák succeed him. The plenum confirmed the change, and a new Presidium, reduced in size to only eleven members, was elected. Dubček (now chairman of the parliament) was the only reformer in the new body. There was little public reaction. What the massive military invasion of August 1968 had failed to accomplish, the long demoralizing months of ''normalization'' had achieved: the fall of Alexander Dubček.

Husák Takes Charge

Husák emerged as a leading exponent of the ''healthy forces'' during the August crisis, and gradually won over doubters among the other Warsaw Pact leaders (especially Kádár, who was suspicious of his Slovak nationalism).[27] During the Prague Spring, Husák had been considered a reformist, but over the ensuing months he proved to be what he had apparently always been: a communist with authoritarian preferences and a taste for power, coupled with the political skill to trim his sails to the prevailing winds. His temperament resembled Polish leader Gomułka's more than Kádár's.[28] Husák quickly set about achieving a ''normality'' acceptable to the Soviet Union. Press and cultural controls were tightened, the reformist journals banned, trustworthy editors placed in charge of other newspapers, and tighter censorship reimposed. Radio and television were also brought to heel, and throughout the newly obedient media attacks on ''rightists'' and a reevaluation of the whole development since January continued. *Zprávy*, no longer needed, was finally closed down.[29]

In party matters Husák initially proceeded with some circumspection, but in the end, he realized he would have to purge the party itself in order to reestablish party control over society. Renewed signs of discontent and resistance through the summer and into the autumn reinforced this message. From August 19–21 demonstrations marked the

first anniversary of the invasion, and prompted legislation "to protect and strengthen public order," under which many people were later "legally" persecuted. Kohout, Vaculík, Havel, and other intellectuals issued a "Ten Points Manifesto" on the anniversary of the invasion, condemning normalization.[30] In response, at the September plenum, Dubček was dropped from the Presidium, and seven others including Smrkovský were expelled from the central committee. In October, Dubček, Smrkovský, and others were removed even from their positions in the parliament.

These steps at the top were quickly followed by a thorough purge of the party apparatus down to the rank-and-file. By screening party members, Husák aimed to remove remaining "rightists," but also to energize the party and to shift representation away from the white-collar, technocratic managers and back to the working-class core. In January 1970 the central committee began the mass screening, starting at the top. Dubček resigned from the central committee to become ambassador to Turkey, and Černík was dismissed as prime minister (Štrougal replaced him) and expelled from the Presidium. From there, the purge continued downward through 1970. It returned to Dubček in May, when he was recalled from Ankara and a month later expelled from the party. According to Husák's report at the December plenum, over 78 percent of the screened party members remained in the party, while nearly 17 percent had their membership canceled and nearly 5 percent were expelled. Estimates of those affected by the purge reach more than 600,000.[31]

The federal parliament was well in hand already, and neither the SNR nor its Czech counterpart mustered significant resistance. The trade union movement proved more difficult, since the decision at the ROH's congress in September 1968 to allow autonomous trade unions had weakened the center. The newly formed metalworkers' union led the campaign against Smrkovský's dismissal, and at its statewide congress in March 1970 the unions reiterated their support for reform. Nevertheless, the ROH felt the bite of the purges, with about 20 percent of the functionaries of its central council dismissed. Eventually its leadership backtracked on earlier promises, without saving their careers.

The youth organizations were also recentralized, and the ČSM, which had effectively disintegrated, was replaced. The Scouts and Sokol vanished once more, as did the autonomous student associations and the leading student newspaper, *Studentské listy* (banned in May 1969). A centralized Socialist Union of Youth (SSM) replaced the proposed fed-

Leading normalizers at an NF meeting on January 27, 1971: from left to right, Gustav Husák, Ludvík Svoboda, and Lubomír Štrougal. (ČTK photo)

eration of youth and children's organizations in the autumn of 1970. Its membership of about 300,000 was only one-third the size of its predecessor before 1968. With time, however, and because it was the sole sponsor of social or extracurricular activities for young people, the SSM's membership increased.

Institutions of education, research, and culture were purged with such gusto that the new minister of education was dropped in July 1971 as an ultra-leftist. Nine hundred university professors lost their jobs, including two-thirds of all faculty of the departments of Marxism-Leninism (which were abolished and replaced by Institutes). Five university departments, including sociology, were abolished altogether. The Academy of Sciences lost 1,200 scholars and its research institutes were reorganized. Dismissals reached all the way down to the secondary and elementary schools, which lost one-fourth of their teachers. The culture ministry in the Czech lands reined in the creative artists and their organi-

zations. Fifteen hundred employees of Czechoslovak Radio in Prague were sacked, and all twenty-five of the cultural and literary journals were closed. Artists who had supported reform were blacklisted, unable to publish or have their works performed. During 1970 the artists' unions were abolished and replaced by new unions led by trustworthy but undistinguished hacks. By the time of the new unions' founding congresses in 1972, their membership approximated a quarter of their pre-invasion size.[32]

The normalizers rapidly returned to the central command model of the economy. Compulsory targets were reimposed in July 1969, shortly after the government withdrew its approval of enterprise councils, and price controls at the beginning of 1970. Thanks to the positive impact of earlier reforms, however, the Czechoslovak economy continued to grow into the 1970s, with agriculture performing better than expected. As one observer summed it up a decade later, "three things helped the new leaders survive with flying colours: the Czechoslovak economy was strong, the agricultural results were good, and the workers were not Polish."[33]

Calculating the total impact of the purges connected with Husák's normalization is made more difficult by the fact that many people resigned from their jobs voluntarily and left the country, to be officially dismissed later. Total figures for emigration connected with the Prague Spring can only be estimates. Nor can we know all the motives prompting people to leave their homeland. Nevertheless, as many as 130,000 to 140,000 Czechs and Slovaks left the country by the end of 1971.[34] The most significant effect of this cumulative brain drain was to deplete the pool of technical experts and experienced people in public policy, while reinforcing the sullen passivity and apathy of those who remained.[35]

In his efforts to satisfy Moscow, Husák also had to defend himself against attacks from the "leftist" camp. The invasion had reinvigorated the party hardliners, who had begun to organize immediately after the arrival of Warsaw Pact troops. During the course of the purges of 1970 and into 1971, however, Husák consolidated his position by removing some of the leading ultras and by subsuming the ultra organizations into the SSM and the Socialist Academy. Husák assiduously courted the Kremlin, traveling to the Soviet Union five times in 1969 and four times in 1970. He stressed the need for unity in the leadership and signaled his discontent with the hardliners within the party. The Soviet Union,

for its part, wanted a clear statement on the reform period to coincide with Soviet views. A new Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty on friendship and mutual cooperation signed on May 5–6, 1970, showed that the Soviets would stick with Husák, and the December plenum meeting reinforced that outcome.[36]

The plenum also put the capstone on the process of normalization by giving the Soviets the statement they wanted, the ''Lessons from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the Thirteenth Congress of the KSČ.'' It reflected the Soviet line, dismissed the Action Program as ''revisionist,'' accepted that by August of 1968 there was a ''counter-revolutionary'' situation, and accused Dubček, Černík, and Smrkovský of treason. The ''Lessons''—distributed throughout the country for compulsory study—also committed the Husák leadership to reject a future return to reform.[37] Though the ultras were chastened, Bil'ak's presence in the top party ranks provided a vigorous and persistent, if always circumspect, hardline presence. This situation suited Moscow, as the stability at the top of the KSČ over the next fifteen years showed.[38]

''REAL EXISTING SOCIALISM''

The victors in the struggle for ''normalization'' celebrated at the official Fourteenth Congress of the KSČ, replacing the disavowed Vysočany congress, in May 1971. Gracing the podium were the leaders of the five invading Warsaw Pact allies: Brezhnev, Gierek (replacing Poland's Gomułka), Honecker (replacing East Germany's Ulbricht), Kádár, and Zhivkov. Brezhnev called it the ''Congress of Victory over the Enemies of Socialism,'' and it also represented Husák's victory over his potential rivals.[39] Until he relinquished the party leadership to his protegé Miloš Jakeš in 1987, Husák balanced atop a leadership composed of two sorts of ''normalizers.'' There were reformers who had seen which way the wind was blowing after August 1968, and there were hardliners like Bil'ak, who would have been in the political wilderness had the Prague Spring not been crushed. As this leadership aged in office even the grudging admission that Husák was better than the alternatives faded, and society regarded its political heads as traitors and careerists. People reserved their strongest disdain for President Svoboda, whose status as national hero tarnished as he clung to his office.

The KSČ once again proved that surmounting its latest crisis hampered its ability to face new challenges. Basing its legitimacy on the "Lessons," the regime could not reach a Hungarian-style accommodation with society. Instead, the Czechoslovak party had to keep constant vigilance against "rightist" tendencies, and quash any suggestion of reforms. It demanded that its citizens give outward, public expressions of support, and in return offered them selective repression, coupled with a decent level of consumption, which sufficed on the whole to keep society passive and apathetic. Renewed dissent achieved international renown but had limited domestic influence until changes in the Soviet Union undermined the stability of the Soviet bloc.

The Powerful: The Communist Party Under Husák

Under Husák the KSČ remained the dominant political force in Czechoslovakia, but it was transformed by the crisis. Voluntary resignations or purges removed thousands of highly qualified members, and there were few prospective new members with equivalent qualifications. After the end of the purge in 1971, the party's membership recovered from its low point of 1.2 million. By 1976 it had reached 1,382,860 members, in 1981 it had 1,538,179, in 1986, 1,675,000, and in May 1988 it boasted 1,717,000 members, once more approaching 12 percent of the population and its highest absolute membership since 1950.[40] Party members reacted to the bewildering sequence of changes with apathy and cynicism. A confidential report from 1972 claimed that one-third of the total membership had not taken part in any organized party activity during the preceding year, and many cells had not held even a fraction of the obligatory ten meetings.[41] The purges decimated the intelligentsia, but many working-class members also left or were expelled. Nevertheless, the party maintained a base among workers, who with "agricultural workers" numbered just over 50 percent of its total membership in 1988. Efforts to recruit youth succeeded so that by 1988, 51 percent of members had joined the party after 1968, and one-third was under age thirty-five.[42]

Comparing the rapid recovery of party membership with its earlier period of growth between 1945 and 1948, one difference stands out: many members from the earlier period, especially among the intelligentsia, genuinely thought they were struggling for a better society. After 1968, the true believer practically disappeared from the Czechoslovak

party, surviving only among the expelled reformers of the ''parallel party'' underground.[43] Existential considerations were practically the only reason to join the party. The party controlled the citizens' prospects, through the network of positions (550,000 in the 1980s) that required party approval or membership, through access to higher education, employment, promotion—in short, to any form of advancement. Anyone with talent was sooner or later faced with pressure to join, while for those without talent, membership in the KSČ went a long way toward making up for that lack.[44]

The party controlled other levers of coercion, including a numerous and active secret police, special riot police, and auxiliary police forces. The party's own special force, the People's Militia (some 120,000 men) was also reinvigorated after normalization. Regular armed forces numbered about 200,000, with approximately two-thirds consisting of conscripts serving two-to-three-year terms of national service. The military forces were under close party control, with between 80 and 90 percent of the officer corps party members.[45] Looming behind the Czechoslovak People's Army was also the Soviet Central Group of Forces, a continuous, not-so-subtle reminder of the ultimate sanction that maintained the Czechoslovak status quo.

While Husák maintained himself at the top of the KSČ, he added the office of state president in 1975, as senility overcame Ludvík Svoboda's resistance to resigning. This accumulation of offices did not mean, however, that Husák's position was secure. Unlike the most successful general secretary of them all, Stalin, he was not surrounded by his own men. Husák's position was solidified by the protective mantle of Soviet approval, which never slipped from his shoulders while Brezhnev was head of the CPSU. Nevertheless, as economic difficulties accumulated, tensions within the KSČ leadership grew more visible.

By the early 1980s, these tensions produced two reactions within the presidium. The hardliners led by Bil'ak urged greater political and ideological mobilization. Cautiously at first, and then more boldly, Štrougal called for technocratic innovation (the word ''reform'' was scrupulously avoided). Jakeš emerged as a member of the leadership with excellent connections in Moscow and increasing economic responsibility.[46] Husák shepherded this leadership through the twists and turns of Soviet policy following Brezhnev's death in 1982. Matters became even more interesting when Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the CPSU. Once again, as during de-Stalinization, the KSČ found itself dis-

comfited by changes in Moscow, while its response was limited by the means it had used to surmount the previous crisis: in this case the dead hand of the ''Lessons.''

The Powerless: Society and the New Social Contract

The collapse of their hopes left Czechs and Slovaks embittered and exhausted. Even more painful was the feeling of betrayal stemming from Dubček's failure to protect anything from the Prague Spring. Though coercion was one prong of the regime's approach to reestablishing party control, the massive application of force was not necessary to cow society: ''normalization'' was characterized by ''civilized violence.''[47] The purges of 1970–71 were sufficient to subdue the population without resort to exemplary show trials and death sentences. Moreover, the crackdown on active dissent, and the veiled but pervasive threat of the secret political police, enforced outward conformity thereafter. That this use of force was ''civilized'' did not make it any less coercive. As Václav Havel pointed out in a letter to Husák in 1975, the question is ''*why* are people in fact behaving the way they do? . . . For any unprejudiced observer, the answer is, I think, self-evident: they are driven to it by *fear*.''[48] And of course for people to fear the consequences of disobedience, they must have something to lose. Thus the second prong of the regime's policy focused on the consumer economy.

The end of the Prague Spring also meant the end of Šik's economic reforms. Orthodox economic policies, including the prescriptive five-year plan, returned.[49] Husák's regime was blessed with good fortune from 1971 to 1976, the most successful plan during Czechoslovakia's communist era. Net material product grew by 32 percent, personal consumption by 27 percent, and real wages by over 5 percent.[50] The emphasis on consumption allowed the regime to trumpet the success of ''real existing socialism,'' while the people focused on material comfort. To tackle an acute housing crisis, the state constructed sprawling prefabricated concrete apartment blocks on the outskirts of cities and towns. Production of the domestic Škoda automobile, as well as imports of the Soviet-built Fiat, the Lada, increased. In 1969 Czechoslovakia had one car per 21 people, one for every 15 in 1971, one for every 10 in 1975, and one for every 7 in 1981.[51] The cottage outside of town came to symbolize the flight into internal migration that was the popular adapta-

tion to "real existing socialism." In the Czech lands alone, the number of cottages increased from 128,000 in 1969 to 160,000 in 1973 and 225,000 by 1981.[52] Indeed, the "three keys" to happiness in Husák's Czechoslovakia, as the joke had it, were the key to the apartment, the key to the car, and the key to the cottage.

Government policies equalized income levels across society, giving most people a reasonably comfortable standard of living.[53] But Czechoslovakia's shabby socialist consumer paradise did not enjoy good fortune for long. The OPEC oil crisis of 1974 had no immediate effect, since a 1966 agreement tied deliveries of machine products to fixed Soviet oil prices, but with prices skyrocketing on the world market, the Soviet Union increased its prices too. By 1975, Czechoslovakia paid nearly double what it had in 1970 for Soviet oil, and in 1981 more than five times as much. At the same time, Czechoslovakia consumed twice as much Soviet oil in 1981 as it had in 1970.[54] Other raw material prices were rising also, and the value of Czechoslovak manufactured products could not make up the difference. Economic growth actually reversed in 1980 and improved only fractionally in 1981.[55] In response, Czechoslovak policy stressed conservation while developing new supplies. Investment in Soviet or CMEA energy projects was a significant part of the planned overall investment strategy up until 1981–85. Though still counting on Soviet oil and natural gas, the state also invested in domestic brown coal and nuclear energy projects. The party also raised retail prices, with the first round of price hikes taking effect in January 1981.[56]

To protect its "social contract," the party adopted the "Set of Measures to Improve the System of Planned Management of the National Economy."[57] The "Set of Measures" sought to improve the use of raw materials and raise quality, but it only called for limited changes, similar to the Brezhnev-style economic tinkering attempted in the Soviet Union in 1979. The measures did not allow any departure from centralized planning.[58] They failed to solve Czechoslovakia's economic dilemma, not only because they relied on planning without market incentives but because implementing them ran into resistance from managers and workers. Amendments in 1983 and 1984 came to nothing, and finally the whole program was quietly abandoned.[59]

After Gorbachev began his twin projects of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, critical voices in Czechoslovakia became bolder. The Institute for Economic Forecasting of the ČSAV formed a center of reform thinking that influenced Czechoslovakia's economic policy after

1989. As Czechs and Slovaks waited to see what impact *přestavba*, the Czech version of *perestroika*, would have on their lives, their tolerance for the shortcomings of the economy was wearing thin. It was not good enough that life was better than it had been under the Nazis or during the First Republic. Nor did Czechs and Slovaks compare their lives with their neighbors in the Soviet bloc, but with what they saw on German and Austrian television. Popular attitudes in the 1980s were summed up in another joke, the Five Laws of Socialist Economics: (1) Though nobody does any work, the plan is always fulfilled; (2) though the plan is always fulfilled, there is nothing in the stores; (3) though there is nothing in the stores, everyone has everything; (4) though everyone has everything, everyone steals; (5) though everyone steals, nothing is ever missing. The question of how much longer Husák's "social contract" would function under such conditions reared its head ever more insistently during the 1980s. Though there was as yet no sign of a mass workers' repudiation of the system as in Poland, Czechoslovaks showed more willingness to challenge the regime in various ways as they entered the second half of the decade.

Culture and Dissent

Protests and opposition to the restoration of "order" after 1968 existed, but isolated acts of self-sacrifice like Palach's suicide did little to affect developments. A group of "workers and students" issued a widely circulated pamphlet that influenced the popular response to the first anniversary of the invasion in 1969.[60] Radical former party members joined with students to organize more lasting, but eventually ineffectual, opposition. A group called the Movement of Revolutionary Youth (HRM), later renamed the Revolutionary Socialist Party, attempted to organize against the Husák regime. Led by Petr Uhl and influenced by Trotsky and the West German New Left, the HRM was quickly infiltrated by the secret police, and in December 1969 its leaders were arrested and placed on trial in 1971.[61] Another group, the Socialist Movement of Czechoslovak Citizens, issued its first manifesto on October 28, 1970. The authorities refrained from attacking it until after November 1971, when the Socialist Movement urged people to boycott the general elections. Between December 1971 and January 1972, they arrested more than 200 individuals and conducted ten political trials at which 47 defendants were sentenced to a total of 118 years in prison.[62] Organized

political opposition from the "party of the expelled" died down after 1972.[63]

The next several years were a time of "general atomization or disintegration," as Havel later recalled. Informal meetings and contacts among intellectuals helped keep alive a cultural alternative to the "gray, everyday totalitarian consumerism" of Husák's Czechoslovakia.[64] Vaculík established a Czechoslovak version of *samizdat*, the Padlock Editions (*Edice petlice*) in 1972, and similar undertakings followed. In time, even journals and anthologies on economic theory, history, religion, and philosophy joined the works of independent literature.[65] This cultural activity kept alive independent Czech and Slovak literature, and also forged links between former communists and the non-communists who became signers of Charter 77. The Helsinki Final Act in 1975, which in spite of its limitations bound the USSR and its allies to respect publicly stated norms of human rights, influenced the emergence of Charter 77. So did Czechoslovakia's ratification in 1976 of the two United Nations conventions on human rights, which were published as part of the code of laws of the ČSSR. These developments increased the contradiction between the Husák regime's words, and its actions against its citizens.

In March 1976 twenty-two young musicians associated with a counter-culture rock group, Plastic People of the Universe, were arrested.[66] For Havel and other leading intellectuals who rallied to their defense, the state's actions were deeply threatening precisely because the "criminals" were not political opponents of the regime. The intellectuals' fear, as Havel expressed it, was that "the regime could well start locking up everyone who thought independently and who expressed himself independently, even if he did so only in private."[67] The Plastic People's defenders organized protests at home and abroad, involving non-communists and former communists. The cause brought together dissidents of differing backgrounds and political experiences, forging a sense of common purpose that found expression in December 1976 in several meetings involving Havel and other dissident intellectuals. In their agreement that "something must be done" lay the germ of the civic initiative, Charter 77.[68]

Charter 77 announced its existence on January 1, 1977. It was not a single protest on a specific issue, though the Plastic People case helped it crystallize, nor did it pursue the political struggle. Reflecting the alienation of normalized society, Charter 77 was an example of "antipolitics," not politics.[69] In the words of its inaugural document, "Charter

77 is not an organization; it has no rules, permanent bodies or formal membership. It embraces everyone who agrees with its ideas, participates in its work, and supports it. It does not form the basis for any oppositional political activity.''[70] Charter 77 based its approach on the demand that the authorities respect the words of their own constitution, laws, and international agreements.

Charter 77 called for dialogue with the authorities and issued documents detailing specific violations of human rights. Of course, Husák's regime ignored dialogue, attacked Charter 77 in the media, and harassed and arrested its members. An ''Anti-Charter'' pushed by organized campaigns in the workplace had some success, and the movement remained numerically small (by 1985 only about 1,200 people had signed it). They came from all age groups, political persuasions, and religious convictions, and young people (including some who were only children in 1968) predominated among the later signers. Workers made up a significant proportion of signers, though the leadership remained in the hands of intellectuals, and few Slovaks were active Chartists.

Charter 77's strength was not in numbers, but in the moral importance of what it did, illustrated in Havel's most influential essay, ''The Power of the Powerless'' (1978). Havel wrote about a greengrocer who places the motto ''Proletarians of the world, unite!'' in his shop window. He argued that this powerless individual, who would undoubtedly suffer serious consequences if he chose not to participate in the regime's lie, nevertheless did have power—the power of exposing the lie simply by opting to ''live in truth.'' Charter 77 was an attempt to live in truth, and Havel argued that behind it lay the ''independent life of society,'' like ''the proverbial one-tenth of the iceberg visible above the water.'' The highly visible dissidents, Havel claimed, were not different from the unnoticed thousands who lived this independent life of society. ''The original and most important sphere of activity . . . is simply an attempt to create and support the 'independent life of society' as an articulated expression of 'living within the truth.' ''[71]

Havel recognized that such an attempt might lead to more political actions, and Charter 77 reflected that in its own activities. It branched out from concerns with abuses of citizens' legal rights (where the related Committee to Defend the Unjustly Persecuted, VONS, took over) to take in other areas. Charter documents dealt with issues the regime ignored, such as minority questions, environmental pollution, and nuclear safety. Independently of Charter 77, other forms of alternative action and living

became more visible during the 1980s. In a running battle with the Ministry of Culture, the Jazz Section of the official Musicians' Union created space for alternative forms of youth music. In 1985 the regime arrested its seven-member executive committee, prompting protests from Western artists.[72] Young people in particular were also active in informal groups supporting peace and nuclear disarmament, as well as in groups focusing on ecological problems created by socialism's disregard for pollution, its technologically outmoded industry, and its intensive chemical agriculture.[73]

Religious life also demonstrated a quickening during the 1980s.[74] The Archbishop of Prague, František Cardinal Tomášek, assumed a higher profile, criticizing the regime's front organization, Pacem in Terris. The celebrations in June 1985 of the 1,100th anniversary of the death of St. Methodius drew from 150,000 to 250,000 people to a weekend festival addressed by Cardinal Tomášek and others. Slovak pilgrimage sites also saw more visitors. On March 6, 1988, Cardinal Tomášek celebrated a special mass in honor of the Blessed Agnes in St. Vitus's cathedral in front of 8,000 worshipers. Afterward they chanted slogans under his windows in support of religious freedom. By early 1988, as many as 600,000 had signed a petition demanding greater religious rights, begun by a group of Moravian Catholics and publicly supported by the cardinal-archbishop.[75] As in Poland, the organization of such undertakings by Czechoslovak Catholics was one of the first laboratories of autonomous civic activity for the participants.

By the later 1980s the ''independent life of society'' was increasingly manifesting itself in ways that challenged the regime. The social contract of normalization, that political passivity and formal support for the public rituals of communism would be repaid by a shabby but comfortable standard of living, was breaking down as the economy continued to falter. And if under Brezhnev Husák could always count on the Soviet Union's support—with the ultimate sanction, the Soviet troops on Czechoslovak soil, held in implicit reserve—after his death the external climate for normalized Czechoslovakia was changing dramatically.

THE GORBACHEV FACTOR

One of the eternal verities shaping Husák's policies was the Brezhnev Doctrine, the USSR's interpretation of the sovereign rights of

states in the ''Socialist Commonwealth,'' promulgated after the 1968 invasion. *Pravda* on September 26, 1968, stated plainly that ''the sovereignty of individual socialist countries cannot be set against the interests of world socialism. . . . To fulfill their internationalist duties to the fraternal nations of Czechoslovakia and to defend their own socialist gains, the Soviet Union and the other socialist states were forced to act and did act in decisive opposition to the anti-socialist forces in Czechoslovakia.''[76] Husák, bereft of almost all domestic legitimacy, was both threatened and reassured by the Brezhnev doctrine. What it did not state, however, was what would happen if Soviet policies themselves changed. The question did not arise under Brezhnev's successor, Yurii Andropov, nor under Andropov's successor, Konstantin Chernenko. Gorbachev was a different matter.

Gorbachev's concern for the Soviet economy, with spillovers into CMEA and bilateral economic relations, put economic changes suddenly back on the agenda. In Czechoslovakia this ran counter to the ''Lessons,'' but the KSČ Central Committee adopted a new economic approach in January 1987, calling for decentralization of decision-making and introducing some market mechanisms. Specialists at the ČSAV's Institute for Economic Forecasting criticized these measures because of their limited use of market mechanisms and because they allowed no change in the political factors affecting economic performance. Thus by the late 1980s the Czechoslovak economy had returned party specialists to the same place as before 1968: to the realization that real economic reform implied political change.[77]

Though Gorbachev was scrupulously careful not to address the Brezhnev doctrine directly, he tolerated enough diversity in bloc relations to imply changes. He was also aware of the threat to the Czechoslovak regime if he forced it to adopt policies similar to his. After a visit in 1987, Gorbachev noted that evaluating the Prague Spring was ''above all a matter for the Czechoslovak comrades themselves.'' He did not push the KSČ leadership on the economy, either, saying ''we have seen that the Czechoslovak comrades in accordance with their own conditions are also looking for ways of improving socialism.'' Ironically, this acceptance of ''separate roads to socialism'' in a new guise suited hardliners like Bil'ak, who insisted that ''one should not copy something blindly,'' and reasserted the validity of the ''Lessons.''[78] Czechoslovakia joined East Germany as the Soviet bloc states least thrilled by the Gorbachev phenomenon.

Gorbachev, meanwhile, found himself driven by the logic of *perestroika* to gamble on the emergence of reformist communist leaders, capable of meeting public demands without losing control. Thus he tolerated changes in Hungary and Poland late in 1988 that began the negotiated transfer of power in those countries from the communists to other forces. That, in turn, opened up the floodgates for further change, and the torrent that led from Warsaw to Budapest to Dresden and Berlin, finally swept up Prague and Bratislava on its way to Sofia, Timişoara, and Bucharest. The fall of communism in Czechoslovakia would have been impossible without the coming together of both internal and external forces in 1988–89. The end of the forty-year communist experiment in Czechoslovakia opened up new prospects for Czechs and Slovaks—new prospects, and new challenges and responsibilities.