

# CZECHOSLOVAKIA

## 1968

### *Reform, Repression and Resistance*

Philip Windsor  
AND  
Adam Roberts

1969  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS  
NEW YORK

FOR  
THE INSTITUTE  
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES  
LONDON



ing been let down by other European powers at Munich in 1938, the Czechoslovaks expected nothing in the way of outside military support in 1968; they knew that nobody else could save their country for them, and even speculated on the possibility that the United States had specifically assented to the occupation of Czechoslovakia as a *quid pro quo* for Soviet acceptance of American actions or spheres of influence elsewhere – perhaps in Vietnam. In their mood of desperation the Czechoslovaks had to act for themselves. They made no attempt to bring in outside military support – a support which events in East Germany in 1953 and Hungary in 1956 had shown to be unobtainable, even if the Czechoslovaks had wanted it.

#### 5. THE COURSE OF THE RESISTANCE

THE actual course which the Czechoslovak resistance took is well known. In the first place there was extensive non-cooperation with the invading forces: at the highest level, President Svoboda, despite the presence of Soviet troops outside his residence at Hradcany Castle in Prague, appears to have given a firm refusal to all Soviet requests to him to bring in a new government; at lower levels, shopkeepers and farmers refused to supply the invading forces, and army officers to collaborate with them. The second form of resistance consisted of attempts actively to frustrate the invaders' purpose, either by sitting in front of tanks, by taking down or replacing road signs, by giving wrong information, or by interfering with radio communications. The third form of resistance consisted of a direct attempt to undermine the morale and efficiency of the invasion forces by appealing to them to leave: demonstrations, radio and poster propaganda, public fasts, and conversations were all geared to inducing sympathy among the invading forces and to making the soldiers reluctant to fire. Although there were very many protest strikes of limited duration, the Czechoslovaks very wisely did not embark on a prolonged general strike, which would have hurt them more than the Russians.

From the first morning the Czechoslovak resistance profited from the fact that, although much of its organization was necessarily underground, it was of an official character. Most

of the newspapers, not only in Prague but also in other cities, succeeded in appearing on 21 August and carried the Praesidium statement. Police cars, with lights flashing and Klaxons sounding, were sometimes used to get the papers past the Russian checkpoints on the bridges in Prague.

The radio and television services, which appear to have caught on to the message of 'passive resistance' more quickly than the party or government, enjoyed help from the Czechoslovak Army, both in the use of transmitters and in the transporting of tape, film and personnel. The highly professional performance by broadcasters was not based on any single switch-over to any single system of transmission: it was continuously improvised, in some cases using normal transmitters, in some cases military ones, and in some cases specially rigged-up temporary equipment. The radios were able to reduce the strain on their own services, and to harass efforts at detection, by operating in parallel.

It has been widely suggested in the invading countries that the underground radios were either operating from West Germany, or were West German sets being used by infiltrators or counter-revolutionary elements. The argument is of course one that is nebulous in character, since no convincing proof has been offered; and perhaps because the argument is hard to prove or disprove it is widely accepted in eastern Europe, even by some of those who outspokenly opposed the invasion. I met no Czechoslovaks, however, who accepted this argument, and they are in the best position to know, since they could recognize announcers' voices, and they could tell whether the news purporting to come from a place did accurately describe developments there. The difficulty of disproving the allegations about German involvement in the underground radios is a reminder of the continuing importance of an underground press: no one claimed that that had been organized in West Germany, since the claim would have been more patently false.

Although inevitably the newspapers and the radio news broadcasts contained many rumours as well as hard facts, they provided a vital underpinning for resistance by giving some kind of leadership, and by spreading confidence that everyone was acting together. The radio was able to com-

municate various important orders, such as the government appeal to the nation of 22 August opposing the use of Czechoslovak food, money or fuel by the occupation forces. Without the news media the Czechoslovak people would probably have been confused, uncertain of what was happening and uncertain how to act. In such circumstances a change of government would have been much easier to impose.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from giving general instructions to the population, the radio was able to give precise directives about particular matters, such as national strikes. The most dramatic directive was the appeal of 23 August, first broadcast at about 10 a.m., to delay the Soviet train which was travelling westwards from Olomouc with radio-jamming equipment. In response to these appeals the train was first held up in a station, then stopped on a main line because the overhead electricity supply failed, and then stuck in a station, apparently on a branch line, with immobile locomotives blocking its movements at both ends. Eventually the jamming equipment is believed to have been transported by Soviet helicopter. Another dramatic radio directive on 23 August was the appeal, made in the afternoon, to remove street signs.

The activities of the radio were complemented by those of government and party organs, which were able to continue functioning in very difficult conditions. In the days after the invasion there was not only the extraordinary fourteenth congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (on 22 August), but also the Slovak Party congress (on the evening of 26 August); the sessions of the National Assembly (on 21 August and subsequently); and of what remained of the government (in the night of 22 August and subsequently). All such meetings, even where they did not lead the resistance in the sense of issuing precise orders, did support the resistance by giving it legitimacy, and by spreading the example of defiance. By and large it was normal legal bodies which co-ordinated the resistance, although spontaneous reactions,

<sup>30</sup> Radios played an equally vital part in Algeria in 1961 in spreading the message of opposition to the *putsch* which had been conducted in Algiers by four right-wing generals. The defeat of those generals by the forces loyal to de Gaulle was frequently called 'la victoire des transistors'.

and the activities of groups of students with duplicators and printing presses, were also vital.

Officials at all levels helped the resistance; and such staggering achievements as the keeping of a few telex lines open throughout the first week of occupation despite serious Soviet attempts to shut them down were obviously attributable, not only to the ingenuity of the operators and engineers, but also to the fact that this was an official resistance movement, enjoying support at all levels.

Although the Czechoslovak civilian resistance was on a larger scale than ever before in that country, its unplanned character meant that there were many classes and groups which were uncertain how to react. It was principally – though not exclusively – the young people in their teens and twenties who engaged in demonstrations and arguments with tank crews. Older people generally approved of this action but were themselves often more cautious. However, in their own way, at their homes and places of work, they made clear their opposition to the invasion and engaged in their own kinds of resistance. The situation in the country was generally quieter than in the towns, with less overt resistance, but even in the villages there were attempts – sometimes successful – to prevent the advance of the invaders' tanks by placing people in the way.<sup>31</sup>

The spontaneous character of the resistance was both its strength and its weakness. It was a strength in that spontaneity may have helped to carry conviction, and to achieve a surprise effect on the invading soldiers. But there were also a number of respects in which it was a weakness. Not only were many people uncertain how to act, but also some groups – for example the army – had a disappointingly minor role to play in the non-violent resistance, and showed some signs of demoralization. Certain actions which might have been taken promptly – such as the taking down of street signs and house numbers – were taken only after a few days' delay. Some

<sup>31</sup> According to a broadcast from Hradec Kralove, in Eastern Bohemia, citizens of a village on the river Upa (also in Eastern Bohemia) stood in a human chain across a bridge from 6.30 a.m. on 21 August 1968 until 3 p.m., holding up a convoy of Russian motorized units, including tanks. At 3 p.m. the Russian column turned round and moved off.—*The Times*, London, 22 August 1968.

Czechoslovaks felt that a quicker and clearer response from the government and from the party Praesidium on the night of 20-21 August would have enabled more forceful action – such as jamming the invaders' communications, forming human chains on bridges, and blocking airport runways with lorries – to have been taken more quickly, and on a larger scale. The lack of planning and central leadership must in some respects have aggravated the problem of the Czechoslovak leaders who took part in the Moscow talks on 23-26 August, as they can only have had a limited idea of how the resistance was proceeding.<sup>32</sup> And in the early stages, before the main outlines of resistance had become completely clear, there were some violent incidents which may have done more harm than good to the Czechoslovak position.

The fact that the non-violent response to the invasion was unplanned and only emerged gradually probably goes far to explain why the most serious violence against the occupation forces occurred on 21 August, the first day of the occupation. On that day youths built barricades near the radio station in Prague, set fire to at least three Russian tanks encircling the radio building, and blew up at least two munitions lorries. Similar incidents occurred in Bratislava. There were also reports of Czechoslovak sniping on that and the next day.<sup>33</sup> Gradually, however, the official line that there were to be no violent provocations of the invading forces filtered down; a radio instruction against the sale and consumption of alcohol may have reduced the likelihood of acts of Dutch courage; and the police and armed forces will have been on watch for provocateurs. Particularly after the first day, the Czech re-

<sup>32</sup> In his broadcast on 29 August, Mr Smrkovsky said: 'Our contacts with home were limited, we possessed extremely little information or almost none . . .'. It should be borne in mind, however, that some members of the Czechoslovak delegation in Moscow only left Prague on the morning of 23 August: they will therefore have had a reasonably clear picture of the development of Czechoslovak resistance, even if they had little subsequent contact with Prague.

<sup>33</sup> For example in reports from Clyde Farnsworth in *The Times*, London, 22 August 1968; and from Denis Blewett in the *Daily Express*, London, 23 August 1968. On the morning of 22 August the underground radio in Prague referred to a shot which had been fired at Soviet soldiers from a building in Prague. Many observers, however, have stated that there was no sniping in Prague or anywhere else. See for example Kai Hermann, 'The Fall of Prague', *Encounter*, London, November 1968.

action to the invasion was astonishingly disciplined and peaceful.

The basic rationale of the non-violent form taken by the Czechoslovak resistance was reiterated constantly over the radio and in the press. Provocations and violence would tend to unite the invading forces; to reinforce their internal discipline; to provide a spurious proof of the Soviet claim that there were 'counter-revolutionaries' in Czechoslovakia; and to give the invading forces an excuse to employ the vast kill-capacity which they possessed. As the Czechoslovak Radio put it on Sunday 25 August: 'Face to face with violence, this people acted with almost inconceivable calm. They even wrecked the idea of many simple occupation soldiers of a counter-revolution which did not exist here before the invasion and does not exist here today. And if we ask you to be even more calm, even more restrained, we have our reasons for this. Those people who have come allegedly to save us from another Budapest today want nothing else but to organize another Budapest. In their despair they are fabricating counter-revolutionary groups, and the disgraceful paradox has gone so far that when they could not find any weapons anywhere, they seized them from the People's Militia and are now exhibiting and photographing them as the arms of the counter-revolutionary forces. . . .' These practical considerations were widely understood by Czechoslovaks; and even those who did not agree with the decision not to employ violent resistance accepted the necessity of sticking together and acting unanimously.

The comparatively small number of deaths inflicted by the occupation forces – certainly less than one hundred in the first week of occupation<sup>34</sup> – was undoubtedly attributable to the restraint shown by the Czechoslovaks; had widespread terrorist or guerrilla resistance been attempted, Czechoslovak deaths would unquestionably been of a quite different order of magnitude. Some of the Czechoslovaks killed had been demonstrating peacefully or arguing with tank crews; but a few were killed in more complex situations, as when munitions

<sup>34</sup> In a television broadcast on 13 September Zdenek Mlynar, a member of the Praesidium of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, said that 'up to today there were killed . . . more than 70 of our citizens'

lorries exploded outside the radio station on 21 August, killing four people. The unhysterical yet far from apathetic Czechoslovak (and indeed Western) response to the invasion probably made it hard for purges, mass deportations or killings to be conducted: such actions are generally easiest to justify and carry out in an atmosphere of crisis, war and secrecy.

For its part, the Soviet Army leadership appears to have been reluctant from the start to play the role of an occupying power. The invasion of Czechoslovakia was an occupation without an occupation government, though on 22 August the Russians did evidently threaten to set up direct rule if the Czechs did not comply with their order to set up a pro-Moscow regime. Martial law appears to have been decreed only in a few towns in Slovakia. In general the Soviet military authorities issued very few public orders, and I have been unable to get reliable confirmation of a report that they issued proclamations announcing their curfew in Prague. The invading forces did make a consistent attempt to publicize their version of events by dropping leaflets and copies of the Soviet *Pravda* from the air: but the fact that they did not proceed from such action to making mass arrests, and setting up an occupation regime, indicates that their initial function was to impress, to terrify, to influence events, but not to set up a direct occupation government. There is nothing particularly unusual about such a function: many occupation forces in many countries have begun, and continued, by trying to influence the attitudes of local political forces, rather than by embarking on the costly, unpleasant and possibly even dangerous course of setting up direct alien rule.

## 6. EFFECTS OF THE RESISTANCE

SINCE the invasion there has been considerable interest in the technique of resistance adopted by the Czechoslovaks; and in many European countries—especially those most liable to have to face the problem of resisting occupation and defending a small isolated country—some assessments have been made of the broader implications of civilian resistance as a defence weapon. This is especially true in the European

neutrals such as Sweden, Finland and Switzerland.

In one sense, of course, it is still too soon to assess the effects of the Czechoslovak resistance: there is a great deal yet to be revealed, and a great deal yet to be decided. Every judgement must be qualified with the words 'so far'. But it is perhaps not too soon to try to outline the terms in which the effects of the resistance should be defined, nor too soon to make some broad assessment of where the resistance succeeded and where it failed.

In certain limited respects the Czechoslovak resistance clearly succeeded in frustrating the original Soviet plans. The refusal of the Czechoslovak News Agency CTK on the night of 20-21 August to transmit a 1,700 word 'Appeal to the citizens of Czechoslovakia'<sup>35</sup> was only the first of a whole series of acts of non-compliance which destroyed the Russian claim that the Warsaw Pact forces were needed to keep Czechoslovakia socialist; and the Czechoslovak resistance as a whole succeeded in destroying the claim that the forces were invited in by 'party and government leaders', as was repeatedly claimed.<sup>36</sup>

The subsequent Czechoslovak refusal to put forward any alternative government marked the second and perhaps most significant setback for the original Soviet aims. Whatever the Russians' exact intentions were, it is clear that they intended from the start to get rid of Dubcek.<sup>37</sup> On 21 August they

<sup>35</sup> Various Czechoslovak sources have confirmed the 'CTK says No' story, a full version of which appeared in a report from Bonn in *The Times*, London, 6 September 1968. It should be made clear, however, that CTK was of course never entrusted with the appeal to the 'Warsaw Five' to intervene. That appeal was evidently sent out by the Soviet Embassy in Prague through diplomatic communication channels; it started out as, and remains, an anonymous document, although Indra and various less prominent men are believed to have signed or at least approved it.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. in the *Tass* statement of 21 August, which is reprinted below, Appendix VI.

<sup>37</sup> There is even some evidence that the invaders at an early stage still hoped to bring back Novotny, the former President and first party secretary. By 6 a.m. on 21 August leaflets had been dropped over Prague pronouncing Antonin Novotny to be President of the Czechoslovak Republic—a fact which was mentioned in a broadcast at the time and has been confirmed by eye-witnesses. The incident, however, appears to have been more or less isolated, although a radio broadcast from Bratislava on 23 August claimed that the occupation forces there were referring repeatedly to Novotny.

arrested him and his colleagues. On 22 August, towards the end of a two-page leading article, the Soviet *Pravda* claimed that Dubcek was one of 'a minority of Praesidium members' who spoke from 'openly right-wing opportunist positions'. The *Pravda* article went on to refer to the 'treacherous actions' of the 'right-wing revisionist elements'.<sup>38</sup> On the same day, at a meeting at Prague's Praha Hotel attended by Soviet officers, an attempt appears to have been made to set up a Quisling government. A conservative troika was named which included two members of the former Praesidium – Vasil Bilak and Drahomir Kolder – as well as Alois Indra, a Central Committee secretary under Dubcek.

At some point on or after 22 August the Soviet authorities decided, temporarily at least, to abandon this particular plan for a pro-Moscow government; and subsequently some of those who were dubbed as collaborators at that time, including Bilak, have denied that they had any part in this scheme.<sup>39</sup> It is, however, known that on 22 August Soviet authorities in Prague held extended talks with President Svoboda, at which the Czechoslovak leader clearly refused to authorize the formation of the new government the nucleus of which had been announced on the same day at the Praha Hotel. President Svoboda explained these negotiations in rather diplomatic terms in his radio broadcast delivered on Friday 23 August before his departure that day for Moscow: 'Yesterday, 22 August, I held talks with representatives of the Soviet Union in Prague concerning the resolution of the situation that has arisen due to the entry of Soviet and other countries' troops into Czechoslovak territory, and particularly with respect to restoration of an orderly functioning of constitutional organs of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Later, when these talks failed to yield satisfactory results in the evening, I requested, in agreement with the Cabinet which gathered at the castle and is still in session here, direct negotiations

<sup>38</sup> The *Pravda* article was quoted at length in *The Times*, London, 23 August 1968. A full English translation appeared in *Soviet News*, London, 27 August 1968.

<sup>39</sup> Bilak issued several denials, including one which was broadcast in summary on 18 September. He gave no convincing explanation, however, of his failure to attend the underground fourteenth party congress, held at the same time as the meeting in the Praha Hotel.

with the highest representatives of the Soviet Union. . . .'

No doubt the Soviet abandonment of the plan for a Quisling government was attributable to a number of factors: not only Svoboda's refusal (for originally they may even have wanted to replace Svoboda as well); but also the opposition of the workers, manifested by a one-hour general strike at midday on 22 August; the huge demonstration in Prague and other cities on 22 August; and the underground meeting of the fourteenth congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, which convened in a factory in the Vysocany district of Prague on 22 August and was attended by about 1,000 delegates, only one of whom voted against a re-affirmation of complete support for Dubcek. Such developments made it clear that no Soviet-imposed government would have any authority, legitimacy or power.

One of the great uncertainties in the power equation was the effect of the Czechoslovak civilian resistance on the occupying forces. The resistance was clearly based, in part at least, on the assumption that violent resistance would tend to consolidate the invaders, whereas non-violent resistance would weaken their internal discipline. The attempt to argue with the troops while at the same time refusing to supply them with food or normal social relationships clearly surprised and upset the occupation forces; and although this phase of the resistance only continued in its most acute form for one week, numerous reports appeared at that time and subsequently pointing to the demoralizing effect it achieved.<sup>40</sup> Czechoslovaks speculated that some of the inefficiency of the occupation forces may have been more or less deliberate, and the result of the effectiveness of the Czechoslovak resistance. Occupation troops openly speculated that they would be sent to Siberia because they had seen too much that could not be squared with Soviet propaganda. There were numerous reports, which appear to have been reliable, of troops being rotated to prevent over-exposure to the Czechoslovak germ. Some Hungarian troops are reported to have been made to operate without ammunition, because of their unreliability. These developments may, even within one week, have made

<sup>40</sup> See for example reports in the *Sunday Times*, London, 25 August 1968; and *The Times*, London, 28 August, 5 October and 22 October 1968.

the Soviet leaders more reluctant to impose direct occupation rule than they would otherwise have been.

The failure of the Soviet leaders to bring in the kind of government they wanted has been seen as proof that the invasion was based on a major political miscalculation; or that it was politically mismanaged; or both. Such an interpretation is almost certainly too facile. It is generally based on the assumption that Mr Cervonenko, the Soviet Ambassador in Prague, had provided the Soviet leadership with an exaggerated picture of the strength of conservative feeling in Czechoslovakia. This may indeed be true, but it is unlikely that the Soviet authorities would have relied on his word alone as a basis for an operation of such dimensions. It is perfectly possible, in fact, that the Soviet leadership knew the strength of pro-Dubcek feeling, and that they invaded with such large forces at the time they did precisely because they knew that after the fourteenth congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, scheduled for 9 September, they would not even have a toe-hold in Czechoslovak political life from which to regain control.

If the Soviet authorities made a political miscalculation, it was the entirely understandable one of failing to foresee that the known popularity of the Czechoslovak leaders would find such effective expression in the civilian resistance of the Czechoslovak people. Since the civilian resistance in Czechoslovakia was on a scale unparalleled in any other invaded country at any time, it is not surprising if the Soviet leaders did fail to predict it. And since the Czechoslovaks themselves frequently refer to the 'silent fight' they waged in the first week of the invasion as 'unbelievable' and 'incredible', one could excuse the Soviet leaders if they used the same adjectives about the same events.

The charge that the actual conduct of the invasion was politically inept and bore the marks of inadequate planning is obviously a valid one, in that the invaders' propaganda inside Czechoslovakia did not work, their explanations for the invasion came in a bewildering variety which did not make for credibility,<sup>41</sup> and their political plans went astray.

<sup>41</sup> The *Tass* statement of 21 August made no mention of West Germany, though it did make one reference to the 'counter-revolutionary forces' which

But it should be borne in mind that the invading powers did make a serious propaganda effort, not only with leaflets, but also with radio transmissions: there were several pro-occupation radio stations, including Radio Vltava broadcasting in Slovak and Czech from Karl-Marx-Stadt in East Germany, which began operations as early as 5.40 a.m. on 21 August, when it carried the *Tass* statement on the invasion.<sup>42</sup> That all such propaganda efforts failed to have any impact in Czechoslovakia was due not only to their poor quality, but also to the inherent and unavoidable difficulty of making effective propaganda on behalf of invading armies lacking in any real local support.

The Soviet propaganda effort was almost certainly made more difficult by the non-violent character of the Czech resistance, and there is much evidence that the Soviet authorities would have preferred a more conventional and violent response to the occupation. The Soviet press certainly made the most of all acts of violence against the Warsaw Pact troops.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Soviet forces in Prague appear to have deliberately staged incidents designed to show that the Czechoslovaks were using violence. In one such incident, outside the *Rude Pravo* office in Prague on 23 August, shots were exchanged; in another such incident, outside the Czechoslovak News Agency building in Prague at 4 a.m. on 1 September, an explosive charge was let off. In both cases the available evidence strongly suggests that no Czechoslovaks were involved. Eventually Soviet propaganda modified, though it

have been a fairly consistent element in Soviet propaganda in this crisis. On 31 August a special correspondent of the Soviet *Pravda* suddenly gave concreteness to the vague Russian statements about counter-revolution when he wrote: 'All that is honest in the Czechoslovak people calls for the immediate liquidation of counter-revolutionary gangs, which number 40,000 desperadoes, and that murderers of our people should be found and punished.'

<sup>42</sup> It has been asserted by Mr Colin Chapman in *August 21: The Rape of Czechoslovakia* (London: Cassell, 1968), pp. 63 and 83, that the Soviet propaganda effort dried up at the end of August, and that both Radio Vltava and the occupation paper *Zpravy* ceased operations. This is not correct. Both remained active.

<sup>43</sup> See for example articles in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 25 August 1968; *Izvestia*, 22 September 1968; and the Soviet White Paper *On Events in Czechoslovakia*, published in Moscow in September 1968.

did not abandon, its original claims that Czechoslovak counter-revolutionaries were using violence: on 11 September the Moscow *Pravda* came out with a new theory of 'peaceful counter-revolution' to justify Soviet action, and to act as a warning to other would-be reformers in Eastern Europe.

In their resistance the Czechoslovaks showed very considerable skill in undermining Soviet propaganda. Very wisely, they did not ask for help from the West, for such an appeal would have compromised them politically without any compensating advantage. They relied heavily in their own propaganda on quotations from Marx and Lenin; the fact that so many Czechs and Slovaks had learned Russian was clearly important; and some of their methods of resistance—for example industrial strikes—must have been particularly embarrassing to the Russians by touching a sensitive ideological nerve.

Of all the 'unbelievable' events in the last ten days of August, perhaps the most surprising was the virtual absence of collaborators.<sup>44</sup> The Army, the police and the Communist Party might all have been expected to produce a proportion of collaborators; but as the resistance gathered momentum many potential collaborators clearly decided that their loyalty lay with the Czech authorities, not with the Soviet ones. They may have been pressured into this decision by the vociferous opposition, both on the radio and in the streets, to all who were suspected of collaboration in general, or of making arrests in particular.<sup>45</sup> Whatever else it may have achieved or failed to achieve, the Czechoslovak civilian resistance, at least for as long as it lasted in its overt form, reduced the extent of collaboration by providing an alternative mode of action and by highlighting the political and ethical issues involved. It is very doubtful if there would have been so few collaborators, and so conspicuous a failure to produce a puppet govern-

<sup>44</sup> Collaboration was seen as inevitable by many people both inside and outside Czechoslovakia. A leader in *The Guardian*, London, on 23 August 1968, declared that although the extent of opposition to the invasion was remarkable, extending even to the people's militia, 'eventually the Russians' man will come forward: there can be no hope that he will not.'

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, according to some reports, far from handing people over to the police, collaborators were themselves handed over. See for example Kai Hermann, 'The Fall of Prague', *Encounter*, London, November 1968.

ment in the first few days, had guerrilla resistance been attempted.

#### 7. THE MOSCOW 'AGREEMENTS'

THE fact that the invasion failed in its original purpose— to rally the forces hostile to Dubcek's liberal reforms—did not signify anything more than a local success for the Czechoslovaks. The Russians still had immense power at their disposal, both military and economic, with which they could reinforce their arguments in dealings with the existing Czechoslovak leaders. This was their new tactic, and President Svoboda's flight to Moscow on 23 August can be seen in retrospect as having marked the end of the Russian attempt to find a puppet regime, and the beginning of the Russian pressure on the legitimate Czechoslovak leadership.<sup>46</sup> In applying this pressure the Russians may have been hoping to compromise and discredit Dubcek in the eyes of his own people, thereby opening the way for his replacement; or they may have hoped that he would make enough concessions to satisfy them, perhaps at an accelerating pace as he lost popular support and came to rely on Moscow.

Whether the Czechoslovak leaders were right to negotiate with Moscow was, and will inevitably remain, a subject of some controversy in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere. There was certainly a strong feeling in Czechoslovakia that there was nothing more to be negotiated with the Russians, that the inevitable result of talks would be concessions, and that the party leaders at all levels (and not just those in Moscow) should talk to the people more, and to each other less. After the Moscow negotiations, Josef Smrkovsky, Chairman of the Czechoslovak National Assembly, expressed very frankly in a radio speech on 29 August the dilemmas the Czech leaders had faced: ' . . . We also considered the fact that at times

<sup>46</sup> There was of course no clear dividing line between these two phases. According to one Czechoslovak source, 'an official of the party Central Committee', the Soviet leaders made a concerted effort in negotiations with Svoboda in Moscow to get Svoboda to appoint a new government, with Mr Lenart, the former Czechoslovak Prime Minister, as First Secretary of the party. Both Svoboda and Lenart (who was also present in Moscow) turned this proposal down. — Report from Vincent Buist of Reuters in *The Times*, London, 29 August 1968.

there is nothing left to do but reject any appeasing settlements—that in the interest of the honour and character of a people it is better to expose one's breast to the bayonets. . . .<sup>47</sup> He went on to argue that the Czechoslovak resistance had created a situation where some kind of acceptable compromise was possible.

In fact, of course, the Czechoslovak leaders had very little choice as to whether to negotiate. Since 21 August they had been captives, and it is highly unlikely that they could have returned to Prague at all without first reaching some agreement, however vague, with the Soviet authorities. The real question is not whether, once in Moscow, they should have negotiated, but whether more of them should have gone into hiding on the night of 20-21 August to ensure the survival of the legitimate leadership in party and government.<sup>48</sup> The resistance in Czechoslovakia had been based on the principle that there should be no concessions to superior force, but Czechoslovakia's leaders, despite their heroic efforts, were in a poor position to implement that principle in Moscow.

There were many reasons to expect compromise from Czechoslovak leaders, quite apart from the brute fact that they were captives. In the first place, they had often shown in the past a willingness to save Moscow's face; and the negotiations in Moscow were sometimes justified in exactly these terms.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, it was true of many of the Czechoslovak leaders, including some of those negotiating in Moscow, that in important respects they had been the stewards, but not always the initiators, of the Czechoslovak reform programme; and when faced, as they were after the invasion, by a sharply polarized situation in which the demands of both sides were rapidly diverging, such men may have instinctively sought compromise. Thirdly, the Czechoslovak leaders had not played a very significant part in the building up of the resistance to the invasion, and were unquestionably deeply con-

<sup>47</sup> The full text of Smrkovsky's speech is reproduced below, Appendix VIII.

<sup>48</sup> The fact that so few party and government leaders in Czechoslovakia went underground on the night of 20-21 August is perhaps a further indication that they had no preparations for resistance.

<sup>49</sup> For example in an anonymous broadcast talk on Czechoslovak Radio on 25 August 1968—two days before the Moscow terms were announced.

cerned about some aspects of that resistance, such as the growing call for neutrality; they cannot all have been keen for the resistance movement to continue. A fourth reason for expecting concessions from the Czechoslovak leaders was the fact that the resistance in Czechoslovakia was not conceived of, by them or by the Czechoslovak people, as part of an overall strategy; despite numerous individual instances of heroism in the face of threats of death, there were many signs that in this unplanned struggle the Czechoslovaks were not prepared to risk casualties on a scale in any way comparable with those which might be suffered in war.<sup>50</sup>

The harrowing Soviet-Czechoslovak negotiations in Moscow on 23-26 August, to which Dubcek and the other prisoners of the Russians were brought, resulted in a settlement which—on paper at least—involved genuine compromises by both parties. The Moscow communiqué, only made public on 27 August, after the return of the Czechoslovak leaders to Prague, re-affirmed Soviet 'understanding of and support for the position of the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which intends to proceed from the decisions passed by the January and May plenary meetings of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party . . .' Agreement was reached, according to the communiqué, on the terms of the withdrawal of the Warsaw Pact troops 'as the situation in Czechoslovakia normalizes'. The word 'normalization' was not defined, but it was stated that 'Czechoslovak leaders informed the Soviet side on the planned immediate measures they are carrying out with these aims in view.'<sup>51</sup> Those measures were not listed in the communiqué, but formed the subject of a secret agreement or protocol. No authoritative version of this secret agreement has been published, and indeed even the Czechoslovak leaders who had taken part in the Moscow talks

<sup>50</sup> In an article in *The Times*, London, 26 August 1968, Richard Davy said that reports from the Prague underground reaching Czechoslovak quarters in Britain said that people had been told to stop trying to argue with the Russian troops because 'some people have paid for it with their lives'. Some Czechoslovaks I spoke with in September had reservations about this decision to call off attempts to influence the invading forces which had only been taking place for three or four days.

<sup>51</sup> The text of the communiqué is printed below, Appendix VII.

seemed uncertain of their precise commitments when they returned to Prague on 27 August. It is possible that the secret 'agreement' consisted of a series of unilateral Soviet injunctions which the Czechoslovak leaders were expected to bear in mind, rather than an actual treaty signed by both parties.

The way in which the Moscow 'settlement' was drawn up and then announced confirmed in the clearest possible way that it was the Soviet leaders, and not their four Eastern European allies, who were calling the tune. At about the same time as the 27 August Moscow communiqué on Soviet-Czechoslovak talks was issued, a second communiqué was issued about the talks held in Moscow between the five invading powers. This communiqué, after listing at some length all of the distinguished participants in these talks, only contained half a sentence of actual text: the representatives of the five countries, it said, 'held a conference and consultations on problems relating to the situation in Czechoslovakia and unanimously passed an appropriate decision'. This made the minor role of the four allies chillingly clear.

The concessions made by the Czechoslovaks in Moscow, and since implemented, were serious: They included the 'resignations' of such liberals as Gen. Pavel (Interior Minister), Dr Sik (Deputy Prime Minister), Dr Hajek (Foreign Minister), and the directors of Czechoslovak radio and television; the re-introduction of a degree of censorship; the annulment of the extraordinary fourteenth party congress held on 22 August; and the reinforcement of party control at the expense of other state bodies or political groupings.<sup>52</sup> But the words of the Moscow 'agreement' were probably less important than the manner in which the various parties chose subsequently to interpret them. Such terms as 'normalization' and 'strengthening the socialist system' can mean almost anything, and in the ensuing events the strengths and weaknesses

<sup>52</sup> The fullest outline of the commitments accepted by the Czechoslovak leadership as a result of the Moscow talks was given by Zdenek Mlynar in a television broadcast on 13 September. Even this outline, however, was clearly incomplete, and although it was first delivered over Bratislava television no mention was made of the federalization issue. It is significant that this particular speech was given by a Praesidium member who had played a leading part in the underground fourteenth party congress of 22 August as well as in the Moscow talks of 23-26 August. On 17 November it was announced that Dr Mlynar had resigned from his party posts.

of both sides continued to count for as much as the words of the Moscow 'agreement' which were either vague (as in the communiqué) or else secret and of uncertain legal standing (as in the secret 'agreement' or protocol).

Underlying all the other concessions was of course a firm and open Czechoslovak commitment to remain in the Warsaw Treaty Organization. For the Czechoslovak leaders there was probably never any doubt whatever about the wisdom of this course: throughout the events of 1968 they had shown themselves sensitive to Soviet feelings about the need for a united defence against West Germany in particular and against NATO in general; and even if the Czechoslovak leaders did have any leanings towards neutrality, which is extremely doubtful, they could hardly have failed to recall the consequences of Mr Imre Nagy's declaration of Hungarian neutrality on 1 November 1956.<sup>53</sup>

But whatever the feelings of the party and government leaders, among the population at large the demand for neutrality, which had been insignificant before the invasion, increased dramatically. As in Hungary in 1956, the idea of neutrality was an immediate, spontaneous response to a Soviet-organized military invasion; and sections of the Czechoslovak Army, as well as workers and demonstrating youths, articulated this proposal—a fact which must have been particularly disturbing to the Soviets. Czechoslovakia's unique geographical position—as a somewhat narrow and bumpy corridor between the Soviet Union and West Germany—made it virtually unthinkable that the Soviets would accept a neutrality proposal in the absence of some more general European settlement. It was a measure of the desperation of the Czechoslovak resistance, as well as of its bravery and idealism, that the demand for neutrality was made. That it was abandoned in Moscow—almost certainly without discussion—was no surprise.

Despite the concessions made by the Czechoslovaks, and

<sup>53</sup> It was announced in Prague at 11 a.m. on 26 August that a message had been sent to the Czechoslovak delegation in Moscow stating: 'With regard to the fact that a spontaneous call for neutrality is going through the country we announce that neither the Government nor the National Assembly nor the new Central Committee identify themselves with this demand.'

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despite the disastrous principle to which they reverted, that Czechoslovak political developments were negotiable in Moscow, the fact that some kind of compromise was hammered out at all was a remarkable achievement. Verbally at least (and no one can have been more conscious of the limited value of words than the Czechoslovaks after Cierna and Bratislava) the Soviet leaders accepted certain parts of the reform programme; they asserted that their troops were not in Czechoslovakia to interfere in internal Czechoslovak affairs; and they recognized the legitimate leadership. The Czechoslovak leadership was able to return to Prague, even including Mr Kriegel.<sup>54</sup> In the next fortnight Soviet tanks left the city centres, though patrols by jeeps and occasionally armoured cars continued.

Perhaps the greatest price the Czechoslovaks had to pay was the calling off of the more overt, massive and striking manifestations of Czechoslovak opposition to the invasion. Certain quieter forms of opposition could and did continue – the refusal to supply food, the generally unfriendly attitude to the occupation forces, the display of pictures of Svoboda and Dubcek – but almost everything else was curtailed. The Czechoslovak people accepted this new situation with very great reluctance, but with a unanimity and discipline which was characteristic of them in this crisis.