



CZECHOSLOVAKIA

1968

*Reform, Repression and
Resistance*

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AND
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responsibility is mine alone, and not that of the many Czechoslovaks who were extraordinarily generous in answering my queries about their 'silent fight'—a term they use frequently to describe their non-violent resistance against the invasion.

2. THE TIMING OF THE SOVIET DECISION

ON the night of 20-21 August armed forces of five member states of the Warsaw Pact Organization (the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria) invaded Czechoslovakia over four frontiers. In retrospect it is no surprise that the invasion took place at a time when the Czechoslovak crisis appeared to have been eased, if not resolved, by the agreements reached at Cierna on 1 August and Bratislava on 3 August. It was at another point of relaxation, towards the end of the apparently successful negotiations with the Nagy government about the withdrawal of Soviet troops, that the second Soviet intervention in Hungary occurred in 1956, on 4 November.

It has been widely argued that the intervention was decided on at the last minute, perhaps even as late as 19 or 20 August. Lower echelon dissatisfaction in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union with the results of the Cierna talks, or prompting from Ulbricht following the East German party leader's visit to Czechoslovakia on 12-13 August, have been seen as factors pushing the Soviet leaders into a decision to intervene.

Whether or not it was finally decided upon at the last minute, the occupation of Czechoslovakia had been the subject of a contingency plan for several months; and the Warsaw Pact staff exercise in Czechoslovakia in June, as well as the manoeuvres on Czechoslovakia's borders beginning at the end of July, had brought that plan to a state of readiness. Once drawn up, a plan of such scope was bound to acquire momentum of its own; and by mid-August Soviet military leaders may well have argued that the forces under their command were in a state of readiness, but could not be kept indefinitely in that state. The political reasons for intervening promptly were perhaps the strongest of all: the draft Czechoslovak Communist Party statutes, published on 10 August, may have added to Soviet alarm; there may have

been a Soviet hope that popular resistance would be weak in the holiday season;³ but the most important factor was that the Slovak Communist Party congress was due to meet on 26 August, and that the Czechoslovak Communist Party congress was scheduled for 9 September. These congresses were bound to mark the departure from party life of precisely those forces on which Moscow naturally hoped to rely for support. The date of the Czechoslovak party congress had been announced as early as 1 June, and 9 September must have long been viewed by the Soviet leaders as marking the point of no return. Politically, the invasion of Czechoslovakia had to be conducted at about the date on which it actually occurred. Nevertheless, virtually no one in Czechoslovakia expected it at that time.⁴ The strong Soviet press attack on Czechoslovakia, which had resumed on 14 August after a post-Cierna lull, had caused dismay but no immediate fear of invasion. The same was true of an editorial in the East German party daily *Neues Deutschland* on 20 August, which declared that 'socialist internationalism also includes a Party's readiness to enlist help and support from the fraternal countries'. In retrospect this editorial must be viewed as a preparation and justification for the invasion.

There has been no convincing proof that Soviet troops had remained in Czechoslovakia throughout August to provide communications and other help during the eventual invasion. On 3 August, the day of the Bratislava Declaration, Prague Radio and the Czechoslovak News Agency CTK both announced that the last Soviet troops to have taken part in the Warsaw Pact command staff exercises in Czechoslovakia

³ The *Two Thousand Words* manifesto, published on 27 June 1968, had warned: 'The time now approaching is the summer holiday time, when our inclination ingrained by habit will be to let everything slip. But it is a safe bet that our dear adversaries will give themselves no summer breathing-space. . . .'

⁴ There have, however, been indications that Czechoslovak leaders feared that the situation continued to be extremely dangerous. Hints of this were dropped at a press conference of members of the Communist Party praesidium held in Prague on 17 August. This has been recounted by Mr Stanislav Budin, editor-in-chief of the Prague weekly *Reporter*, in an article which was reprinted in *The Times*, London, 28 August 1968. Mr Budin also referred to a mysterious air journey by Mr Dubcek on 17 August to an unknown destination.

at the end of June had departed from Czechoslovak territory; and no evidence to the contrary was produced in the Czechoslovak press either before the invasion or after it.

The actual course of the invasion of Czechoslovakia does not afford any very conclusive evidence about the time at which the decision to go ahead with the intervention was taken. The final preparations, to turn a contingency plan into an actual invasion, need have taken hours but probably not days. Giving final briefings to officers of all five participating countries, getting tanks on to tank transporters, painting all military vehicles with the broad white stripe of the invasion forces, and loading up planes, were unlikely to take more than a day. But the 'Black Book' published by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in late 1968 says that KGB men came three days ahead to prepare the invasion.

One of the first Soviet preoccupations was with the airports, particularly Prague's main airport, at Ruzyně: and there is some unconfirmed evidence that the invading forces concerned themselves with Ruzyně airport more than twenty-four hours before the beginning of the invasion proper. According to a clandestine newspaper put out by Czechoslovak pilots on 30 August, on the evening of 19 August *Aeroflot*, the Soviet airline, informed Prague that an extra flight would be coming in at 10 p.m. An AN-24 civilian aircraft duly landed and stayed at the end of the runway. More than twenty-four hours later, shortly after midnight on the night of 20-21 August, another special *Aeroflot* passenger aircraft arrived, and then after 2 a.m. a steady stream of invading aircraft landed at Ruzyně without help from the control tower. The assumption is that the first *Aeroflot* plane was guiding the planes in.⁵ This report, however, should be treated with circumspection, as a quite different though not totally incompatible account has also been published, making no reference to the story in the Czechoslovak pilots' newspaper, and alleging that the first invading plane landed after 11 p.m. on 20 August. This second report adds that the control tower was immediately seized by commandos who had

⁵ Report from Dessa Trevisan in Prague in *The Times*, London, 31 August 1968.

jumped from the plane.⁶ Most Czechoslovaks state that the first Soviet plane landed on the afternoon or evening of 20 August, and not before. This is probably correct.

There have been many suggestions that the political confusion which followed the invasion indicates a hurried implementation of the decision to intervene. The evidence for these suggestions is of two kinds: first, the general failure of the invaders to establish a plausible government; and second, the ignorance of many of the invading troops even as to which country they were in.

The last is the most easily explained. On 21 and 22 August 1968 there were numerous reliable reports that some of the Soviet troops, and some Poles and others, thought that they were on manoeuvres, or that they were in some country other than Czechoslovakia. But there were no compelling reasons why the military authorities should brief all their troops about the mission on which they were engaged; and to have said too much too soon might conceivably have caused alarm in some units, or else have led to some degree of political dissatisfaction. During the second Soviet intervention in Hungary in November 1956 the Soviet authorities likewise failed to inform many of their troops about their mission.⁷

The failure of the invaders to establish an alternative government in Czechoslovakia, or to provide a convincing justification of their action complete with a signed invitation from Czechoslovak leaders, does seem to constitute more convincing evidence that the decision to intervene, once taken, was executed hurriedly. But such failures can have causes other than hasty and inadequate planning; and any judgement on this point must necessarily follow an account of the course of the invasion.

3. THE COURSE OF THE INVASION

TECHNICALLY the invasion of the Warsaw Pact forces on the night of 20-21 August was a relatively easy operation.

⁶ Article by Gordon Brook-Shepherd and David Floyd in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 October 1968.

⁷ See for example *Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary*, Supplement no. 18 to the Official Records of the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly, United Nations, New York, 1957, p. 10.

They were able to cross into Czechoslovakia over 2,625 kilometres of frontiers.⁸ Clearly one reason why the USSR was so anxious for allied support in this operation was that an invasion over four frontiers could be conducted far more effectively than an invasion over the 98 kilometres of the Soviet-Czechoslovak frontier: the distance by road from East Germany to Prague is 105 kilometres, whereas from the Soviet border it is some 750 kilometres.⁹

Czechoslovakia's frontiers were crossed at about 11 p.m. Czechoslovak time (which is the same as British Standard Time). Owing perhaps to the effective resistance of railwaymen encountered by the Russians during the invasion of Hungary in 1956, the invading forces appear to have used the railways very little, especially at the beginning. This was an invasion by road and by air. The Czechoslovak road network, though not very modern, is very extensive, with a criss-cross pattern of main roads covering the whole country, and crossing the country's borders at several dozen points.

Nearly three hours after the invasion began, at just after 1.50 a.m., the Prague domestic service made the first public announcement of the invasion: 'Yesterday, on 20 August at around 2300 hours, troops of the Soviet Union, the Polish People's Republic, the German Democratic Republic, the Hungarian People's Republic, and the Bulgarian People's Republic crossed the frontiers of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.'

As the Prague Radio announcement indicated, from the first evening of the invasion the forces of all five of the signatories of the Warsaw letter of 15 July were involved. At various times doubt has been cast on the presence of East German forces, either in Prague in particular or in Czecho-

⁸ Czechoslovakia's frontier with Poland is 1,391 km.; with Hungary 676 km.; with Austria 570 km.; with East Germany 459 km.; with West Germany 356 km.; with the Soviet Union 98 km.

⁹ In 1956 the Soviet Union had a similar problem in invading Hungary, since their joint frontier is also rather short. The Soviet forces were therefore sent into Hungary through Czechoslovakia and Rumania as well as over the Soviet-Hungarian border. However, Czech and Rumanian armed forces did not take part in that invasion, although both Czechoslovakia and Rumania did give the Soviet Union some subsequent help in reforming Hungary's security forces.

slovakia in general.¹⁰ On the basis of reliable eye-witness reports, however, it is clear that there were indeed a few East German units in Prague in the first days of the invasion, and that East German forces remained in Czechoslovakia until late October 1968. The East German radio only announced in the afternoon of 25 October that the East German troops had left Czechoslovakia—an announcement confirmed in the next morning's issue of *Neues Deutschland*.

The presence of East German troops in Czechoslovakia has been described as a violation of the Potsdam Agreement of 1945. This is true, however, only in the very general sense that any revival of German militarism is in violation of that agreement. Although they considered the matter, the Western signatories of the Potsdam Agreement did not in the end make a specific complaint to their Russian co-signatory on this point, although they did of course protest in general terms about the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The size of the invasion forces was on a scale larger than any comparable operation in Europe since 1945. On the first day of the invasion it was estimated that 175,000 troops had invaded Czechoslovakia.¹¹ This figure was probably an underestimate. By 28 August, according to an estimate of General Dzur, Czechoslovak Minister of Defence, there were 650,000 foreign troops on Czechoslovak soil.¹² Estimates have run as high as 750,000.¹³ The most generally accepted figure for the occupation forces at their peak (around mid-September) has been 500,000 (of whom half were in fighting formations and half in logistic and support units).¹⁴ General Dzur's higher figure could conceivably have been correct as the Czechoslovak Army has, obviously, a widespread information system and considerable expertise in these matters. On the

¹⁰ For example by Murray Sayle in *The Times*, London, 29 August 1968; and by Gordon Brook-Shepherd and David Floyd in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 October 1968.

¹¹ Report from Tad Szulc in *The Times*, London, 22 August 1968.

¹² Report from Dessa Trevisan in *The Times*, London, 29 August, 1968.

¹³ Czechoslovak sources quoted by Associated Press in the *Daily Telegraph*, London, 19 October 1968. The estimate refers to the situation as of mid-October 1968.

¹⁴ See for example Charles Douglas-Home's estimate in *The Times*, London, 25 September 1968; and Clyde H. Farnsworth in *The Times*, 22 October 1968.

other hand, the Czechoslovak Army might have had motives for wanting to avoid any under-estimate of the numbers of the Warsaw Pact forces. Possibly the true figure is about 400,000, of whom at least three-quarters were Soviet, with a maximum total of sixteen Soviet divisions plus one Soviet tactical air army and transport aircraft for logistical back-up. Whatever the precise figure, the Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia were very roughly twice as numerous as the Soviet forces in Hungary in 1956.

Of the invading forces, the overwhelming majority were Soviet. There were perhaps as many as 50,000 Polish troops, perhaps 20,000 Hungarians, roughly the same number of East Germans, and fewer than 10,000 Bulgarians. All of these forces came under Soviet Army General Ivan Pavlovsky, the Soviet Deputy Defence Minister and commander of all Soviet ground forces, who had been appointed to command the occupation of Czechoslovakia. It should be emphasized that all the above figures are provisional in character: the invading countries themselves have been notably reticent about the type and number of forces involved, which they have generally referred to under the deliberately vague term 'units'.

During the night of 20-21 August airports throughout Czechoslovakia were seized and there was very heavy air traffic: but the main weight of the invasion appears to have come by road. Tanks arrived in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, at about midnight—no doubt because it is so close to the Hungarian border.¹⁵ Kosice, capital of Eastern Slovakia and only 26 kilometres from the Hungarian border, was also occupied at about midnight. Karlovy Vary, near the East German border, was occupied by about 3 a.m.¹⁶ Plzen and Brno were occupied between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. Prague itself was occupied from about 3.30 a.m. onwards, though the forces there only built up gradually during the early hours, and only appeared outside the radio building—a conspicuous enough target—at about 7.30 a.m. One of the first targets in Prague was the Central Committee building, which was surrounded

¹⁵ Eye-witness reports, particularly that of P. G. Cerny in *The Guardian*, London, 22 August 1968.

¹⁶ This and much subsequent information about the course of the invasion comes from local Czech radio station broadcasts made while the invasion was in progress, and monitored by the BBC and other monitoring services.

between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m.¹⁷ Many important cities in Czechoslovakia, such as Gottwaldov, Hradec Kralove and Banska Bystrica, were only occupied later on in the course of 21 August. The invasion was overwhelmingly against civil targets, not military ones (except for airfields); and there appears to have been no immediate attempt to put invading forces in strength along the border with West Germany.¹⁸

The course of the Warsaw Pact forces' operation was from the first a combination of invasion and *coup d'état*. For a *coup*, smaller forces might have sufficed, and the capital might have been occupied earlier, with immediate attempts to capture the radio station, central committee building, parliament building and presidential palace. The immense size and scope of the Warsaw Pact operation suggests that something other than a simple straightforward *coup* was being attempted; or else that the Soviet leaders had anticipated stubborn resistance, perhaps of a military character, and therefore felt the necessity for overwhelming strength. Possibly both explanations are correct.

The Soviet leaders may well have hoped that, as in Hungary in November 1956, a massive invasion would of itself result in important government and party figures gravitating towards a more 'acceptable' line and towards the prize of power. Indeed, it is just conceivable, though it must remain a matter of speculation, that the invasion took place on a Tuesday night precisely because the Soviet leaders knew that the Czechoslovak party Praesidium met regularly on Tuesdays.¹⁹ Departing from the time-honoured practice of

¹⁷ According to a report on Czechoslovak Radio on 24 August, Mr Cernik, who had earlier returned from the Central Committee building to the Prime Minister's office, was led out of his room there at 3 a.m. by Soviet parachutists. If this is correct, and it is confirmed by the Czechoslovak 'Black Book', Cernik's office clearly had a very high priority in the Soviet target list.

¹⁸ In the course of September considerable forces were deployed on the West German border; but only as a second line of defence, behind the Czechoslovak armed forces, who continued to stress their ability to defend the border by themselves.

¹⁹ The Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, which had eleven members at the time of the invasion, normally met at 2 p.m. on Tuesdays and its meetings generally continued until 8 p.m. or later. On the evening of 20 August it had a heavy agenda and a late end to the meeting was to be expected. Praesidium members from out-

invading at week-ends, the Soviet leaders may have hoped for a speedy act of compliance and the emergence of a Czechoslovak equivalent of Hungary's Kadar.²⁰

In the course of 21 August no possibility of replacing the adherents of Alexander Dubcek, First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, had emerged; and the Soviet government had slowly to abandon its earlier clear intention of finding a Czechoslovak Kadar. The fact that Prime Minister Cernik, Dubcek, and other Czechoslovak leaders were not actually taken away from their office buildings in Prague until the afternoon or evening of 21 August tends to confirm that the invaders hoped for some faction favourable to themselves to emerge in the course of that day. The Soviet hope of a more sympathetic – or at least compliant – reaction may also explain why Soviet troops encircled the presidential residence at Hradcany Castle but did not arrest President Svoboda; why the Czechoslovak News Agency building in Prague was not physically occupied until the late evening of 21 August; and why the Soviet troops came with such inadequate food supplies.

Whatever their assessment of the probabilities, the Soviet leaders must have allowed for the possibility of Czechoslovak military resistance. The white stripes along the tops of the invading vehicles provide some indication of this: they would clearly have been useful for identification purposes if air-power had been called in by the invaders to crush the Czechoslovak armed forces. The amount of bridging equipment brought in also suggests that it was possible that the Czechoslovaks would fight, or at least engage in violent sabotage. The number of troops involved, and of fighter planes brought into Czechoslovakia from the start of the invasion, both indicate a provision for military resistance. So does the number of munitions lorries – although these might have been carrying normal first-line ammunition, without which the invad-

side Prague normally stay in town overnight, so the Praesidium meeting could in any case have re-convened after the invasion. In fact of course it was still in session when news of the invasion came through.

²⁰ It is worth recalling that Kadar, who on 4 November 1956 announced the formation of a new Hungarian 'Worker-Peasant Government', had until that point been a close collaborator of Mr Nagy, Prime Minister of the democratic Hungarian government.

ing armies would have been unlikely to embark on any operation in Central Europe, of however peaceable a character.

The invasion has been widely described as a militarily brilliant operation. Certainly it was efficient, and demonstrated an impressive degree of mobility. But it took place in unique conditions which bear no relation to those more likely to be encountered in any situation where Western or neutral countries are involved: the Warsaw Pact command had detailed knowledge of Czechoslovak defence plans; it had been able to stage a dress rehearsal for the invasion in the form of the June staff exercises in Czechoslovakia; it was able to cross over four frontiers; and it encountered no military opposition. In these circumstances the occupation of virtually all the important towns of Czechoslovakia within less than two days was a capable but not necessarily brilliant achievement. The overwhelming character of the invasion, and its organizational efficiency, did perhaps contribute to the Czechoslovak decision not to retaliate with violent resistance, and the first real test came as the civilian resistance gathered momentum.

4. THE CZECHOSLOVAK RESPONSE

THERE have been many suggestions that the Czechoslovak resistance to the invasion was planned in advance; but neither the course of events on the night of 20-21 August, nor subsequent enquiries, confirm this. The evidence is that the Czechoslovak response arose out of uniquely difficult conditions, and out of national traditions.

The failure of the Czechoslovak government or party to plan for civilian resistance is perhaps regrettable, but it is certainly not surprising. Throughout the summer the government had clearly known that invasion was conceivable, yet it appears to have taken virtually no precautions, military or non-military, against the invasion threat. This lack of precautions is characteristic of many governments when faced with a military threat but uncertain of their military capacity to meet that threat. In 1920 and 1923 the German government only made a minimum of preparations against the Kapp *putsch* and against the Franco-Belgian invasion of the

Ruhr, though both of these attacks were known about in advance. In 1967 the Greek government appears to have made no preparations for its own survival. In 1968, even if the invasion of Czechoslovakia was not a total surprise to all of Czechoslovakia's leaders, it did catch them unprepared.

The first definite news of the invasion will certainly have reached the authorities in Prague, including those who were meeting in the Central Committee building, before midnight on 20 August.²¹ There is substantial evidence that even before the invasion began the authorities had reason to suspect some such development; and on 20 August Czechoslovak tourists returning from East Germany by road were diverted from the main roads as they neared the frontier.

From the start there can have been little serious question of armed resistance. Even if no specific order had gone out to the Czechoslovak armed forces before the invasion, their normal practice would be to get in touch with the government before firing. During the night of 20-21 August they received instructions not to fight. These instructions were widely understood both outside and inside Czechoslovakia.

Probably outnumbered even within hours of the invasion, the Czechoslovak Army of 175,000 men was in any case geared to deal with an attack coming from West Germany, not from Czechoslovakia's neighbours. The Czechoslovak Air Force, with 600 combat aircraft, was unlikely to prevail for long against the opposition which it faced. The overwhelming character of the invasion, the vulnerability of the Czechoslovak economy to reprisals, and the small size of Czechoslovakia's para-military forces (which number only some 40,000 men) were all factors helping to rule out frontal military resistance as a serious strategy. Czechoslovakia's situation was as bleak as that of any country suddenly invaded by an overwhelmingly strong force. Another country, such as Yugo-

²¹ An eye-witness report broadcast on the Czechoslovak underground radio on 22 August stated that Dubcek learnt of the invasion at 11 p.m. on 20 August. Another eye-witness report, printed in *Ranni Vydani Spojenych Deniku* of 23 August, stated that Prime Minister Cernik informed the Praesidium of the invasion at 11.40 p.m. In a broadcast reprinted in *The Listener*, London, 5 September 1968, Mr Kamil Winter of Czechoslovak Television said: 'I was called to the Central Committee together with three other colleagues around 11 o'clock. That was just at the time that the message arrived. . . .'

slavia, might have attempted guerrilla resistance even in a situation as bleak as this; and Czechoslovakia's geography, with many woods and mountains, is not wholly unsuitable for guerrilla activities. But the consequences for the country and its people could have been as catastrophic as the consequences of the Vietnam war; and there was very little feeling that such resistance should be attempted. However, before the invasion it had not been a completely foregone conclusion that violent resistance should not be attempted in such an eventuality. Some Czech writers had made statements earlier in the summer such as: 'If the Russians invade, don't shoot at them. Practise passive resistance.' But the *Two Thousand Words* manifesto of 27 June had said: 'There has been great alarm recently over the prospect of foreign forces intervening in our development. Whatever superior forces may face us, all we can do is to stick to our own positions, behave decently and start nothing ourselves. We can show our government that we will stand by it, with weapons if need be, if it will do what we give it a mandate to do.'

The decision not to resist militarily had certain serious consequences. For the second time in thirty years Czechoslovakia had built up a sophisticated modern defence system and then failed to use it. The result, as far as those who worked on that defence system were concerned, was a deep disillusion which can be detected at many levels in the army. General Dzur, the Czechoslovak Defence Minister, is believed to have asked for general mobilization during the crisis, but the refusal to give the order to fight seems to have been respected universally and understood widely in the army.

It appears to have taken the Czechoslovak party Praesidium about two hours—from before midnight until shortly before 2 a.m.—to decide how to react to the invasion. It is known that there had been heated discussion earlier on in the Praesidium meeting on other issues, and that there had been some opposition to Dubcek. The names of Alois Indra, Drahomir Kolder, Vasil Bilak and Oldrich Svestka²² have been

²² The last three were full members of the eleven-man Praesidium, and the last two had recently been in Moscow. Indra, as a secretary of the party's Central Committee, was entitled to attend meetings of the Praesidium, but not to vote.

particularly closely linked to criticisms of Mr Dubcek at the Praesidium meeting. A clear distinction, however, should be made between the conservatism which such criticisms implied, and collaborationism. One of the remarkable features of the Czechoslovak situation in 1968 was that conservatives did not necessarily support the occupation.²³ It is believed that Drahomir Kolder, at least, supported the Praesidium statement expressing clear opposition to the invasion.

Shortly after 1.50 a.m. the Praesidium's statement, which included the first public announcement of the invasion which had begun three hours earlier, was read out over the Prague domestic service.²⁴ The statement made it clear that the five armies were participating in the invasion; that it was taking place without any invitation or legal sanction; that the citizens were to remain calm and not put up resistance; that the army had been told not to fight; and that the legal authorities continued to exist and exercise their functions.²⁵

The fact that no news of the invasion had been broadcast before the Praesidium statement suggests a deliberate attempt by the party and government to suppress all news until it had been verified and until it could be accompanied by pleas for calm and order. There was a further oddity in the situation: the reference in the Praesidium's statement to the fact that this invasion was by the five armies. It is scarcely credible that the Czechoslovak leaders would have been able to check up that Bulgarians or East Germans were actually taking part in the invasion, unless they had been in touch with Moscow or with the Soviet Embassy.²⁶ It seems likely that even at this late hour there was some diplomatic contact.

²³ The difference is clearly shown by the story, which may be true, that had it not been for the invasion Dubcek would have been defeated by six votes to five in the Praesidium on 20 August. — Kai Hermann, 'The Fall of Prague', *Encounter*, London, November 1968; also Harold Jackson, 'The Invasion Step by Step', *The Guardian*, London, 29 August 1968.

²⁴ It has frequently been stated that the broadcast was at about 12.50 a.m., not 1.50 a.m. This mistake is due to the fact that broadcast monitoring services generally use Greenwich Mean Time, which is one hour behind Czechoslovak time (which is the same as British Standard Time).

²⁵ The full text of the Praesidium statement is reprinted below in Appendix V.

²⁶ According to the eye-witness account of the Praesidium meeting published in *Ranni Vydani Spojenych Deniku* on 23 August, Mr Cernik an-

The 1.50 a.m. broadcast Praesidium statement was terse and in many respects inadequate; but it did establish a number of fairly clear principles: calm, order, inner opposition to the invasion but no violent resistance to it. This broadcast was repeated several times during the night, and other announcements were made giving the population some broad outlines for action. At 4.40 a.m. a Prague Radio announcer said: 'Let us be courageous and dignified but calm . . .' At 5.30 a.m. a female voice said: 'Wherever you meet members of the occupation forces do not allow open clashes to arise which might be regarded as provocations. Wherever you have contacts with foreign soldiers, explain to them that in this country up to their arrival there was absolute calm, no threat of counter-revolution. . . .' The first mention of the convening of the party congress appears to have come from the Slovak station at 9.30 a.m.; the first mention of the term 'passive resistance' appears to have been made on Prague Radio, and Radio Czechoslovakia, shortly after 11 a.m. Extraordinarily enough, even as late as 8.30 p.m. on 21 August Prague Radio was still trying to *discourage* people from holding demonstrations against the invasion: after describing protest demonstrations against the invasion held all over the world, the radio warned that such demonstrations were not called for at home.

Throughout the early hours of 21 August the radio gave the impression of following events as much as of initiating them; and indeed, even before the radio had announced that the invasion had taken place, people in Bratislava had embarked spontaneously on the campaign of non-violent resistance which was to become, within hours, a nation-wide response to the invasion. Many aspects of the Czechoslovak resistance were so efficiently conducted that it was felt that there must have been some advance organization directed towards the specific purpose of resisting a Soviet occupation. But even some of the most technically accomplished operations of the week following the invasion, such as the main-

nounced the invasion to the Praesidium at 11.40 p.m. by saying: 'Forces of the five parties have crossed our frontiers and have begun to occupy our country.' This seems a curiously final and well-checked statement to make in such a rapidly changing situation.

tenance of radio and television transmissions, the production of the regular newspapers underground, and the calling of the fourteenth party congress, were all organized on a largely *ad hoc* basis.²⁷ There is no evidence of a 'secret plan', and a great deal of evidence of confusion, chaos, and hasty improvisation. As late as 8 a.m. on 22 August Prague radio had to make a public appeal to members of the Army to put broadcasting equipment at the disposal of the free Czechoslovak radio in Hradec Kralove—a strong indication that nothing had been planned in advance. As Mr Kamil Winter stated in *The Listener*, London, 5 September 1968, 'I must confess to you that nothing was organized at all. Everything went on spontaneously. I wouldn't like to boast, but the Czechs are a very resourceful nation and everybody from the lift-boy to the technicians and editors came up with ideas. . . .'

Of course, too absolute a distinction should not be drawn between the concepts of organization and spontaneity. Although there appears to have been no preparation or organization directed specifically to the purpose of supporting general civilian resistance against invasion, there were certain preparations and organizations which could be adapted to such a purpose. The armed forces, naturally, had contingency plans for maintaining radio communications under battle conditions; and such plans probably helped the army to support the civilian authorities in this crisis.

Although the resistance was largely spontaneous, it profited from Czechoslovak conditions and traditions. In a technically advanced society with a radio network which is in any case very widely scattered and decentralized it proved virtually impossible for the invading forces to silence all transmitters, despite their attempts to do so from the early hours of 21 August onwards. The numerous Czechoslovak telephone and telex links with the outside world also proved to be too complex to cut off completely. Because communications survived,

²⁷ One small additional indication that there was no master plan is the fact that the Director of the Office for Control and Administration of Means of Communication was a well-known conservative, Karel Hoffmann, who had been Minister of Culture under Novotny. Had the Dubcek regime formed any scheme for popular resistance and for communications to coordinate it, it is unlikely that Mr Hoffmann would have been left in this key position.

the Czechoslovak people had a vital breathing space in which they could work out the main lines of action, and in which they could build up a sense of mutual solidarity.

The political conditions for resistance were equally important. In Czechoslovakia—and particularly in the Czech lands²⁸—there is a tradition of passive resistance to foreign occupations. But it is largely a tradition of individual and concealed non-compliance, exemplified by *The Good Soldier Schweik*, the subject of Hasek's novel about World War I. The traditional and limited meaning of the term 'passive resistance' in Czechoslovakia was well summed up by the Prague Radio and Radio Czechoslovakia broadcast shortly after 11 a.m. on 21 August 1968: 'The best solution is the act of passive resistance: not to take any notice of anyone, do nothing, to refuse to do anything at all.' What in fact occurred in the week following 20-21 August was a much more active and widespread campaign of resistance than the term 'passive resistance' implied; by the same token, it was more active and widespread than anything which had taken place previously in Czechoslovakia.

United action was possible in August 1968 because of a number of factors: the democratization process itself; the clear public feeling that underlay that process, and which had been expressed forcefully as early as October 1967 in the effective mass boycott of *Literarni Noviny*, the Novotny-controlled weekly of the Writers' Union; the revulsion of Czechoslovaks against the use of violence in public affairs—a use which they associated with the discredited Novotny regime;²⁹ the national sense of outrage against an invasion which in Czechoslovak eyes was incomprehensible; and the lack of serious class antagonisms such as might well have led to collaboration with the occupiers.

In addition to these factors, the very desperation of the Czechoslovak situation was clearly a spur to resistance. Hav-

²⁸ The term used to describe Bohemia and Moravia—in other words all of Czechoslovakia except for Slovakia itself.

²⁹ The Czechoslovak revulsion against political violence is brought out clearly in the booklet *The Road to Democratic Socialism* published in Prague in June 1968, for example in the following statement: 'Symptomatic for the revolutionary events is the fact that though their impact is far-reaching, they occurred without any violence whatsoever. . . .'

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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.

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