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## The Czech Republic: A Nation of Velvet

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### COMMUNIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1948-1968

The foremost aim of the Communists after the coup of February 1948 was to replicate Stalinism in Czechoslovak politics and economics. The government was run by a coalition of left-wing parties, including the Communist Party, which was called the National Front. This was a 'front' in another sense, providing a veneer of institutional pluralism to mask the communist monopoly of power. The true practice was to eliminate all competing sources of power. Even left-wing parties were subject to coercion and the Social Democrats were forced to merge with the KSČ.

The openly anticommunist Jan Masaryk was found dead on 10 March below his apartment window. The communists asserted that he had committed suicide (revising their verdict to accidental death) but non-communists at home and abroad were convinced he was murdered. As part of their consolidation of power, the communists rewrote the Czechoslovak constitution and thereby proclaimed Czechoslovakia a 'People's Democracy', Stalin's terminology for new socialist regimes that had not yet achieved the maturity of the Soviet Union. The National Front won unfree elections in late May and early June whereupon Beneš resigned as President and Gottwald promptly took his place. Beneš died shortly thereafter.

Society was to be atomized and then reconstituted under communist control; independent organizations, political and otherwise, were either disbanded, converted into or absorbed by official communist structures. Censorship was introduced, and religious persecution was begun. This process intensified under 'High Stalinism'. Religious leaders were arrested; and then leading communists themselves were tried in political show trials, with former KSČ leader Rudolf Slánský and other important figures sentenced to death. In total, some 180 political figures were executed and thousands of private citizens were unjustly accused and punished with sentences of forced labour or imprisonment. Monuments in towns across former Czechoslovakia now commemorate these victims.

Slovak communists found themselves in an ironic situation. While their wartime resistance was meant to translate into political favour under communism, support for communism was stronger in the Czech Lands and 'the case for keeping the power of state centralised and in Czech hands appeared obvious'. Slovak communists therefore had to 'accept a role subordinate to that of the traditional Communist Party of Czechoslovakia within which Slovak aspirations would be more easily contained. The fact that the Slovak Communist Party had no counterpart in a Czech Communist Party was an anomaly which, however, proved convenient for the centralising of the

Czech communists'.<sup>29</sup>

The new regime sought to replicate Soviet economics. Nationalization, already appropriating the bulk of the economy before 1948, was intensified, while wide-ranging land reform was introduced. Czechoslovakia's first Five-Year Plan was launched on 27 October 1948. It stressed heavy industrialization, particularly for Slovakia. Part of this programme diverted resources to military production. The currency reform of 1 June 1953 wiped out savings and reduced the bulk of the population to a uniform economic level.

Czechoslovakia mimicked the Soviet Union in international affairs as in domestic life. Whereas between 1945 and 1948 the Soviet Union redirected Czechoslovakia away from new international institutions, after 1948 it was enmeshed in new socialist bloc mechanisms. The first was the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, established in 1949, which would allow the further centralization of all East European economies under one plan. In 1955 the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) was enacted, in part to counter the rearming of West Germany and its entry into NATO. The WTO facilitated the integration and centralization of command of East European armed forces. This served both external security needs, ostensibly deterring attack from the West, but also enhanced Soviet leverage over indigenous armed forces. Such regional mechanisms were particularly useful to the Soviets in the case of Czechoslovakia because, unlike in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and, before 1958, Romania, the official Soviet military presence in Czechoslovakia had been withdrawn. The extent of Soviet penetration was revealed in August 1968 when Czechoslovak reform leaders discovered that their Soviet counterparts often knew more about the Czechoslovak security services and military than they.

With Czechoslovak communists firmly in power, a small nod to reform was made by the KSČ after Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' of 1956 condemned aspects of Stalin's rule. But no softening of communist rule or socioeconomic experimentation was permitted in Czechoslovakia, even though such occurred in Poland and Hungary. For a time it seemed that the economic situation in Czechoslovakia was favourable, with increasing foreign trade and initial signs of a 'consumer society'.<sup>30</sup>

The original hardline of the KSČ continued after the death of Gottwald in 1953, just nine days after that of Stalin. This intolerance was illustrated by the violent repression of a moderate protest in Plzeň in June 1953 over price increases. Later the same year the country's two senior posts of President and KSČ First Secretary, both of which had been held by Gottwald, were reassigned. Antonín Zápotocký became the former, Antonín Novotný the latter. Through these leadership changes the Party remained wedded to its original programme. Indeed, the Communists continued to turn on themselves. Some Slovak Communists were arrested in the early purges of 1949-50 because they had been 'home communists' during the war and therefore deemed politically unreliable; thereafter other Slovak communists were charged with 'bourgeois nationalism', including the future KSČ First Secretary Gustav Husák who

was arrested in 1951 and sentenced in 1954.

With Zápotocký's death in 1957, Novotný also became President. But because of his personal involvement in Czechoslovak crimes, he ensured that the findings of the Investigation and Rehabilitation Commission, established by the KSČ in 1955, were negligible. Even after Khrushchev's Secret Speech Czechoslovakia underwent little of the 'thaw' experienced in neighbouring Poland and Hungary. Czechoslovakia remained a hardline communist regime.

While political life was centralized under the communists, perhaps the most significant post-war political development resulted from the expulsion of Germans and some Hungarians and the granting of Carpathia to Stalin: Czechoslovakia was now decidedly a binational country, with a small Hungarian minority remaining. Stemming from the Košice Programme, an expectation continued among some Slovaks of greater autonomy for Slovakia and more access to the decision-making process. But instead of increased autonomy, Slovaks suffered severely under the post-1948 political repression. The many organizations that existed to represent Slovak interests, often not having cognates in the Czech Lands, were subordinated to national communist structures, including the Slovak Communist Party. The stifling of Slovak political hopes became one of the many sources for change in the 1960s that led to the reform movement.

Economic policy meant the thorough absorption of private property and self-governing economic entities into a centrally planned system. Similarly, throughout the 1950s, private plots of lands were appropriated by the state and amalgamated into collective farms. By 1960 over 90 percent of farmland in the country was collectivized.<sup>31</sup> The Communist regime employed legal pretexts such as tax evasion, although exaggerated or falsified, to nationalize smaller enterprises so that nationalization went much further than was ever envisaged after the war. Severe limitations were imposed on family inheritance.

Foremost in the communist plan was heavy industrialization. The country's successful consumer goods industries were converted to heavy industry. The agrarian areas were to be transformed, and with them their peoples. Interwar Czechoslovakia's least developed region, Carpathia, was shed to the USSR; efforts were concentrated on Slovakia. Particularly because of its location—sufficiently removed from the East-West faultline but close to the Soviet heartland—it was designated for arms production. For Czechoslovakia the industrialization of Slovakia was one of the most important legacies of the Soviet era: the transformation of a primarily agrarian population into an industrial one, who had to rely on inefficient industry for their livelihoods. The result, however, was that by 1968 the industrial lag between the Czech Lands and Slovakia was reduced from 50 to 20 years.<sup>32</sup> Equality was achieved, according to official Communist Czechoslovak statistics, in what became the final year of communist rule.<sup>33</sup>

The communist economic programme was not strictly for production; it sought to redesign people and society. As in all Soviet-type systems, the intention was to

generate a large proletarian working class and, at least before the communist notional egalitarian society was achieved, to invert the social hierarchy. Party affiliation rather than merit determined advancement, as did class background. Those classified as children of the bourgeoisie—shopkeepers, professionals—were barred from higher education. Such a fate befell the future dissident playwright and post-communist president Václav Havel. Those that came from un- or under-educated backgrounds filled universities and technical schools. A new cadre of the politically correct was created, but its expertise and skills were by no means guaranteed. This social revolution occurred rapidly enough that by the early 1950s, half of the personnel in party administration, state bureaucracy and economic management lacked education commensurate with their work requirements.<sup>34</sup> As a major post-communist Czech reassessment of the 1960s attests, understanding Czechoslovak society and politics of that era rests on appreciating the simultaneous stratification of society and the egalitarian and bureaucratic tendencies that ran alongside it.<sup>35</sup>

The Communist programme did not deliver popular goods. In the 1950s the country had already suffered an economic downturn. Further currency devaluation and abolition of savings reduced economic well-being across the population and provoked industrial action and the Plzeň uprising. Despite these economic problems, Czechoslovakia was in a relatively privileged economic position in communist Eastern Europe. It was largely undamaged by the Second World War and did not have to rebuild to the same extent as war-ravaged Poland; it could also draw on Bohemia's advanced industries. But this legacy masked deep-seated problems, ones which communist rhetoric sought to hide even more.

The new Constitution of 11 July 1960 heralded Communist Czechoslovakia's successes by renaming the country the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and announcing that it had achieved 'really existing socialism'. This was an ideological landmark as Czechoslovakia became the first country, after the Soviet Union itself, to gain the title of 'socialist'. Socialism in its egalitarian sense may have been attained in Czechoslovakia, but only in a crude and unintended fashion: the bulk of the population was now economically 'equal'. But instead of advancing the economic status of the many, it achieved a lowest common denominator which impoverished many more people than it had elevated.

Despite official statements to the contrary, Czechoslovakia continued to brew an economic crisis. In 1961-63 economic growth stopped altogether, an unprecedented occurrence for the communist bloc. The fall of national income in 1962 and 1963 was accompanied by a paucity of consumer goods. The regime responded to these indicators by attributing the economic decline to the (limited) decentralization permitted in 1958, which it then tried to reverse at the 1962 Party Congress. During this time Novotný succeeded in removing some Stalinists from senior posts and proposing modest reforms. But these measures were a palliative; those who wanted greater reform remained unsatisfied and the continuing fall in productivity became evident to all as the use of street lights was curtailed to conserve electricity.

Under the third Five-Year Plan which covered the period 1961-65, national income was to rise by 42 percent, industrial production by 56 percent, and agricultural output by 22 percent. The results, however, were substantially less, with national income increasing only by 10 percent, industrial output by 29 percent and agriculture actually contracting by 0.4 percent.<sup>36</sup> The economic situation both called for and permitted wider, more free economic discussion and important economic studies emerged from this debate. More than providing solutions to the economic malaise, these studies amounted to attacks on specific policies in Czechoslovakia and on tenets of Soviet-bloc socialism. Throughout the arts and social sciences alternatives to Czechoslovakia's unmitigated socialism were being quietly contemplated. Wrote one Western observer, 'in their contributions to cultural weeklies and in scholarly journals and conferences, in the daily round of lectures and discussions, in books' Czechoslovaks were conducting 'an intellectual revolution'.<sup>37</sup>

Alternative thinking particularly emerged in the economic and social sciences. Economists like Ota Šik contemplated significant modifications of the socialist economy,<sup>38</sup> while a substantial team of researchers produced the far-ranging study entitled *Civilization at the Crossroads: Social and Human Implications of the Scientific Technological Revolution*. First published in 1966, the study attempted to demonstrate that it was in keeping with Communist Party practice. In explaining their methodology, the collective of authors wrote 'we are now able to draw on the first steps in a Marxist approach to the scientific and technical revolution, contained in the Programme of the CPSU. They also pronounced that American studies failed to confront the 'sociological and anthropological dimensions' of the scientific and technological revolution; this may have been a genuinely-felt observation, but it was also one that could serve to appease ideological scrutineers in the Czechoslovak or Soviet Communist Parties.<sup>39</sup>

The whole reform movement amounted, especially in its cultural aspects, to a departure from Soviet norms and 'a return to Europe'. So momentous was the reformers' thinking that, as one commentator put it, 'the goals, thus conceived, had no precedent'.<sup>40</sup> Pressure for change mounted within and without the Communist Party, and ran through society. While 1968 saw social protest in several countries, Czechoslovakia was unique in the cross-generational character of its movement.<sup>41</sup>

## THE PRAGUE SPRING AND SOVIET INVASION

Divisions within the communist leadership over such liberalization concluded with the establishment of a reform-minded leadership. Alexander Dubček replaced Novotný as First Secretary in January 1968. Dubček had solid political credentials, his father was a co-founder of the KSC who had taken his family to live in the Soviet Union during the decade preceding Munich. Dubček was active in the wartime communist resistance. The National Assembly then elected General Ludvík Svoboda President on 30 March 1968, while shortly thereafter reformist economist Šik was

made Deputy Prime Minister.

The reforms were codified and launched publicly on 5 April as the Action Programme. It largely ended censorship and opened lively discussion on the possibilities for political life and on sensitive historical questions, particularly the 1950s show trials. It sought initiatives from society rather than top-down directives from the Party. In its first section, the Action Programme concluded that the implementation of socialism in Czechoslovakia had had harmful consequences. It attributed the problems to centralised control and decision-making, which resulted because 'socialist democracy was not expanded in time, [so that the] methods of revolutionary dictatorship deteriorated into bureaucracy and became an impediment to progress in all spheres of life in Czechoslovakia'.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, the Party, according to the Action Programme, removed the contribution of individual opinion from society. The Action Programme seemed to challenge Lenin's notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat by writing: 'In the past, the leading role of the Party was often conceived as a monopolistic concentration of power in the hands of Party bodies. This corresponds to the false thesis that the Party was the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. The Action Programme declared 'this harmful conception weakened the initiative and responsibility of the State, economic and social institutions and damaged the Party's authority, and prevented it from carrying out its real function'. The role of the Party, it elaborated, 'is not to become a universal "caretaker of the society, to bind all organizations and every step taken in life by its directives"'. Instead, the mission of the Party lay 'primarily in arousing socialist initiative, in showing the ways and actual possibilities of communist perspectives, and in winning over all workers for them through systematic persuasion'.<sup>43</sup>

The combination of popular initiatives and a Party document rolling back its own authority risked giving the impression that the Party had lost control over society. This was increased with the publication of Ludvík Vaculík's '2,000 Words' which attacked the corruption and self-service of the Communist Party, Moscow was irate, but Dubček refused Soviet leader Brezhnev's demand that he renounce the Action Programme. The Soviet Union and its allies continued to signal to the Czechoslovak leadership, including through Warsaw Pact meetings in March and April, that its reforms were unacceptable and even jeopardizing the integrity of the bloc. By June, the warnings had turned into Warsaw Pact exercises being conducted on Czechoslovak territory. But the Czechoslovak communists never believed that their reforms amounted to 'counterrevolution', seeing them as still within the ambit of socialist thinking and never intending them as a rejection of it. The Dubček leadership was also cautious in its reforms, avoiding statements of an outright withdrawal from the WTO such as Hungarian reform-leader Imre Nagy had fatally proposed in 1956. Never did the Dubček government propose an end to the KSC's monopoly on power. The phrase most associated with the Czechoslovak reforms, 'socialism with a human face', captured Western imaginations, especially among the

European left, as a viable form of socialism. It later became a catch-phrase for the 'third way', and came, if ill-fatedly, to be associated with Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.

Despite the seemingly benign nature of the reforms and the level of international sympathy, the Warsaw Pact continued to press Prague to change its course. Soviet-Czechoslovak talks commenced at the end of July 1 1968 while the largest post-war movement of Soviet forces began in Czechoslovakia's three neighbouring socialist states. Dubček left the talks still believing that Czechoslovak sovereignty was secure. Throughout the night of 20-21 August military forces from five Soviet bloc countries overran Czechoslovakia and Dubček and his entourage were taken forcibly to Moscow. In September the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* carried an article that proclaimed the obligation of socialist states to intervene to protect socialism. This principle would become known as the 'Brezhnev Doctrine'.

Various interpretations of the Soviet motivations for the intervention have been advanced, including that it was based on a strategic calculation of the risks posed to the integrity of the Warsaw Pact, the danger of ideological non-conformity within the bloc, or the dissemination of political or even nationalist sentiments in East European states such as East Germany or Soviet republics such as Ukraine.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, it may be that Dubček could not convey his intentions in suitable language and was unable to show the Soviet leadership sufficient 'political love'.<sup>45</sup>

Dubček and other senior reform leaders were taken to the Soviet capital where they were forced to sign the Moscow Protocol on 26 August. After pleading with Soviet officials in Moscow, Svoboda secured the release of Dubček. Public displays of support for him upon his return to Prague deferred Dubček's ouster, but the presence of Soviet military forces and increasing Soviet penetration of the Czechoslovak government undermined his position. There was some resistance, often noted as 'passive', which manifested itself in removing road signs to impede the movement of Soviet military forces. Of particular significance was the self-immolation of philosophy student Jan Palach in January 1969. Others fled the country, or did not return if abroad, including some notable figures of the Czech cultural world.

One enduring legacy of the intervention was that whatever genuine sympathy and support Czechs and Slovaks had held for the Soviet Union and for communism evaporated and was replaced by fierce anti-communism. But an equal legacy was that the current generation of Czechoslovaks would overwhelmingly become passive and accepting of Soviet domination and of communist entrenchment in Czechoslovakia. The Soviets were able to call upon another faction within the KSČ leadership and initiate a process euphemistically called 'normalization' to weed out reformers and to solidify hardline communist rule.

## NORMALIZATION

Normalization began at the pinnacle of Czechoslovak leadership. Already politically humiliated and denuded, Dubček was finally removed from office in April 1969. His successor was Gustav Husák, who ironically was imprisoned by his fellow communists in the 1950s on charges of Slovak nationalism. Normalization sought to penetrate deeply into society. Some 500,000 Czechoslovaks, representing almost one third of the Party, resigned, were expelled or 'deleted' from the KSČ.<sup>46</sup> This affected, by extension, millions, as party membership carried with it family privilege such as access to education. People both within and outside the Party were forced to give written denunciations of friends and colleagues who had participated in the Prague Spring or refused themselves to engage in denunciation. A few individuals, such as Havel, opted not to accept this collective act of falsification and became isolated and persecuted dissidents. The regime reimposed strict control over the media, and those who refused to conform to the dictates of the regime met with police surveillance, telephone tapping, coercion and prison sentences.

All reforms of the Prague Spring, save one, were reversed. Retained was the federalization of the country, which was introduced as a constitutional amendment in October 1968 and formally implemented on 1 January 1969. As a result, a federal parliament was complemented by the establishment of Slovak and Czech republics, each with its own parliament, prime minister and executive. In addition, the federal parliament was made bicameral, with a House of Nations and a House of the People. The latter was simply representational by direct election throughout the country, but the former was constituted on the basis of 75 MPs elected separately from each of the two republics. These substantial governmental changes could be construed as a deliberate and genuine effort to recognize and enshrine Slovak national interests in the political policy process. Routine legislation required a simple majority in each House, but major bills, including constitutional amendments, required a three-fifths majority of all those elected, not just those present. The Slovak and Czechs MPs would be counted separately in the House of the Nations and each group would have to return a majority vote in order to enact legislation. As few as 31 members of the House of Nations could, therefore, veto key legislation; this was a structural legacy destined to become pivotal to the future of Czechoslovakia in 1991.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed this was exceptional, with Western scholars noting that they knew of 'no democratic government anywhere in which comparable minorities of legislative bodies have as much blocking power'.<sup>48</sup> Slovaks seemed to receive greater representation in general political life as well. Normalization affected Czechs disproportionately more than Slovaks, but Slovaks were elevated in the political system. Foremost was the ascent of Husák, but fellow Slovak Vasil Bil'ak assumed responsibility for the important posts of Ideology and International Affairs. Husák was then seen to provide disproportionate state and party employment to Slovaks. While these promotions may have dismayed Czechs they did not necessarily satisfy

Slovaks either as they tended to dismiss co-ethnics who moved to Prague for federal posts as having become ‘Czechs’. This was often the view held of the Slovak post-communist Czechoslovak Prime Minister Marián Čalfa.

The Slovak economic situation continued to improve, both in absolute terms and relative to the Czechs. Sociological studies determined that proportionately more Slovaks lived in private houses, with more rooms per family and in superior condition than the Czechs. While this was partly due to Slovakia having been less urbanized than the Czech Lands before communism, it also suggested overall that Slovaks enjoyed an improving standard of living. In addition, very notably, Slovakia received substantial subsidies and continued its industrialization. Even if the gap was not entirely filled, by the end of the 1980s ‘the Czech Lands constituted the stagnating part of the federation, whilst Slovakia the progressing one’.<sup>49</sup> The rapidity and thoroughness of industrialization and of the raising of the standard of living in Slovakia under communism has even been called ‘an economic miracle’.<sup>50</sup>

The tremendous irony was that Slovaks would come to feel that they were run by Prague and stymied in their attempts to secure true self-rule. The Czechs meanwhile viewed the post-1968 constitutional changes, political appointments and economic subsidies of Slovakia as evidence that the Slovaks had managed to seize the country.

The post-1968 leadership was fortunate that the economic situation in Czechoslovakia picked up and that it did not suffer real setbacks until the 1980s. (This can be compared to Hungary and especially Poland where deteriorating economic conditions spawned social discontent.) Many simply engaged in what became known as ‘inner migration’: avoiding politics in exchange for a modest standard of living.

There was one group that consciously did not accept this withdrawal. The most striking literary expression of the rejection of this thinking was Havel’s ‘The Power of the Powerless’. His essay centred metaphorically around a greengrocer who, unconsciously, followed central instructions to place among his vegetables a sign proclaiming ‘workers of the world, unite’. While the slogan meant nothing to the greengrocer, it signalled his robotic compliance with the regime and contributed to a public aura of acceptance of the regime’s creed. Havel called upon people to empower themselves by rejecting the masquerade of supporting the regime and to ‘live in truth’.<sup>51</sup>

State persecution helped to concentrate the limited opposition that existed. The trial of the underground rock group ‘Plastic People of the Universe’, so named to mock the quality of the country’s political leadership, united and made more public what opposition there was. The core of Czechoslovakia’s independent thinkers coalesced during the 1970s. On 1 January 1977, Charter 77 was launched, being a loose grouping of independently-minded citizens. Its leading members were arrested even as they posted an open declaration of their cause to the Czechoslovak President and other officials.<sup>52</sup>

Dissent in the form of Charter 77 certainly provided an important intellectual core.

Its membership included three distinct groups: Catholics, or religious advocates; independent intellectuals; and former or ‘reform’ Communists. This seemed, therefore, to be a broad grouping. But in reality, its scope and influence was limited. It never achieved the mass membership of Poland’s independent Solidarity trade union, having 231 original signatories (of whom only two were Slovak) and its membership never exceeded 2,000. More importantly, however, it probably served as a national conscience and certainly, when the protests began on 17 November 1989, it provided a nucleus and structure for maximizing opportunity and carrying through the Revolution. While dissent was important, impetus for change came from elsewhere.

#### GORBACHEV: THE WINDS OF CHANGE?

Elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev slowly inaugurated reforms in his country. His policy pronouncements on Soviet bloc relations in the first two years of his leadership indicated that he wanted to retain and even intensify the mechanisms of control that bound the East European satellites to the Soviet Union. By late 1986 and early 1987 Gorbachev was embarking on substantial reforms at home and pronouncing policy changes for Eastern Europe. The hardline Czechoslovak regime greeted Gorbachev’s reforms with hesitation for fear that they might disrupt its firm control over the country. The Czechoslovak population was also sceptical of both Gorbachev’s intentions and his ability to institute them. A contemporary joke compared his reforms to Dubček’s in 1968, and asked the difference between the two reformers, intimating the fate that befell Dubček. The answer ran ‘none—but Gorbachev doesn’t realize it yet’.

Modest economic proposals were advanced in January 1987, including a nod to planning decentralization and increasing the scope of enterprises, but there was no mention of any political reform.<sup>53</sup> Rather, the proposals could be seen in the light of Husák’s efforts to deflect the winds emanating from Moscow. In early 1987, in advance of Gorbachev’s Prague visit in April 1987, Husák began referring to *přestavba*, the Czechoslovak equivalent of *perestroika*. Change came in December 1987, not necessarily for the worse but equally not for the better, when Husák was succeeded as First Secretary by Miloš Jakes.

But unlike in Poland or Hungary, there was no faction in the Czechoslovak leadership intent on serious reform or on accommodating the interests and demands of the opposition. Timothy Garton Ash describes these two countries as undergoing ‘refolution’, whereby change resulted from both inclination towards reform from above, the regime, and from pressures from below, the revolutionary population.<sup>54</sup> The context in Czechoslovakia was very different. Instead of seeking a negotiated compromise, the regime continued its crackdown on dissent.

The regime responded to the few demonstrations with violence and

imprisonment, such as with the March 1988 Bratislava rally for religious expression and the protests to mark important national anniversaries, including the foundation of the Republic in 1918 (generally ignored by the regime), and the twentieth anniversaries of the Soviet intervention and Palach's death. It was during the latter that Havel was again arrested and jailed.

Events moved swiftly in summer 1989. Poland enjoyed elections in which some seats were contestable. With Solidarity's victories, the dissident Tadeusz Mazowiecki became Prime Minister. The reformist Communist government in Hungary removed part of its barbed wire border with Austria. The East German government, as a modest concession to its people, had eased visa requirements allowing its citizens to vacation in Hungary. Holidaying East Germans took advantage of the opened border to flee the Eastern bloc. As East Germans haemorrhaged to the West in greater numbers even more East Germans began protesting for change at home. Faced with continuous, sustained mass protests in 7 major cities in early November 1989, the East German regime consented on 9 November to open all of its border crossings, including the most famous at the Berlin Wall. This harsh regime effectively ebbed away as jubilant crowds enjoyed freedom of movement.

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