

1968 Prague Spring: Origins



- **What came before:**
- **February 1948 communist take-over**
- **Polarisation of society:
enthusiastic communists x rest of society**
- **Enthusiasm – political prisons, executions**

1968 Prague Spring: Origins

- Young political activists:
- Pavel Kohout,
- Milan Kundera



1968 Prague Spring: origins

- Political executions:
- Milada Horáková



1968 Prague Spring: origins

- The 1960s:
disillusionment of the
thirty-year-olds
- Increasing role of the
literature and the arts
- Film, theatre, pop
music, radio



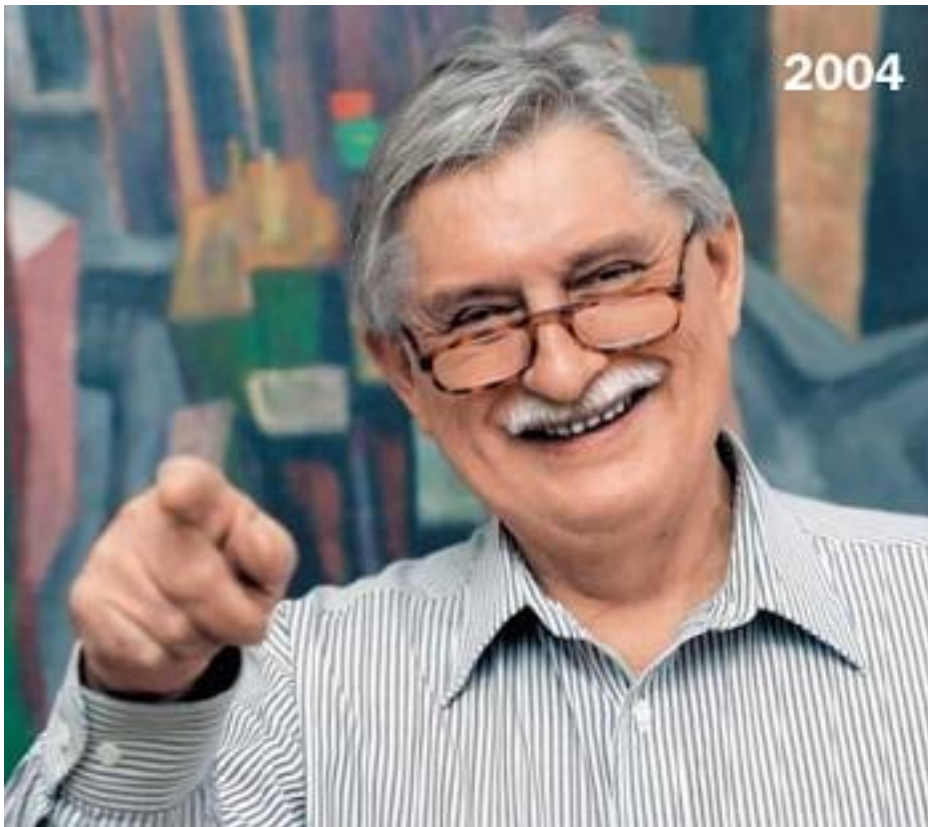
1968 Prague Spring: origins

- Role of culture in creating freedom:
- Miloš Forman, Fireman's Ball
- Milan Kundera, The Joke
- Ludvík Vaculík, The Axe



1968 Prague Spring: Origins

- Czechoslovak Radio,
- Jiří Dienstbier
- Sláva Volný
- Věra Št'ovíčková
- Karel Kyncl

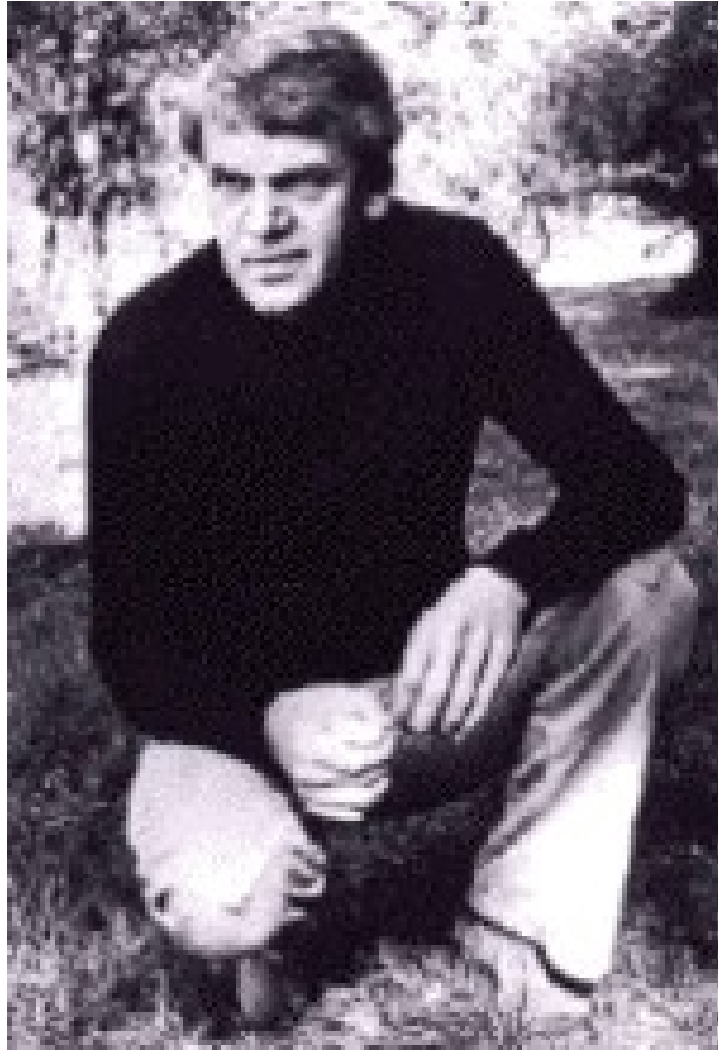


1968 Prague Spring: Preparation



- Czechoslovakia from 1963 onwards:
- Need for economic reform – Ota Šik
- Need to rehabilitate the unjustly persecuted (slow)

1968 Prague Spring: Preparation



- **June 1967:
Congress of
Czechoslovak
Writers**
- Milan Kundera: "The existence of the Czech nation is not self-evident"
- Ludvík Vaculík
- Writers' rebellion

1968 Prague Spring: Preparation

***31st October 1967: student demonstration
(Strahov Hall of Residence: "We want
light!")***

***while the Communist Party Central
committee in session, discussing the
Writers' Congress***

police brutality - criticism

A Run Up to 1968 Prague Spring:



- Dramatic debates in CzCP Central Committee:
- Russian leader Brezhnev arrived in December 1967:
- "Eto vashe delo"
- ("It's your own business")

1968 Prague Spring

- President, CP leader Antonín Novotný (1957-1968)
- Took part in 1950s persecution
- Delayed rehabilitation, economic reform
- Eventually defensive



Prague Spring 1968



- CzCP Central Committee's session interrupted for Xmas 1967, "comradesses needed to bake Xmas baking".
- Slovak CP leader Alexander Dubček elected Head of CzCP on 5th Jan 1968

1968 Prague Spring



- Nothing moved for about two months, at beginning of March, media discovered total freedom of the press
- Literární listy relaunched
- Open radio and TV debates about communist abuses

1968 Prague Spring



- President Novotný resigned end of March 1968, replaced by General Ludvík Svoboda
- CP Action Programme
- "party to become democratic", to retain its "leading role"

1968 Prague Spring

- Vaculík's "Two Thousand Words" manifesto published
- Even sceptics seized by enthusiasm
- Junák, Sokol, K-231, KAN established
- Trade unions
- Some communists committed suicide



1968 Prague Spring



- Increasing pressure from the Allies came to dominate the media agenda, troops
- Pressure especially from the East German party leader Walter Ulbricht – "fear of the third world war"

1968 Prague Spring

- Negotiations with the Soviets
- Čierná nad Tisou (border town), July
- Bratislava 3rd Aug.: SU will "defend socialism"
- Dubček and Czech leaders defended reform programme;
- Czech Messianism, antireformism in Russia
- Russians relied on CP conservatives (Bilak, Indra, Švestka)

1968 Prague Spring

- Political cartoons:
- Reform debate was totally driven by the media. Cartoonists were beginning to attack Dubček's arbitrary attempt to curtail it



1968 Prague Spring

- False relief after Bratislava
- The Brezhnev doctrine: whenever "socialism is threatened", the Soviet Army has the duty to intervene
- Danger of CP congress scheduled for the autumn
- The autumn would have firmly established the reforms (daily *Lidové noviny* was planned, etc.)

21st August, 1968

- Warsaw Pact Invasion
- CP leadership kidnapped to Russia
- Vital role of 24 hour media, mostly radio
- Euphoria of a unified nation



1968 Russian invasion

- Political cartoons:

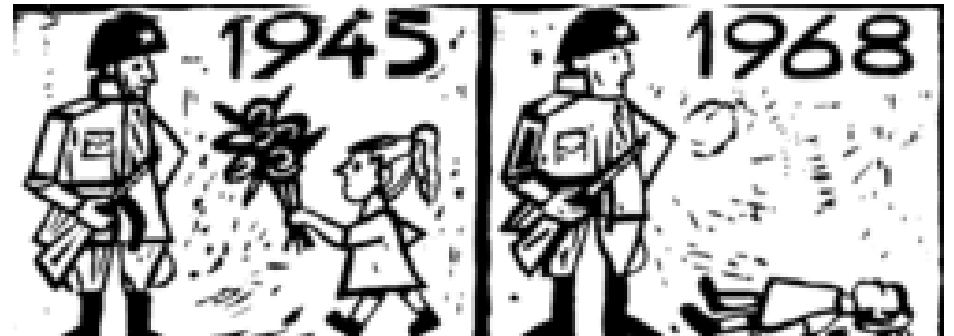


1968 Russian invasion

The Russians said that the Czechoslovak "working classes" had invited them to invade. In 1990, the Russian authorities gave Václav Havel this letter, signed by Czech CP hardliners Bilak, Švestka, Kolder and Kapek.

1968 Russian invasion

- Cartoons in the street:



1968 Russian Invasion

- Political posters which covered the streets



1968 Russian Invasion

- Front page of a picture weekly, one of many periodicals which came out every day and were distributed from moving vans for free in the Prague streets



The Aftermath

Spontaneous resistance of the public saved the
CP leaders lives

They returned on 27th August, having signed a
secret protocol on defeat
only František Kriegel did not sign

1968-1969

Slow slide into a clampdown

The autumn of 1968 still relatively free

Student strike in support of freedom

Christmas TV – a celebration of national unity in
adversity

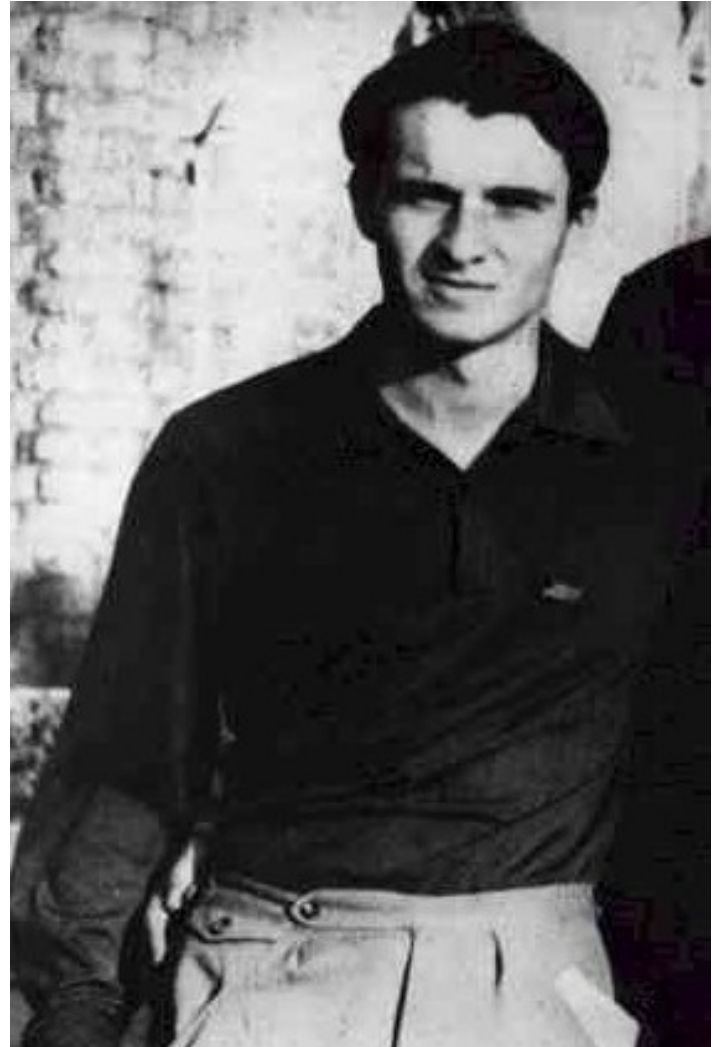
Jan Palach's immolation

- On 16th January, 1969, in protest against the continuing clampdown. About a million people came to his funeral



Jan Palach

- Jan Palach



April 1969: beginning of clampdown

On March 21 and 28, 1969, Czechoslovak ice-hockey team beat the Soviets in the Stockholm championships. Half a million fans celebrated
Secret police provocateurs burned down Prague
offices of Aeroflot

Clampdown



- Brezhnev came back and threatened second invasion
- Dubček was deposed and replaced by maverick Gustáv Husák, who presided over the whole "normalisation" period (as Party chief until 1987)

Purges, emigration

Some 300 000 Czech professionals left for the
West

The whole nation was forced to approved the
invasion

Those who collaborated received modest
consumerist rewards

The ethos of the "normalisation" period imprinted
itself most strongly on Czechoslovak society

Only a small ghetto of dissidents