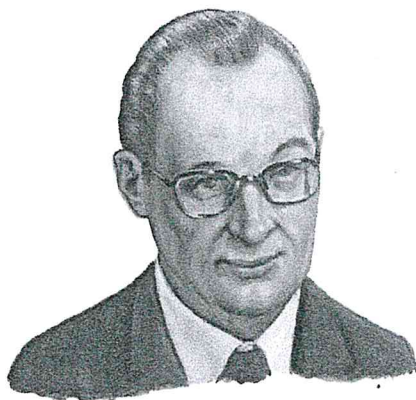


**FOCUS**

You have already looked at some of the most serious crises of the Cold War. The final crisis you are going to examine took place in 1968 in Czechoslovakia. It was an important event in its own right, but it also had long-term consequences which would be important long after 1968. You will practise writing a narrative to describe these momentous events, but also examining their wider consequences.

**RETRIEVAL PRACTICE**

- 1 Why was Brezhnev happy to let Dubcek take over?
- 2 How did Dubcek improve people's personal freedom?
- 3 How did Dubcek change the way the economy worked?
- 4 How did Dubcek change the way politics worked?

## 2.3 The Czechoslovakia Crisis, 1968

### Communist Czechoslovakia, 1948–68

Czechoslovakia had been ruled by the Communist party since 1948. Like most of the satellite states, the economy of Czechoslovakia was geared to benefit the USSR. There were also many restrictions on personal freedom, speech, travel, etc. But by the 1960s there was a demand for change.

In January 1968, the party removed Antonin Novotny, the Czech Communist Party leader, and replaced him with the much more popular Alexander Dubcek. He promised what he called 'Communism with a Human Face'. Dubcek still believed in a one-party state but he thought the Communists should allow free speech, the involvement of ordinary people in decision making. He also wanted economic reform which would give Czechs a better quality of life.

### Communism with a human face: Dubcek and the Prague Spring, 1968

Dubcek introduced a number of reforms which became known as the **Prague Spring** (Prague was the capital city of Czechoslovakia).

- Dubcek reduced the powers of the secret police.
- He relaxed restrictions on travelling abroad.
- He relaxed controls on free speech and the media.
- Trade unions were allowed to argue for better wages and conditions rather than simply obeying government orders.
- Farmers were allowed to choose which foods they produced (so they could make more money) rather than being told by the state.
- Government ministers could be interviewed on television. Several of them faced difficult questions about the state of the economy, corruption and also the way the USSR controlled Czechoslovakia.
- A ten-year plan was proposed in which Czechoslovakia would eventually have more than one political party and also free elections.

The Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev (who took over from Khrushchev in 1964), knew and liked Dubcek. He was a loyal Communist who had trained in the USSR and supported the Warsaw Pact. Brezhnev agreed to let Dubcek try his new ideas.

## SOURCE 1



Soviet tanks in Prague in 1968.

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

Explain why this source is useful as evidence about the Soviet actions in 1968.

### RETRIEVAL PRACTICE

- 5 Who was concerned about what was happening in Czechoslovakia?
- 6 Why were they concerned?
- 7 What did Brezhnev do on 20 August 1968?
- 8 What did the Brezhnev Doctrine say about the power of the Communist Party in the satellite states?
- 9 What would happen if the power of the party was threatened?
- 10 What did the doctrine say about the Warsaw Pact?



## The re-establishment of Soviet control

Dubcek's reforms were extremely popular in Czechoslovakia. However, in the USSR, Brezhnev watched events with growing concern. Brezhnev was worried that Dubcek planned to leave the Warsaw Pact (in fact, he didn't). Some of the other Eastern European leaders were even more concerned because they feared that their own people would demand Dubcek-style reforms. Walter Ulbricht of East Germany and Wladyslaw Gomulka of Poland, in particular, urged Khrushchev to intervene in Czechoslovakia.

Brezhnev put pressure on Dubcek to reverse his reforms. He also ordered Warsaw Pact troops to carry out training exercises on the Czech border. Dubcek gave in to some of Brezhnev's demands. He agreed to re-impose some controls on the media and he promised not to allow any new political parties. However, for Brezhnev and the other Warsaw Pact leaders this was not good enough. On 20 August 1968, to the stunned amazement of the Czechs and the outside world, Soviet tanks moved into Czechoslovakia.

There was little violent resistance. Dubcek and all his ministers were arrested and taken to Moscow. Dubcek was removed from power. His experiment in communism with a human face had not failed; it had simply proved unacceptable to the other communist countries. Dubcek was not executed but he was thrown out of the Communist Party and carefully removed from communist history.

## The Brezhnev Doctrine

During the Czechoslovakia Crisis, Brezhnev claimed that the USSR had been forced to invade Czechoslovakia in order to save communism. After the invasion, he went further still. He set out a policy for the satellite states of Eastern Europe, which became known as the **Brezhnev Doctrine**.

All Eastern Bloc countries would be one-party states – the Communist Party.

- Any attempt to reverse communism (i.e. with reforms like Dubcek's) in any communist state would be seen as a threat to all communist states. If a communist state was threatened in this way, then other communist states would intervene (i.e. send in troops).
- All communist states in Eastern Europe should be members of the Warsaw Pact.

**RETRIEVAL PRACTICE**

- 1 How did the USA react to the Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia?
- 2 How serious was the US reaction and why?
- 3 How did Western communist parties react?

## The international reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

### The reaction from the USA and the Western world

Not surprisingly, the reaction in the West to the Soviet action was extremely negative. They condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the fact that Brezhnev had effectively removed Dubcek and replaced him with a leader who was prepared to follow the Soviet line.

However, neither the USA nor any other country did much more than condemn. As with Hungary in 1956, the USA did not intervene directly. Czechoslovakia was part of the USSR's sphere of influence. In addition, the USA was, at that time, tied up in a costly and damaging war in Vietnam and it did not have the resources to support Czechoslovakia as well. In some ways, the events in Czechoslovakia actually helped the USA because the Vietnam War was going badly and the Soviet actions distracted attention from this.

Another interesting development was how the communist parties in Western European countries reacted. They condemned the Soviet invasion. As a result, the communist parties in Britain, France and Italy cut many of their links with the USSR.

### The impact in the communist world ...

The events of 1968 showed that the USA would not intervene in a situation involving a Warsaw Pact state. It also showed that any challenges to communist governments in Eastern Europe would be crushed by the USSR. So, in the short term, it strengthened those governments. The leaders of East Germany and Poland were pleased with the Soviet actions as it strengthened their position in their own countries.

**RETRIEVAL PRACTICE**

- 4 In what ways did Soviet control become stronger?
- 5 Why were governments in Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany dependent on Soviet support?

However, everyone could see now that these communist governments were dependent on the USSR to prop them up if they faced opposition. And opposition and resentment did increase among ordinary people, particularly in Czechoslovakia, Poland and East Germany. If the USSR ever changed its policy in the future and refused to intervene then these communist governments might fall.