




**Czechoslovakia**

**The Prague  
Spring**

**1968**

# Czechoslovakia and the Prague Spring: 1968



 **Mission:** to understand the causes, process and consequences of the Prague Spring.

Unlike in the Hungarian uprising in 1956, events in Czechoslovakia did not begin with, or largely feature riots and demonstrations. The pressure for change within Czechoslovakia took place within the context of the policy of *détente* - an easing of tensions between countries. There had been growing unrest and discontent especially amongst students and writers who were increasingly unhappy with the poor state of the economy and restrictions on freedom of speech and control of information. Worried about this, the Czechoslovak president Antonin Novotny asked the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev for help. (Brezhnev had replaced Nikita Khrushchev in 1964). Novotny did not receive the support he expected and in January 1968, he was replaced by Alexander Dubcek.

Dubcek believed in a form of communism that was more socialistic in nature and liberal in terms of freedom of speech. Another aim included taking industry out of state government. These new ideas and reforms were the basis of the Prague Spring - a few months of Czech freedom from Soviet influence. Without further developments it is possible that the Soviets would have stayed out of Czechoslovakia. However, other events and further changes altered the course of the revolution. In August, 1968 the Yugoslavian President, Tito visited Prague. Although communist, Yugoslavia never signed the Warsaw Pact. In addition, during the summer months new, more radical ideas developed. There was discussion of allowing another political party, the Social Democratic Party to form and stand in elections against the Czech Communist Party. From the Soviet perspective these potential reforms were a bridge too far. Czechoslovakia was too strategically important to lose, being centrally placed in the Eastern Bloc and with a strong industry. (Romania already wiggled free from Soviet control and Albania had just been allowed to leave the Warsaw Pact). Other Communist leaders in Poland and East Germany pressured Brezhnev to re-assert Soviet control. The Soviet response was an escalation - from initial attempts to persuade Dubcek, then intimidate him by holding military operations using Warsaw Pact troops on the Czech border. Finally, a summit (high level meeting between leaders) was arranged. Dubcek agreed not to allow the creation of a new Social Democratic Party and to remain within the Warsaw Pact. It had appeared the summit had worked and tensions eased.

Then, on the 20th August, 1968 the watching world was shocked when 200,000 Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia. The Soviets faced little violent opposition, instead the Czechs stood in front of their tanks and gave flowers to soldiers - (Jan Palach, burned himself to death). Dubcek and other leaders were arrested and replaced by Gustav Husak, a pro-Soviet communist. The events in Czechoslovakia led to the Brezhnev Doctrine which gave clearer rules for those countries in the Warsaw Pact and under Soviet influence. Communism was more clearly defined as a model with a one party system and members had to stay within the Warsaw Pact. The initial hope and optimism that helped spawn the Prague Spring had been crushed and the Czechs were left with strict Soviet control and occupying troops. It also meant a shift from the policy of *détente*, and heightened Cold War tensions. Romania and Yugoslavia expressed disgust at the actions of the Soviets.

● Causes / background

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● Key players



**Brezhnev**

**Dubcek**

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● Almost solved

● Short term cause

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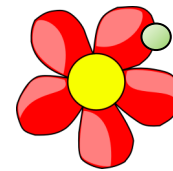


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Soviet response

Czech response

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● Consequences

● Causes / background

Students + Writers  
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Detente  
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Poor Economy  
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● Key players



Brezhnev  
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Dubcek  
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● Almost solved

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● Short term cause

Socialist Party?  
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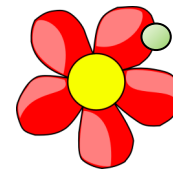


Soviet response

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Czech response



Flowers  
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Warsaw Pact Compulsory  
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Cold War Got Colder  
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Soviet Troops Remain  
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● Consequences