
The Promise and Failure of 'Developed Socialism': The Soviet 'Thaw' and the Crucible of the Prague Spring, 1964–1972

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Abstract

This article examines the international history of the early Brezhnev era, 1964–72, when the Soviet Union simultaneously became more politically stable and socially stagnant. Evidence from a variety of sources indicates that, contrary to the presumptions of many observers, Brezhnev had a serious programme ('developed socialism') for revitalising the Soviet system. This programme included a number of international and domestic measures to improve Soviet technology and consumer economy within a strictly managed political framework of authority. Improved relations with the United States and Western Europe ('détente') were crucial to this programme. Continued Cold War competition gave 'developed socialism' a necessary source of legitimacy. Brezhnev succeeded in selling this programme to other Cold War leaders, but he confronted debilitating resistance at home. Rising domestic expectations within the Soviet empire, the maturation of the post-Stalin generation of citizens, and pervasive social unrest exposed the hypocrisy and shallowness of 'developed socialism'. Although Brezhnev's programme sought to give the Soviet system a new start, by the late 1960s it contributed to a deepening rot.

In autumn 1958 the American economist Walt Rostow gave a series of lectures at Cambridge University that immediately influenced the political discourse of the Cold War.¹ The book that grew from Rostow's lectures – *The Stages of Economic*

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¹ Members of the US State Department extolled the virtues of a new so-called 'Rostow doctrine'. They quoted the *Economist's* praise of Rostow for providing 'the most stimulating contribution to political and economic discussion made by any academic economist since the war'. See Henry Ramsey to Mr. Rubottom, 1 December 1959, Folder: M.I.T., Box 122, Record Group 59, Lot 67D548, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, National Archives, College Park, MD.

Growth (1960) – argued that all societies follow similar steps to industrial growth and social modernisation. In place of Marxist assumptions about the stages of class conflict – feudalism, bourgeois capitalism, the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, and communism – Rostow substituted a succession of landmarks based on the mobilisation of domestic resources. A ‘traditional society’, according to this model, had ‘limited production functions, based on pre-Newtonian science and technology’. Societies allegedly entered ‘take-off’ when they applied technology (such as railways) and organised enterprises (such as the corporation) to increase aggregate economic output. A period of ‘maturity’ followed, when societies used laws and redistributive mechanisms to make economic growth sustainable. ‘Mass consumption’ of material goods contributed to an increased standard of living and social stability during this ‘mature’ stage of development.²

Scholars have spent the last three decades criticising Rostow’s ideas about ‘development’ and ‘modernisation’ for supporting what Odd Arne Westad identifies as a string of regimes in the poorest parts of the world that were ‘more intrusive and more exploitative than . . . colonial authorities had been’.³ This applies to the allies of both the United States and the Soviet Union. Despite ideological differences, Washington and Moscow similarly used large investments of capital in industrial enterprises to support what they perceived as ‘development’ in places as diverse – and ill-suited to these ideas – as Somalia, Ethiopia, Laos and, of course, Vietnam.⁴

Despite its shortcomings in the ‘developing’ world, Rostow’s model remains valuable for historians because it – unintentionally – tells us something very important about the Soviet Union. The leaders of the Communist Party perceived the period before 1917 as a ‘traditional’ stage in Russian development, when society remained backward in its economy and class relations. The years between the civil war and Stalin’s death represented a costly ‘take-off’, when the dictator made many mistakes, while forcing the Soviet Union on a necessary path toward industrialisation. Khrushchev promised to continue this ‘take-off’ through more humane means, bringing the state to ‘mature’ communism.⁵

This article will begin with the Khrushchev years, but it will focus on the immediate period after his demise, 1964–72. The new leaders in the Kremlin – Leonid Brezhnev, in particular – formulated a series of policies that recognised the

2 Walt Whitman Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1960]), esp. 4–16.

3 Odd Arne Westad, ‘The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms’, *Diplomatic History*, 24 (Fall 2000), 563.

4 See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), esp. 183–306; D. Michael Shafer, *Deadly Paradigms: The Failure of US Counterinsurgency Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 43–132, 240–75.

5 See Speech of Comrade Khrushchev at the Sixth Polish United Workers’ Party Central Committee Plenum, Warsaw 20 March 1956, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 10 (March 1998), 48–9; Nikita Khrushchev, Report on the Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, delivered at the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 18 October 1961, trans., Soviet Novosti Press Agency (London: Farleigh Press, 1961), esp. 46. See also William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), esp. 507–28.

disruptions induced by Soviet attempts to 'take off' economically. Instead of pursuing Khrushchev's ambitious goals, Brezhnev abandoned hopes of building a prosperous communist society. He self-consciously moved his state from Rostow's 'take-off' stage of development to a period of enforced 'maturity', when domestic and international stability, not development, guided political action.⁶ The Soviet leadership no longer attempted to outpace its capitalist competitors. Instead, Brezhnev sought to preserve the status quo. He favoured international co-operation, and he craved foreign affirmation that the Soviet Union was a 'normal' state. Brezhnev spoke not of developing communism, but instead of living comfortably in an already 'developed' socialist milieu.⁷

This article will describe how an emphasis on 'developed socialism' made Soviet foreign policy deeply conservative and risk-averse between 1964 and 1972.⁸ This represents a marked contrast with the bravado of the Khrushchev years, most clearly displayed during the Berlin and Cuban missile crises. Brezhnev worked to make Soviet authority in Eastern Europe more sustainable through limited reforms, increased East–West interchange and, when necessary, the use of force. In broader terms, he sought détente with the United States, privileging co-operation with Washington above communist commitments in Cuba, China and Vietnam.⁹ 'Developed socialism' made socialism dependent on capitalism.

The hopes and discontents of the Khrushchev thaw

The early 1960s were a heady time for academics in the United States, Western Europe, and even the Soviet Union. Space travel, industrial agriculture and 'cybernetic' management of information networks all promised to improve the political influence of knowledge producers. Policy makers in the West and East took C. P. Snow's famous injunction to heart. They created new fellowships, research institutes

6 See Dmitri Volkogonov, *Sem' Vozhdey: Galeria liderov SSSR v dvukh knigakh*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), 26–40. While Khrushchev favoured confrontation and mobilisation, George Breslauer explains that Brezhnev favoured consensus-building and political stability. See George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 3–20.

7 Brezhnev first began to speak of a 'developed socialist society' in 1967. By 1971 the phrase 'developed socialism' received prominent attention in various Communist Party documents and journals, especially *Kommunist*. See Leonid Brezhnev, *Report to the Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 3 November 1967*, trans. David Skvirsky (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 26; Alfred B. Evans Jr, 'Developed Socialism in Soviet Ideology', *Soviet Studies* 29 (July 1977), 412–14.

8 Geoffrey Hosking uses the term 'developed socialism' in a similar way for the period between 1964 and 1985. See Geoffrey Hosking, *The First Socialist Society: A History of the Soviet Union From Within*, 2nd enlarged edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 363–401. See also Mark Sandle, 'Brezhnev and Developed Socialism: The Ideology of *Zastoi*?' in Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, eds., *Brezhnev Reconsidered* (Houndsmill: Palgrave, 2002), 165–87; Evans, 'Developed Socialism in Soviet Ideology', 414–28; Donald R. Kelley, 'Developed Socialism: A Political Formula for the Brezhnev Era', in Jim Seroka and Maurice D. Simon, eds., *Developed Socialism in the Soviet Bloc: Political Theory and Political Reality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 3–20; Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 245–65, 290–92.

9 For more on the origins and consequences of détente, see Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. 213–59.

and ‘technical advisory councils’ to bridge the gap between what Snow identified as the ‘two cultures’ of scientists and humanists – *fisiki* and *liriki* in Russian parlance.¹⁰

Fearful that a largely ‘closed’ society would inhibit the scientific investigations and intellectual inquiries underpinning programmes for ‘modernisation’, state leaders – particularly Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev – worked to expand the resources at the disposal of prominent national academics. In contrast to the years of Stalinist isolation, Soviet intellectuals now had special access to foreign periodicals and technology. Khrushchev oversaw the construction of new scientific communities – such as Akademgorodok – where scholars could interact in relative freedom.¹¹

In nearly every society – East and West – intellectuals exerted more influence on policy than ever before in recent memory. The Kennedy White House was, of course, the model, where the ‘best and the brightest’ organised a young and ambitious government. In the Soviet Union long-repressed writers and scientists also circulated their ideas – often through newly created academic and policy institutes – with fewer restrictions than ever before.¹²

The Khrushchev ‘thaw’, however, also triggered active dissent, especially among the young. In 1963 an attentive reading of the official Soviet press revealed that vocal student resistance to Communist Party authorities had become quite prevalent, eliciting unprecedented government hand-wringing. Radio Liberty – a radio broadcast and research organisation formed in Western Europe to circumvent censorship within the Soviet Union – reported that ‘Scepticism, because it is so widespread among Soviet intellectuals, in particular the young people, is the subject of much attention in the Soviet press. And surprisingly the basic cause is frequently suggested in the press – the disparity between communist theory and Soviet reality.’¹³

10 C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1959]), esp. 1–21. On Snow’s influence in the Soviet Union see Paul R. Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited: Akademgorodok, The Siberian City of Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 124. On the growth of cybernetics as a discipline in the Soviet Union see *ibid.*, 123–4; ‘Ot Redaktsii’, *Problemy Kibernetiki* 1 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoy izdatel’stvo fiziko–matematicheskoy literatury, 1958), 4; Willis H. Ware and Wade B. Holland, ‘Soviet Cybernetics Technology: Soviet Cybernetics, 1959–1962’, Report RM-3675-PR (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 1963).

11 See Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited*, esp. 9–63. Contrast what Josephson calls the elements of ‘democratic communication’ in Akademgorodok under Khrushchev’s leadership with the closed and terroristic environment for science during Stalin’s years. See David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 96–115, 134–49.

12 For the growth of scholarly influence on policy making in both the Soviet Union and the United States during this period see Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), esp. 25–44. On the United States see David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972), *passim*; Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 21–68. On increased freedom of expression in the Soviet Union see Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–64* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), esp. 5–6; Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Paul Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), esp. 83–101.

13 ‘Where do Sceptics Come from in the USSR?’ 5 September 1963, Radio Liberty Analysis, Box 80–1–497, Fond 300, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Open Society Archives, Central

Soviet newspapers explained that the Communist Party encountered increased difficulty in its attempts to motivate young citizens for military duties, farm labour, and basic public service.¹⁴ The Communist Youth League – the Komsomol – found that students avoided mandatory activities, and when present displayed deep apathy. Many young people engaged in informal methods of resistance, including absenteeism and foot-dragging.¹⁵ Informal meeting groups ('kompanii') supplanted the state-controlled Komsomol. When provided with full doses from the Soviet canon of heroic socialist films and books, students openly voiced their preference for the realism of Solzhenitsyn and *samizdat*. 'I want to read about real youth, not about an invented one', one young citizen boldly proclaimed. Another student inveighed that 'One must portray not "cut-outs" but living people in books.'¹⁶

Komsomolskaya Pravda – the official Soviet journal most directly concerned with youth issues – became obsessed with the troubling 'psychology of contemporary young people'.¹⁷ Men and women frequently wrote to the newspaper explaining that they felt bored, unchallenged and depressed. Soviet society was relatively stable in the 1960s, but it offered, according to one letter from students in Novosibirsk, little space for interesting and creative work.¹⁸ One eighteen-year-old adopted the language of existential angst, writing that 'I've lost faith in the future, faith in life.'¹⁹ A public survey conducted by Soviet authorities in 1964 revealed that more than four out of every five students refused to heed the leadership's call for the cultivation of 'virgin lands'.²⁰

Soviet authorities confronted the classic dilemma – first described by Alexis de Tocqueville a century earlier – of 'rising expectations' among the educated population during a period of liberalisation.²¹ Attempts to institute gradual, controlled reforms produced a flood of demands for broader change. Domestic discontent and informal resistance never threatened the regime, but they undermined the Kremlin's hopes for

European University, Budapest, Hungary (hereafter RFE/RL Papers). On Radio Liberty see James Critchlow, *Radio Hole-in-the-Head: An Insider's Story of Cold War Broadcasting* (Washington, DC: The American University Press, 1995), 1–14, 99–111.

14 'Molodej Sovetskovo Soyuz', 5–6 November 1962, Institute for the Study of the USSR, Munich, Box 80–1–497, Fond 300, RFE/RL Papers.

15 'Komsomol and Youth', 19 April 1963, Box 80–1–497, Fond 300, RFE/RL Papers; 'Problema podrostkov i perestroika roboti komsomola', 13 October 1965, Box 80–1–496, Fond 300, RFE/RL Papers; 'The Interests and Aspirations of Soviet Youth', 3 November 1965, Box 80–1–496, Fond 300, RFE/RL Papers.

16 'Which Books are Popular among Soviet Youth?', 13 October 1964, Box 80–1–497, Fond 300, RFE/RL Papers.

17 *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 27 April 1961.

18 'No Work for Graduates', 23 May 1962, Box 80–1–853, Fond 300, RFE/RL Papers.

19 *Komsomolskaya Pravda* 20 Aug. 1961.

20 'Molodej yhodit iz kolhozov v goroda', 1 December 1964, Box 80–1–497, Fond 300, RFE/RL Papers. On Khrushchev's 'virgin lands' programme see Nikita Khrushchev, Report on the Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, delivered at the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 18 October 1961, trans., Soviet Novosti Press Agency (London: Farleigh Press, 1961), 31; Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, 356–62; Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, revised edn (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 329–41.

21 Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952 [1856]), 226–31.

improved productivity in the 1960s. If anything, piecemeal Soviet reforms detracted from the regime's economic and political power.

At the Twenty-second Communist Party Congress, in January 1961, Khrushchev had proclaimed that the Soviet Union would eliminate all poverty, building the most prosperous society in history. 'This will be an imposing achievement', he promised. 'No capitalist country can set itself this task.'²² By the middle of the decade, however, growth rates failed to approach these over-ambitious standards. This failure in Khrushchev's programme became public knowledge. Prominent economists, such as Abel Aganbegyan of the Novosibirsk Institute of Economics, warned that, if anything, the Soviet Union would soon fall further behind its counterparts in the West.²³

Openness in the early 1960s produced popular excitement, but it weakened the external strength and internal coherence of the Soviet state. The Communist Party coup that forced Khrushchev from office in October 1964 was a direct reaction to the difficulties that the General Secretary's attempts at reform had inspired within the Soviet Union, as well as abroad. A Soviet 'thaw' remained necessary in the eyes of the Communist Party, but it required better management from the Kremlin.²⁴

Leonid Brezhnev and new Soviet openings after Khrushchev

Influenced by the caricature of Leonid Brezhnev as incompetent, self-indulgent and frequently inebriated that became prevalent during the second half of the 1980s, many scholars have dismissed Khrushchev's successor as a serious leader. Some observers have also doubted Brezhnev's control over Soviet policy, especially during the years following the 1964 leadership transition. Edwin Bacon and others have recently offered a re-evaluation of these judgments. Brezhnev was a leader who valued stability above other goals, but he also implemented a wide-ranging agenda, especially in the area of foreign policy.²⁵ In particular, Brezhnev endorsed cautious trade openings designed to substitute foreign consumer goods for shortcomings in domestic production. He also sought, through limited intellectual and cultural openings, to increase the dynamism of the Soviet bloc while enforcing strict adherence to the political status quo. Brezhnev's programme of 'developed socialism' was about strengthening Soviet power through careful relaxation of state repression and continued overall domestic control.

22 Nikita Khrushchev, Report on the Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, delivered at the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 18 October 1961, trans., Soviet Novosti Press Agency (London: Farleigh Press, 1961), 46.

23 See Hosking, *The First Socialist Society*, 363–4.

24 See Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 3–17, 578–619; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 272–4; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *'One Hell of a Gamble': The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 353–5.

25 See Edwin Bacon, 'Reconsidering Brezhnev', in Bacon and Sandle, *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, 1–21. See also Mark Sandle's essay in the same volume, 'Brezhnev and Developed Socialism: The Ideology of *Zastoi?*', 165–87. For an older assessment that agrees with Bacon and Sandle, see Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 245–65.

Brezhnev's programme, initially part of a 'consensus' Kremlin leadership with Aleksei Kosygin, began by expanding Soviet and Eastern bloc trade with the West. Conscious of domestic discontent and economic shortcomings, Brezhnev and Kosygin authorised a series of agreements through which the communist states would export raw materials (including oil and gas) to their capitalist counterparts, in return for manufactured products (including heavy machinery and computers.) This was a reversal of Khrushchev's emphasis on domestic production of agrarian and manufactured goods. Increased imports of industrial products after 1964 promised to boost domestic Soviet consumption and minimise the risks of the communist behemoth falling farther behind the Western economies in technical development.²⁶

The Soviet computer industry provides a clear example of the shift from indigenous economic development during the Khrushchev years to reliance on informal (and sometimes illicit) Western aid under Brezhnev. Between 1957 and 1964 Soviet computer scientists, working with extensive government support in Akademgorodok and other 'science cities', designed transistor-based computing devices close in quality to those pioneered in the United States at the time. The 'Ural 14' for example, did not match the 256K storage capability of the IBM 7030 in the early 1960s, but it performed many of the same data-processing functions.²⁷

In 1965 the Soviet authorities almost completely abandoned domestic computer development, opting to focus their efforts on copying technology imports. This technique created a greater time lag between Western and Soviet production, but it eliminated many of the costs incurred as scientists pursued their own independent – and often unsuccessful – roads to new invention. The 'Ryad' computers of the late 1960s and early 1970s explicitly copied the architecture of IBM models, offering little or no innovation.²⁸

The Soviet Union had more scientists and engineers than any other society, but its leadership used foreign technology transfer and trade to limit the disruptions that accompanied the kind of domestic innovation Khrushchev initially championed.²⁹ Brezhnev did not want to develop new products at home; he wanted to import already developed items. Soviet consumer and defence production after 1964 emphasised the quantitative and controlled duplication of external advances.³⁰

26 In his first major speech after Khrushchev's ouster, Brezhnev emphasised the need for new 'economic incentives' and 'trade'. See *Report by Leonid Brezhnev on the 47th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, 6 November 1964* (Moscow: Novosti, 1964), 12–13. See also Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*, 137–52.

27 See Daniel L. Burghart, *Red Microchip: Technology Transfer, Export Control, and Economic Restructuring in the Soviet Union* (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1992), 59–60; Antony C. Sutton, *Western Technology and Soviet Economic Development, 1945 to 1965* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 318–23.

28 See Burghart, *Red Microchip*, 60–4.

29 Paul Josephson notes that between 1950 and 1965 the total number of Soviet scientists grew from 162,500 to 665,000. By the early 1970s the Soviet Union had a quarter of the world's scientists, half the world's engineers, and a third of the world's physicists. See Josephson, *New Atlantis Revisited*, 23, 30.

30 See Matthew Evangelista, *Innovation and the Arms Race: How the United States and the Soviet Union Develop New Military Technologies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 22–82, 218–68.

Table 1. *Trade between the Soviet Union and West European countries, 1964–70*

Year	Total trade turnover (US\$ million)			
	UK	France	Italy	West Germany
1964	382.0	205.0	238.0	365.0
1965	461.6	218.0	279.4	357.0
1966	492.9	247.6	279.2	380.6
1967	515.4	342.4	399.6	462.9
1968	624.0	439.3	463.5	567.0
1969	706.4	470.3	531.3	741.0
1970	773.2	476.5	589.4	764.0

Source: James K. Libbey, *American–Russian Economic Relations: A Survey of Issues and References* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1989), 98.

During the second half of the 1960s the Soviet bloc used Western Europe as its primary source for industrial and high technology imports. In part this reflected continued tensions between Moscow and Washington, as well as Brezhnev's determination to avoid dependence on his primary capitalist adversary.³¹ More significantly, the Soviet Union had to contend with criticisms of alleged 'revisionism' from allies in Beijing, Havana, and other capitals.³² Increased trade with Western Europe, rather than the United States, attracted less venom from dogmatic communists.

Between 1964 and 1970 Soviet trade with each of the largest West European economies more than doubled (see Table 1). Moscow also encouraged its allies in Eastern Europe to expand their commerce with the West. A series of attempted reforms in the Eastern bloc Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) sought to replace with favourable foreign trade the large subsidies that the Soviet Union provided to communist regimes. By opening the CMEA Brezhnev not only hoped to increase his state's access to high technology; he also aimed to reduce the heavy financial burden of empire.³³

Most surprisingly, West German trade with the Soviet Union, East Germany and the other communist states grew rapidly during this period. In previous years Khrushchev had invested a great deal of political capital in discrediting what he called

31 See Volkogonov, *Sem' Vozhdey*, 2: 31.

32 See Fidel Castro to Nikita Khrushchev, 31 October 1962, reprinted in James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn, and David A. Welch, *Cuba on the Brink* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 489; Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 3, *The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961–1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 318–23.

33 See Randall W. Stone, *Satellites and Commissars: Strategy and Conflict in the Politics of Soviet-Bloc Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. 33–9. Stone argues that Soviet attempts to reform the CMEA in the late 1960s and early 1970s failed because 'the incentive structures in the Soviet bureaucracy were perverse, neither motivating officials to pursue the leadership's objectives nor allowing them to do their own jobs competently'. Failures to reform the CMEA contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union, according to Stone. See Stone, *Satellites and Commissars*, 39–46, quotation on 39.

the 'revanchist' Bonn government.³⁴ On two occasions – in 1958–9 and 1961 – he attempted to undermine the Federal Republic's claim as the successor to the pre-war German state by severing its guaranteed connection to West Berlin.³⁵

West German trade with the East had begun to grow in the late 1950s, but its expansion after 1964 reflected a new determination in both Moscow and Bonn to accept the geopolitical status quo. The Soviet Union would live with West Germany, exploiting its economic wealth to improve life in the communist states. In return, citizens of the Federal Republic – separated from their families on the other side of the Berlin Wall – received assurance that their trade and aid would help to improve the lives of loved ones in the East.³⁶

The movement toward closer relations in central Europe – 'Ostpolitik' – really began in 1964, when Brezhnev's government sought co-operation with the West German state, rather than continued conflict. Citizens and leaders in the Federal Republic, discouraged by their inability to break the enforced division of their nation, began to reciprocate the conciliatory Soviet attitude during this period as well. Even a staunch anti-communist like Konrad Adenauer accepted the idea of more amicable East–West relations during the early 1960s.³⁷

Increases in Soviet–US trade during the late 1960s and early 1970s followed the general pattern in central Europe. Commercial exchange largely replaced geopolitical conflict, setting the stage for broader international co-operation – including a 1972 agreement on 'most-favoured-nation' status for trade between the two states.³⁸ The United States remained a much smaller Soviet trading partner than any of the major West European countries, but by 1970 its commerce with Moscow had more than tripled compared with a decade earlier (see Table 2).

34 See, for example, Khrushchev's letter to President Kennedy 28 September 1962, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1961–63, 6: 157.

35 See Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, 194–202, 248–58; John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 138–49.

36 See Robert Mark Spaulding, *Osthandel and Ostpolitik: German Foreign Trade Policies in Eastern Europe from Bismarck to Adenauer* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997), 422–58; Angela E. Stent, 'From Rapallo to Reunification: Russia and Germany in the Twentieth Century', in Sanford R. Lieberman, David E. Powell, Carol R. Saivetz and Sarah M. Terry, eds., *The Soviet Empire Reconsidered: Essays in Honor of Adam B. Ulam* (Boulder: Westview, 1994), 168–75; Heinrich Machowski, 'Soviet–West German Economic Relations: The Soviet Perspective', and Jochen Bethkenhagen, 'Soviet–West German Economic Relations: The West German Perspective', in Angela E. Stent, ed., *Economic Relations with the Soviet Union: American and West German Perspectives* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), 49–89.

37 See Horst Osterheld an Adenauer 12 November 1962; Sprechzettel für die Verhandlungen in Washington November 1962, Ordnung III/61, Adenauer Nachlaß, Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus, Rhöndorf, Germany; David Klein to McGeorge Bundy 12 November 1962, Folder: Germany, General 11/62, Box 76 (Temporary), National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA; Klaus Gotto, 'Adenauers Deutschland- und Ostpolitik, 1954–1963', in Rudolf Morsey and Konrad Repgen, eds., *Adenauer Studien*, Vol. 3, *Untersuchungen Dokumente zur Ostpolitik und Biographie* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1974), 70–5; Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der Staatsmann, 1952–1967* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1991), 701–2.

38 See 'Agreement between the government of the United States of America and the government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics regarding trade', 29 May 1972, *Department of State Bulletin* (20 November 1972), 595–600.

Table 2. *Trade between the Soviet Union and the United States, 1960–70*

Year	Total trade US\$ million
1960	61.8
1961	68.7
1962	36.2
1963	44.0
1964	166.9
1965	87.6
1966	91.1
1967	101.3
1968	115.7
1969	161.0
1970	195.5

Source: James K. Libbey, *American–Russian Economic Relations: A Survey of Issues and References* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1989), 98.

The Soviet Union and its East European satellites lacked the hard currency to pay for their growing imports after 1964. In 1970 the communist states, led by Poland, began to borrow money extensively from Western banks in order to finance their trade. Between 1970 and 1975 Soviet bloc debt (excluding Yugoslavia) grew from US\$7 billion to US\$29 billion.³⁹ Now the communist states were not only dependent on Western technology and material goods for domestic consumption: they also relied upon Western capital for their sustenance.

In 1947 Stalin had rejected similar loans, offered by the US-sponsored European Recovery Program (the Marshall Plan), because foreign capital threatened to destroy the independence and secrecy that the dictator wished to maintain for his empire. Years of acute East–West tension followed from Stalin’s decision. The Soviet Union and the United States proceeded to build separate and antagonistic alliances in Europe.⁴⁰

Brezhnev and Kosygin reversed Stalin’s decision. They encouraged an unprecedented flow of Western capital into the communist sphere. Foreign loans stabilised the cash-poor economies in the Soviet bloc, saving them from the disruptions that accompanied competition with the more vibrant capitalist world. Trade and aid undermined the isolation that had long characterised Stalin’s empire. Brezhnev and Kosygin tolerated this shift because it allowed them to produce the

³⁹ Benjamin J. Cohen, *In Whose Interest? International Banking and American Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 181.

⁴⁰ See Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 41–3; Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*, 46–53; Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 27–9.

goods that Khrushchev promised without the internal difficulties that had previously followed from indigenous efforts at development.

'Developed socialism' was socialism that depended on capitalism. It fostered broad commercial exchange, technology transfer and financial borrowing for the preservation of communist institutions. Brezhnev and Kosygin mixed continued authoritarian political controls with selective socioeconomic liberalisation. The fate of Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s illustrates how precariously control and liberalisation coexisted under 'developed socialism'.

Hopes for controlled reform in Czechoslovakia

Like its counterpart in Moscow, the Czechoslovak government found it increasingly difficult to motivate students for patriotic duty in the military and membership of the Communist Party after Khrushchev's 'thaw'. Warsaw Pact representatives observed a threatening decline in the operational effectiveness of the Czechoslovak armed forces as recruits frequently challenged regimental discipline.⁴¹ While the youth population grew during the 1960s, the number affiliated with the state-sponsored Czechoslovak Union of Youth declined by 33 per cent, from 1.5 million in 1963 to barely 1 million in 1966. Students comprised less than half of 1 per cent (0.4%) of Communist Party membership in 1966. Czechoslovakia was a state with aging leaders and a large cohort of young, disaffected citizens.⁴² Even state authorities spoke in the 1960s of a 'youth problem'.⁴³

During November and December 1967 discontent among students, intellectuals and other citizens bubbled to the surface throughout the city of Prague. The streets remained orderly, but young people became overtly critical of General Secretary Antonín Novotný and his fellow party bosses. Students threatened to demonstrate if the government refused to initiate new reforms. They formed a co-ordinating committee to organise their protests, violating official prohibitions. In alliance with dissident writers, students demanded the right to publish their own journal, free of Communist Party censorship.⁴⁴

Novotný's government faced an upsurge in domestic resistance that threatened imminent disorder. With each day the demands of students and intellectuals seemed to grow. Foreign observers began to worry that Czechoslovak society would either descend into chaos or suffer a violent round of neo-Stalinist repression. The US ambassador, Jacob Beam, reported that the population of Prague was visibly

41 See the reflections of Soviet General Aleksandr Mayorov, interviewed in Miklós Kun, *Prague Spring – Prague Fall: Blank Spots of 1968*, trans. Hajnal C satorday (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999), 139.

42 In 1967 Czechoslovak citizens under twenty-four years of age comprised the largest demographic cohort of the nation's population. See Vladimir V. Kusin, *Political Grouping in the Czechoslovak Reform Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 123–6.

43 See H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 72–7.

44 See 'Unrest Among Prague Students', Radio Free Europe Research Report, 28 November 1967, Fond 300, Subfond 30, Box 30/1/313, RFE/RL; Galia Golan, *The Czechoslovak Reform Movement: Communism in Crisis, 1962–1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 264–5.

‘unsatisfied’. Unable to inspire or even enforce civic loyalty, the Communist Party had entered a worrying period of ‘internal confusion’, according to Beam. ‘Tolerable solutions’ for ‘grave problems’ appeared particularly difficult for Party leaders and domestic critics who had become increasingly alienated from one another.⁴⁵

Internal disorder contributed to intense acrimony within the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In late October 1967 Alexander Dubček – the first secretary of the Slovak Communist Party (subsumed within the larger Czechoslovak apparatus) – criticized Novotný for following a method of governance that was too ‘conservative’. The leader’s unwillingness to pursue necessary reforms contributed, Dubček argued, to threatening conditions among the ‘solid citizenry’. Confronted with student unrest, intellectual dissent, and many other domestic difficulties, the time appeared right for a new ‘long-term party programme’ that would strengthen communism rather than brute repression.⁴⁶

Dubček’s criticisms resonated with many other Party leaders, especially as student unrest escalated in the last two months of the year. Novotný had his defenders, but his inability to prevent public displays of discontent made him vulnerable to charges of incompetence. A group of respected Communist Party officials – Mária Sedláková, František Kriegel and Josef Špacek – joined Dubček in demanding more energetic leadership and drastic policy change. Students and intellectuals had not overturned the ruling party, but they had managed to make the political status quo appear untenable. The Czechoslovak leadership had to undertake new measures – along a more conservative Novotný path, or perhaps in a more ‘liberal’ direction.⁴⁷

Alarmed by the divisions within the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Brezhnev made an emergency visit to Prague. He spent forty-eight hours in the city, on 8–9 December 1967, meeting frantically with different members of the regime. Brezhnev later reported that during his stay he only had three hours free from discussion for ‘personal hygiene and food’. While this was surely an exaggeration – particularly for a self-indulgent man like Brezhnev – the description of marathon deliberations captures the urgency of the moment for the Czechoslovak (and Soviet) leadership.⁴⁸

Brezhnev was initially disposed against any change of leadership in Czechoslovakia. He came away from his visit, however, with the impression that ‘Comrade Novotný hasn’t the slightest idea about the true state of affairs.’ His dictatorial control over government activities inspired dangerous resentments among well-meaning communists. Groups seeking to resist state authority took advantage of the leader’s failed policies and the divisions among his associates. Brezhnev found Dubček’s call for a new Communist Party programme more promising than Novotný’s continued

45 Telegram from the Embassy in Czechoslovakia to the Department of State, 2 December 1967, FRUS, 1964–68, 17: 180–2, quotations on 181–2.

46 See Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution*, 166.

47 *Ibid.*, 166–8.

48 See János Kádár’s Report to the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party Politburo of a Telephone Conversation with Leonid Brezhnev, 13 December 1967, repr. and trans. in Jaromír Navrátil et al., ed., *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, trans. Mark Kramer, Joy Moss, Ruth Tosek (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 20–2.

adherence to a dogmatic hard line. He lamented that the long-time Czechoslovak leader 'does not know what collective leadership is' nor 'how to handle people'.⁴⁹

Brezhnev did not explicitly endorse any side in the dispute among the Czechoslovak communists. 'I did not come to take part in the solution of your problems', he announced. 'We do not do this, and you will surely manage to solve them on your own.' The Soviet leader stressed the 'achievements' of the Warsaw Pact states in defending the 'socialist camp' against US-sponsored aggression. Czechoslovakia required a strong and unified government to deter external challengers. '[U]nity', Brezhnev explained, 'is a supreme principle that begins at the nucleus of the [Communist] Party.'⁵⁰

This call for unity favoured the arguments of men like Dubček who promised new ideas rather than more of the same failed policies. The Soviet leader's failure to back Novotný against his challengers sealed his fate. Novotný could no longer rely on Moscow to ensure his legitimacy and, more important, his access to necessary military force.⁵¹ After Brezhnev's departure criticisms within elite Czechoslovak circles proliferated, many citing the present leader's inability to redress the 'political discontent of the people', as well as the 'declining activity and interest of the party members'.⁵² Czechoslovak military figures joined Party officials, refusing to back Novotný's authority unconditionally. In the face of these pressures, now coming from both inside and outside the Communist Party, Novotný had to resign from his supreme position as First Secretary.⁵³

Alexander Dubček became the new leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on 5 January 1968. His mandate from the Central Committee reflected the regime's concerns about growing domestic discontent. In order to revitalise the public standing of the government, the Party called for 'far greater encouragement of an open exchange of views' within society. Under Dubček's guidance, the Czechoslovak leadership would formulate a new 'Action Programme' to improve conditions among citizens.⁵⁴

Born in Slovakia on 27 November 1921, Dubček had spent more than a decade of his childhood in the Soviet Union. He returned to Czechoslovakia in 1938, and played an active role in the communist resistance to Nazi occupation. After the communist seizure of power on 20 February 1948, Dubček joined the Party apparatus, working diligently for Soviet bloc unity during the early 1960s. Appointed to the post of first secretary for the Slovak section of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1963, he

49 Ibid. The quotations are from Kádár's account of Brezhnev's words during their telephone conversation.

50 Remarks by Leonid Brezhnev at a Meeting of Top Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Officials, in Prague, 9 December 1967, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 18–19.

51 See Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniya diplomata, sovetnika A. A. Gromyko, promoshchnika L. I. Brezhneva, Yu. V. Andropova, K.U. Chernenko, M.S. Gorbachev* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994), 145–7; Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, 179.

52 Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, 168–171, quotations on 169.

53 Ibid., 178–9.

54 Resolution of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia's Central Committee Plenum, 5 January 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 34–6.

remained a loyal Moscow ally, but he also became an early proponent of internal regime reform. Like Brezhnev, Dubček hoped that a less dictatorial Communist Party could inspire broad public enthusiasm while guaranteeing the authority of the present leadership. His criticism of Novotný's neo-Stalinist activities in October 1967 was only an explicit manifestation of the reformist tendencies that Dubček and others harboured in the context of shared hopes for 'developed socialism' in Eastern Europe. For Dubček, building 'developed socialism' was not about revolution, but instead about widening and strengthening communist legitimacy through domestic liberalisation.⁵⁵

Speaking on 22 February 1968 at the twentieth anniversary celebrations for the Communist Party's accession to power, Dubček announced that the government would direct 'all of our endeavours . . . towards a true invigoration and unification of all constructive and progressive forces in the republic'. 'This is the necessary prerequisite for a new inception of socialism in our republic', he exclaimed. The future strength of the Czechoslovak Communist Party required the cultivation of what Dubček called 'democratic forms', originating 'from below' – among workers, scientists, intellectuals and students.⁵⁶

The new Czechoslovak leader was a devoted believer in the sanctity of the Communist Party. He also understood the importance of following Soviet tutelage in Eastern Europe. Dubček had witnessed the disastrous consequences of Hungary's attempts to break with the Warsaw Pact in 1956.⁵⁷ For these reasons he emphasised the 'leading role' of the Party and the virtues of 'centralism' in his 22 February speech. 'We want to rally all the citizens of our republic to implement the progressive objectives of socialist development and strengthen confidence in the party.'⁵⁸

Dubček hoped to build a new political consensus in Czechoslovakia somewhere between the dogmatism of Novotný and the raucous behaviour of the Prague students. While preserving the anti-capitalist shibboleths of the Communist Party, Dubček promoted 'voluntary discipline' that would strengthen the Czechoslovak state. '[T]oday more than ever', he explained, 'the important thing is not to reduce our policy to a struggle "against" but, more importantly, to wage a struggle "for".' 'We cannot preserve past values simply by defending them all the time', Dubček announced. He called for all factions in society to look 'new problems boldly in the face'. 'We shall tackle these in a new and creative manner, in a manner dictated by our present reality.'⁵⁹

55 See Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak politics, 1968–1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3–28; William Shawcross, *Dubček* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), esp. 98–125; Vladimir V. Kusin, *The Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring: The Development of Reformist Ideas in Czechoslovakia, 1956–1967* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 19–27; idem, *Political Grouping in the Czechoslovak Reform Movement*, 1–8.

56 Alexander Dubček's Speech Marking the 20th Anniversary of Czechoslovakia's 'February Revolution', 22 February 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 51–4, quotations on 53–4.

57 See Shawcross, *Dubček*, 65–9.

58 Dubček's Speech Marking the 20th Anniversary of Czechoslovakia's 'February Revolution', 22 February 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 53.

59 Ibid., 52.

Dubček singled out students for particular attention. He argued that the future success of Communist Party reforms required 'far greater participation' from the nation's youth. Young men and women in Prague were better educated than their forebears. They promised to infuse Czechoslovak society with new creative energies to overcome what Dubček perceived as a contemporary malaise. Calls for open discussions and explorations served as a direct appeal to the young. Co-opting them in a state strengthening project, rather than suppressing their dissident thoughts, Dubček expected that he could coax the unruly students into becoming loyal communists. Reforms, according to this model, would channel rebellious energies for constructive purpose.⁶⁰

The new Czechoslovak 'Action Programme', published on 10 April 1968, followed these general lines. It affirmed the 'leading role of the Communist Party', the continuing struggle against capitalist 'imperialism', and the fundamental importance of Prague's alliance with Moscow. At the same time, the Action Programme called for increased domestic pluralism. The document proclaimed that 'the [Communist] Party does not want to and will not take the place of social organisations'. '[O]n the contrary, it must ensure that their initiative and political responsibility for the unity of society are revived and can flourish.'⁶¹

Instead of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat', the Action Programme advocated a more circumscribed place for the Communist Party in society. Dubček and his counterparts would encourage change within a socialist framework, but they would not manage all domestic affairs – they would not play the role of 'universal caretakers' for society. 'The role of the Party', the Action Programme explained, 'is to find a way of satisfying the various interests without jeopardizing the interests of society as a whole.' In this context, the Dubček government went so far as to advocate 'freedom of speech' and expanded rights of personal choice in profession and 'lifestyle'.⁶² These expanded individual rights would encourage more creativity and 'voluntary discipline' on crucial issues of state. The Communist Party would lead by persuasion, not coercive force.

The Action Programme appears somewhat tame in retrospect, but it was a radical departure from the stolid authority of the Soviet bloc in the late 1960s. Jiri Valenta observes that this 'Magna Carta of Dubček's new leadership' was 'more comprehensive and went much further than the initial programme of [Imre] Nagy in Hungary' during that country's tragic break with Soviet authority in 1956.⁶³ Recognizing this, Czechoslovakia's East European allies – especially in Poland and East Germany – quickly expressed their disapproval of Dubček's reforms. They worried, in the words of Polish leader Władysław Gomułka, that Czechoslovakia risked following a 'path to counter-revolution'. Free speech would allow 'imperialists'

60 Ibid.; Williams, *Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, 14–25.

61 The Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 10 April 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 92–5, quotations on 92–3.

62 Ibid., 93–5.

63 Jiri Valenta, 'Revolutionary Change, Soviet Intervention, and "Normalisation" in East-Central Europe', *Comparative Politics*, 16 (January 1984), 131.

to gain support among students and workers. 'Why not draw conclusions from what happened in Hungary?' Gomulka asked. 'That all began in a similar way'.⁶⁴

Leonid Brezhnev had similar apprehensions, but he also recognised the promise of Dubček's reforms. If the new Czechoslovak leader could revitalise his society, he would inspire similar improvements in morale and unity throughout the Soviet bloc. Brezhnev understood the necessity of pursuing a more dynamic 'route' to 'socialist democracy'. This was the essence of 'developed socialism' and the Soviet leader's hopes for controlled reform throughout his empire. Novotný had tried to rule like Stalin, producing a stagnant, discontented and divided society. Dubček offered an alluring – if dangerous – alternative from the Kremlin's perspective.⁶⁵ If Dubček's reforms succeeded, Brezhnev hoped to show that he could encourage dynamic reforms in decaying communist institutions while still maintaining strict Soviet control. Kremlin-sponsored reform in Czechoslovakia would be a showcase for 'developed socialism' and an alternative to both the Stalinist legacy of state terror and Khrushchev's over-ambitious efforts at public mobilisation.

In this context, Brezhnev warily endorsed the new Czechoslovak Action Programme. He wrote a personal letter to Dubček on 11 April 1968, explaining: 'I understand very well that your work is aimed at overcoming certain difficulties, the most important of which is that amidst the healthy trends, revisionist and hostile forces are seeking to divert Czechoslovakia from the socialist path.' '[Y]ou can always count on our full support', the Soviet leader pledged, 'in the struggle to bolster the cause of socialism, the cohesion of the socialist countries, and the unity of the world communist movement.'⁶⁶

Brezhnev desired a gradual opening in Czechoslovakia. Dubček, however, saw a need for rapid reform. Both men sought to strengthen the authority of the Communist Party, but they disagreed fundamentally on tactics. Dubček's methods were eclectic, uncertain and often filled with hesitation.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, he consistently allowed new freedoms for protesting students and intellectuals, exposing his regime to domestic criticism. Brezhnev feared the consequences of freer dissent among young Czechoslovak citizens. The Soviet leader's gradualism was rooted in a desire to maintain stability above all. Ironically, Dubček's radicalism – like that of the Prague students – was much more orthodox in its socialist theory. It was Dubček, not Brezhnev, who sought to unleash the energies of the proletariat and purge the reactionary elements of the political order.

'The Prague Spring', encouraged by the forty-six-year-old Czechoslovak First Secretary, aimed to build a more humane society based on shared needs. In place of large bureaucracies and coercive police forces, the government would run on a

64 Stenographic Account of the Meeting of the Warsaw Pact states in Dresden, 23 March 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 64–72, quotations on 67.

65 See letter from Leonid Brezhnev to Alexander Dubček, 11 April 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 98–100, quotations on 99.

66 *Ibid.*, quotations on 99–100.

67 On Dubček's eclecticism and the difficulties it created for successful implementation of liberalising reforms, see Williams, *Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, 25–8.

pledge to make everyone's life better. Encouraging innovative ideas, public criticisms and independent groupings, the Communist Party would serve as an umbrella organisation bringing together the concerns of all citizens. A truly classless society would emerge as everyone co-operated on an equal footing. This was a vision of democratic socialism inspired by a long tradition of nineteenth-century European thought.⁶⁸ Dubček hoped to build a workers' and intellectuals' state without the exploitative characteristics of either capitalism or Soviet bloc communism.⁶⁹

Polish and East German worries about this programme proved to be extremely well founded. By the middle of 1968 the promise of the 'Prague Spring' encouraged many students and intellectuals to challenge the sacrosanct 'leading role' of the Communist Party. Writing at the behest of proponents of expanded domestic reforms, Ludvík Vaculík published a bold manifesto on 27 June 1968 – 'Two Thousand Words' – that extended his criticism of the Communist Party voiced a year earlier at the Czechoslovak Writers' Congress.⁷⁰ Referring to the first years after the Second World War, Vaculík remembered that 'Most of the nation' – including the author – 'welcomed the socialist programme with high hopes.' He regretted that the promise of independence from foreign domination and equality among citizens had come upon 'evil days' because power 'fell into the hands of the wrong people'. The Communist Party captured 'all the offices' in government, filling them with 'power-hungry individuals', 'cowards' and 'people with bad conscience'.⁷¹

Instead of relying on the wisdom of the Czechoslovak Communist Party to manage society, Vaculík contended that citizens must 'some day elect statesmen with sufficient courage, honour and political acumen'. This required the forced resignation of many Communists, and an elimination of the Party's monopoly of political power. Vaculík advocated 'public criticism, resolutions, demonstrations, demonstrative work brigades, collections to buy gifts for [Communists] on their retirement, strikes, and picketing at [Communist Party] front doors'. Through informal 'civil committees and commissions' across the nation, the author called for grass-roots activity to select new leaders. Vaculík's vision would replace Communist Party dominance with a direct, pluralist democracy.⁷²

Vaculík recognised that in 1968 a crucial moment for change had arrived. An upsurge of support for 'democratisation' had grown among students, intellectuals, workers and even members of the ruling elite in Czechoslovakia. This sense of

68 See Kusin, *Intellectual Origins of the Prague Spring*, 1–18.

69 Ibid., 140–2; Williams, *Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, 3–28; Mark Kramer, 'The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine', in Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 131–5; Valenta, 'Revolutionary Change, Soviet Intervention, and "Normalisation" in East-Central Europe', 131; Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, 217–24, 827–52.

70 On the voices of dissent at the Czechoslovak Writers' Conference, 27–29 June 1967, see the excerpts from speeches by Ludvík Vaculík, Václav Havel, Milan Kundera and Pavel Kohout in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 8–10.

71 Ludvík Vaculík, 'Two Thousand Words', 27 June 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 177–81, quotations on 177–8.

72 Ibid., 180–1.

democratic realisation – a renewed ‘springtime of the people’ – was truly international in scope, infecting societies from West to East.⁷³ In response the forces of ‘intervention’ had also gathered, fearful of the dangers to established authority, especially in the Soviet bloc. At this historical crossroads, Vaculík pleaded for citizens to seize the opening for broader reform at once. Instead of trembling before the tightening fist of Warsaw Pact reaction, he called for courage, determination and immediate action. ‘This spring a great opportunity was given to us once again, as it was after the end of [the Second World War]’, Vaculík wrote. ‘Again we have the chance to take into our own hands our common cause, which for working purposes we shall call socialism, and give it a form more appropriate to our once-good reputation and to the fairly good opinion we used to have of ourselves.’⁷⁴

More than seventy prominent Czechoslovak intellectuals, scientists and athletes signed their names to Vaculík’s manifesto. The text appeared in four widely read journals – *Práce*, *Mladá fronta*, *Zemědělské noviny* and *Literární listy*. The last publication alone had a circulation of 300,000 copies. Almost immediately an unprecedented outpouring of supportive letters from students and other citizens arrived at newspaper, radio and television offices throughout the country. Pressured by their followers to support Vaculík’s eloquent clarion call, the Czechoslovak media affirmed the importance of instituting broader political pluralism in society. The real danger of ‘counter-revolution’, according to most writers, came from the conservative Communist Party figures who wished to limit the free expression of critical ideas.⁷⁵

In a television address, Alexander Dubček attempted to offer a mild response to Vaculík’s challenge. He emphasised the importance of national unity and continued Communist Party leadership. In another speech he contended that ‘strikes and demonstrations’ would not help the cause of reform. The Czechoslovak leader admitted that many problems required further domestic self-criticism, but he warned against a lapse into the extremes of either Novotný-like reaction or radical excess. As in January, Dubček spent the early summer of 1968 attempting to find a middle ground that would revitalise Czechoslovak society by building popular support for existing Communist Party institutions. He knew that he had to salvage hopes for ‘developed socialism’ against the growing prospect of a Warsaw Pact invasion.⁷⁶

Moscow’s forceful reaction to events in Prague

Brezhnev’s earlier ambivalence about the course of the ‘Prague Spring’ now turned to panic. Attempts to reform socialism in Czechoslovakia had produced an open revolt against Moscow’s authority. This was the Khrushchev-like consequence that Brezhnev feared above all else. On 4 July 1968 the Soviet Politburo sent a frantic letter to the Czechoslovak leadership warning against the ‘destruction of the leading

⁷³ See Suri, *Power and Protest*, 164–212.

⁷⁴ Vaculík, ‘Two Thousand Words’, 179, 181.

⁷⁵ See Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution*, 277–9. On the writing of the ‘Two Thousand Words’ manifesto, and the reaction in Czechoslovakia, see Miklós Kun’s interview with Ludvík Vaculík in Kun, *Prague Spring – Prague Fall*, 204–8.

⁷⁶ See Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution*, 277.

role of the Communist Party'. Singling Vaculík out for attack, the Kremlin argued that the 'whole content of the "Two Thousand Words" platform is directed against the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and is intended to weaken the position of socialism in Czechoslovakia'. Condemning the critical language that pervaded radio, television and the press, the letter expressed dismay at the 'indiscriminate belittlement of party cadres'.⁷⁷

Brezhnev and his colleagues spared no insult for those who dared to advocate political pluralism in place of the Communist Party's monopoly of power. Dissidents 'are bringing together under one political roof', the letter contended, 'everyone who can serve their anti-socialist aims, ranging from the muddle-headed and those who are disoriented by the complicated political situation to open class enemies of the socialist system, from right-wing social democrats to former Hitlerites'. These groups allegedly used 'various "clubs" and other organisations for their subversive aims'.⁷⁸

The Soviet government called on Dubček to take more vigorous action against the 'anti-socialist' forces before they brought 'death' to the Communist Party. Abandoning the earlier hope that Dubček could inspire 'unity in general' throughout Czechoslovakia, the Kremlin prohibited political compromises that jeopardised established Eastern bloc leadership. Moscow's letter demanded that the Czechoslovak government 'rally all communists' and 'normalise' the domestic situation. A crack-down on critics and a strengthening of 'healthy forces in the Party' would ensure necessary order.⁷⁹

When he met the leaders of Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria in Warsaw on 14–15 July 1968, Brezhnev's criticisms of the Prague Spring became even more strident. In a long, rambling speech he proclaimed that 'Czechoslovakia is at a dangerous phase on the path leading out of the socialist camp.' As happened during the years of Khrushchev's leadership of the Soviet Union, limited reforms 'snowballed' out of control. Brezhnev feared that Czechoslovakia 'was only a small step' away from 'open repudiation of Marxism and of socialism in general'.⁸⁰ While writers like Vaculík pledged their loyalty to socialist principles, their criticism of the Communist Party branded them as 'anti-socialist' in the eyes of the Warsaw Pact leadership. The communist parties in Eastern Europe asserted a monopoly over the legitimate interpretation of socialist ideas. Brezhnev and his colleagues would not tolerate deviance from Eastern bloc discipline.⁸¹

In Warsaw the Soviet leader articulated Moscow's version of the 'domino theory'.⁸² Brezhnev explained that challenges to the leadership of the Communist Party in

77 Letter from the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 4 July 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 194–8, quotations on 194–5.

78 *Ibid.*, 194.

79 *Ibid.*, 195, 197.

80 Transcript of the Warsaw Meeting, 14–15 July 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 212–33, quotations on 221, 223.

81 See Volkogonov, *Sem' Vozhdey*, 2: 41–2.

82 For a wide-ranging analysis of the US version of the 'domino theory', see Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 276–311.

Czechoslovakia affected ‘the entire socialist system’ and ‘the whole world communist movement’. As in 1956, protests in one Soviet bloc state threatened to inspire similar demonstrations in neighbouring countries. An anti-communist upheaval would tarnish the image of Soviet power and domination. The departure of one nation from the Eastern bloc would embolden citizens elsewhere to offer their own challenges to Moscow. The Soviet Union had to deter future threats by reaffirming the credibility of its pledge to protect communist regimes, especially in Eastern Europe. ‘There has never been a case’, Brezhnev argued, ‘in which socialism triumphed and was firmly entrenched, only to have a capitalist order restored. This has never happened and we are certain it never will.’⁸³

Brezhnev’s fears of a ‘spill-over’ from Czechoslovakia reflected a very real danger. Political reforms and social unrest in Prague emboldened domestic critics of the Kremlin’s authority in Romania, the western borderlands of the Soviet Union, and even the city of Moscow. In the case of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu extended his rift with the Soviet leadership, dating back to at least 1964. Ceaușescu actively encouraged Dubček to push reforms and resist Warsaw Pact pressures.⁸⁴ In Ukraine and other parts of the borderlands, the evidence of Czechoslovak-inspired unrest came from the local population, as men and women more openly voiced their long-standing discontent with Soviet domination.⁸⁵ Dissident figures in Moscow expressed solidarity with Dubček and the citizens of Prague who promised an apparently humane alternative to the stolid and repressive form of communist authority in the Soviet Union.⁸⁶ The Prague Spring was clearly an international event within the Eastern bloc, inspiring ‘spill-overs’ that threatened to bring down the established regimes throughout the region, one ‘domino’ after another.

Brezhnev really did not want to send Soviet tanks into Prague, but the larger regional significance of events left him with little choice. Czechoslovakia was his unwanted war, his Vietnam. While the Soviet leader supported reforms in pursuit of ‘developed socialism’, he could not tolerate revolt against Moscow’s hegemony. He hoped that through both persuasion and threat he could convince Dubček to take a harder line with radical domestic opponents. The Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies (excluding Romania) called on the authorities in Prague to mobilise ‘all means of defence’, reassert ‘control over the mass media’, and close ‘the ranks of the Party’

83 Transcript of the Warsaw Meeting, 14–15 July 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 228.

84 See Mark Kramer, ‘The Soviet–Romanian Split and the Crisis with Czechoslovakia: Context, Reverberations, and Fallout’, paper presented at Stanford University, 15 January 2004.

85 See Amir Weiner, ‘Déjà Vu All Over Again: Prague Spring, Romanian Summer and Soviet Autumn on the Soviet Western Frontier’, *Contemporary European History*, this issue, 159–194; Kramer, ‘The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine’, 141–5; idem., ‘Ukraine and the Soviet–Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968 (Part 1): New Evidence from the Diary of Petro Shelest’, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 10 (March 1998), 234–47.

86 See KGB memorandum presented in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 5 November 1968, in *Istoricheskii arhiv 1* (1994), 176–93; V. Grishin to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 21 August 1968; V. Grishin to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 22 August 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 453–55; ‘Three Years of Reactions in the Soviet Union to the 1968 Invasion of Czechoslovakia’, 16 August 1971, File 300, Sub-file 80, Box 80/1/1028, RFE/RL; Suri, *Power and Protest*, 205–06.

against dissident elements. These actions would protect the interests of the Soviet bloc states without the cost of armed intervention against a 'fraternal' nation.⁸⁷

In late July and early August 1968 Brezhnev pleaded with Dubček to crack down on critics of the Communist Party. The Czechoslovak leader had, however, lost control of events. On 13 August 1968 Brezhnev telephoned Prague to press for an immediate restoration of domestic order. Exhausted and distraught, Dubček explained that 'it is impossible' to squash popular support for reform 'in as short a time as you are suggesting'.⁸⁸ As before, the Czechoslovak leader was reaching out for some middle ground between the growing radicalism within his society and the deepening pressure from Moscow. He recognised that his options were getting worse with each passing day, and he spoke somewhat pathetically of resignation. 'I'm running out of steam . . . I'm thinking of giving up this work.'⁸⁹

The exuberance of the Prague Spring had infected all institutions of authority in Czechoslovak society. Dubček risked triggering a massive wave of protests if he attempted to call in military or police forces, as Novotný had tried in late 1967. 'This is a complex process', the Czechoslovak leader told Brezhnev. It had 'encompassed the whole party, the whole country, the whole nation'. Confronted with Soviet demands for immediate action, Dubček responded that he did not have the capacity to make society over with a few simple moves: 'I can't just resolve these matters myself. It's not so simple, Comrade Brezhnev, to resolve such matters'.⁹⁰ Even if he wished to resort to force, Dubček could not count on the loyalty of the Czechoslovak armed forces.⁹¹

The Soviet leader would not accept Dubček's calls for patience while students and intellectuals attacked Communist Party authority. On the night of 20–21 August 1968, 165,000 soldiers and 4,600 tanks entered Czechoslovak territory from across the Polish, Hungarian and East German borders. This marked the beginning of 'Operation Danube' – a Warsaw Pact plan to smother the Prague Spring with direct force and restore power to a reliable set of conservative leaders. The Soviet Union authored the plan, and it supplied the majority of the men and equipment.⁹²

Brezhnev had arranged for a 'letter of invitation' from five of Dubček's hardline opponents in the Czechoslovak Communist Party.⁹³ He had failed to confirm,

87 Letter from the leaders of the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, 15 July 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 234–8, quotations on 238.

88 Transcript of Leonid Brezhnev's Telephone Conversation with Alexander Dubček, 13 August 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 345–56, quotation on 350.

89 *Ibid.*, 355.

90 *Ibid.*, 350.

91 On the politicisation of the Czechoslovak military during 1968, and the popularity of the Prague Spring reforms among many officers, see Condoleezza Rice, *The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army, 1948–1983* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 111–56. See also the reflections of Soviet General Aleksandr Mayorov, interviewed in Kun, *Prague Spring – Prague Fall*, 139–40.

92 See Williams, *Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, 112–25; Kramer, 'The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine', 151–6.

93 See the 'letter of invitation' from the anti-reform faction of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, August 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 324–5.

however, whether these apparatchiks could command authority after Soviet forces arrested the reformist leadership and attacked protesters on the streets. Within days of the invasion, Brezhnev realised that his co-conspirators in Czechoslovakia were really a liability. Their traitorous 'invitation' for foreign military assistance only strengthened the resolve of the population in Czechoslovakia to resist Moscow's leadership.

Hours after the invasion, Kirill Mazurov – one of Brezhnev's representatives in Prague – reported that despite the successful military operation events had gone 'haywire'. '[T]huggish elements have been throwing explosives and grenades at tanks, trying to provoke our soldiers. Crude anti-Soviet broadcasts are being transmitted on radio and television from various stations throughout the day.' The hardliners who Brezhnev hoped would create a more disciplined regime had 'gone to pieces'. In 'shock' from the depth of public resistance to Warsaw Pact forces, conservatives in the Czechoslovak Communist Party failed to show what Mazurov called the necessary 'initiative and firmness of purpose'. 'Our friends', he reported, 'have made no real progress in forming a new government.'⁹⁴

The Warsaw Pact invasion transformed the Prague Spring from a broad search for domestic reform into a popular resistance movement. Tad Szulc, the *New York Times* bureau chief in the Czechoslovak capital at the time, witnessed countless manifestations of public rage. Young men and women reacted with particular violence against Soviet soldiers. According to Szulc, they 'spat at the tanks and troopers, hurled garbage and insults, and, in many instances that first morning, tried and succeeded in setting the armored vehicles afire'. Students threw burning, petrol-covered rags into the tanks that occupied the streets. Others painted swastikas on foreign military vehicles. Prague descended into 'guerrilla warfare'. Szulc remembered watching 'young people, many of them long-haired boys and girls in slacks, [fight] the tanks with their bare hands, setting them on fire with flaming torches and hitting at them with branches fallen from the trees'.⁹⁵

At the behest of defiant underground Czechoslovak radio broadcasts, citizens combined guerrilla warfare with passive resistance in the weeks and months after the invasion. Residents of Prague and other cities removed street signs and painted over house numbers. Unfamiliar with their surroundings, foreign soldiers found it difficult to conduct their activities without local address markers. Workers initiated a series of general strikes, paralysing necessary services throughout the country. Czechoslovak citizens denied foreign soldiers food and water. Communist Party officials who courageously defied Soviet authority issued a proclamation that captured the widespread sense of public resistance. 'Do not aid the foreign troops', the reformers advised. 'Pay no attention to them, ignore them!'⁹⁶

The KGB reported that many university attendees in the Soviet Union sympathised with the aims of the Prague Spring and condemned the Warsaw Pact invasion:

94 Report by General Kirill Mazurov to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee Politburo, 21 August 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 452.

95 Tad Szulc, *Czechoslovakia since World War II* (New York: Viking, 1971), 390–1, 394.

96 Quotation from Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, 769. See also Szulc, *Czechoslovakia since World War II*, 417–18.

'The very word "opposition" is something students find appealing.' On reading this report, KGB Director Yuri Andropov lamented a widespread decline in youth discipline.⁹⁷ Reported acts of student dissent and 'hooliganism' within Soviet society only increased in the forthcoming months and years.⁹⁸ The invasion had sought to limit 'spill-over' effects, but it had, in fact, contributed to growing dissent, especially among youth.

Brezhnev defended the 'leading role' of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, but only at very great cost. He enjoyed a clear military victory against a weak satellite, yet the political outcome was ambiguous, at best.⁹⁹ The Sino-Soviet split of the mid-1960s now grew into a pervasive public rift among communist regimes, East and West. In recognition of these political difficulties, Brezhnev took a step backwards, returning Dubček – after his initial post-invasion incarceration – to power in Prague.¹⁰⁰ Meeting with the Czechoslovak leader in Moscow less than three days after the start of the invasion, Brezhnev felt it necessary to approach Dubček about 'a more acceptable solution' to the disorder that both preceded and followed the deployment of force. Brezhnev did not have an adequate response to Dubček's condemnation of the invasion as the 'greatest political mistake and one that will have tragic consequences'. 'I am certain', Dubček inveighed, 'that not only in Czechoslovakia and in Europe, but in all communist movements this act will cause us to suffer the greatest defeat, and will bring about a collapse and a huge breach in the ranks of communist parties in foreign countries, in the capitalist states.'¹⁰¹

Dubček was, of course, correct in his judgment of the invasion's counterproductive brutality. Protests against Soviet authority in Czechoslovakia continued until April 1969, when the Kremlin replaced Dubček with a more Novotný-like figure – Gustáv Husák. The new Czechoslovak leader used concerted force during the early 1970s to repress domestic critics.¹⁰² Husák's government and its Soviet backers, however, never recovered the authority that Prague and Moscow had possessed before 1968.

'Developed socialism' now resembled Stalinist repression. Open protests occurred less often in the early 1970s, but public disillusion became more palpable in every

97 KGB memorandum presented in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 5 November 1968, in *Istoricheskii arhiv* 1 (1994), 176–93.

98 See 'Three Years of Reactions in the Soviet Union to the 1968 Invasion of Czechoslovakia', 16 August 1971, Fond 300, Subfond 80, Box 80/1/1028, RFE/RL; John Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture* (Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), esp. 205–33.

99 On this point, see Matthew J. Ouimet, *The Rise and Fall of the Brezhnev Doctrine in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

100 See Williams, *Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, 144–91; Kramer, 'The Czechoslovak Crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine', 158–9.

101 Stenographic Account of Alexander Dubček's Talks with Leonid Brezhnev and Other Members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee Politburo 23 August 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 465–68, quotations on 466–68.

102 See Williams, *Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, 226–53; Rice, *The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army*, 157–96.

communist state.¹⁰³ The Soviet bloc entered a period of evident social and political stagnation (*zastoi*) in the wake of 1968.¹⁰⁴ China – engaged in a self-proclaimed ‘Cultural Revolution’ against foreign domination – emerged as a more credible model than the Soviet Union for radical change.¹⁰⁵ While Mao Zedong’s followers waved a ‘little red book’ pledging power to the masses, the Kremlin could only offer the so-called ‘Brezhnev Doctrine’ – a commitment to use force in defence of the political status quo.¹⁰⁶ In the eyes of many young men and women, the heirs to the Russian Revolution had aged into a conservative Old Regime. ‘Developed socialism’ protected public order, but it failed to attract popular support and international enthusiasm as Khrushchev’s successors had initially hoped.

Conclusions

In the aftermath of Soviet misadventures in Afghanistan and other areas, Brezhnev’s foreign policy is open to easy caricature. The senile leader, wearing scores of medals he awarded to himself, appeared completely out of touch with the world around him. That was the Brezhnev of the late 1970s.¹⁰⁷

During the early part of the decade, however, Brezhnev had acted with clear purpose. He recognised the need to strengthen his empire from within, but he refused to tolerate the disruptions that accompanied Khrushchev’s more reckless initiatives. In order to finance and control necessary reform, Brezhnev mixed international openness with domestic repression. To limit uncertainty and manage common difficulties, he also pursued a close and personal relationship with foreign adversaries. This was the essential bargain behind Soviet *détente* policy: targeted reforms aimed at strengthening the Soviet bloc, accompanied by severe reaction when reform challenged Moscow’s authority. Brezhnev recognised the need for a restructuring of communist society, but never at the cost of the Kremlin’s political controls.¹⁰⁸

‘Developed socialism’, as I have used the term, had many meanings and applications in the areas of international trade, great-power diplomacy and relations within the Soviet bloc. It embodied one unifying sentiment that I have tried to illustrate from a number of angles. ‘Developed socialism’ meant that development in economic and social terms was necessary, but that socialism must be preserved in its present political

103 On this point see Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 12–45; Williams, *Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, 251–3; Rice, *The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army*, 195–6.

104 See Volkogonov, *Sem’ Vozhdey*, 2: 29.

105 Radical students in France and other countries spoke of China as the ‘red base of the worldwide proletarian revolution’. Protesters in Europe pledged to ‘defend’ China against both US and Soviet aggression. See, e.g., ‘Contre La Sainte Alliance Réactionnaire, Défense de la Chine Rouge’, *Faculté des lettres du Censier*, 1969, AJ/78/35, Les Archives nationales, Paris, France. See also Suri, *Power and Protest*, 127–9, 186–94.

106 See the Unofficial Enunciation of the ‘Brezhnev Doctrine’, 26 September 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 502–3.

107 See Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American–Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. edn (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 985–1046.

108 For more on Soviet *détente* policy see *ibid.*; Suri, *Power and Protest*, 245–58.

contours. Adopting Rostow's model for the stages of economic development of the Soviet Union, the Brezhnevite leadership assumed that their state had reached a period of 'maturity' when change could be tolerated in institutions and ideology without revolutionising the governing structures of political authority. If 'take-off' implied a period of domestic revolution and rapid industrialisation, the Soviet Union had now entered a more stable period of controlled change.

The events in and around Czechoslovakia during 1968 proved that the Kremlin could not, in fact, control the social change it initially countenanced and in small measure even supported. As Alexis de Tocqueville anticipated in his analysis of the *Ancien Régime*, limited reforms and openings encouraged rising popular expectations for political freedom.¹⁰⁹ Fresh light on the failings of Novotný and other Soviet bloc leaders exposed a deeper rot within the communist system. Vaculík and other prominent figures in the Prague Spring did not renounce the ideals behind state socialism, but instead the authoritative personalities and institutions that had corrupted these ideals through brutal and self-serving means. In Vaculík's famous phrase, power had fallen 'into the hands of the wrong people'.¹¹⁰ Citizens in Czechoslovakia – as well as in Ukraine, Russia and other parts of the Soviet bloc – used the limited opening for reform to turn the discursive pretensions of the communist system against the Kremlin. They affirmed the core legitimacy claims of the Soviet Union and exposed the root hypocrisies of 'mature', 'real existing socialism'.

This challenge posed an insoluble dilemma for Brezhnev. If he allowed the reformist impulses of the Prague Spring to spread, then resistance to Soviet authority would surely grow. If, however, he crushed the Prague Spring, then he would jeopardise the modernising and reforming claims of 'developed socialism'. Brezhnev's recognition of the acuteness of this dilemma explains his hesitation in following the hard line advocated by Ulbricht and Gomulka in early 1968, when it would have been relatively easy to remove Dubček and other reformers from power. Brezhnev endorsed Dubček's 'Action Programme' in April 1968, instead of forceful Soviet intervention, because he hoped that controlled reforms would satisfy citizens while preserving the authority of the communist party. Throughout summer 1968 the Soviet leader clung to this proposed middle ground between full-fledged reform and heavy-handed repression.

Ultimately, the fundamental illegitimacy of Communist Party authority forced Brezhnev to choose between the two alternatives. In late August 1968 he authorised military intervention to protect Moscow's power. The remarkable resilience of Czechoslovak resistance, in the face of extreme Warsaw Pact force, proved the depth of the political challenge to the Kremlin. While the Soviet bloc continued to increase its trade and other interactions with Western Europe during the early 1970s, and détente between Moscow and Washington blossomed by 1972, Brezhnev's reaction to the Prague Spring undermined the claims of 'developed socialism'. Few

109 Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime*, 226–31.

110 Ludvík Vaculík, 'Two Thousand Words', 27 June 1968, in Navrátil, *Prague Spring 1968*, 177–8.

people – particularly those living in Eastern Europe – took the promise of internal Soviet reforms seriously any more. ‘Developed socialism’ became stagnant socialism, and the promises of a dynamic and ‘mature’ communist society gave way to the greyness of *zastoi*. Thus emerged the bleak but stable post-1968 Soviet bloc.

With the failure of ‘developed socialism’, the Soviet Union could offer its people few promises of social progress. In this context, citizens had little reason to endorse additional sacrifices on behalf of the communist system. Khrushchev had inspired rising expectations that grew into a popular activism that he could not control. Brezhnev, in contrast, fostered widespread pessimism and cynicism in the 1970s. Hopeless citizens did not protest in the streets very often. Their apathy, however, made them unwilling to work on behalf of communist society. As a consequence, the Soviet Union and its larger empire spun into a slow, silent decline. Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to reverse this trend more than a decade later, only to find the legacies of the Brezhnev era, and earlier periods of Soviet brutality, too grave to overcome. Soviet authority never recovered from the challenges of the late 1960s.¹¹¹

111 On this general point, see Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Jeremi Suri, ‘Explaining the End of the Cold War: A New Historical Consensus?’, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4 (Fall 2002), 60–92.