

The Consequences of De-Stalinization in Eastern Europe: The Comparative Analysis of the Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring

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INTRODUCTION

The Eastern European countries consolidated their communist regimes through different repressive and contractual mechanisms under Joseph Stalin's strict supervision. Nikita Khrushchev's attack on the Stalinist system brought Eastern European communist leaderships into uncertainty and instability. Besides, people under communist regimes were dissatisfied and frustrated because of stagnant economies, limits on private space and consumption, constraints and censorship on social, cultural and political life. Khrushchev's "Thaw" allowed them to experience relative, monitored and limited liberalization. Many reform-minded factions in the communist parties tried to accelerate reform process and broaden their basis of political support. However, many divisions in workers' and youth unions and intellectuals would witness where the reform process had to be stopped. When people had the chance to experience the slight enjoyment of freedom, they would not let it go.

The Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring were the most important examples in Eastern Europe, where people tried to change the repressive and limiting nature of their communist regimes and resisted alien intervention of the Soviet Union to protect their newly established freedom. Both events were milestones of international socialism and directly of the Soviet Union's Eastern Europe policies. I chose to analyze the Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring, because the Soviet Union's responses were the reification of its limited vision and fierce approach to the idea of deviation from the socialist road. The communist integrity and Soviet interests had militated against indigenous design and development in Eastern Europe.

The Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring had a causal parallelism with the Soviet decision-making process. On the one hand, a revolutionary activism in Hungary gained momentum after Khrushchev's "Secret Speech". The Prague Spring, on the other hand,

resulted in the “Brezhnev Doctrine.” In both cases, the relative liberalization process ended up with the Soviet-imposed “normalization,” reversal of reforms and re-centralization.

The main aim of this research is to compare the Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring through different levels of analysis. Both events bore many resemblances in the formation of dissident groups, intellectual and youth activism, the support of the workers’ union; carried sequential parallelism of events; followed by invasion and normalization processes; and affected the Soviet’s attitude in inter-state relations. Analyzing both events is interesting not only because of similarities and parallel patterns, but also the divergences between the Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring such as the histories, historical relations with the Soviet Union, the legitimacy of the governing parties, national formations, democratic or authoritarian traditions, reasons of nonconformism, advancement of the civil society and initiative, range and context of liberalization and reforms, the role of the leadership and the degree of Soviet reaction. Even they differed in the normalization process because of the distinct experiences during the military invasions.

By examining similarities and differences I will also concentrate on how national and historical images and symbols had circulated in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and how the idea of “national” and indigenous allegiances were fostered and challenged in both countries. The secondary intention of this research, besides the comparative analysis, is to explain how Soviet leaders treated the idea of “national” in Eastern Europe, especially in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, coped with indigenous nationalist allegiances and surpassed national interests in the years of shattering in international socialism.

The central argument of the research is that the Soviet Union used the idea of “national” in a hypocritical and dual way: denying national allegiances and imposing international socialism, on the one hand, while allowing national formations to legitimize its policies and justifying its actions, on the other. The suppression of the Hungarian Revolution

and Prague Spring reveals how the Soviet Union was bound up in its interpretation of communism and one-party hegemony, the unity and integrity of its sphere of influence, and its unacceptable stance against national interpretations of communism. The obsession of losing control on its satellite countries and the paranoia of the possible influence from Western countries resulted in the recursive invasions of the Soviet Union.

In the thesis, the causes and effects of Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring are not represented as two historical non-interactive blocs. The historical forces in the crises, the evolution of communism, the changing rationale of the Soviet leaderships on reformism, the reciprocal historical process in the Eastern Europe and the effect of the ever-changing international realities are crucially important in the historical analysis. The diverse actors, the overlapping and conflicting interests and motivations, the causes of intra-party rivalries, the reasons of the *resentiment* and resistance and the ill-balance between masses, indigenous party elites and the Soviet Presidium are the central evaluation points in my multileveled comparative analysis.

The research follows a historical evolutionary path, which is steadily supported by comparative analyses between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. I compare in the first section the Hungarian and Czechoslovak communist takeover and Stalinist consolidation in order to understand differences in the political atmosphere, the power bases of the communist parties and the role of the Soviet leadership. The main difference, the legitimacy of the communist party, would lead Hungary and Czechoslovakia to different socialist evolution. On the other hand, the communist parties consolidated their regimes with similar Stalinist methods and actions. The Stalinist leaders purified the party due to purges, trials, imprisonment and execution of the dissident members in the party. The infamous trials of Laszlo Rajk in Hungary and Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia would become the main symbols in de-Stalinization and rehabilitation processes.

The next section concentrates on the de-Stalinization in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Khrushchev's Secret Speech "On the Personality Cult and its Consequences" had a tremendous impact on the relative decentralization in the Eastern Europe since the death of Stalin. Matyas Rakosi in Hungary and Antonin Novotny in Czechoslovakia had copied Stalin's personality cult and tried to establish their totalitarian system. Thus, the attack on Stalin's personality and achievements was targeting directly the legitimacy of the indigenous rulers and legality of their established systems. Rakosi's replacement, reformist Imre Nagy, envisaged in his "New Course" a new economic policy, purification of the party and compensation for the crimes of the past. However, the Soviet leadership realized that Nagy was leading Hungary to terra incognita and was removed from office. Consequently, Nagy's "New Course," which mobilized frustrated masses in Hungary, proved the side-effects of the "Secret Speech" in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia could delay its regime reevaluation due to the disastrous consequences in Poland and Hungary. The Czechoslovak leadership prevented the formation of adverse groups in society and managed the intra-party stability.

In the third section, I examine the developments in Poland in 1956, the reasons of the Poznan Revolt and the process in the "Polish October," which sparked partially the Hungarian Revolution. In turn, the reactions in Hungary influenced the Polish leadership and society. The Polish case cannot be overlooked, because it had a major impact on the social forces in Hungary and on the Khrushchev's rationale, precautions and actions. The conceptualization of the events in 1956 is the center of the research, because the Hungarian Revolution provides connections between the Polish case, Hungarian Revolution and Czechoslovak crisis in 1968. The crisis in Hungary affected internationalist socialism and resulted in the auto-control of the Eastern European communist regimes. Furthermore, I base my analysis on Hannah Arendt's

“Spontaneous revolution,” Ferenc Vali’s “National revolution” and Gabor Gyani’s “Counterrevolution” approaches to “1956.” The multiple actors with diverse interests and motivation lead me into an “open-ended conclusion.” “1956” carried all elements such as national, anti-Soviet, counterrevolutionary, revolutionary and anti-totalitarian, but the different views converged in one common motivation, which was the fight for freedom.

In the fourth section, I concentrate on the Prague Spring, in which Alexander Dubcek gave momentum to reform process in Czechoslovakia. The comparative analysis leads me to examine one of the main differences between Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring, which was the role of the party leadership. The Czechoslovak Communist Party could appease the social forces and the Soviet leadership due to gradual and controlled development in the reform process. However, the situation in Czechoslovakia started to deteriorate not only because of the growing frustration of the society and the Soviet Union, but rather the party followed an independent path to organize its domestic politics and foreign relations. My analysis contains the “Slovak Question,” the ethnic composition in Czechoslovakia and its reflection on the central and local parties, elections, representations, the decision-making and reform process is one of the main distinctions between Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring. Moreover, following Scott Brown’s path, I try to explain why the Slovaks cannot be overlooked be in the “centralized” Prague Spring. Indeed, the “Slovak Question,” including federalization-democratization dilemma, was the catalyst of the Prague Spring.

In the fifth section, I try to discover the reasons and motivations of the Soviet invasions in 1956 and 1968. The psyche of the Soviet leadership cannot be analyzed unless Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist approaches to “nationalism” were understood. Nationalism was a dogmatic stigma and also an instrument for the Soviet Union. The reform movements, resurgence of the social forces and National Fronts, increasing civil initiative, the search for a new identity and formation of an independent foreign policy would result in the crucifixion of

the communist party in Eastern Bloc. The idea of “national” was used to suppress any liberal and democratic reform and always connected to “bourgeois nationalism” and the influence of the “imperial agents.” Therefore, the indigenous communist party must have been losing the leading role over the society. Any deviations from the “socialist road” were stigmatized and punished by the Soviet Union.

Eventually, Hungary and Czechoslovakia shared the same experience, but in different degrees of violence and resistance. Both Hungarian and Czechoslovak communist parties were the targets of the Soviet accusations. Both parties lost the initiative and counterrevolutionary activism was close to seize power over the country. The main differences, long-lived reform process and passive resistance, of the invasion of Czechoslovakia emanated from the gradual pace of reforms, steady communication between the communist party leaders of Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries and relatively stronger party leadership. The two invasions revealed the legitimacy problematic of Soviet-led international socialism in Eastern Europe. Besides international condemnation of the invasion in 1968, the problems in legalizing “law of peaceful coexistence” in the Brezhnev Doctrine resulted from the unexpected passive resistance of the Czechoslovak society.

In the final section, I compare the normalization in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Although Soviets had prescribed regulations in the normalization and chosen appropriate leaders, the societies had experienced different degrees of repression, recentralization and limitations, the normalization processes under Janos Kadar in Hungary and Gustav Husak in Czechoslovakia had differed a lot. Finally, I will finish the research with the conclusion that although the Soviet leadership approached more patiently to individual countries in East and Central Europe and followed a pluralist decision-making course, the principles of the Soviet Union on the protection of international socialism were much dominant. This led the Soviet

leadership to deteriorate the artificial atmosphere of the fraternal and mutual relations between communist countries and undermined its sole legitimate leader-status.

SECTION 1: COMMUNIST TAKEOVER AND STALINIST CONSOLIDATION IN HUNGARY AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

1.1: The Difference between Czechoslovak and Hungarian Communist Takeovers

The goal of the Communist parties in the immediate post-war period was not to destroy the nation, but rather to claim it as their own. Fulfilling Marx's advice from the Manifesto, they wanted to become the national classes.¹ The Communists did not immediately takeover the governments of the newly liberated Eastern European countries. Stalin's apprentices in Moscow, who were first political survivors, exiles and runaways and then trained by Soviet elites and supervised according to the Soviet doctrines, took over their countries gradually. The main strategy of the Soviets to achieve the consolidation of the Stalinist system was, first, to ally with other parties before the elections or after governments were formed, then, to make alliances with different groups or to quietly change their stance so as to gradually cause friction amongst other parties, and finally, to eliminate the opposition.

Immediately after liberation, the very first governments were mixed cabinets containing representatives of all or most pre-war parties who had not been tainted with fascism or collaboration with German occupiers. To inspire confidence, the Communists established 'popular fronts' out of all the anti-fascist parties. The existence of coalition governments and the possibility of free political competition, including free elections, were not regarded as a permanent option by the communists. So they always arranged and occupied leading offices in the interior and defense ministries. Thereby, they had control over local administration, national police, security services and later information flow. Through appointing all the leading personnel of the police and army, soon all the means of coercion were in communists' hands. Because of their improved conditions, the communists gradually

¹ Walter A. Kemp, *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: A Basic Contradictions?* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999) pp. 95-96.

intensified their activities and pressure over the parties. They phased out the officers of other parties and forced socialists to unite with communists.

Hungarian and Czechoslovak Communist Parties consolidated communism through completely different ways. Hungary never enjoyed full political support of the masses, and the communist party in Hungary relied on the Soviet support to establish its regime. On the contrary, in Czechoslovakia, the communists were in a commanding position from the start and the Red Army was not needed. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia always ranked among the country's four strongest parties.² Czechoslovak Communists were able to operate literally under the protection of the government; they had unlimited use of the tremendous propaganda facilities of a free press and most of the party leaders were simultaneously members of the Czechoslovak legislature and were thus actually paid salaries for their subversive work.³ Submitting to Soviet guidance, after the Second World War, Czechoslovak communist leadership introduced some of the takeover methods to consolidate its regime.

On the other hand, the postwar developments in Hungary followed the general path of communist takeovers. Hungarian communists followed a strategy of coalition, increased their influence in the trade unions and allied the Social Democrats and Smallholders' Party. They secured the ministry of the Interior and then sought further alliances with Socialists and the National Peasant Party in order to counteract the strength of the Smallholders. In the end, the communist parties in Hungary and Czechoslovakia waged a battle for power from below by mobilizing the masses. Ben Fowkes indicates that "window-dressing" had the aim to bring the masses on to the stage as a means of pressure, though the true locus of decision-making laid

² Edward Taborsky, *Communism in Czechoslovakia 1948-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

elsewhere. Consequently, the Action Committees of the National Front in Czechoslovakia made a coup look like a revolution in February 1948.⁴

In contrast to neighboring Poland and Hungary, Czechoslovakia did not harbor anti-Russian sentiment. The majority of the population had been won over to the idea of socialism long before the communists usurped unlimited power. To be sure, the Soviets' liberating role in the Second World War – the part they played in the defeat of Hitler and in saving the Czechoslovak people from national liquidation at the hands of the Nazis – led to respect and sympathy for the USSR, augmented by a feeling of Slavonic mutuality.⁵ On the other hand, the two communist parties converged in many Stalinist policies and totalitarian measures. Both Hungarian and Czechoslovak policies introduced five year economic plans, including heavy industrialization, collectivization of the farms and rearmament of the military for an expected war with the West. The countries' social classes were devastated through repression, imprisonment, police terror and surveillance, labor camps, executions, and trials.

1.2: Stalinization in Hungary and Czechoslovakia: Rajk-Slansky Trials

Heavy industrialization and forced agricultural collectivization resulted in, according to the report of U.S Army Intelligence “Hungary: Resistance Activities and Potentials,” widespread and intense passive resistance. The suppression of the multi-party system and communist domination of every aspect of political life intensified the antipathy of politically conscious Hungarians.⁶ Following the economic and administrative path of Sovietization, the

⁴ Ben Fowkes, *Eastern Europe 1945-1969: From Stalinism to Stagnation* (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000), p. 24

⁵ Vilem Precan, “Dimensions of the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1967–1970,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 10, (Routledge, December 2008), p. 1663

⁶ Study Prepared for U.S. Army Intelligence, “Hungary: Resistance Activities and Potentials,” January 1956 Source: U.S. Army Military History Institute Pennsylvania, Carlisle Barracks in (ed) Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, Janos M. Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest : Central European University Press, 2002), p. 88

party's rule grew systematically and the General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, Matyas Rakosi adopted Stalin's concept of the "enemy of the people". The Security Police exercised terror and, the purges and show trials against both party and non-party elements, along with the deportations of "reactionaries."

The most important cases in Hungary and Czechoslovakia were the political trials, which would change the nature of passive resistance and would transform it into public disturbance, intellectual dissidence and political factionalism. Two political trials and executions, Laszlo Rajk in Hungary and Rudolf Slansky in Czechoslovakia would be the main figures of discussion, symbols of rehabilitation process, limits of de-Stalinization and would signal sincerity of the leaders in conducting reforms. They were sacrificed according to Stalin's purifying directives and anti-Yugoslav campaigns. The Central Leadership of the Hungarian Working People's Party on "Cadre Policy work" assumed that the class enemy had fundamentally infiltrated the party from the leading bodies down to the branches. From this assumption it naturally followed that seeking the enemy in the ranks of the party was the guiding principle of work with cadres.⁷

Laszlo Rajk, the Hungarian Communist leader, as Minister of the Interior, was instrumental in achieving Communist domination in Hungary. It was a surprise for many when Rajk was suddenly relieved of his duties and given less weighty post of Minister of Foreign Affairs on August 3, 1948. The date is significant: five weeks earlier the Cominform excluded Yugoslavia from its ranks and Rajk was known to have entertained friendly relations with his Yugoslav comrades.⁸ The estrangement of Tito and Stalin in 1948, together with the growing Cold War tensions, led to the Soviet Union's imposition of even greater orthodoxy and uniformity in the Eastern European "satellites." Rakosi participated with exemplary vigor

⁷ Janos Berecz, 1956 *Counter-Revolution in Hungary-Words and Weapons*- (Budapest: Akadémia Kiado, 1986) p. 34

⁸ Ferenc A. Vali, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary, Nationalism versus Communism* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 60

in the ensuing area-wide campaign against alleged Titoists.⁹ Laszlo Rajk was arrested as a in May 1949 and forced to confess in the course of his well-arranged trial that he had conspired with Tito to overthrow the Hungarian communist regime, murder Rakosi and his associates, and attempted to restore capitalism in Hungary with the help of the “imperialists.”¹⁰ A storm of arrests and trials based on false charges aimed to purify and provide hegemony of Muscovites against indigenous Communists followed in the wake of the Rajk case.

Czechoslovak Stalinism was also characterized by political trials and executions starting from 1950s. The secretary general of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Rudolf Slansky, and thirteen codefendants confessed to crimes of high treason against the Prague government, espionage on behalf of the west, and sabotage of the socialist economy. Eleven were executed.¹¹ The most important difference between Slansky and Rajk trials was that twelve of the victims of Czechoslovak trials were Jewish.¹² According to Skilling, the President of Czechoslovakia, Klement Gottwald showed most strikingly his subservience to Soviet will and his apparent impulse to destroy his own handwork, the communist party and its prestige.¹³ The trials were more than imitation of earlier trials in the Soviet Union. Rather, the trial process was an instrument to discredit the Czechoslovak national path to socialism. Furthermore, Stalin wished to eliminate plurality and diversity within his empire and to impose the Soviet model on the other communist-ruled states. Gottwald allowed and directed the execution of his co-workers, who helped him by preparation and implementation Czechoslovak policies and road to socialism. So, he condemned and liquidated his own

⁹ Bennett Kovrig, “Hungary,” in *Communism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 91

¹⁰ Vali, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary Nationalism versus Communism*, p. 61. See also George Mikes, *The Hungarian Revolution* (London : Andre Deutsch Limited, 1957), p. 44

¹¹ Igor Lukes, “The Rudolf Slansky Affair: New Evidence,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, 1999), p. 160

¹² Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Communism in Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 120

¹³ H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 388.

creation. On the other hand, Karel Kaplan, who had been placed in charge of research for the Piller Commission, emphasized:

As in the Rajk affair, the trial was produced by the “Cold War,” the division of the world into two camps, and the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the bloc. Kaplan indicated that the conditions created an atmosphere of tension in the communist world and led to the appeal for “caution and vigilance,” the demand for absolute unity, and the adoption of more militant policies. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia adopted harsher policies at home, including severe measures against farmers and tradesmen, the establishment of forced labor camps and trials of non-communists.¹⁴

Kaplan connected events in Hungary and Czechoslovakia as waves of suppression. The trials in Hungary and other people’s democracies served as a model and a warning, and in fact led to direct pressure from Rakosi for action against certain Czechs and Slovaks whose names had come up in the trial of Laszlo Rajk. This in turn led to the introduction of Soviet advisers in October 1949, and to the search for “a Czechoslovak Rajk.”¹⁵ He also stresses the ethno-religious dimension of the trials in Czechoslovakia. The party started campaigns against Slovak nationalists and Jews. The latter was related in some degree to the rise of the campaign against Zionism by the world communist movement. Gustav Husak commented that the Soviet leaders considered bourgeois nationalism to be the Slovak parallel of Titoism and other forms of the “nationalist danger.”¹⁶ Therefore, it was necessary to eliminate leaders behind the Slovak Uprising. With the influence of trials, Slovakia was subordinated under Prague centralism.

¹⁴ See Kaplan, *Nova mysl*, no. 6 (1968), pp. 786-90; no. 7 (1968), pp. 925-33; no. 8 (1968), p. 1061, as quoted in Skilling, *ibid.* 389

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Skilling, p. 388.

SECTION 2: DE-STALINIZATION IN HUNGARY AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

2.1: A Soviet Experiment in Hungary: Imre Nagy

The homogeneity and participation in Hungary was an illusion, because political participation was compulsory and ritualistic and the non-existence of opposition parties strengthened this illusionary unity of the regime. In addition to the frustration of police terror, trials and executions, the communist regime had been experiencing difficulties because of the inefficiencies and dogmatic application of the new command economy and the forced reorientation of Hungarian trade toward the Soviet bloc. Bennett Kovrig indicates:

The intensive development of heavy industry and the collectivization of agriculture created disastrous consequences: Forced industrialization brought a massive influx of new workers to urban areas, where the already critical housing shortage was alleviated by the deportation of “class enemies” to the country-side. The brutal collectivization campaign and increasingly heavy levies on farmers only alienated the peasantry, leading to declining productivity.¹⁷

The tensions due to strikes and demonstrations in Hungary, Berlin Uprising, the Pilsen riots in Czechoslovakia and Stalin’s death made the Soviet “collective leadership” cautious and sensitive.

Less than five weeks later after the elections, Rakosi was called to Moscow. The Soviet authorities, led by Georgii Malenkov and Lavrentii Beria told Rakosi that they felt indisposed because of Rakosi’s “high-handed and domineering style” in office, which had led to countless “mistakes and crimes.”¹⁸ Rakosi was accused of abusing socialist legacy by taking advantage of his dominant position in Hungarian society. The Kremlin ordered Rakosi to relinquish his prime ministerial duties to Imre Nagy but retain the responsibilities of the

¹⁷ Kovrig, p. 92

¹⁸ Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Sage Publications, Ltd, 1998), p. 175

Party Secretary. The Soviet decision created a dual leadership, accelerated factionalism in Hungarian Communist Party and would ultimately damage the authority of the party. Vali specified:

The Moscow-tolerated conflict between two Hungarian leaders – the support of Nagy, the reprimand of Rakosi without his liquidation – signified the existing rivalry existing in the Soviet Presidium. The equilibrium within the Soviet Presidium determined the consequences for Hungary: Rakosi was blamed, but never dropped and Imre Nagy was praised and encouraged but never given the means of enforcing his program.¹⁹

A veteran Communist and Muscovite, Nagy gave momentum to Hungarian politics and society after his appointment to prime ministry. His “New Course” envisaged a new economic policy, purification of the party and compensation for the crimes of the past. He condemned the previous Five Year Plans and blamed former leadership explicitly for the deterioration of the standard of living.

First of all, he slowed down the expansion of heavy industry and gradually stopped the collectivization of farms. Therefore, collective farm membership fell by nearly 40 percent and investments were redirected to light and consumer industries.²⁰ The standard of living improved; many goods which had disappeared from the market, reappeared anew; internees and deportees were set free and private enterprise was allowed again on a small scale.²¹ Secondly, he stood up for all intellectual society, former dissidents or conformists, and criticized the purges, unlawful administrative methods and violent measures of the current figures in the party. Most communist political prisoners, including Kadar, were released.

Nagy’s attacks on party officers, their actions and bureaucratic excesses, the limited pluralism and relaxation in society had been annoying Rakosi and his colleagues. In the beginning, Rakosi held a moderate position on Nagy’s “New Course.” However, he did not neglect the opportunities to attack Nagy and followed a cautious approach. Molnar indicated

¹⁹ Vali p. 159

²⁰ Kovrig p. 92

²¹ George Mikes, *The Hungarian Revolution*, (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1957), p. 60

that in public, Rakosi and his supporters pretended to be conciliatory or even in favor of Nagy's innovations. Yet in secret, they continued to block them, going as far as to encourage the opposition of the party apparatus, which was completely outside Nagy's control.²²

The First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev, had gradually eclipsed Prime Minister Malenkov, enabling the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to regain its pre-dominant status in Soviet politics. Khrushchev sought to reinforce his victory by prodding the Eastern European countries to halt their New Courses and to give renewed emphasis to the "leading role" of their communist parties.²³ Khrushchev was uncomfortable, because the leadership in Hungary seemed to realign with "detrimental" forces in society. In addition to the transformation under Khrushchev leadership, Nagy's efforts on the revitalization of the Popular Front and cultural liberalization resulted in first the impeachment and then the deprivation of his membership in the Politburo. Nagy came to be charged with "right-wing opportunist deviation" by the press and his adversaries.

Soon, Nagy was forced to resign from the Presidency of the Popular Front, gave up his seat in Parliament and was finally expelled from the party. George Mikes pointed out that Nagy failed to remember one basic command of the master: destroy your enemies.²⁴ Molnar emphasized Nagy's need to have at his disposal the mechanism of administration, the ministers, the prefects, the directors of state enterprises and the police.²⁵ However, the state administration, duplicated by a network of party officials, received its orders from the party's central committee, which remained hostile to Nagy's initiatives. The Politburo and the Central Secretariat was composed of long-standing Stalinists such as Rakosi and Gero. Furthermore,

²² Miklos Molnar, Budapest 1956: *A History of the Hungarian Revolution*, trans. Jennetta Ford (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), p. 32

²³ Kramer, p.175

²⁴ Mikes p. 59

²⁵ Molnar p. 41

the political police force was always subordinate to the party and since Nagy could not take whole control, the state security forces stayed loyal to Stalinists.

According to Kemp, Nagy was not advocating a departure from communism. Rather, his argument was a call for restoration of socialist values. He wanted to base relations between communist states on well-established Marxist-Leninist principles. Kemp points out that main problem was the incongruence between the political culture and the political system. The system could not be legitimated and this incongruence would eventually provoke crisis.²⁶ Nagy could not establish his “New Course” permanently in the authoritarian system. He had to eliminate the opposition and strengthen his cadres to maneuver freely.

2.2: Nagy on the New Course

The legitimacy of the Hungarian Communist Party became more questionable after Nagy’s dismissal. According to Vali, Rakosi was aware of the problematic situation and wanted to force Nagy to enter his resignation, even wishing to press him into a full recantation of his errors and self-criticism.²⁷ However, Nagy preferred to be discharged from office, because he knew if he were to resign, his popularity would decline. His determined and inflexible stance provided him support from different sectors in Hungarian society. Thus, he became the symbol of frustrated masses and reform-minded people.

After his expulsion, he continued his passive resistance in the intellectual and political realm. Nagy tried to rid himself of the charges against him, such as being a right-wing deviant politician and to justify his “New Course” by writing his ideas and conceptualizations in his “thesis” “In Defense of the New Course.” He adamantly denied that he was a nationalist or a chauvinist. According to Hugh Seton-Watson, Nagy stressed that he had always favored, and

²⁶ Kemp, pp. 141-143

²⁷ Vali, p. 163

actively pleaded for, friendship between Hungary and the Soviet Union, and between Hungary and her territorial neighbors. At the same time he proudly asserted his devotion to his own country and his Hungarian patriotism.²⁸

In my opinion, patriotism was always a problematic, vague and tamed jargon in communism. Walter Kemp describes patriotism as allegiance to a fairly well-defined existing or historical territory, patria, the motherland, one's ancestral homeland. Patriotism, therefore, means devotion to the interests of a particular state, whereas nationalism means devotion to the interests of a particular national community.²⁹ Therefore, communist regimes promoted the idea of socialist patriotism, which would not allow any national or indigenous deviations. However, socialist patriotism was not local and innate and could not represent the signifying national political culture. Defining himself as Hungarian socialist patriot was a political and popular statement. Here, socialist patriots indicates his devotion to true Marxist and Leninist tenets and Nagy points out his allegiance to his nation by emphasizing Hungary.

Nagy blamed Stalin's, and also Rakosi's, monopolization of explaining Marxism-Leninism based on the cult of the individual, which inescapably brought about dogmatism, the crippling of courageous and pioneering theoretical work and disregard of the particular characteristics of the various countries.³⁰ Nagy aimed to justify his statements by quoting Lenin's statement "all nations will eventually arrive at socialism but they will not arrive there in a completely identical fashion." He strengthened his ideas by paraphrasing the concept of *Panch Sheel*, or Five Principles, which was declared by India and the People's Republic of China in 1954. Nagy was demanding mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual nonaggression, mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. In "In Defense of the New Course" he

²⁸ Frederick A. Praeger, *Imre Nagy On Communism: In Defense of the New Course*, with a foreword by Hugh Seton-Watson (New York, Inc. 1957), p. xxii

²⁹ Kemp p. 7

³⁰ Praeger, p. 5

expressed that these five principles would strengthen the socialist camp due to mutual understanding and close cooperation. Then, he indicated that the mutual coexistence and noninterference between states would also lead independent national policies by respecting national sovereignty. National independence and sovereignty were basic requirements of national unity, creation of national loyalty and legitimacy of the party. Actually, Nagy's demands were not limited to the five principles. His description of national sovereignty, which demanded further active coexistence and neutrality, was in conflict with Soviet's sphere of influence and the meaning of Warsaw Pact. Nagy stated:

The most practicable plan, seemingly, is the active coexistence of progressive democratic socialist or similar countries with those other countries having a different system, through a coordinated foreign policy and through cooperation against the policies of the power groups, through neutrality or active coexistence. This path is made easier for Hungary by its geographical location through its neighboring states, neutral Austria, and countries building socialism, among them the Soviet Union, and neighboring Yugoslavia, which stands on the principle of active co-existence.³¹

It was obvious that he was thinking of independence from Soviet domination or at least equal footing in mutual agreements and arrangements in economy and politics. However, in the context of a "satellite country" such arguments were high risky. His "unorthodox" ideas were not the sole reasons of Hungarian Revolution, but it gave the movement momentum and hope for the society.

2.3: The Impact of Khrushchev's Secret Speech on Hungary and Czechoslovakia

Stalin's death in 1953 gave way to a power struggle in the Kremlin between L. Beria, V. Molotov, G. Malenkov and N. Khrushchev, from which, by 1955, Khrushchev had emerged as the leader. At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, he condemned Stalin's "cult of personality" in his secret speech "On the Personality Cult and its Consequences:"

³¹ Ibid., p. 33

At present we are concerned with a question which has immense importance for the Party now and in the future – [we are concerned] with how the Stalin cult gradually grew, the cult which became at a certain specific stage the source of a whole series of exceedingly serious and grave perversions of Party principles, of Party democracy, of revolutionary legality.³²

Khrushchev accused Stalin and his actions resulted in the “Great Purges,” which traumatized and alienated all people in the Soviet Union and in the other communist states. Khrushchev stated that Stalin forestalled the doctrines of Marxism and Leninism, the party apparatus and communist individuals. Therefore, he supposed that he had the right to take all the actions and suppressive policies due to his infallible character and cult. Another fault was Stalin’s introduction of the notion “enemy of the people,” which could identify every communist and non-communist citizen as the enemy of the people. Stalin violated party norms of the collective leadership and aggressively attacked every single person, who had disagreed Stalin’s decisions. His decisions on purges, deportations and executions resulted in a situation of uncertainty, suspicion and distrust. Thus, Khrushchev initiated a series of strategic and doctrinal changes. He decided to reverse the absolutist and oppressive regime, started de-Stalinization process and wanted to reform whole system in Soviet Union and its relations with the communist states.

Khrushchev’s Secret Speech in 1956 had an impact on Polish and Hungarian politics, but not immediately in Czechoslovakia. The side-effects of the speech first started to arise among communist leaders and their rank and file members, who were confused in the beginning because the speech was neither accompanied by any clear policy directives, nor any indications of what promotions or demotions the Soviet leadership might desire among the Eastern European leaderships.³³ Rakosi and Novotny had evaluated the speech and tasks

³² Thomas P. Whitney, ed., *Khrushchev Speaks: Selected Speeches, Articles, and Press Conferences, 1949-1961* (New York: The University of Michigan Press, 1963) p. 207

³³ Terry Cox, ed., *Challenging Communism in Eastern Europe: 1956 and its Legacy* (London: Routledge, 2008) p. ix

differently due to the distinct economic, political and social atmosphere in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Although Rakosi's character and actions stood closer to Stalin's personality cult, Rakosi had to take more actions and revisions than Novotny in 1956. He immediately submitted his report to the Hungarian Central Committee on March 12 and 13, 1956. Vali expressed that Rakosi displayed no inhibition in declaring that the "cult of personality is alien to Marxism" and that "the principle of collective leadership is an elementary affair for a proletarian Party" – thus quoting Mikoyan.³⁴ The efforts in the implementation of collective leadership and intra-party democracy for strengthening Socialist legality were illusionary in Hungary, because the "Hungarian Stalin" was still leading the country. Vali concluded:

It was easy for Rakosi to say that "collective leadership" existed in Hungary, but it was harder to find people to believe it – at least so long as the Hungarian dictator ruled supreme over the party and government in Hungary. Nor could Rakosi convince anyone that internal party democracy had been firmly established, that illegalities had ceased, or that "control" over the Security Police had been firmly secured.³⁵

The situation in Czechoslovakia in 1956 was slightly different. The economy and living standards were better than in Hungary and the party leadership did not experience strong ebb and flows like Hungary did with Imre Nagy. Besides, the political atmosphere and social environment in Poland and Hungary continued to deteriorate and there was less public pressure for reform in Czechoslovakia. So, the Czechoslovak regime kept tight control and did not introduce any reforms. Moreover, Antonin Novotny was aware that denouncing Stalinism would have meant denouncing his own actions. Thus, the Czechoslovak leadership prevented the formation of adverse groups in society and managed to maintain the intra-party stability.

Only in the early 1960s did problems with the centrally planned economic system become fully apparent in Czechoslovakia. This coincided with Khrushchev's second attack on

³⁴ Vali, p. 216

³⁵ Ibid., p. 217

Stalinism at the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in October 1961.³⁶ Contrary to Khrushchev's expectations, Antonin Novotny became the President of Czechoslovakia by first protecting his position as the First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Khrushchev ordered him to implement the process of de-Stalinization, but the concentration of power in the hands of one leader made even harder for Novotny to accept his errors and crimes of the past. Furthermore, Novotny and his officers were aware of the fact that an acceleration of de-Stalinization in Prague might easily produced crises comparable to those in Budapest and Warsaw and may have threatened their position.

Novotny adopted a clever line of symbolic de-Stalinization, which was designed to associate himself verbally with current Soviet policy and to ward off criticism of his own responsibility during his eight years in power.³⁷ While he was admitting that the personality cult had continued in his administration, however, he represented his policies and actions as a rupture from old leadership. He cleared himself by targeting Gottwald as the main source of the personality cult and justified his regime by confirming Gottwald's actions: The liquidation of the Slansky group had been the first step in the elimination of Stalinist methods. The de-Stalinization continued in Prague but in a superficial way: The Prague monument of Stalin was removed and Gottwald's embalmed body would be buried.³⁸

In 1963, Novotny felt the need to be approved by the current Soviet leadership and needed the loyalty of reform-minded members within his own Central Committee. He set up a new commission of inquiry into the Slansky trial and other associated political show trials, under the direction of Drahomir Kolder, a regional party secretary in Ostrava who owed his

³⁶ Laura Cashman, "Remembering 1948 and 1968: Reflections on Two Pivotal Years in Czech and Slovak History," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 10 (Routledge, Dec 2008) p. 1648

³⁷ Skilling, p. 39

³⁸ Mary Heimann, "The Scheming Apparatchik of the Prague Spring," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 10 (Routledge, Dec 2008), p. 1720

position to Novotny's patronage.³⁹ In February 1963, the Kolder Commission reported to the Presidium that the Slansky trial and the other show trials of the 1950s were constructed by the use of Stalin's "confession" techniques. The state had fabricated "the anti-state conspiracy," stigmatized the victims as "the enemy of the peoples" and triggered the political lynching.

Skilling indicated that apart from Slansky and some of his fellow victims, the responsibility for the trials and the breach of "socialist legality" was placed on Gottwald and the entire political leadership. The report blamed Stalin for his methods and doctrines, Beria's security officers, and Rakosi for direct pressure on the Czechoslovak leaders.⁴⁰ Meanwhile none of this was revealed to the general public, which was pressuring for a complete and systematic implementation of reforms and rehabilitation of the victims. The congresses of writers and journalists in April and May 1963 were dominated by this theme and provided a forum bitter denunciation of the Stalinist past and the slowness of changes in policy.

A prominent Slovak, Alexander Dubcek was a member of the Kolder Commission, which was more cautious in the matter of the Slovak show trials of so-called "Slovak bourgeois nationalists." *Kulturny zivot*, the weekly journal of the Party-approved Union of Slovak Writers, was suddenly allowed to go beyond the bounds of censorship then permitted in the Czech-speaking regions of the country. In no time, even *Pravda*, the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Slovakia began to press for a reinvestigation of the "Slovak bourgeois nationalist" trials. Novotny had no choice, sacked three remaining Gottwald appointments that he could no longer afford to save, and to call for a new commission, known as the Barnabitky Commission, to reopen the files on the Slovak political trials.⁴¹ Dubcek's attachment to the Slovak Party had safeguarded the continuity of the rehabilitation process.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 1722

⁴⁰ Skilling, p. 48

⁴¹ Mary Heimann, p. 1724

The rehabilitation process had two important consequences: First, the Slovak public was mobilized and had displayed their will to administer justice and fight against Prague's centralist and historical discrimination. The second consequence was Alexander Dubcek's elevating personality and his promotion to become the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia in May 1963. However, the success of the commission was limited, because the leadership continued to cover up the truth about the trials. None of the report's conclusions concerning illegal methods or the analysis of responsibility was revealed. Nor was the judicial exoneration coupled with political rehabilitation in all cases. Slansky and others were still treated as guilty of serious failings and were not readmitted to the party. Moreover, only a few hundred of the leading party victims had been exonerated by name, and thousands of other had not been publicly absolved of charges of serious crimes or compensated in any way.⁴² Neither top politicians nor lower administrative workers such as judges, security forces and investigators who were involved and responsible for the trials of the fifties were charged by anything.

2.4: The Reform and its Limits in the Era of Novotny

The situation got worse for Novotny after the "cosmetic changes" in the regime. The economy was crippled because of the failure of the Soviet model and centralist tendencies. Due to a lack of compatibility between promise and reality, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia lacked legitimacy.⁴³ Slow paced rehabilitation, growing Slovak discontent, open dissent of the intellectuals, the political apathy of the youth, a muffled criticism of

⁴² Skilling, p. 49

⁴³ Manfred Spieker, "Crises in Eastern Europe since 1956," *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Springer Page, Oct., 1986), p. 197

foreign policy and resistive tendencies among students contributed to the sapping of the foundations of the system.⁴⁴

Czechoslovak writers had been calling for a “European context” – a return to the civilized culture sphere, corresponding to the history and traditions of the Czechoslovak people. At the Fourth Congress in Prague from June 27-29, 1967, they expressed their sovereign and independent attitudes – on issues ranging from Prague’s role in the Middle East to amending the law of the press to allow freedom of speech – as well as their determination to regain their convictions in what the writer Milan Kundera called their “responsibility for the very existence of their nation.”⁴⁵

Novotny, instead of reconciliation, that would have cooled down the tensions and opened the way for reformers, moved to tighten his control and tried to reinstall the concept of “enemy of the peoples” by reporting the rise of the “anti-socialist” activities. The writers were condemned by the Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Jiri Hendrych, “for the presentation of views that run directly contrary to the state, socialism, and even national interests of our people.”⁴⁶ Several writers were expelled from the Party, while others were reprimanded and subjected to disciplinary action. Furthermore, the Writers’ Union was stripped of its weekly journal, *Literarni noviny*, the tribune of social criticism and revisionist views. As in all cases in Eastern Europe, starting with de-Stalinization, the oppressive measures had deteriorated and the situation gave birth to mass actions.

The student demonstration, which was about the ill conditions in the Strahov dormitory, was suppressed harshly by the Czechoslovak police. Afterwards, several hundred students took to the streets in a spontaneous protest on 31 October 1967.⁴⁷ After marching close to Prague Castle, where the Central Committee was in session, their chants acquired an increasingly political nature, and they were brutally dispersed by police at the bottom of

⁴⁴ Skilling, p. 46

⁴⁵ Jaromir Navratil, ed., *The Prague Spring 1968 A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Prague: CEU Press, 1998), p. 5

⁴⁶ See “Proceedings of the 4th Czechoslovak Writers’ Congress, June 27-29, 1967, and a Follow-up Resolution by the CPCz CC Plenum, September 1967”, as quoted in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Prague: CEU Press Prague, 1998)

⁴⁷ Precan, p. 1664

Neruda Street. Several were badly injured and retreating students resumed their protest outside their hostels, prompting another police assault.⁴⁸ The intense reaction of the police had irritated and outraged even the conformist students. Student leaders demanded an investigation into who was responsible for the police terror and they threatened to stage another march if the inquiry proved unsatisfactory. The growing malaise in the society made Novotny even more paranoid, and so he expelled many university student leaders, while many independent student organizations were disbanded and the expellees were drafted into the army.

Novotny's image had been deteriorating since the start of the reform and rehabilitation process. He could not continue reforms in accordance with the growing social, cultural, political and economic demands of the Czech and Slovak society. He only wanted to appease the reformists in the party in order to secure intra-party cohesion. His half-hearted initiative in the rehabilitation process triggered discontent of the officers in the party started to question his legitimacy.

The fragmentation of the treasured cohesion of the party manifested itself at a Central Committee Plenum held from October 30-31, 1967. The criticism raised at the Plenum was directed above all against Novotny, and against his concentration of power as first secretary, president of the republic, supreme commander of the armed forces and supreme commander of a kind of private army of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the People's Militia.⁴⁹

Alexander Dubcek, the first secretary of the Slovak Communist Party, angered Novotny by stating during the Plenum that the government and party tasks must be carefully separated, especially in central leadership and management. Dubcek also called on the Czechoslovak Communist Party to deepen intra-party democracy, and readdress the top-down control that the centralized Central Committee leadership exercised over almost every aspect

⁴⁸ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 56

⁴⁹ Navratil, p. 6

of Czechoslovak life.⁵⁰ Again, the Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party accused Dubcek of advocating “bourgeois nationalism.” According to the hard-liners in Prague, Dubcek was falsely motivated by his local interests. The October Plenum showed that the unrest in society had also spread into the ranks of the party.

Like Matyas Rakosi, Novotny sought the support of the Soviet leadership as his last chance to undermine his opponents. Without informing any of his party colleagues, Novotny invited Brezhnev for a brief, unofficial visit to Prague in early December. Clearly, Novotny hoped that Brezhnev’s visit, and presumed endorsement, would help him reconsolidate power. But that proved not to be the case. Brezhnev acted diplomatically. Over a period of eighteen straight hours, he spoke to almost all the members of the Presidium individually and learned that Novotny was widely unpopular.⁵¹ In the end, he attended a Presidium meeting on December 9, 1967 and indicated that the problem in Czechoslovakia would have to be solved domestically and that he would not take part in that process. According to Maud Bracke, the Soviet unwillingness to support Novotny gave momentum to the reformist forces inside the highest party ranks.⁵²

⁵⁰ “Speeches by Alexander Dubcek, and Antonin Novotny at the Central Committee Plenum, October 30-31, 1967” in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, 1998 , p.13

⁵¹ “Remarks by Leonid Brezhnev at a Meeting of Top CPCz Officials, in Prague, December 9, 1967 File for A. Novotny; Vondrova & Navratil, vol. 1” in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, 1998 , p.18

⁵² Maud Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak crisis 1968* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007) p. 136

SECTION 3: HUNGARY 1956

3.1: Mutual Interaction: Poland and Hungary in 1956

The political atmosphere in Poland has a special place in evaluating Hungarian Revolution. The process in 1956, especially triggered by the Twentieth Party Soviet Congress, was by no means unidirectional. Instead, the events in Poland in 1956 set off a chain reaction, a self-perpetuating, mutually reinforcing cycle of actions and reactions. Events in Poland such as the Poznan Revolt and “Polish October” sparked reactions in Hungary and those reactions of the Hungarians then influenced the Polish leadership and population.⁵³ As in Hungary, a division existed between Polish Muscovites and indigenous communists. Poland was experiencing, on the one hand, the impact of de-Stalinization; on the other hand, the change of the leadership. Boleslaw Bierut had died of a heart attack during the Twentieth Congress in Moscow and another Stalinist Edward Ochab took over Bierut’s position of the First Secretary of the Communist Party.

The Poznan riots arose from national and international political disorder. The conditions of the workers in Poland’s fourth largest city, Poznan, were deteriorating. On Saturday 23 June workers of the Poznan Stalin Works locomotive plant met and decided to send a delegation to Warsaw to persuade the central authorities to meet economic demands, including a 20 per cent wage increase. By 28 June the delegation had still not received an answer from the authorities about the wage increase, and rumors were also spreading that this delegation had been arrested.⁵⁴ Eventually, the workers assumed that the delegation had been arrested so, the worker mass attacked the city jail, freed the prisoners, and seized weapons

⁵³ Johanna Granville, “Hungarian and Polish Reactions to the Events of 1956: New Archival Evidence,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 7 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Nov., 2001), p.1051

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1053

from the guards. The anarchy accelerated when the workers attacked the radio station and the building of the District Office Security, where many people had died because of the order to open fire. The demonstration had spread over other Polish cities and escalated into large anti-government riots.

The Ochab regime dealt with the riots, but had to dismiss several senior Stalinist officials and exposed economic failures. Demands for reformist Wladyslaw Gomulka's readmittance to a top leadership position increased after the Poznan Revolt, because Polish society was in need of economic policy changes. The Polish leadership gradually grew sympathetic toward Gomulka's restoration to power after the Poznan events. Consequently, the majority of the Polish leadership backed by the Army and the Internal Security Corps brought Gomulka as First Secretary on October 19.⁵⁵ Gomulka's takeover was not approved by the Soviet leaders. The Soviet leadership on 19 October ordered its troops to advance toward Warsaw. Stationed in northern and western Poland, their purpose was undoubtedly to intimidate the Polish leadership. Polish troops loyal to Gomulka responded by taking up defensive positions around the capital.⁵⁶ The decision done by authorities was so determined that even the threat of Soviet military intervention and the unscheduled visit of the Soviet delegation, including Khrushchev, Molotov, Mikoyan, and Kaganovich, could not deter the Poles.⁵⁷ After intense debates, the responsible and collective action of Polish leadership convinced Soviet leaders to handle the events on their own.

The Polish leader Gomulka cooled the public pressure with a genuine attempt to make the national culture part of his official policy. When he replaced Ochab, he immediately made several concessions to the masses. He reconciled marginalized figures with the communist regime, made peace with the Catholic Church and released Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, the Primate of Poland, who had been under house arrest for three years.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Vali, pp. 262-263

⁵⁶ Granville, p. 1053

⁵⁷ Vali, p. 263

⁵⁸ Kemp, p. 145

Furthermore, Gomulka needed to soothe anti-Soviet feelings, so he removed the Soviet Polish-born General Konstantin Rokossowski and replaced him by the Pole Marian Spychalski. With the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the dissolution of the Committee for Public Security, terror was eased in Polish society.

Gomulka did not want to deviate from the Soviet principles. On the contrary, Nagy's "New Course" led him to rejecting anything that restricted or violated his country's interests as defined in terms of building Communism, which in turn led him to adopt a position which was not only non-Stalinist, but even non-Leninist, and much like Tito's.⁵⁹ Simultaneous to the developments in Poland, people in Hungary were experiencing a paradox: On the one hand, the Hungarian Communist Party resolution declared that the Poznan provocation to be a warning to every Hungarian worker and called for every honest patriot firmly to oppose attempts at trouble-making and to help the unfettered development of those forces which, on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and in the spirit of the Twentieth Congress, lead the People's Democracy to new successes.⁶⁰ On the other hand, many reformist, non-communist politician, workers, students and intellectuals were fiercely supporting the developments in Poland.

The embodiment of Hungarian dissident and intellectual force was the Petofi Circle, which was first no more than a small informal group of like-minded younger Communist intellectuals. Paul Zinner emphasizes its potential significance as an organ of opposition, which would surpass the Writers' Union and attract intellectuals from diverse social stratifications.

It became an active force and accelerated the pressure for reforms. The Petofi Circle sponsored thirteen debates and reunions between March 17 and June 27. For instance, the debate on June 27 attracted a crowd of 6,000 people. The reunions brought together former members of university students' organization from the immediate post-war period, the people's colleges and veteran fighters of the workers movement who

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 146

⁶⁰ "Central Committee Statement, 30 June 1956. National Communism and Popular Revolt: A Selection of Documents (New York, 1956)" as quoted in ed. Terry Cox *Challenging Communism in Eastern Europe/1956 and its Legacy* (London: Routledge 2008), p. 82

held a joint rally with young intellectuals. Because of the broad representation and popularity of the intellectual circle, Muscovites in the Party were forced to consider the will to reform. Moreover, intellectuals had reached important layers of the communist party membership and even functionaries in various institutions.⁶¹

In July 1956, Rakosi was forced to retire. In contrast to Ochab in Poland, who assisted the reformer Gomulka, Rakosi had promoted Erno Gero, a like-minded hard-liner.⁶²

For Gero and Soviet leadership, the Petofi Circle was a crucial social and political factor, which deserved urgent attention. However, their approach had diverged in the beginning. The Soviet Presidium considered the Petofi Circle as a dangerous formation in the Hungarian society:

The Petofi Circle was “an ideological Poznan without gunshots.” Although they were mostly intellectuals and students, and supporters of Imre Nagy, he warned that there were no direct counter-revolutionary attacks in Poznan. Thus, the absence of counter-revolutionary slogans in the Petofi Circle should not reassure the Hungarian communists.⁶³

On the other hand, Gero described the intellectual circle as a second leading center, which was challenging the sole political center, the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party.⁶⁴ His awareness signified that Gero, as the newly elected First Secretary of the Party, aimed to follow a moderate way. However, people knew that Gero was chosen by the Soviet authorities without attending the society’s needs. It was obvious, as a hard-liner, that Gero would persecute his predecessor’s policies.

From the start, the Soviet Presidium’s choices were contradictory: on the one hand, they delegitimized the regime by removing the omnipotent figure, who could suppress the frustrated masses and maintain order. On the other hand, the Soviet leadership did not allow a reformer to lead Hungary and the Party, although the Hungarian people wanted to see Nagy as

⁶¹ Paul E. Zinner, “Revolution in Hungary: Reflections on the Vicissitudes of a Totalitarian System,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Cambridge University Press, Feb 1959), pp.22-23

⁶² Krzysztof Persak, “The Polish-Soviet Confrontation in 1956 and the Attempted Soviet Military Intervention in Poland,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 58, no. 8 (Dec 2006), p. 120

⁶³ Granville, p.1058

⁶⁴ Kovrig, p. 93

their leader. Incomprehension of the future, indecision on the leadership and misapprehension of social and political currents resulted in the disastrous mistake.

In addition to the Soviet leaders' mistake, Gero left the country alone and implemented inappropriate policies. Gero wanted or forced to follow Khrushchevian strategy, reconciliation with Yugoslavia. Gero, completed the process by sending the letter to Tito. In the letter, Gero apologizes for the problems caused by the Laszlo Rajk trial and the fierce propaganda campaign against Yugoslavia, in which Rakosi had played a leading part. Apparently preoccupied with the unfolding Suez crisis, Tito's official response came only on September 11, but significantly, he raised no objections to starting negotiations. The talks eventually took place between October 15 and 22 in Belgrade, but their significance was immediately overtaken by the revolution, which broke out on October 23.⁶⁵

Gero kept his promise by allowing the ceremonial reburial of Laszlo Rajk and three other Communist victims of terror on October 6. Gero had in his mind that the reburial would not damage his authority, rather strengthen his leadership. He thought he did not belong to the political circle, which was the source of all wrong-doing. Besides, he did not predict that 200,000 frustrated people would attend Rajk's reburial. The social disorder and frustration were not eligible for people to follow a logical understanding of Gero's policy outcomes. Kemp emphasizes that by reburying Laszlo Rajk publicly the regime was acknowledging that it had been wrong.⁶⁶ Gero believed he could exclude himself from former crimes of the Party and he would also show that he took into account popular concerns in order to retain a sense of legitimacy.

Obstinate insistence on conservative personalities in Hungary was maybe one of the most important factors which had inflamed people's resentment in Hungary. Another

⁶⁵ See the "Letter from Erno Gero to Josip Broz Tito, July 19, 1956" in ed. Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, Janos M. Rainer *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), p. 157

⁶⁶ Kemp, p. 147

difference was, according to Johanna Granville, the absence of the personality cult in Poland.⁶⁷ In Hungary, there was a groundswell of hatred toward the so-called “Rakosi-Gero clique” and Rakosi’s hegemonic personality. While Gero was busy of completing his agenda and traveling to Belgrade looking to establish belated accommodation with Tito, agitation by students and intellectuals took the form of manifestos. Rakosi and Gero could not realize how fierce the transformation in the Hungarian society was. Between all of the bureaucratic and political fights within the party leadership and the Soviet Union, the Soviet leaders were also completely unaware of what impact Imre Nagy’s “unsuccessful premiership” had on the Hungarian psyche.⁶⁸ Motivated by the change in Polish society, the student demonstration on 23 October was highly significant in the revolutionary process. The demonstrators marched as a symbolic gesture to the statue of the Polish General Jozef Bem – the hero of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-49 – chanting the slogans:

Independence based on freedom and equality! Poland shows us the way, let's follow the Hungarian way! We're the nation of Father Bem and Kossuth, let's walk hand in hand! Long live the Polish nation! Long live the Polish Workers' Party! Long live the Polish-Hungarian friendship! To hell with traitor leaders! We want new leadership; we trust in Imre Nagy! We won't stop half way, death to Stalinism! Independence, freedom! ⁶⁹

It is very important to compare the different attitudes of the Soviet leadership in regard to the Hungarian and Polish events in order to understand the connection between Hungarian Revolution, Prague Spring and the responses of the Soviet Presidium. The Soviet leadership had evolved in its experimental approaches in Eastern and Central Europe. The reaction of the Soviet forces could have been different, but the leadership had always the same expectations: The unity of the Warsaw Pact Members, the dependency of the communist parties on the Soviet leadership and the leading role of the party. According to Vali, the revolutionary character of the Polish event deviated from accepted norms of Soviet supremacy. It was a

⁶⁷ Granville, p.1056.

⁶⁸ Vali, p.166.

⁶⁹ Granville, p. 1051.

revolutionary act carried out by the Central Committee of the Polish Party, thereby violating rules of Communist conduct set by Moscow.

It was a revolt within the Communist orbit carried out against the paramount Soviet leadership by the local communist party organ, like a vassal state acting against the accepted customs of vassalage. In Poland it was not the people that imposed their will upon the government by revolutionary action, but rather the local communist party itself that rose against the bondage imposed by Soviet authority. The Polish change, albeit supported by the masses, was not a people's revolution in the sense that the Hungarian Revolution was.⁷⁰

Hungary differed because people revolted both against their Hungarian Communist Party and against Soviet hegemony. Therefore, Soviet's political intervention in Polish Communist Party leadership reassured the Soviet Presidium. On the contrary, the Soviet leadership had found that they already had lost Hungarian leadership and the masses.

The reasons for the Soviet's different approaches to Hungary and Poland had emanated not only from mass-elite phenomenon, but rather from multiple social dynamics, political actions, inter-state relations, international politics and personalities. First of all, the Poznan crisis was mainly a workers' revolt caused by economic distress and the Polish authorities were able to contain the rebellion in Poznan due to its limited goals. In contrast to the resented workers in Poznan, the Hungarian students' demands were more political and harder for the conservative regime to meet.⁷¹ Secondly, Ochab and his colleagues were physically present in Poland on 28 June and thus could take action. However, Gero and his delegates were in Yugoslavia to normalize their relations and the atmosphere had escalated in their absence. The demonstration would turn violent when the leadership arrived on the day of the student rally.

Thirdly, the Polish leaders could manage the Poznan crisis on their own, without calling in Soviet troops. The Polish military containment was prompt and efficient. On the

⁷⁰ Vali, p. 263

⁷¹ Johanna Granville, "1956 Reconsidered: Why Hungary and Not Poland?" *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 80, No. 4 (Maney Publishing, Oct 2002), pp. 660-666

contrary, the first Soviet intervention in Hungary on 23-24 October was actually an invasion by invitation.⁷² Gero requested Soviet forces and the ministries supported foreign interference because of the inability and the inefficiency of Hungarian police and military forces. Fourthly, the discipline and authority over Polish soldiers provided quick containment of the revolutionary atmosphere. Granville emphasizes:

The overwhelming majority of Polish soldiers obeyed orders, yet the regular Hungarian army units wavered and some deserted to the side of the so-called freedom fighters. The soldiers were forbidden to open fire unless they were fired upon. Only the Hungarian State Security Authority units could shoot unhesitatingly at the Hungarian demonstrators.⁷³

The disorganization and indeterminacy of the Hungarian units flamed the protesters and demonstration.

Another difference emanated from the approaches of the leaders: In contrast to Ochab's conciliatory attitude to the demonstrators, Erno Gero delivered a scathing radio speech on 23 October denouncing the Hungarian demonstrators as counterrevolutionaries, further enraging his audience.⁷⁴ The main mistake committed by Hungarian leaders was that they immediately associated demonstration, which had anti-Soviet elements, with a counter-revolution against socialism.

Finally, the new reformist leaders of frustrated masses shaped the events in totally different ways. Gomulka could reconcile hard-liners, the Soviet leadership and frustrated masses. However, Nagy found himself in a different position: He had no choice other than to orient himself with the demands of the masses. Many newly established organs in Hungarian society were taking initiatives without Nagy's leadership. In my opinion, maybe the most important factor was Nagy's "New Course," in which he planted the seeds of reform, freedom, the idea of national sovereignty, multi-party system and neutrality. Gomulka acted

⁷² Ibid., pp. 661-668

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 666

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 667

cautiously by following Soviet line, declared his devotion to Warsaw Pact and emphasized the leading role of the Party.

3.2: Conceptualizing “1956”

Gero's appointment to the General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party exacerbated the situation in Hungary. Khrushchev had tried to find the middle way by replacing Rakosi with Gero. However, the Soviet leadership could not analyze the dynamics and change in the Hungarian society. People were aware that Gero was anything but a reformer. At Gero's leadership, the Party's power liquidated and lost its control over social and intellectual activism. Simultaneously, the Soviet leadership kept receiving reports from its officers telling them that the counterrevolutionary forces seized the government and society. Instead of trying to keep order in Hungary, Gero was too busy following Khrushchev's new reconciliatory path with Yugoslavia. When he came back from his trip to Hungary, he found wreckage instead of the communist party. The atmosphere in Hungary was in total disorder. An unexpected number of people had attended Rajk's reburial and the fervent attitude of the people worried the authorities. The Soviet leadership increased its warnings about counterrevolutionary activity. Therefore, Gero found himself at a position of constant defense:

There are those who intend to create a conflict between proletarian internationalism and Hungarian patriotism...We, Communists are Hungarian patriots...Yet while we proclaim that we are patriots, we also categorically state that we are not nationalists...We are patriots but at the same time we are also proletarian internationalists.⁷⁵

Nagy's defense on his “New Course,” Gero's poor initiative, the continuing frustration against Rakosi-Gero clique, and the increase in the Soviet intervention in Hungarian internal affairs had exacerbated the legitimacy problem of the communist party. The 23 October

⁷⁵ Gero's speech was aired on Radio Budapest, October 23, 1956, 18:30 hrs. See the transcript in M. J. Lasky (ed.), *The Hungarian Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1957), pp. 51-52.

demonstrations were the landmark for the course of events in Hungary. People demanded the reinstatement of Nagy to the government, the expulsion of Rakosi from the party, public trial for Farkas and others implicated in the Stalinist outrages, the publication of foreign trade agreements including Soviet exploitation of Hungarian uranium, the freedom of expression in literature, and finally, the evacuation of Soviet troops.

Eventually, the peaceful demonstrations in Budapest turned into a violent fight between Hungarian State Security officers supported by limited intervention by the Soviet forces, and the frustrated masses. The Central Committee was forced to appoint Nagy as Premier and Janos Kadar as First Secretary. Installed in power, however, Nagy did not act, especially at first, like a revolutionary leader. His primary endeavor upon taking office was to restore order and disarm the insurgents. His appeals to the fighters to lay down their arms were fruitless, and his initial popularity declined rapidly.⁷⁶ Therefore, he understood that he needed listen to the demands of the new rising social forces.

After a few days' hesitation, he started to fulfill the demonstrators' demands. Soviet troops were withdrawn from Budapest and the internal security service was disbanded. A multi-party system was restored and the holding of free and secret parliamentary elections was announced.⁷⁷ However, the changes in the society were too rapid, and the new civil initiative, the revolutionary and workers' councils spread nationwide and pressed Nagy for far-reaching reforms. They demanded freedom of assembly, free unions, the right to strike, cultural and religious freedom, a democratic multi-party system, independent farming, free choice in the formation of agricultural cooperatives, motivating self-management in economy, elimination of police terror, political sovereignty and state neutrality. In the end, Nagy found

⁷⁶ Paul Kecskemeti, "Anatomy of a Revolt," in *Eastern Europe Transformation and Revolution, 1945-1991: documents and analysis*, ed. Lyman H. Legters (Lexington, D. C. Heath and Company, 1992), p. 151

⁷⁷ Tony Kemp-Welch, "Dethroning Stalin: Poland 1956 and its Legacy," in *Challenging Communism in Eastern Europe: 1956 and its Legacy*, ed. Terry Cox (Routledge London-New York 2008), p. 88

himself in a situation, in which he was declaring the withdrawal from the Soviet Bloc and Hungary's neutrality. According to Paul Kecskemeti, Nagy did not choose this radical course spontaneously, but rather he was forced into it by the uncontrollable, overwhelming upsurge of the masses' revolutionary élan.⁷⁸

The feverish, fast and complex course in Hungary was generally reduced to a national revolution or national mass action. In many studies, the national symbolic events and actions in "1956" came to fore. My approach in the analysis of "1956" would not underestimate or overemphasize the role of nationalism in Hungary. Obviously, people were motivated by national discourses, some intellectuals started to search for true national expression and some politicians gave national declarations through the course of events. Still, there were symbolic actions, which presented how people were frustrated and attacked symbols of Stalinism. For example, Walter Kemp indicated:

It is no coincidence that the group that was the driving force behind change in Hungary in 1956 (the Petöfi Circle) was named after a poet of national resistance from the 1848 revolution. It is also telling that the rally of 23 October, which led to a severe crackdown, was mustered around the tomb of (Polish) General Józef Bem, hero of the 1848 revolution. Interesting too was that Nagy popularly received the decision of 28 October wherein he promised to restore the Kossuth coat of arms (without the Apostolic Crown) to the Hungarian flag and reinstate 15 March (the anniversary of the 1848 Revolution) as a national holiday.⁷⁹

People in the demonstrations attacked every image, which had been representing Stalin's repressions and terror. Many statues of Stalin were destroyed. Heino Nyysönen gives other symbolic examples, which showed the change into the celebration of national and historical heroes:

Stalin Street was renamed the Street of Hungarian Youth, the Stalin Bridge was renamed the Arpad Bridge, and Stalin Square became György Dózsa Square. They were renamed after the old national heroes of Hungary. On the 30th of October *Népszava* demanded eternal glory for the dead heroes. Events were again compared to 1848, and in both cases the struggle for freedom originated from the desire for both internal and external freedom. The new military commander of Budapest, General

⁷⁸ Paul Kecskemeti, p. 152

⁷⁹ Kemp, p. 147

Béla Király, began to organize a Revolutionary Defense Committee comprised of members of the army, police and National Guard. According to Király the National Guard was “the heir of the heroic national guards of the glorious revolution and struggle for freedom in 1848.” Moreover, Király also connected the National Guard with the troops “who in the spring of 1849 squashed the aggressive forces.”⁸⁰

There were many other examples, which demonstrate how the national fever mixed with anti-Soviet sentiments. However, just focusing on the “elective selection” of the national fervor does not provide a complete picture of the situation at hand. Therefore, I continue this chapter with the deeper analysis and conceptualization debates on the Hungarian Revolution.

The debate on the conceptualization of the crisis in Hungary is vital for my research, because it will lead to an understanding of the dynamics and aims of the Hungarian society, the intensity of the rivalry in the party, the power of the Hungarian Communist leaders and the Soviet Union’s approach on the “New Course.” My aim is not to reach a definitive conclusion or deepen the debate in details. Even in current politics and historiography in Hungary, “1956” is fiercely debated. Factions in contemporary Hungarian politics attempt to take possession of the 1956 events. I am going to present the social transformation and the role of many social actors and I will benefit from Gabor Gyani’s deep analysis and his comparison between many authors and intellectuals. Furthermore, Ferenc Vali’s and Hannah Arendt’s argumentation will be deeply examined in this chapter. I believe that, “1956” can have several interpretations, because the developments in the society, the change in the social and political structure and participants from every social stratum symbolize the complexity of “1956”. The “revolution” argument is considered to be the common approach, especially among foreign scholars. In any conceptualization – counterrevolution, revolution, national uprising or anti-totalitarian movement – the revolutionary elements in the society are undeniable. Therefore, I preferred using “Hungarian Revolution” in my research, but it does not signify that I am adhering to one interpretation.

⁸⁰ Heino Nyysönen, “Time, Political Analogies and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution,” *KronoScope* 6:1 2006 pp. 51-52

Hannah Arendt defined “1956” in the epilogue of her book, “Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution,” as a “spontaneous revolution,” which was conceptualized by Rosa Luxemburg. In her political thinking, the dialectic of spontaneity and organization was her leitmotif. Spontaneity and organization are not separable or separate activities. According to Luxemburg, the modern proletarian class does not carry out its struggle according to a plan set out in some book or theory.⁸¹ Not “organized” and hence “planless,” these economic, partial, and local conflicts continuously, “spontaneously” grew into general political and revolutionary mass strikes – from which, in turn, further local actions sprouted up thanks to the revolutionary situation and the potential energy of the masses’ class solidarity.⁸²

Hannah Arendt indicated that the theory of Luxemburg became a fact in Hungary in 1956. She emphasized the uniqueness of the Revolution: It had no leaders, was not organized, was not centrally directed and the will for freedom was the moving force in every action.⁸³ Luxemburg also describes in her philosophy the workers as “the leaders of their own” and they create their own developmental process. Parallel to what Luxemburg stressed over again, Arendt pointed to the spontaneous formation of the worker councils and revolutionary council system in Hungary.

The establishment of the Revolutionary and Workers’ Councils represented “the first practical step to restore order and to reorganize the Hungarian economy on a socialist basis, but without rigid party control or apparatus of terror.”⁸⁴ This spontaneous reorganization represented the only alternative of democratic electoral representation to the one presented by the Continental multi-party system, argued Arendt. She idealized the evolution in Hungarian

⁸¹ Junius, *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie* (The crisis in the German social-democracy), new ed. Berlin, 1919, pp. 82-83. Rosa Luxemburg

⁸² Rosa Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke* (Collected Works) Vol. 2, trans. David Wolff, (News & Letters, April 1980), pp. 344-77, 378-420

<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1910/theory-practice/>> last accessed 27.04.2009

⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1958), p. 482

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 498

society and in the political realm and repeatedly emphasized the uniqueness of the revolution.

She wrote:

“Thus, the men elected for the councils are chosen at the bottom, and not selected by the party machinery and proposed to the electorate either as individuals with alternate choices or as a slate of candidates. The choice, moreover, of the voter is not prompted by a program or a platform or an ideology, but exclusively by his estimation of a man, in whose personal integrity, courage and judgment he is supposed to have enough confidence to entrust him with his representation. The elected, therefore, is not bound by anything except trust in his personal qualities, and his pride is to have been elected by the workers, and not by the government or a party, that is, by his peers and from neither above nor below.”⁸⁵

Free elections, self-coordination and direct representation would enable “the council-men” to form their unique Supreme National Council, as the counterpart of normal government and exceptional National Revolutionary Committee, as the replacement of National Assembly. Arendt concluded that the unique evolution of the councils, not the restoration of parties, was the clear sign of a true upsurge of democracy against dictatorship, of freedom against tyranny.⁸⁶

Rosa Luxemburg’s “spontaneous revolution” could emerge theoretically in the revolutionary class-conscious worker masses in a disorganized and unplanned way. Gabor Gyani is right in his critique indicating that the class characteristics of the Hungarian event have to be established in order to call it a revolution, because according to the usage requirements, a revolutionary event is the violent manifestation of the awakening of class-consciousness of a given social group.⁸⁷ Arendt laid stress on the evolution of workers’ councils and denounced “1956” a workers’ revolution.

According to Gyani, the British historian Bill Lomax put the same emphasis on the revolutionary and self-regulatory aspect of the Hungarian society.⁸⁸ Lomax thought that the

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 499

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp.500-501

⁸⁷ Gabor Gyani, “Revolution, uprising, civil war: the conceptual dilemmas of 1956,” *European Review of History*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (Routledge, Oct 2008), p. 519

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 520

self-mastery of the workers in establishing direct control over their factories through the workers' councils, had thus in one blow both smashed the former state power ruled over by the Communist Party, and reopened the road to a society in which hierarchy would give way to equality, and political institutions would be replaced by social power.⁸⁹ Many intellectuals, political scientist and historians object to the over-emphasized role of the worker class in 1956. The defenders of the "National Uprising," "Counterrevolution" and "Anti-Totalitarian Revolution" bring out the diversity of the social actors in Hungary 1956.

The conceptualization of "1956" as a National Uprising attaches importance to the "national" component. According to its supporters, the change and transformation in Hungary could not be dedicated to one class. Rather it was a collective action by politically conscious masses. Gyani warns about the choice of uprising, revolt or freedom fight, because exact wording reveals the bias of the researcher, but these definitions have something in common. They do not imply a sudden and spontaneous action. These conceptualizations changed variably to emphasize the direction of dissidence against the mismanagement of the leader, corrupt policies of the party or government, and the alien ideology or the presence of foreign forces. However, the convergence uprising, revolt or freedom fight with the idea of nationalism will bring the researcher to a very different point. My main interest is to understand if the national component of the conceptualization played a dominant role in explaining sources of motivation and frustration.

According to Ferenc Vali, the conflict was not essentially between communist and anti-communist forces. Rather, Hungarians strived for freedom from foreign control. Vali pointed out that the Hungarian government underwent successive transformations from October 23 to November 4. From a Communist administration, subservient to the Party, it became a successively a pseudo "national" government, an inner cabinet of mixed

⁸⁹ Bill Lomax, *Hungary 1956*. (London: Allison & Busby, 1976), p. 203

allegiances, and finally balanced, representative coalition government. To allay difficulties and counteract the aftereffects of monopolistic Communist rule, it had to resort to extra-constitutional revolutionary measures, such as the creation of the Revolutionary Committee of Armed Forces. The central government, under revolutionary pressures and in view of its own de-Sovietization and democratization, had to acknowledge the existence of the de facto revolutionary groups and institutions.⁹⁰ Vali indicated:

All institutions of the country worked together to express its national freedom, sovereignty and its break-up from the supranational entity, the Soviet Union. The re-centralization under new national institutions were completed with the acts of legitimization, which started on October 26 with the Party's recognition of worker's councils and the encouragement of their formation, continued with the opening of governmental negotiations with the Freedom Fighters on October 28, and reached a climax with in a declaration by the Prime Minister on October 30. The revolutionary organization in Budapest and in the provinces had been declared legal and incorporated into the administrative system of the country.⁹¹

People cannot deny the fact that national elements, symbols and declarations were existent in "1956" and had partially motivated the society and triggered the idea of freedom, national sovereignty and neutrality. However, it does not mean that nationalism was the most powerful factor that led to a rift within the communist party and united people against the proletarian internationalism. The national emphasis is also related to the form of the event. Actually, the violent atmosphere and reaction produced a sudden detachment from socialist doctrines and the institutional dismissal support the idea of spontaneity. However, people had been suffering from cultural and political limitation, police terror and experiencing economic hardship. In such an environment, frustration and resentment were aggregated and many social groups, even reform-minded people in the party, were signaling the need for reform and liberalization. Moreover, "1956" did not occur because of the consciousness and unity of one social class or sole national impulse. Therefore, the conceptualizations as revolution and

⁹⁰ Vali, p. 320

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 321

national uprising are in a sense limited, because there are many more actors with diverse interests in “1956”.

The peasantry had played important role in the initial phase and in the later stages. Younger kulaks carried revolutionary action outside of big cities. Older representatives of the wealthier peasants occupied leading positions in local affairs. Intellectuals took also an important role in the revolution. They were the mediators between the party and masses. Since communist takeover, they witnessed how Marxist-Leninist ideals and tenets were evaporated due to corruption in politics and violent measures, even against their comrades. The contradictions between the communist ideal and reality estranged them and transformed most of them into reformers.

The metamorphosis of the intellectuals was not always balanced and moderate. Some of them were marginalized because of the strict policies and became non-conformist. Eventually, both disappointed groups facilitated the masses and played an active role in the formation of the civil movement. Reform-minded and non-communist intellectuals organized forums, discussions and meetings. Obviously, they were the mental workers of the revolution, who also took part in the formation of councils.

Other important groups, who had played an active role in “1956”, were the university students and the youth. Before the outbreak of the revolution the university students had triggered political mobilization and declared their radical demands. According to Gyani:

The revolutionary mobilization of university students requires a little more explanation, because the universities’ strict admission policies before 1956, along with the intense ideological propaganda incorporated in university training, were not the ideal breeding ground for revolutionary activism. Since the admission policies favored students who came from the lower social classes, university students were counted among the more reliable supporters of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” and the Communist system.⁹²

⁹² Gyani, “Revolution, uprising, civil war: the conceptual dilemmas of 1956,” p. 522

Additionally, the youth surprisingly played crucial role in fighting against the state authority police and the Soviet troops. The brutal policies already affected them and caused total irritation against the pro-Soviet government. Their relatives and families were directly affected by the brutal policies of the regime and many of them grew up in bad living standards and experienced economic hardships. Most importantly, they lacked the freedom in the over-politicized society, which caused them to question their identity and their indoctrination in the education system.

The most critical dynamic force during the revolution was the workers, which had diverse interests and reasons to support or to resist. Workers were not a homogenous group in Hungarian society and especially industrial workers were the social and economic basis for the communist regimes. In exchange, they had benefitted from social and political prerogatives, which were provided by the Party. However, as Gyani emphasizes:

The actual circumstances of the workers in general were not really better than the circumstances of any other social group. The politics of forced industrialization inflated their numbers tremendously, which in turn brought about further changes, both structural and mental. Industrial workers in the 1950s were nothing like their counterparts in the 1920s and 1930s.⁹³

Gyani points out that a widespread feeling of uncertainty and transience set in, with many people becoming confused about their identities:

The declassée's of the 1945 changes experienced this growing feeling of uncertainty just as much as those who replaced them, and who faced the task of becoming the new intelligentsia, the new elite or the new working class in this cartwheel of social mobility from one day to the next. In the Hungary of the mid-1950s, there was not one compact social group whose identity coincided with their image.⁹⁴

Gyani expresses that this general feeling of uncertainty was the crucial factor in the formation of revolutionary potential. He called this phenomenon “the mobility trap”:

The rapid industrialization forced by the Stalinist political elite, coupled with the determined efforts to keep society in a perpetual state of mobility, dug its own grave. The reason why this “social politics” eventually proved to be a trap was that the

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 523

mobilization strategy, which was meant to stabilize the system and legitimize the duplicitous seizure and arbitrary exercise of power, backfired.⁹⁵

Gyani's emphasis on the feeling of uncertainty, the diversity of interests and the mobilization of different factions in the society shows that the developments in Hungary were not attributable to the definition of homogenous national revolution.

The notion of *revolutio* works better to describe the analytical meaning of the Hungarian anti-Soviet and anti-Communist disturbance. The reason has been that the main thrust of the Hungarian situation in 1956 was similar to the seventeenth-century English and the eighteenth-century American "revolutions," to return definitively to a point of departure by regaining some of the formerly lost social and political liberties.⁹⁶

Gyani sees the changes in Hungary as an act of restoration, a return to an earlier stage, because "1956" had a declared goal and had a foreseeable conclusion:

Finally we come round to 1956: if most of the demands that the instigators of the events had in mind merely concerned "restoration" instead of progressive changes, such as the elimination of the monopoly of the Communist party and its replacement with a multi-party system, the institutional restoration of the established freedoms of bourgeois democracies and the creation of some forms of direct democracy anew (the possible antecedents of the workers' councils included the revolutionary councils of 1944–1945 and the factory and national councils of later times), then the propriety of applying the word "revolution," when meant in the modern sense, is at least doubtful.⁹⁷

Gyani has true remarks on the motivations of the social forces in Hungary and he finds that "1956" carried more counterrevolutionary aspects than revolutionary traits. "1956" was more of a restoration than a further extension of modern revolutions. In this strict conceptual sense, and only in this sense, 1956 was more of a counter-revolution than a revolution, since it was a return, rather than a step in the progressive direction, according to the notion of the permanence of revolutions.⁹⁸

It is still hard to define "1956" as a conscious act to restore former order. In my opinion, Hungary did not experience true democratic consolidation. Two World Wars, ethnic

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 519

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 526

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 527

tensions, border disputes and foreign interventions prevented true pluralism and parliamentary system. During the crisis, people wanted their freedom, independence, democratic, civil, social and political rights. People were living in a bipolar world as they were neighboring “neutral” Austria, “Titoist” Yugoslavia and pro-Soviet countries. The importance of turbulent atmosphere in Poland should not be overlooked. Obviously, the party and social forces affected them from their neighboring countries. Yugoslav “national communism”, Austrian neutrality and the Polish Revolt had played an important part in defining Hungarian future.

After the Party had lost its total control and Nagy was forced to head the government, there was no more elite driven socialist reformism or revisionism. Arendt was at some point right about the uniqueness of the workers’ and revolutionary councils. People acted in a short time and formed councils in an almost democratic manner, in which they voted and elected their representatives directly. People were demanding a neutral foreign policy and crying out for national independence instead of Soviet patronage. Hungary was under foreign supervision since the start of the Second World War. These demands were pointing out anything but restoration of old order.

On the other hand, Gyani is right, because many reform-minded workers, intellectuals and party members did not have the aim of abolishing communism in Hungary. I believe that, “1956” had no definite direction, which does not mean that it was a revolution. The multiple actors with diverse interests fought for their freedom. We could not theorize and guess the regime or developments what if the Soviets did not interrupt Hungarian freedom fight, because the Soviet leadership and communism were intertwined with the Hungarian administration, culture, society, politics and security. The anti-Soviet feeling also facilitated the feeling of uncertainty and mobilized masses. Moreover, it was partially a national uprising. The circulation of national and historical symbols, search for the national identity and the rise of the national declarations, overlapped with the anti-Soviet feeling, resentment

against Rakosi-Gero clique. The complex“1956” had one common motivation, which was the fervent desire for freedom.

SECTION 4: CZECHOSLOVAKIA 1968

4.1: The Prague Spring: Transformation in Czechoslovakia

Dubcek's premiership gave hope to all forces in society, and many people in Czechoslovakia were expecting a strong will and initiative, which would accelerate the reform process and end the inequalities between the Czechs and Slovaks. However, Dubcek had to follow a cautious path in order to appease the Soviet leadership. Dubcek delivered a speech at the Twentieth Anniversary of communist takeover in Czechoslovakia, "February Revolution." The speech disappointed people in the party and society, because he strongly emphasized the need to "uphold democratic centralism" and "enforce the leading role of the party."⁹⁹

Jaromir Navratil indicates that Dubcek had the will to implement reforms, which would have made people in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union uncomfortable. In the earlier draft of the speech, Dubcek wanted to express innovative formulations in the Czechoslovak foreign affairs. However, Dubcek's projects were removed from the speech, however, because of the attendance of party and state officials from Warsaw Pact countries. Precautious behavior of Dubcek and his team indicated the existent distrust and doubt of the Warsaw Pact members with the new Czechoslovak leadership. The awareness on the Warsaw Pact members' surveillance would help to lead "Prague Spring" last longer than Hungarian Revolution.

Dubcek decided to implement domestic reforms but in a gradual way. He was aware of the failures of Novotny's leadership, domestic policies and discriminative attitude toward

⁹⁹ "Alexander Dubcek's Speech Marking the 20th Anniversary of Czechoslovakia's "February Revolution," February 22, 1968" in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, 1998, p. 51

Slovak people. Dubcek started to develop political and institutional reforms, which would improve the administrative methods, democratize the internal functioning of the party and disconnect party and state institutions. Moreover, Dubcek wanted to include forces outside the party mechanism, which had been stigmatized by the former leadership. Zdenek Mlynar, the head of the Commission on Political Reform, proposed the participation in decision making of independent political and social groups alongside the communist party. He did not advocate a true multiparty system, but instead foresaw the enhancement of the National Front and of the role of the non-communist parties in it.¹⁰⁰

According to Bracke, the Prague Spring was not only an elite-led top-down process, but rather it was a double development. On the one hand, it was a movement of political and economic reform, initiated and carried out by the communist party leadership. On the other hand, it was a movement of intellectual and cultural revival in the broadest sense. With the relative emancipation in the reform process, intellectuals and writers found great space to maneuver. For example, the Czechoslovak Writer's Union demanded full rehabilitation of all citizens who had been unlawfully imprisoned, persecuted or hurt professionally after February 1948. An open letter signed by 134 writers and cultural figures on March 25 called on the Czechoslovak Communist Party to "stand up to international pressure motivated by doubts about the nature and objectives of our internal measures," and to move the nation toward "permanent democracy."¹⁰¹ The mutual dialogue between the party members and the support from social groups resulted in the emergence of the "Action Program."

Immediately after preparing the "Action Program" Dubcek had to reassure the Soviet leadership and Warsaw Pact members. Dubcek wanted to show that the "Action Program"

¹⁰⁰ Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak crisis, 1968*, p. 136

¹⁰¹ "Open Letter from 134 Czechoslovak Writers and Cultural Figures to the CPCz Central Committee, March 25, 1968" in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, 1998, p. 76

emerged out of popular demand and was not dangerous for the legitimacy of the communist parties in Warsaw Pact. The main fear among the member parties was that they feared a chain-reaction of popular demands in their countries, especially after the implementation of indigenous reform programs. Dubcek emphasized that the current socialist system in Czechoslovakia was damaged by the former leadership and contaminated by the corrupt actions and policies. The Action Program aimed to strengthen the system according to Marxist-Leninist tenets.¹⁰² While the plan envisioned small steps toward “political pluralism” and “reform of the whole political system so that it will permit the dynamic development of social relations appropriate for socialism,” the authors of the Action Plan stressed the solidarity of Czechoslovak foreign policy with the Soviet bloc:

We stand resolutely on the side of progress, democracy, and socialism in the struggle by the socialist and democratic forces against the aggressive attempts of world imperialism...The basic orientation of Czechoslovak foreign policy...revolves around alliance and cooperation with the Soviet Union and the other socialist states.¹⁰³

Dubcek and his team needed to constantly emphasize over and over the indivisible connection between the sole position of the party and its mutual and coherent role in the international socialism, because the Czechoslovak Communist Party would be reorganized into a true political party with a mission “to inspire socialist initiative” rather than dictate it. Dubcek was totally against the monopolistic concentration of power. The party would secure its leading role through consolidation of the true socialist system, which would require the support from other political parties of the National Front and rapprochement of all social and cultural forces.

At the Central Committee’s April session, Dubcek’s Action Program was formally adopted. The Program called for a wide-ranging societal initiative, for an open exchange of

¹⁰² Peter Sugar, “Continuity and Change in Eastern European Authoritarianism: Autocracy, Fascism and Communism,” *East European Quarterly*, 18 (1984) p. 20

¹⁰³ “The CPCz CC Action Program, April 1968 ” in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, 1998 , p.92

opinions, and a democratization of the entire social and political system, in which legal steps were taken and aimed to secure the civil rights, freedom of speech, assembly and travel. Furthermore, the Program shut down political surveillance by the secret police; abolished censorship in scientific publications, works of art and the mass media; predicted gradual mixing socialist economy with a market one, and introduced semi-free elections. The Action Program also called for “a crucial change in the constitutional arrangement of the relations between Czech and Slovaks, and to carry out the necessary constitutional modifications.” A “socialist federal arrangement,” according to the plan, would redress the Slovak problem and provide for “the legal coexistence of two equal nations in a common socialist state.”¹⁰⁴

Another important aspect of the Action Program was the formulation of a new active European policy. Although the Czechoslovak leadership emphasized its interdependent and mutual relationship with the Warsaw Pact members, the new independent foreign policy was totally controversial against the dogmatic vision of the Soviet-led internationalism, especially in East and Central Europe. To prevent Czechoslovakia’s isolation, Dubcek and his followers sought more active participation in international organizations, especially the United Nations and its bodies.¹⁰⁵ The independent initiative in international affairs started with the normalization of relations with the Federal Republic of Germany, which was a taboo for the Eastern Bloc and could have definitely irritated East Germany and the Soviet Union.

Czechoslovakia’s desire to connect with the rest of the world emanated from its own national and strategic interests. In addition to international liberalization, the Action Program granted the communist party a privileged role in the National Front, and the other political

¹⁰⁴ Milan Hübl, “The Legacy of 1968,” in *Communism and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Frantisek Silnitsky, Larisa Silnitsky, Karl Reyman, (Brighton: The Harvester Press 1979), p. 27

¹⁰⁵ Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Détente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak crisis, 1968*, p. 137

groups in it were considered as partners but not as equals to the party.¹⁰⁶ International and domestic liberalization emanated from intellectual debates during 1960s. The novelist Milan Kundera and the playwright Vaclav Havel were crucial intellectual symbols in the Czechoslovak national and international revival.

Their personal and artistic backgrounds also differed considerably: Kundera had first gained recognition as a lyric poet with orthodox communist themes, only later gaining prominence for his innovative fiction, while Havel, who was of a slightly younger generation and from a wealthy Prague family, had never joined the Communist Party.¹⁰⁷ They played important roles through the Prague Spring. Their interpretation of different aspects of liberalization signaled the varying emphasis on Czechoslovak domestic and international identities. Charles Sabatos brilliantly compares Havel's and Kundera's approaches:

Kundera's concept of "critical thinking" idealized what he called the Czech national "destiny," while Havel called for the "courage" to look at the difficult issues of the present. At the time, this polemic was seen as representing two camps: reform communists, such as Kundera, and those non-communists more skeptical of the possibility of true reform, including Havel.¹⁰⁸

According to Sabatos, the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union in June 1967, and in particular the speeches by Milan Kundera and his fellow novelist Ludvik Vaculik, was a major turning point in the Czechoslovak intellectual awakening. Josef Korbel has described the speeches of this congress as fascinating: "The Czech language, which had been mutilated by Russisms during the Stalinist years, shines in all its richness and beauty; the themes, formulated up to then only in journals in scholarly terms, are expressed in a scintillating variety of literary styles."¹⁰⁹ The resentment against Soviet impositions such as Russian language instructions in school and in literature gave rise to "critical thinking," as the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Sabatos, *Criticism and Destiny: Kundera and Havel on the Legacy of 1968*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 10 (Routledge, Dec 2008), p. 1827

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Jozef Korbel, *Twentieth-Century Czechoslovakia: The Meanings of its History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 277

Czech intellectuals started to rediscover their cultural and historical richness and search for their true identity in Central Europe. Kundera presented this historical and cultural inbetweenness as a unique trait of Czech society. According to Kundera, the greatness of Czech culture lay in:

The whole course of our nation's history, torn between democracy, fascist enslavement, Stalinism and socialism, and further complicated by its unique nationality problem, features every important issue that has made our twentieth century what it is...Our nation then has experienced, I daresay, more than many others have in this century and, if its genius has been alert, it will now know more than the others.¹¹⁰

Kundera's approach was reflected in the party's identification of its new active role in international politics. The foreign policy was formed according to Czechoslovak national interests. The Czechoslovak leadership was determined not to be enslaved by a supranational entity in its international relations.

Havel was demanding true domestic liberalization and freedoms. Vaclav Havel published the essay "On the Theme of an Opposition," which called for a genuine opposition party to the all-powerful communist party. Havel evoked "the strong and specific Czechoslovak democratic and humanistic tradition" and suggested that the new opposition party "could be a democratic party drawing on this tradition of democracy and humanism."¹¹¹ Havel was asking for true opposition, a control mechanism, which could check and balance the whole system. Havel was defending the need of "self-criticism." In my opinion, a controlled National Front would function as a self-critic of the regime and its policies.

The "true consolidation of the regime or true reconciliation with the outer world" debate would culminate within mobilized social factions and intellectuals in order to support domestic and international liberalization of Czechoslovakia. The Soviet leadership had been

¹¹⁰ M.Kundera, 'Speech at the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union (1967)' in Hamsik, D. (ed.) *Writers Against Rulers* (New York, Random House, 1971) p. 169

¹¹¹ Václav Havel and Paul Wilson, *Open Letters: selected prose 1965-1990*, (New York, Vintage, 1991), pp. 30-31

pressing for the protection of the “leading role of the communist party” and against Czechoslovakia’s deviations from the socialist fraternal relations. According to Vilem Precan, independent public opinion was being formed and expressed. An infrastructure of organizations and institutions emerged, wresting themselves free from the “leading role of the Party,” and the foundations of a new political and social pluralism and the prerequisites for the renewal of civil society began to take shape.¹¹²

The problem lay in the fact that the Warsaw Pact members were pressuring the Czechoslovak leadership to halt the reform process, purge “the harmful” elements in the party and society, and renew party control over the country. The party was also aware that it had to reassert its authority, because the reform process became an organic mechanism, which was now way beyond the scope of the party initiative. While existing political parties, the Socialist Party and People’s Party, were reactivated, a Social Democratic Party came into being, without formally being legalized. Some new organizations, which would be defined counterrevolutionary elements in Czechoslovak society by the Warsaw Pact members and hardliners in the Party, emerged with different interests:

“Influential new organizations were KAN, the Club of Engaged Non-Party Members, and K213. The first was a club for political discussion, which wanted to participate in the building of “a new political system, hitherto never realized in history: democratic socialism.” It advocated party pluralism and the defense of civil and human rights. It was founded by 144 members, a number which rose to 3,000 just before the invasion. The K213 was a more controversial matter: it was organized as a group of former victims of the communist takeover, charged by the 1948 “Law for the Defense of the Republic (n.213).” Its starting point was to strive for the rehabilitation of all victims; from there, it broadened the debate on human rights. None of these parties or groups, however, was allowed into the National Front, and they continued to have a semi-illegal status.”¹¹³

The relative rise of the civil society and civil initiatives resulted in the development of a civil control mechanism, in which independent and semi-independent social actors were demanding a true legal system. All social groups were calling for the full rehabilitation of all

¹¹² Precan, “Dimensions of the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1967–1970,” p. 1665

¹¹³ Bracke, pp. 140-141

citizens, communist and non-communists, who had been victims of unlawful practices over the past 20 years. The civil initiative demanded a fair legal process, in which the authorities responsible for the crimes had to be punished due to their indirect or direct involvement.

“The press, radio, and television were filled with condemnations of the political leaders deemed to be ultimately responsible, including, Gottwald, Bacilek, Cepicka, and Novotny, but also of lesser figures – high officials, security investigators, judges, procurators, and lawyers. Many, it was charged, still held public office and had blocked the implementation of rehabilitation. Certain incumbents, such as A. Neuman, the Minister of Justice, J. Kudrna, Minister of Interior, J. Bartuska, Procurator General, J. Litera, Chairman of the Supreme Court, and others tried to defend themselves publicly, with varying degrees of admission of guilt and self-criticism, but were soon removed from office.”¹¹⁴

Following public demand for the replacement of Novotny as head of state, the CC Plenum of April voted in Svoboda as the new President of the Republic. Like Dubcek, Svoboda was a compromising figure in favor of moderate reform led by the party.¹¹⁵ The reformist movement also targeted the military, the secret police and internal security network, which were directly involved or indirectly prevented the rehabilitation processes. Important personal change took place and the Dubcek leadership also aimed to shift the advantage for reform into the cadres of security forces.

Both civil and political authorities saw the completion of rehabilitation as a moral and political obligation. Moreover, the victims of illegal practices had to be recovered and unified with new system, which had to give moral, personal, economic and social aid to the victims. The rehabilitation process was important for the regime so that it could face its prior crimes and not repeat Novotny’s mistakes by declaring, the rupture and independence from the past administrations and personalities. The pressure of the civil initiative evidenced growing democratic consciousness. There were now forces outside of the intra-party opposition and they wanted to see the new regime raking over the ashes of the past. Eventually, the civil supervision and pressure on the rehabilitation process would also provide the transparency of

¹¹⁴ H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution*, p. 375

¹¹⁵ Bracke, p. 137

the courts. That would directly result in the revision of the incorrect administrative measures and the rehabilitation of the law and justice.

The reform movement strengthened the hands of the social forces, which could not be responsible for the Soviet leadership, which stifling the reaction and critiques against the Czechoslovak authorities. The social forces witnessed the gradual slowdown of reform and an increase of the party initiative. The Dubcek leadership was taking too much risk, while the Party was following a middle road, in which it tried to appease everyone. According to Vilem Precan, the “independent public” was mobilized by two fears in particular:

The first was that the new regime would only consider the demands of some social entities and see the demands of others as incompatible with the “leading role of the Party.” The second fear was that the reform leaders would give in to pressure from outside. In other words, the current leaders of the Czechoslovak state and Party would be unable to respect, and defend, the right of the Czechoslovak people to decide on internal matters in their own country, and would give preference to the interests of “socialism” and “international obligations,” that is to say, they would give in to Moscow.¹¹⁶

Written by the writer Vaculik and signed by 70 artists, intellectuals and public figures, the “Two Thousand Words” Manifesto was published on 27 June 1968. The Manifesto was a civil intervention against the Party’s vanishing will to reform and was concerned with the present threat and intervention of the foreign forces. It advised the revival of the National Front, demanded a public meeting of national committees and emphasized the need of special citizens’ committees and commissions to solve the problems. Moreover, the Manifesto requested the change of the district and local press, which had degenerated into a mouthpiece for official views. It called for the formation of editorial councils to be composed of representatives of the National Front and demanded the establishment of committees for the defense of free speech. Furthermore, the Manifesto pointed out the need for resolution of the

¹¹⁶ Precan, p. 1667

Czech-Slovak question and it considered federation as one means of solving the nationality problem as well as an important step toward democratization.¹¹⁷

The cosignatories indicated that they did not want to create chaos and a state of general insecurity. However, they argued that the people of Czechoslovakia should take “direct action” at the local level, through debate, demonstrations and strikes in order to provide a continuation of the reform process. Furthermore, it proposed that the people take necessary armed action to back the government, if the foreign countries were to intervene in their internal affairs. Consequently, the “Two Thousand Words” Manifesto exasperated the Warsaw Pact leaders and shocked the Dubcek leadership, because it was obvious evidence for the leaders of Warsaw Pact that the Party had lost its leading role, and the reform process had mutated into a counterrevolutionary movement. Unfortunately, the Czechoslovak leadership condemned the text in a Central Committee resolution, mainly due to these internal and external pressures.

The reform process in Czechoslovakia was first activated by the Czechoslovak elites in the communist party. The intra-party struggles and limited pluralism in the party gave birth to the “Prague Spring.” The gradual and relatively calm nature of the reform movement did not immediately facilitate the civil initiative. The party could consolidate its regime without major swings from the party and society. Therefore, many commentators avoided describing the process in Czechoslovakia as “a revolution.” According to Gordon Skilling, many scholars preferred moderate concepts, such as “political change” or “the reform movement,” because the aim of the party was not the destruction of socialism, but rather a reformed socialism, non-Stalinist and democratic.¹¹⁸ The elite-driven reforms affected legal procedures, but through existing institutions. The pace of legislative change was slow, as the Slovak

¹¹⁷ “2000 Words: A Statement on Democratization” (East Europe, August 1968) in *Eastern Europe: Transformation and Revolution, 1945-1991*, ed. Lyman H. Legters (Lexington, D. C. Heath and Company, 1992), p. 215

¹¹⁸ Skilling pp. 827-828

Question was not resolved and federalization of the regime was not reified until the end of Prague Spring.

On the other hand, Czechoslovakia had experienced a dual liberalization process, not only within the party initiative. There was a growing public opinion, a rehabilitation of non-communist victims, a formation of non-communist, civil and intellectual communities and a strengthening of civil initiatives. Civil society could express itself and apply pressure for the continuation of reform, but they did not involve themselves in non-constitutional forms of struggle, as they did not aim to overthrow the government nor to seize political power. Skilling indicated that if the process had not been interrupted from the outside, the Prague Spring would have transformed itself into a revolution. He argued that the process had revolutionary character and that people were willing to sacrifice themselves to protect the new status quo, but that they were also demanding true political pluralism and independent foreign policy. In my opinion, it was true that especially the post-invasion period especially had shown that civil and social forces had the potential to change the system into a democratic pluralist regime. In the “Two Thousand Words” Manifesto, they called for free elections and for the real revitalization of the opposition parties. Skilling wrote in his book “Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution:”

“January was the product of a breakdown of the old order conforming to Lenin’s classic recipe for a revolutionary situation: the rulers were unable to continue to rule in the old way, and the ruled were unwilling to be so ruled. It involved the gradual loss of power by a strong ruling group – the bureaucratic or apparatchik class, some 100,000 in number – and a portentous shift in the balance of forces within the party and in society as a whole. Although the impetus for reform was initially given by party leaders and by certain intellectual elite, all social groups were eventually drawn into the quickening currents of political action. Moreover, the changes envisaged were many and substantial, and affected all aspects of life without exception. At least three major reforms were extremely radical in the context of the Soviet model. The extent of freedom of expression was a complete break with the Soviet pattern of censorship and indoctrination. The rehabilitation process was intended to correct gross injustices in a thorough and systematic manner unequaled in other communist countries, and was to be accompanied by radical changes in legal procedures. Federalization, designed to reorder Czech-Slovak relations on a federal basis, was without parallel in

Czechoslovakia either before or under communist rule, and was the antithesis of the pretenses of Soviet federalism.”¹¹⁹

The developments, especially in pre- and post-invasion, signaled the possibility of a revolution. The social forces mobilized themselves in a passive resistance, which transformed into declarations, demonstrations and general strikes. One of the main differences between the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring was in the role of the party leadership. The Czechoslovak Communist Party did possess the power to balance Soviet demands and civil-social requests. The equilibrium between internal and external pressures was destabilized not only because of the growing civil dissidence and frustration. Rather, the party followed an independent path to organizing its foreign relations. Both factors, elite and civil initiatives, had facilitated the destabilization of the regime.

In my opinion, the progress in Czechoslovakia was evolutionary, not revolutionary. The Czechoslovak and Slovak Party created the relative pluralist atmosphere, which was boosted by with the growth of the civil-intellectual initiative. The gradual permission of the formation of the non-communist movements and groups, and the controlled activation of the National Front were part of this “evolutionary process.” Czech and Slovak lands became the center of civil, political and intellectual forums. The reforms were implemented gradually not to enrage the Soviet leadership and nor to lose total control to newly emerged social forces. Czechoslovakia was carrying legacies, misdeeds, criminal personalities, lawless legal system of the former regime. It was hard process for the new Czechoslovak leadership to take advantage in the political, bureaucratic and security cadres, which were still packed with hard-liners in pre-invasion. With the motivation and pressure, the legal, social and administrative system started to change gradually. Thus, the Warsaw Pact troops interrupted an evolutionary, organic and healthy process in the Prague Spring.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 834

4.2: De-centralizing Prague Spring: “The Slovak Question”

The Czechoslovak crisis in 1968, popularly known as “Prague Spring”, carries the discriminative legacy of Prague centralism. One of the main differences between the Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring was the ethnic composition in Czechoslovakia and its reflection on the central and local parties, elections, representations, decision-making and reform process. Slovaks in Czechoslovakia provided a check and balance system against the centralist tendencies of the Czechs. The “Slovak Question” was always waved aside by the Czech authorities, which had acted aggressively against the national demands of Slovaks in many instances. Moreover, Slovaks were more than a regulating factor in Czechoslovak society: They took leading positions in the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and they always questioned the administrative, political and structural reforms. They also wanted to establish equal relations with the Czechs, based on a federal state system.

The Slovaks experienced the fear of total assimilation since the fall of the Great Moravian State in the tenth century. Despite the thousand-year national dependence and strong Magyar influence, the Slovaks were not subdued and survived as a nation. During the First World War, the Czechs and Slovaks joined forces to form a common state. The Pittsburg Agreement, signed May 30, 1918 by representatives of Slovak organizations active in the US and T. G. Masaryk, the Czech representative, set the stage for the foundation of this state. According to this agreement, the new state was to include the Czechs and Slovaks, since the Slovaks preferred to enter the new, democratic Czechoslovakia, rather than remain constantly subject to the Magyar threat.¹²⁰ The Pittsburg Agreement provided Slovaks a kind of semi-autonomous status, in which they formed their government and their own court. The

¹²⁰ Frantisek Silnitsky, “The Nationality Problem,” in *Communism and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Frantisek Silnitsky, Larisa Silnitsky and Karl Reyman, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979), p. 33

Slovakian language became the official language, to be used in the schools and universities. Czechs and Slovaks would work for mutual independence to form one country.

However, the government of Czechoslovakia became more centralized with each passing day. The “Slovak Question” started to arise from the very beginning of the establishment of the multinational Czechoslovakia. Another legacy, which would persist even after Gustav Husak’s normalization and federalization of the country, was the national idea of “Czechoslovakianism” in the new Czechoslovak state. According to this idea, Czechs and Slovaks were considered to be one national group. Frantisek Silnitsky indicated:

Czechoslovakianism was, at that time, not a political invention. To the contrary, this was the result of joint actions by the Czechs and Slovaks against the Magyarization of Slovakia, and it embodied an entire set of attitudes – from the view of the Slovaks as a branch of the Czech people who lived under Hungarian rule, to the concept of the Czechs and Slovaks becoming unified in one state.¹²¹

In order to prevent Magyarization and strengthen national consciousness, the Czech authorities promoted the development of Slovak culture. In my opinion, Czechoslovakianism was transformed into a political project. Starting with Magyar influence, Czechoslovak nationalism was reified until the end of the Second World War and the expulsion of German minorities against Nazi expansionism.

The new system of political pluralism, with the multi-partied government of the National Front in 1945, aimed to abandon Czechoslovak nationalism. However, the Czech National Council was disbanded in May 1945 and incorporated into the central government of the Czechoslovakian Republic. Despite this, the Slovaks were allowed to maintain special autonomous organs of government, while none are available for the Czechs. The Communist Party of Slovakia existed as a special subdivision of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia with no equivalent on the Czech side. Silnitsky indicated that the Czechoslovak government automatically identified with the Czech people because of the absence of Czech national

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 34

political organs.¹²² This asymmetrical political arrangement, in turn, created inequalities in representation and decision-making and resulted in Prague centralism.

The lack of communist traditions in Slovakia was one of the important reasons for Prague centralism and the persistence of the “Slovak Question.” The Communists were considerably stronger in the Czech provinces than in Slovakia. While over 40 percent of the Czechs cast their ballots for the Communist Party in the 1946 elections, the Party was the choice of only a little over 30 percent of the voters in Slovakia. Of the 2,311,066 members and candidates of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1949 only 236,432 were from Slovakia, or slightly over 10 percent, although more than one-quarter of Czechoslovakia’s population lived in that area.¹²³

Edward Taborsky suggests that the reasons for the weaker standing of the party in Slovakia than in the Czech provinces was that Slovakia suffered more heavily at the hands of the Red Army than did Czech provinces. Slovak Catholicism goes deeper and is more conservative than the Czech variety. Despite a recent upsurge in its industrialization, Slovakia remained more agrarian than the Czech areas and had therefore a smaller ratio of industrial workers. Much less confiscated property was available for distribution in Slovakia than in the Czech provinces and thus there was much less reason to be thankful for gifts from the communist donors.¹²⁴

The rise of the communists in the Czechoslovak government and the takeover of the key political institutions, ministries and security forces resulted in the liquidation of political pluralism starting from 1948. An asymmetric form of limited federalism, which included the setting up of Slovak institutions such as the Slovak National Council and the Communist Party of Slovakia, was inscribed in the constitution in 1948. In practice these institutions were

¹²² Ibid., p. 36

¹²³ Taborsky, *Communism in Czechoslovakia 1948-1960*, p. 41

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 42

deprived of real powers. The methods of communists, which were aimed to dominate cultural, economic and political realms in Czechoslovakia, revitalized the idea of Czechoslovakianism to imply socialist unified nation. The Slovak Question was ignored due to the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism, which predicts denationalization of the society. The communist regime had maintained the classic Marxist-Leninist view and thought that the problem of nationalities would solve itself automatically once Slovakia had caught up economically.¹²⁵

The failed reforms did nothing but increase public discontent. Those who were insisting on bringing the Slovak problem to the surface, were called provocateurs and accused of being “bourgeois nationalist.” Stalinist consolidation was needed to purify the Communist Parties of Czechoslovakia and Slovakia. Therefore, the party began to expose its enemies within its own ranks and sentenced many important figures of the Slovak Uprising. Until the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961, Prague centralism had functioned well and suppressed the dissident voices from Slovakia.

The 1960 Constitution of Czechoslovakia limited the autonomy that had already been granted to Slovakia. The Slovak national political organs were deprived of practically all of their most essential rights. However, Slovakia was undergoing intense economic development. Paralleling the economic growth was a strengthening of Slovak national consciousness and increased demands for an analysis of national relations within the Czechoslovakian state.¹²⁶ The economic betterment was not the sole reason for the Slovak awakening. The Slovak people were aware of the Czech superiority and discrimination, which was legalized in the 1960 Constitution. In almost all institutions, for instance, the trade unions, the Academy of Sciences, the youth league, and the cultural associations, Slovaks were in subordinate positions, and subject to bureaucratic rule from Prague.¹²⁷ For Slovaks,

¹²⁵ Bracke, p. 135

¹²⁶ Silnitsky, “The Nationality Problem,” p. 39

¹²⁷ Skilling, p. 53

any real or cosmetic reform had no legitimacy, because Slovaks had identified Novotny with the constitution of 1960 and thus with the weakening of Slovak national institutions. Scott Brown indicates that the individuals responsible for the trials of other Slovak Communist leaders emerged uncompromised while the heresy of “Slovak nationalism” remained operative.¹²⁸

The de-Stalinization process in Czechoslovakia directly affected the Slovak leadership in 1963. Alexander Dubcek took the lead after his struggle against the hardliners, while Karol Bacilek and Pavol David and became the First Secretary of the Slovak Communist Party. Dubcek symbolized a new current in Slovak politics, in which he would promote and defend the Slovak national interests. He started his struggle against Czechoslovakianism, which had been justifying the inequalities under the name of converging into one nation.

To this end, the Communist Party of Slovakia celebrated important national milestones in Slovak history. In 1963 it commemorated the centennial of the Matica slovenska, an important Slovak cultural and educational organization. The following year it celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising with great fanfare, holding ceremonies attended by not only Novotny, but also Nikita Khrushchev.¹²⁹

These events, especially the celebration of the Slovak National Uprising and Novotny’s necessary recognition, were critically important for the Slovak nation, because it officially condemned the erroneous policies on Slovak national figures. Moreover, it exculpated the imprisoned and then partially rehabilitated personalities like Gustav Husak. Husak’s political comeback was critical for the treatment of the “Slovak Question,” because Dubcek was following a relative cautious policy on the idea, federalization of Czechoslovakia. According to Skilling, the Communist Party of Slovakia occupied a peculiar

¹²⁸ Scott Brown, “Socialism with a Slovak Face: Federalization, Democratization, and the Prague Spring,” *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Sage Publications, April 2008) pp. 467–495 p. 473

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 474

position in this struggle between Prague centralism and Slovak nationalism.¹³⁰ Brown points out that although Dubcek was promoting Slovak national consciousness as the First Secretary, he did so in constant reference to the need for state unity, making no mention of his opinion on federation.¹³¹ Husak's inclusion in politics started with his participation in Smolenice conferences, in which he indicated the need to push the federalization debate toward a new constitutional arrangement. His public appearances had an impact both in Prague and Bratislava. This, in turn, made Husak a deputy chairman, responsible for developing a new constitutional basis for Czech-Slovak relations. Husak's appointment revealed the popular demand for the resolution of the "Slovak Question."

The Czech public, especially intellectuals, were not ignoring the agenda of the Slovak leadership. Many reform-minded Czechs supported the Slovak cause in de-centralization. According to Frantisek Silnitsky, political terror, anti-Semitism and its tragic consequences – the persecution of the so-called Slovak bourgeois nationalists – all led the Czechs to raise the issue of morality and conscience in politics.¹³² Reform-minded Czechs were defending the respect for national rights, which would follow an overall democratization of the country. The Slovak Question, thus, mobilized both Slovaks and Czech and in the end, it contributed to the fall of Novotny leadership. Bracke emphasized that the Prague Spring was a national revival, in a double sense.¹³³ In my opinion, general approach, which named the reform spring in Czechoslovakia as "Prague Spring", concentrated only on the revival of Czechoslovak national identity. The revival of the Slovak national consciousness was overlooked. Both Slovaks and Czechs questioned the place of Czechoslovakia not only in the socialist world. According to Czechoslovak intellectuals, the Czechoslovak identity was inescapably

¹³⁰ Skilling, p. 54

¹³¹ Brown, "Socialism with a Slovak Face: Federalization, Democratization, and the Prague Spring," p. 475

¹³² Silnitsky, p. 40

¹³³ Bracke, p. 138

connected with the European identity, culture and history. On the other hand, Slovak national revival should not be ignored in evaluating “1968”.

The question of federalization was critically important in 1968 reform process of Czechoslovakia, where the former First Secretary of Slovak Communist Party, Alexander Dubcek, headed the government. Federalization and democracy were the key words in the debates among Czechs and Slovaks. Even Slovaks were not unified about the federalization issue, which transformed the Czechoslovak political and cultural space into a multilateral forum. The language of Slovaks could vary among themselves, but the popular slogan of the Slovaks was “first federalization, then democratization.” As Scott Brown indicated:

According to many Slovaks, federalization and democratization were mutually dependent. Federalization The Slovak intellectuals in the late 1960s saw federalization as a necessary precondition for democracy; they regarded the nation as one of the basic units of democracy, which led them to champion institutional safeguards for Slovak national rights as a prerequisite for successful democratization.¹³⁴

On the contrary, after Novotny’s removal, the Czech intellectuals started to favor the argument “first democratization, then the Slovak Question.” Some Czechoslovak thinkers accused Slovaks of being obsessed with the form of the administration of Czechoslovakia, and therefore Slovakia and they represented that “liberalization”, which was aimed by the Czechs, was a noble cause in form and content. Brown indicated that even Slovak intellectuals had recreated the misleading juxtaposition of reform as “a matter of form and contents, while federalization was by definition “a matter of form only.”¹³⁵

On the other hand, many other intellectuals who had a neutral stance on the “federalization-democratization” debate argued that Czech and Slovak motivations would converge within the liberalization process. The argument “first federalization” served different interests of the Slovak politician and intellectuals. Some Slovaks would press for

¹³⁴ Brown, p. 467

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 469

federalization to balance the hereditary inequalities that existed even in the reform process, in which they blamed Czechs for their discriminative and ignorant positioning against Slovak people. Therefore, they repeatedly brought the Slovak problems to the surface.

Other supporters of the “first federalization” argument feared democracy would be incomplete and untenable without a satisfactory settlement of the Slovak question. They thought democratization without federalization would lead to majoritarianism, an outvoting by the numerically larger Czech population that would leave the Slovak nation just as weak in a reformed Communist state as it had been in the democratic order of the First Republic.¹³⁶ Therefore, they wanted first federalization, in which their institutions, political organs and national rights would be protected. The federalization-democratization debate lasted until the invasion of Warsaw Pact members.

However, both societies were beneficiaries during the reform process. Many Czech had internalized “Slovak Question” and they recognized eventually that it was the question of Czechoslovakia, which needed both democratization and federalization simultaneously. Therefore, as Jaromir Navratil put in words, the “Slovak Question” thus became the catalyst of the entire subsequent development towards the “Prague Spring.”¹³⁷

The federalization-democratization dilemma was resolved after the military intervention of the “Warsaw Five.” Federalization was the only major reform from the “Action Program” to survive the demise of the Prague Spring. The Soviet leadership recognized the potential of federalization to normalize the relations between the Czechs and Slovaks.¹³⁸ The Constitutional Law of Federation was passed on 28 October 1968 and led to the federalization of Czechoslovakia. From 1 January 1969 the state was sub-divided into the

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 487

¹³⁷ Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968, A National Security Archive Documents Reader* p. 7

¹³⁸ Carol Skalník Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation versus State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 65-66

Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic. The previous Czechoslovak parliament was renamed the Federal Assembly and new national parliaments were created.¹³⁹

This should not be seen as “victory in defeat” for Slovaks. On the contrary, as Milan Hübl indicates the constitutional enactment of the federation, adopted after the occupation on October 27, 1968, was the only judicial enactment of one of the 1968 reforms: neither a federal constitution, separate constitutions for two republics, nor new laws securing criminal and civil rights were enacted.¹⁴⁰ Federalization under the authoritarian rule showed Slovaks that it was meaningless just to cry out for national interests. Gustav Husak, national hero-survivor of the trials, under the Soviet supervision resumed recentralization under the disguise of “formal” federal institutionalization. The content was empty without democratization and therefore, the imagined democratic-federal regime stayed as a fiction. Husak renewed the discourse of Czechoslovakianism in different terms and in a new way. The unitary federation normalized and suppressed the hopes for liberalization and democracy.

¹³⁹ Cashmann, p. 1652

¹⁴⁰ Milan Hübl, “The Legacy of 1968,” 26

SECTION 5: THE INVASIONS

5.1: Marxist-Leninist legacy: The Instrumental Approach to Nationalism

For Marx and Engels the nation-state was primarily an economic unit, an objective condition that stemmed from a rational set of circumstances.

Nation was the product of capitalism. Therefore as capitalism was a transitional phase on the evolutionary path to socialism, so too was its by-product – nationalism. As capitalism would evolve into socialism, nation-states would wither away (or at least be controlled by enlightened internationalists) and there would be no impetus for national sentiment.¹⁴¹

Marx and Engels did not realize the national problematic as a serious fact and modern formation. Marx and his followers considered nationalism as an invention of bourgeois capitalism, a part of modernity that would wither away along with the state once society reached the post-capitalist phase of history and embraced class consciousness, not nationality, as the prime source of identity. The Communist Manifesto indicated the national strategy of the proletariat: the working man has no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.¹⁴²

Despite Marx and Engel's outlook that nationalism would lose its significance in time, the revolutions of 1848 in Europe did not follow the predicted Marxist path. Nationalism showed itself to have much stronger appeal than socialism. Indeed, nationalism was by and large underestimated by Marx and Engels. According to them, those states that were the most nationalistic were the least developed. They would therefore have to be encouraged to modernize in order to pass through the phase of capitalism and then on to socialism. If they could not modernize quickly enough they would have to be dissolved or assimilated by larger economic units. As a result of these criteria Marx and Engels became very forthright in their support of certain national movements, which they interpreted as being in the vanguard of the

¹⁴¹ Kemp, p. 23

¹⁴² Ronaldo Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue: Marxism and Nationalism* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1986), p. 24

international revolution.¹⁴³ For this very reason their line of argument necessitated to co-opt nationalism as a political tactic not an ideological current. Socialist movements had stolen the clothes of nationalism when it suited them, or denounced it when it did not.¹⁴⁴

“Revolutionary nationalism,” advocated by Lenin, differed from the original Marxist views insofar as it recognized the importance of national feelings and encouraged the notion that every nationality exhibits its own particular virtues (language, culture and history) and therefore enjoys the right to its own existence. The practice of appealing to revolutionary nationalism first arose during the Russian Revolution. The aim was using revolutionary nationalism to oppose and undermine the power of bourgeoisie elites. As a result, Lenin did not wish initially to abolish nations. Since the proletariat must acquire political supremacy, they have to rise to the leading class of the nation, therefore, they become ‘national’, but not in the bourgeois sense of national formation. Once in power the proletariat can work to diminish national antagonisms between different states. Thus, Lenin’s approach to nationalism in a much serious way indicated that Marxism must take both tendencies into account, advocating the equality of nations on the one hand and the struggle against bourgeois nationalism on the other.¹⁴⁵

Lenin was a fierce supporter of the idea of national self-determination, which would later lead to the breakdown of national barriers and make anything but the most resolute proletarian internationalism a regressive policy. In a sense, Lenin’s slogan right to national self-determination was itself a tactic to supersede nationalisms and promote socialism. But Lenin was aware of the controversial character of nationalism. Nationalism clearly had the capability to either stabilize or destabilize communist polities.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, Lenin set socialist

¹⁴³ Kemp, p. 26

¹⁴⁴ Munck, *The Difficult Dialogue*, p. 1

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 73

¹⁴⁶ Robert Zuzowski, “Nationalism and Marxism in Eastern Europe.” *Politikon: South African Association of Political Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (April 2006), pp. 71-72

patriotism or revolutionary nationalism apart from bourgeois nationalism. Lenin's instrumental attitude towards nationalism, the nation-state and national self-determination reflected the pressure of social realities upon doctrine.

5.2: Dogmatic Simplicity or Tactical Complexity

Marxist-Leninist view on nationalism had functioned as a simple guidance of understanding nation and nationalism. The communist leaders of Eastern Europe were expected to follow two basic principles: The protection of the leading role of the communist party and international socialism. The communists stigmatized the idea of “national,” which would damage the cohesion and equality between fraternal communist states. National interests had to be suppressed by the party leadership. The emphasis on the leading role of the party in communist regimes was the product of the Soviet double-speak: The communist parties in Eastern and Central Europe had never established their independent peculiar leaderships. Basically, the “leading role of the party” had signified the leading role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the policy makers of Eastern Europe, therefore, had to consult the Soviet Presidium, when they wanted to implement policies.

Soviet-led international socialism made the indigenous communist parties dependent on the Soviet demands. Their economies, especially heavy industrialization and production, were directed to the needs of the Soviet Union. The intra-state agreements were always in check by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Most importantly, the indivisible nature of the Communist Bloc prevented them from contacting the Western world. Besides foreign affairs, domestic politics in Eastern and Central Europe were controlled by Soviet agents, military officers, political police and consultants. The pilgrimages to Moscow were determinant in domestic policy approvals. In some points, if it was seen necessary, the Soviet authorities and delegates would visit the countries in order to make sure that the indigenous

party would not pose any problems. Moreover, the Kremlin had to give consent to the replacements, elections and reforms in the communist regimes. Thus, the regimes could make first step towards “consolidation.”

Stalinist oppressive methods enabled the indigenous leaders to establish their communist regimes. However, de-Stalinization produced anomalies in Eastern European societies. Khrushchev ordered the leaders to leave Stalinist methods and reform their system. The intra-party conflicts were echoed in the communist parties of Eastern Europe. On the one hand, the Soviet Presidium promoted reform-minded communists. On the other hand, they allowed conservative Muscovites to retain their offices. It was a strategic move to protect the bases of control in the communist parties. However, de-Stalinization created “parallel reality,”¹⁴⁷ in which the Soviet leadership deployed both reformists and conservatives in Eastern European communist parties. The dual leadership caused a parallel administrative and bureaucratic structure. Simultaneously, relative liberalization in the society exacerbated the situation and created a chaotic atmosphere. On the one hand, the reformers tried to implement reforms and appease the masses; on the other hand, they resisted conservative majority in the party and state apparatus.

Due to internal and external demands for reform and control, the society oscillated between repression and liberalization. The distrust against Soviet experimentalism, the chaotic reform process and the intra-party rivalry led the reformers to seize public support. Kemp indicates the legitimacy dilemma of the communists:

The goal of most nationalists is to gain control of the state as a means of structuring the national will in order to make the state mechanism and national organism one and the same or, in other words, to build a nation-state. The Communists worked in reverse. Once they controlled the state they tried to gain control of the nation by championing its history and distinctive cultural traditions. As they would discover, one

¹⁴⁷ Antonin Liehm, “The Czechoslovak Reform Movement,” in *Eastern Europe Transformation and Revolution, 1945-1991*, ed. Lyman H. Legters, Lexington, D. C. Heath and Company, 1992), p. 184

can hold power by controlling the state; but one needs to secure the support of the nation to have legitimacy and authority.¹⁴⁸

At this point, the communist party leaders facilitated not only reforms based on de-Stalinization, but also reforms based on indigenization. Some Eastern Bloc countries excluded Russian language teaching from schools and rehabilitated national heroes vilified during Stalin's period. The parties started to celebrate national holidays. Moreover, official histories of various Eastern European nations were revised. For example, during Stalinist consolidation, textbooks of Hungary were purged of nationalist prejudices in order to eliminate national identities and to create communist consciousness. In early 1954, a Resolution of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party dealing with the state and tasks of public education decided to reverse the process and strengthen the patriotic feelings of Hungarians. In order to improve the teaching of the mother tongue, Hungarian literature, history and geography, the Resolution emphasized all the important progressive factors of Hungarian history.¹⁴⁹

The process was part of "state-sponsored nationalisms."¹⁵⁰ The Soviet Union and the leading parties of Eastern Europe implemented national policies from above. There were no mass demands and action for policy change from below. It was not the nationalists who tried to conquer government; it was the government that used nationalism to win the backing of the population.¹⁵¹ People were not against these national reforms and liberalization, but the problem was that they were demanding their civil, social and political rights. Moreover, they wanted to live in better economic conditions and they wanted the party to stop state terror. To sum up, they wanted a legal and more democratic state.

¹⁴⁸ Kemp, p. 6

¹⁴⁹ George Barany, "Nationalism in Hungary," in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter F. Sugar and Ivo J. Lederer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), pp. 301-302

¹⁵⁰ Peter Sugar, "The Problems of Nationalism in Eastern Europe: Past and Present," in *East European Nationalism, Politics and Religion* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 1999) p.

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¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 9

The diversity and context of the demands had no meaning for the Soviet leadership, which was concentrated only on two conditions. Anything that would threaten the omnipotent presence of the indigenous parties caused an immediate reaction in the Soviet Union.

Political pluralism and the increase in the civil initiative were the direct dangers against the communist regime. All reforms in the liberalization process were simplified and stigmatized by the Soviet leadership as national deviation or counterrevolutionary activism. Therefore the approach of the Soviet leadership was hypocritical. The popular support for Nagy and Dubcek did not change the attitude of the Soviet leadership, which even did not question if reform process was answering the specific needs of the societies. From the start, the Soviet Union was against the differentiation of the societies. Thus, the Soviet Union used the idea of “national” in its simple equation, which should not deceive the researcher while analyzing the Hungarian Revolution and Prague Spring. The Soviet Union reduced the complex reform processes in both countries to simple terms: Imperial agents, bourgeois nationalist and counterrevolutionaries.

Naturally, this attitude fostered national reactions or search for the national identity and triggered anti-Soviet feeling. In the Soviet-imposed and bipolar system, people belong to the proletarian international class or “bourgeois nationalist.” Because of dependent foreign policies, limited cultural space, including compulsory teaching of the Russian language in all schools, and repeated declarations of solidarity with stages people were forced into a supranational framework that was not clearly defined, never clearly or comprehensively explained, but were big, frightening, strange, impersonal, and nationally deracinating.¹⁵² The communists subjugated citizens to the collective illusion of an identity of the “People-as-One,” which was confronted with permanent attacks by “enemies of the people.” Social reality was “defined” by a dream world, where the daily life of shortage, delusion, and

¹⁵² Sugar, “The Problems of Nationalism in Eastern Europe: Past and Present,” p. 15

victimization was tolerated due to the eschatological vision of a better world.¹⁵³ According to Maria Todorova, the main cause of growing tension in Eastern Europe stemmed from Soviet domination. As long as the Soviet Union existed, it provided Eastern Europeans a collective “other.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, Soviet indoctrination and coercion resulted in the creation of a collective other, the Soviet Union itself. It should not be surprising why people were easily motivated and attacked in fervor the symbols of the Soviet repression both in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

5.3: The Soviet Invasion in 1956: Intimidation

After Stalin’s death, the Soviet leadership swept into obscurity, because the Presidium and the Party had never experienced healthy collective leadership during Stalin’s administration. The legacy of Stalin was rivalries, greed, jealousy and factionalism in the party. The power struggle between Lavrenty Beria, Georgy Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev had affected the communist regimes and their leaderships in the East and Central Europe. Ferenc Vali argued that both the rise of Imre Nagy to the premiership and his fall from that position were primarily attributable to oscillations in the internal balance of the Soviet Presidium.¹⁵⁵ The fluctuations in Malenkov-Khrushchev *duumvirate* damaged the Hungarian leadership and the uncertainty of the Hungarian Communist Party was also echoed in Hungarian society.

According to Vali, the concept of irresponsibility for acts committed outside the Soviet Union, acts for which Stalin might have been blamed, eventually led Khrushchev to a contradictory position: anti-Stalinism within the Soviet Union, and neo-Stalinism in most of

¹⁵³ Harald Wydra, “The Power of Second Reality: Communist Myths and Representations of Democracy,” in *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Alexander Wöll and Harald Wydra, (New York: Routledge 2008), p. 66

¹⁵⁴ Maria Todorova, “Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Communist legacy in EE,” *East European Politics and Societies* 7:1 (Winter 1993), p. 153

¹⁵⁵ Vali, p. 165

the satellite countries.¹⁵⁶ Khrushchev, who spoke for reforms, change, de-Stalinization and progress in rehabilitation, caused Nagy's removal from the Prime Ministry and the Hungarian Communist Party. Ironically, Malenkov had recruited Nagy first as the Prime Minister by replacing hard-liner Stalinist Rakosi as General Secretary. So, the Soviet leaders were always the biased referees in the resolution of intra-party conflicts and their indecisiveness created dual leadership in 1953 and helped to foster polarity in the party between conservative and reformist factions.

To stop the disarray within the Hungarian leadership and the growing ferment in Hungarian society, Anastas Mikoyan was charged by Khrushchev. Upon his arrival in Budapest on 13 July, Mikoyan met with Rakosi and three other senior Hungarian officials, including Erno Gero. These preliminary talks convinced Mikoyan that the situation would improve only if Rakosi stepped down. Having been authorized by the Presidium to do whatever was necessary to "restore unity in the Hungarian leadership"; Mikoyan bluntly informed Rakosi that it would be best if someone else took over as HWP First Secretary. Rakosi had little choice but to accept the Soviet "advice" and Gero was endorsed as the new First Secretary.¹⁵⁷

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union delayed the option to interfere physically and tried to reconcile the Party with the society. However, the method of trial and error had frustrated the society even more. Gero was incompetent to understand the needs of the society, which had hope for liberalization during Nagy's "New Course." The rise in the activities of the dissident groups in any communist country would be interpreted by the Soviet Union as the ascendancy of the "subversive activities of the imperialists" and the Soviet leaders and conservative groups in the indigenous communist party stigmatized the reformists as "bourgeois nationalists."

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 213

¹⁵⁷ Kramer, p. 179

Because of the self-defense mechanism mixed with hysterical paranoia, Gero called upon the Soviets to request help and invited the Soviet troops. A Soviet Presidium meeting had already been scheduled for 23 October to discuss other matters and Khrushchev abruptly changed the agenda to focus on the situation in Hungary.¹⁵⁸ Khrushchev and all but one of the other participants strongly supported the introduction of Soviet forces, but a key Presidium member, Anastas Mikoyan, opposed the decision, arguing that the Hungarians themselves will restore order on their own. He thought that the Soviet leadership should try political measures, and only then send in troops. Despite the pro-intervention consensus among all the other participants, Mikoyan held firm in his opposition. The Presidium therefore had to adopt its decision without unanimity, an unprecedented step in such an important matter.¹⁵⁹ Contrary to common judgment and expectation, the discussion in the Soviet session showed that the Soviet-decision making was not homogenous and open for evaluations, but it did not change the truth that Khrushchev authorized Soviet Defense Minister Zhukov to redeploy Soviet units into Budapest to assist Hungarian troops and state security forces in the restoration of public order.

After the first wave of fighting, in which “the freedom fighters” were successful against the forces of state authority and Soviet Union, the Hungarian government announced on 28 October that the recent event had been a national-democratic uprising rather than a counterrevolution. The fighting caused the deaths of hundreds of Soviet soldiers and Hungarian civilians. This, in turn, resulted in the change of the Soviet views, and the Soviet leadership had to support the current government and prepared to withdraw troops from Budapest. On 30 October, the Soviet Union announced “Declaration on the Principles of

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 183

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 184

Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation between the USSR and Other Socialist Countries:”

The Soviet-Eastern European relations had been plagued by “egregious mistakes” in the past, and that Moscow had committed rampant “violations of the principle of equality in relations between socialist countries.” It pledged that in the future the Soviet Union would scrupulously “observe the full sovereignty of each socialist state” and reexamine the basis for its continued troop presence in the Warsaw Pact countries, leaving open the possibility of a partial or total withdrawal.¹⁶⁰

Khrushchev had aimed to reconcile the Union’s relations with Hungary by following the peaceful path. Yet, it was too late to slow down the demanding masses of Hungary, which were creating an alternative to the communist system by establishing revolutionary and workers’ councils.

According to Mark Kramer, the grisly reprisals, that some of the insurgents carried out against disarmed troops of the Hungarian state authority, caused even greater alarm in Moscow.¹⁶¹ The last impact on the Soviet leadership was the Hungarian decisions: First, withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and then, the declaration of neutrality. Both decisions were absolutely not acceptable for Khrushchev, who immediately reversed the decision of negotiation. So, the Presidium unanimously approved the full-scale use of military force to protect the worker class in Hungary. Khrushchev said during his delegation visits in 1958: “in giving aid to the Hungarian people in routing the forces of the counterrevolution, we fulfilled our international duty.”¹⁶² The final acts brought an end to the long period of indecision and wavering in Soviet policy.

The Soviet Union could not take the risk of losing a Warsaw Pact member and the leadership was aware that as a last option they would take military action. Moreover, the

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 187

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 189

¹⁶² “Triumph of indestructible of Soviet-Hungarian friendship”- The Soviet Party and Government Delegation Visits in Hungary Source Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, No.14, Vol.10/14, (Minneapolis, USA, 1958), pp. 15-16, <<http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/issue?issue=724124>>, last accessed 22.03.2009

Hungarian leadership was in a delusion, in which they sought the help of United Nations and the involvement of the Western Powers by declaring neutrality. Csaba Bekes indicates that the bipolar world system designed to stabilize the post-1945 European status quo left the countries of the Soviet empire with no realistic chance of ridding themselves of the communist system. Any Western effort to detach these countries would be seen as an intervention.¹⁶³ No superpower would even dare to create a directly armed conflict and the risk of a third World War. Aleksandr Stykalin emphasizes that the effectiveness and impunity of the Soviet action in Hungary constituted a clear proof that the postwar bipolar system of international relations was unshakeable.¹⁶⁴ Besides the international outcomes, the military invasion revealed the limitations of the ideological permissiveness that was suggested by the national roads strategy. According to Maud Bracke, it did not cause a break with this strategy, but it marked the limits of it in the sense that was highly disadvantageous for the autonomy of communist parties and states worldwide vis-à-vis Soviet dominance.¹⁶⁵

5.4: “The Rise of the Warsaw Five” in 1968

Khrushchev realized that the impact of his policies, like de-Stalinization, on the “satellite” countries in Eastern and Central Europe could be hazardous. His social and cultural experimentations and frequent interventions in domestic policies of other socialist countries stirred existent anti-Soviet feelings. Khrushchev understood that he had to pursue a much more cautious policy in Eastern and Central Europe. However, there was an obvious lesson for Khrushchev: The urgent need to improve economic situation in socialist countries. The economic discontent had flamed especially workers and peasant and converged in the end

¹⁶³ Csaba Bekes, “The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Declaration of Neutrality,” *Cold War History* Vol. 6, No. 4, (Routledge, Nov 2006), p. 493

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 493

¹⁶⁵ Bracke, p. 54

with the social and political malaise. Another crucial conclusion for the Soviet leaders was that unequal relations and discriminative status quo between the Soviet Union and other communist countries in East and Central Europe should be ameliorated and improved.

However, Maud Bracke indicates:

The events of 1956 did not affect the basic orientations of the internationalism of Communist parties in the short term, because the phenomenon of “delayed consciousness” played a role here: the effects of 1956 were only felt at a later stage, as inside the world communist movement and inside these parties mechanisms existed by which questions regarding major changes were tabooed. Hence, Indicative of this is the fact that, contrary to what happened in 1968, all the West European communist parties openly supported the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The internationalist orientations of these parties were not immediately affected in 1956, because the leaderships of these parties consciously used internationalism as an element of continuity at a time when continuity was much needed.¹⁶⁶

The world communist movement reacted sharply to the invasion in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Yugoslavia and Romania had opposed the idea of intervention, and then the use of armed forces. However, the wave of suppression emerged this time, according to the needs of the “Warsaw Five.” International socialism had been always an element of continuity, stability and certainty for the East and Central European communist states. There were more states, communist parties and socialist movements, which were awakened by the Soviet action. People in world communist movement had lost their faith in the party leaderships and communism after the Czechoslovak invasion. However, the consciousness in the Eastern Bloc had to be delayed again, as people in many neighboring states demonstrated against the Soviet violations and consequently, the communist governments silenced the masses by taking repressive measures.

Alexander Dubcek was aware from the beginning of his leadership that his decisions and actions needed to be in harmony with the basic principles of the Soviet Union. However, people were impatient and demanded more and more reforms in Czechoslovakia. Through the democratization process, the social forces found more space and mobilized themselves in

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 56

order to pressure the Czechoslovak leadership. According to the members of Warsaw Pact, the Dubcek leadership gradually lost the control of the reform process. Kieran Williams stated that Dubcek and his team deviated from the Soviet operational code in three ways: they tried to avoid meetings with Soviet counterparts, they did not indicate clearly whether they allied themselves to the pro-Moscow faction within the Czechoslovak leadership and they repeatedly promised to reassert control of the reform course, but never carried out the measures Moscow expected.¹⁶⁷ The security and unity of the communist bloc were critically important for the Eastern and Central European communist regimes.

The German Democratic Republic and Poland adopted the most critical attitude towards developments in Czechoslovakia. They believed the present situation in Europe was extremely tense, a result of the policy of the Federal Republic of Germany. Therefore, it was essential to strengthen ideological unity and unify the defense of the European socialist countries, already threatened by Yugoslavia and Romania's autonomous policies.¹⁶⁸ The fear that Czechoslovakia might change its foreign policy and the reform process would have spillover effect in their countries resulted in Dresden meetings on March 23. Dresden would provide a multilateral forum to demand a suppression of the reform movement in Czechoslovakia. According to Navratil, the conference of the six communist parties was a significant watershed in the history of the Prague Spring, marking the first time the Soviet-led Bloc applied outright pressure on Czechoslovakia in an attempt to halt the so-called "counter-revolutionary" developments under Dubcek.¹⁶⁹

Contrary to Ulbricht and Gomulka's direct accusations on Dubcek leadership, Kadar followed a mean course and criticized the situation in Czechoslovakia as "strikingly

¹⁶⁷ Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its aftermath*, p. 37

¹⁶⁸ Navratil, p. 28

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 32

reminiscent of the prologue to the Hungarian counterrevolution.”¹⁷⁰ The main differentiation between the Hungarian Revolution and the Prague Spring was the pluralism present in the decision-making process. The Five Warsaw Pact countries, Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union each differently approached in the early stages of the crisis. Gomulka, the old reformist and neo-Stalinist leader of Poland, criticized Dubcek fiercely from the beginning. Navratil indicated that Gomulka’s pronounced hostility toward the Prague Spring clearly stemmed in part from the difficulties he had been encountering at home, which he suspected were being inspired, at least indirectly, by the events in Czechoslovakia.

Ulbricht was also afraid of the waves of reforms in Czechoslovakia and its domestic repercussions, but the Dresden meeting and Dubcek leadership reassured him partly and he was not doubtful as Gomulka. Brezhnev also tried to follow a middle road and was enjoying his role being a conciliator between the members of the Warsaw Pact. The other Soviet delegates, for example Kosygin, made no attempt to hide their growing dissatisfaction with the recent developments in Czechoslovakia. Only the Hungarian leader, Janos Kadar respected Dubcek’s leadership and indicated that the developments in Czechoslovakia should not be their concerns. He thought that the Czechoslovak leadership could solve its problems by themselves. Navratil described the balance in Dresden meeting, in which the harsh views of Gomulka and Ulbricht helped put pressure on the Czechoslovak authorities, whereas Kadar’s approach facilitated Soviet attempts to rely on “comradely persuasion” as well as coercion.¹⁷¹

The Dresden session worked on the contrary to the desired expectation: it exacerbated the situation by irritating reformist forces, who saw the forum as an interrogation and system

¹⁷⁰ Stenographic Account of the Dresden Meeting, March 23, 1968 in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Prague: CEU Press Prague, 1998) p. 64

¹⁷¹ Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, p. 64

of intimidation. Even moderate groups in the party and society were affected by this anti-Soviet feeling. The frequency of bilateral talks was increased and the communist leaders continued to express their concern about the course of the events. The process was much more pluralistic than in Hungary. There was a traffic of foreign ministries, diplomats, delegations, personal meetings and calls. On the one hand, the leaders were anxious about the possibility that external enemies would tempt Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, they worked hard not to jeopardize their relations with Czechoslovakia.

The situation got worse, when the Soviet negotiators expressed that the Czechoslovak army and security forces were being weakened and subverted, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was being deprived of its most loyal cadres, that West Germany and the United States were covertly undermining the Czechoslovak regime, that Czechoslovak foreign policy would soon become openly pro-Western and that the counterrevolutionary forces were raging in full force.¹⁷² These reports raised the alarm among the members of Warsaw Pact and after Dubcek's rejection of the Brezhnev's invitations, the need for outside military intervention came to the fore. Dubcek's hesitant approach to the suppression of the nonconformist elements and the slowness of the reform process triggered intellectuals and other social forces to attempt to prevent Dubcek's leadership potential departure from reformist line.

According to Navratil, the "Two Thousand Words" Manifesto came to symbolize the Prague Spring more than any other document. The manifesto's author, writer Ludvik Vaculik, was joined by nearly seventy prominent individuals, including writers, cultural figures, distinguished scientists, and Olympic athletes, as well as a number of ordinary citizens who signed the "Two Thousand Words:"

The statement called upon on ordinary Czechs and Slovaks to undertake direct action at the district and regional levels – through public criticism, demonstrations, strikes,

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 114

and picketing – to compel anti-reformist officials to step down. Once these officials were out of office, the statement adds, a more vigorous grass-roots effort could be mounted to “improve our domestic situation,” to “carry the renewal process forward,” and to “take into our own hands our common cause and give it a form more appropriate to our once good [national] reputation.”¹⁷³

The document concludes with a reference to “foreign forces” that might be preparing to intervene in Czechoslovakia’s internal affairs. The signatories pledge that they and other Czechs and Slovaks will back our government, with weapons if necessary, against anyone who might interfere.

The Czechoslovak newspapers published the Manifesto on June 27 without the authorization of the government. So, the Dubcek leadership was caught off-guard. Although the Czechoslovak leadership condemned the manifesto by adopting a resolution, the Soviet leaders denounced the Manifesto as the evidence of “anti-socialist call to counterrevolution.” The foreign press, especially in the “Warsaw Five,” started pressure campaigns and targeted the “Two Thousand Words Manifesto.” On the contrary, domestic forces were propagating an anti-Soviet feeling. Dubcek and his team did not want to be interrogated by the “Warsaw Five” and wanted Romania and Yugoslavia’s inclusion to the sessions.

Czechoslovakia was geopolitically crucial to the Soviet Union. The country was the westernmost of those in the Warsaw Pact and the only country sharing borders with both the Soviet Union and West Germany. Maud Bracke highlights that Czechoslovakia was the “weakest link” in the defense system of the European communist world. Czechoslovakia had refused, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, to let Soviet ground troops be stationed permanently on its soil. In the mid-1960s, the Soviet Union had drawn up a number of top-secret agreements providing for the deployment of Soviet tactical warheads and nuclear-capable delivery vehicles with Hungary, East Germany, Poland and also Czechoslovakia. In the Czechoslovak case, however, the absence of permanently stationed Soviet troops made the

¹⁷³ “The Two Thousand Words” Manifesto as in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Prague: CEU Press Prague, 1998) p. 177

actual deployment of these arms problematic.¹⁷⁴ Due to the negative developments in Czechoslovak society, the construction of the facilities had to be postponed until 1969.

The Czechoslovak military leadership resisted against Soviet pressures to increase its conventional military spending, and a lively public debate developed on this issue. The so-called Gottwald Memorandum, issued by the Klement Gottwald Military Political Academy in May 1968, strongly criticized the Warsaw Treaty Organization and proposed a far-reaching revision of Czechoslovak military policies.¹⁷⁵ In July, in response to the Warsaw Treaty Organization's military exercises taking place at the Czechoslovak border, the post-January chief political officer, General Prchlik emphasized in a press conference the need to draw up a new Czechoslovak military doctrine, which could change the position of Czechoslovakia and its army in the Warsaw Pact and in the Joint Command and the role of the Political-Consultative Committee.¹⁷⁶

Besides disturbing changes in Czechoslovak military, the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia in the Action Program was one of the most important reasons why the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact members had invaded Czechoslovakia in the end. The officials repeated that the main aim was to strengthen mutual respect and solidarity in the Warsaw Treaty Organization, but it could not appease the leaders due to new emphasis of assuming a more politically active role in Europe. The new direction in foreign policy also envisaged an independent initiative in international affairs. The Czechoslovak leadership favored a constructive policy vis-à-vis Romanian and Yugoslav leaders, whose autonomous policies were not welcomed by the Soviet Union, East Germany and Poland. Furthermore, the Dubcek leadership expressed wishes to engage in commercial, diplomatic and cultural contacts with

¹⁷⁴ Bracke, p. 143

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 139

¹⁷⁶ Press Conference with Lt. General Vaclav Prchlik, July 15, 1968 as quoted in (ed) Jaromir Navratil, *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Prague: CEU Press Prague, 1998), p. 239

France, Italy and Austria. More dangerously, Czechoslovakia took steps in the direction of normalizing relations with the Federal Republic of Germany. These all deviations led the Warsaw Pact countries without Romania to invade the Czechoslovak territory in August 20.

SECTION 6: NORMALIZATION

6.1: Same End – Different Results: Normalization in Hungary and

Czechoslovakia

If democratization is about introducing organized uncertainty, then normalization is primarily about restoring extreme predictability.

Kieran Williams

The normalization processes under Janos Kadar in Hungary and Gustav Husak in Czechoslovakia have similarities and contrasts. Although Soviets had prescribed regulations in the normalization and chosen appropriate leaders, the societies had experienced different degrees of repression, recentralization and limitations. Soviet-led normalization predicted “the re-establishment of rigid centralized control over the society by a disciplined, pro-Soviet party,”¹⁷⁷ “the reconciliation of populations with the regimes and the neutralization of the marginal elements”¹⁷⁸ and “the reversal of the revolutionary change.”¹⁷⁹

How could both societies experience so differently the normalization process under the Soviet surveillance and control? The differences were not emanated from the experiences of the leaders. On the contrary, both leaders were victimized due to their Stalinist measures, had imprisoned and experienced political hardship, which showed them the errors of the anti-reformist politicians and the terror and people’s resentment against the leadership. After their rehabilitation, they joined the reformist forces and took important roles in politics and, in the end, they witnessed the evaporation of their collective-reformist leadership. However, the Soviet Presidium recommissioned them, although they were active even during the invasion.

¹⁷⁷ Edward Taborsky, “The Return to ‘Normalcy’,” *Problems of Communism* 19 (1970), p. 31

¹⁷⁸ Zvi Gitelman, “The Politics of Socialist Restoration in Hungary and Czechoslovakia,” *Comparative Politics*, 13 (January 1981), p. 187.

¹⁷⁹ Jiri Valenta, “Revolutionary Change, Soviet Intervention, and Normalization in East-Central Europe,” *Comparative Politics*, 16 (1984), p.128

The differentiation in the course of normalization between these converging personalities emanated from the nature of the resistance in both countries. There was popular support for the continuation of reforms and revisions in both countries. However, Kadar and Nagy were not in a position to control the process, in which the communist party became weak because of factionalism and the leadership had lost the initiative to lead frustrated masses. They were forced to follow people's demands, which were too marginal and would exacerbate the situation. On the contrary, Husak and Dubcek had been leading a gradual reform process, in which they had partially consolidated their regime.

In the end of the Prague Spring, the party could answer neither people's expectations nor the Soviet Union's callings for recentralization. The invasion in Czechoslovakia was met with a passive and long resistance, which would play an important role in the change of Husak's character and policies. On the other hand, the fight between forces of occupation and insurgents caused great tragedies in Hungary, and Kadar witnessed all wrong-doings. The violent suppression of the Hungarian crisis, arrests, imprisonments, runaways and executions including Nagy and many top officers exacerbated the anti-Soviet feeling. The presence of the occupation forces worsened the situation in Hungary and cause even more resentment in the people. On the other hand, Hungarians understood that they could not resist Soviet Union with arms, which dashed the spirit of the revolutionary development. The Soviet leadership was also aware of the frustration and hatred of the people and they did not expect the escalation of the crisis. Thus, they authorized Kadar, with relative broad powers.

Czechoslovakia's almost bloodless resistance was not broken by the presence of the Warsaw Pact forces. The masses were totally mobilized, and many non-communist and reformist groups had emerged. They were willing to resist any invading force and they were part of the reform process, which was led only by the party in the beginning of 1968. The masses had the means even after mass arrests, imprisonments and expulsions and they

demonstrated, organized strikes and worked underground. However, after the Sovietization of their leaders, people were deeply disappointed, because they signaled a reversal in the reform process and started to take repressive measure against many social divisions. In the end, Husak could not consolidate his regime and his normalization process took longer than Kadar's.

Hungary was under Soviet military administration for several months. The fallen leaders of the communist party took refuge in the Soviet Union and were planning to regain power in Hungary. The Soviet leadership was demanding severe reprisals against the perpetrators of the "counter-revolution." However, Kadar followed a different path to legitimize his authority. In his visit to Moscow on 2 November, he did not favor large-scale Soviet military intervention and warned that "the use of military force will be destructive and lead to bloodshed" and added the intervention would 'erode the authority of the socialist countries" and cause "the morale of the communists in Hungary to be reduced to zero."¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, he was aware that the counterrevolutionary elements were active in the revolution. He highlighted the existing government's failure to prevent the "killing of communists," and said that he "agreed with Soviet officials that it was impossible to surrender a socialist country to counter-revolution."¹⁸¹

In these meetings, Kadar declared that his new "revolutionary government" could not be legitimate and act freely until the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. He knew how hard it was to have a popular base for his activities and leadership. Therefore, he repeatedly warned the authorities that the new government must not be under the mandate of the Soviet Union. According to Kramer, even on 3 November Kadar did not portray the recent events in Hungary in a uniformly negative light. Although he claimed that Nagy's policy had counter-revolutionary aspects and that hour by hour the situation in Hungary was moving rightward,

¹⁸⁰ Kramer, p. 200

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

he urged the Soviet leadership to recognize that the uprising had stemmed from genuine popular discontent.¹⁸² In other words, he was arguing that the entire nation took part in the movement, to get rid of the Rakosi-Gero clique.

In the course of time, Kadar found himself adopting the rigid formulas, which were imposed by the Soviet leadership. In December 1956 he described the whole uprising as no more than a counterrevolution.¹⁸³ However, when Kadar analyzed the crisis and knew that he had to be honest to the masses. He confessed his mistakes and the responsibility of mismanagement. Even though he made less effort to downplay the Soviet's role in the events, Kadar emphasized more the criminal errors of Rakosi and Gero than Nagy's misdeeds. George Ginsburgs indicates that this preoccupation with past mistakes and awareness of the necessity of divorcing in total the program of the newborn party from the discredited policies of its predecessor clearly underlay Kadar's resolute.¹⁸⁴ Kadar announced in his speech on November 1 the creation of the new communist party and emphasized explicitly that the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was not the heir and successor to the Hungarian Workers' Party. He defined communism in Hungary as "the new type which emerged from the Revolution, which does not want to have anything in common with the Communism of the Rakosi-Gero group, which is Hungarian and a sort of "third line," with no connection to Titoism or to Gomulka's Communism."¹⁸⁵

Unfortunately, Kadar's approach could not purify his terror under Soviet supervision in the normalization process. Two years of intensive "normalization," including wholesale purges, arrests, deportations and executions, culminating in the executions of Nagy and Pal

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 201

¹⁸⁴ George Ginsburgs, "Demise and Revival of a Communist Party: An Autopsy of the Hungarian Revolution," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Sep 1960), p. 789

¹⁸⁵ "Broadcast by Radio Free Kossuth, November 1, 1956 21:00 hrs., as quoted in George Ginsburgs, "Demise and Revival of a Communist Party: An Autopsy of the Hungarian Revolution," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Sep 1960), p. 793

Maleter in June 1958, were required to eliminate the most active opposition to Kadar's regime. By the time the process was complete, more than 100,000 people had been arrested, 35,000 had been tried for "counter-revolutionary acts," nearly 26,000 had been sentenced to prison, and as many as 600 had been executed.¹⁸⁶

In Czechoslovakia, people had reacted totally differently against the military intervention by the "Warsaw Five." The whole population, triggered by the alien existence and the nonviolence of young people, workers and intellectuals acted spontaneously without being controlled and managed. The civil resistance unconditionally condemned the occupation and demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops, refused to collaborate with the invading units and refused political collaboration of any kind. They demanded that the state and party representatives who had been taken away by force of arms be permitted to return to office, as well as the continuation of the restructuring of the social system that had already begun.¹⁸⁷

Following civil initiative, the Czechoslovak delegates assembled at a Prague factory in Vysocancy and, with a quorum present, adopted the resolution supporting the decision of the Politburo of the CPC, formulated on the night of August 21 and condemning the entry of soldiers as an act of violation of international law and the principles governing relations between socialist states.¹⁸⁸ The leaders of the "Warsaw Five" did not want to exacerbate the situation in Czechoslovakia. So, they released the Czechoslovak leaders and charged Dubcek to reverse his policies to normalize the country. The Czechoslovak leaders were not actually freed, they were tied up by the Moscow Protocol on 26 August. Maud Bracke indicates that it was not an agreement, but a Diktat imposed on Dubcek and the other Czechoslovak leaders. The protocol was a political program for systematically undoing the Prague Spring, including

¹⁸⁶ Kramer, pp. 210-211

¹⁸⁷ Precan, p. 1669

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

the re-establishment of the “leading role” of the communist party and its full control over the press, and the cancellation of the Vysocny Congress. The document further sanctioned the troop presence, but it was affirmed that they would not interfere in the political situation.¹⁸⁹

Kieran Williams has explained the change of the Czechoslovak leaders as a result of “auto-normalization.”¹⁹⁰ The transformation was not only necessary because of the regulations and impositions of the Warsaw Pact member states. The Czechoslovak leadership felt the need to prevent the systemic crisis. Consequently, this unexpected change shocked and frustrated Czechoslovak society, because they started to witness the evaporation of reforms. The leadership began to censor and suspend periodicals and then ban new political organizations. This, in turn, resulted in the mobilization of different social groups, which did not want to lose their newly gained rights and freedoms. Crowds summoned in big cities protested the new policies of the government. University students launched a nationwide sit-in strike to demand respect for civil and political rights, but all of these anti-authoritarian demonstrations were violently suppressed by the state.

Since the invasion, Gustav Husak had been running the Communist Party of Slovakia. Within the support of Moscow, Husak succeeded Dubcek as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in April 1969. Husak was expected to emulate Kadar’s policies in Hungary after 1956: a relatively brief course of repression to be followed by a program of national reconciliation, characterized by tolerance and by modernization efforts within the confines of Moscow’s hegemony. According to Otto Ulc, Husak steered a dogmatic course, attacking only the progressive reformers and his former supporters. As a result, he became

¹⁸⁹ Bracke, p. 200

¹⁹⁰ Kieran Williams, “The Prague Spring: From Elite Liberalization to Mass Movement,” in *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule*, ed. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (New York: Berg, 2006), p. 104

identified with the policies of the party conservatives, whereas Kadar followed a centrist course opposing both the left and the right wings of the party.¹⁹¹

Husak declared war against mobilized workers, trade unions and university students, because the students' national union established a pact with the metalworkers' union to call a general strike. Eventually, the Czechoslovak Presidium decided that the university students' union would be banned, while the core of a new, docile union would be recruited from cadets in military academies. Under this strong pressure, the workers' union leader could not keep their promises to help university students and the party broke the backbone of the passive resistance in the end. Husak "consolidated" his regime by eliminating all political opposition through purges, arrests, imprisonment and police terror. Jiri Valenta brilliantly compared the different processes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia:

"In Hungary the pattern of normalization led to a flexible regime tolerated not only by the Soviets but also by most Hungarians. Kadar's famous slogan of 1961 – "Who is not against us is with us" – reflects his strategy for building national allegiances and achieving domestic liberalization. Normalization in Hungary brought an end to terror and ushered in political relaxation and even cautious pluralism...The reverse of Kadar's slogan describes the process of normalization in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s: "Whoever is not with us is against us." Normalization in Czechoslovakia under Husak proceeded slowly from an unsuccessful search for compromise and a fictitious endorsement of the continuation of Dubcek's democratization to a policy of open repression and continuous repression."¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Jiri Valenta, "The Soviet Union and East Central Europe: Crisis, Intervention, and Normalization," in *Communism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 346-347

CONCLUSION

On the Law of Peaceful Coexistence

Socialist law and legal actions were considered in communism to be an instrument, which would serve the domestic and international policy needs of the Soviet Union. First of all, they were defined by Stalin domestically to advance the cause of socialism. Then, Khrushchev formulated the law of peaceful coexistence in order to halt radicalization in Hungary, but it was a last moment attempt, and unsuccessful one. However, the events in Hungary and Poland had shown the Soviet authorities the need to establish a legal order, in which intra-state relations and the tenets of international socialism had to be arranged. In domestic or international law, the legality reflected special bias and purpose of the Soviet leadership. Bernard Ramundo indicated that Soviet domestic law was said to serve "the building of communism," a euphemism for continued Party rule of the Soviet Union. In their statement of the international legality they endorsed, the Soviets had not been so obvious, preferring instead to mask a similarly biased and subjective legality behind the more objective-sounding legal standard of "peaceful coexistence."¹⁹³

In the Post-January period of Czechoslovakia, its active foreign policy and the normalization with the West had paralyzed the Warsaw Treaty Organization. After many multilateral forums and bilateral meetings, the Warsaw Pact members invaded Czechoslovakia and violated mutual relations and respect between member states. Brezhnev had felt the need to rationalize and justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Therefore, the "Brezhnev Doctrine" was established and legalized the law of peaceful coexistence in September 1968. Ramundo explains:

¹⁹³ Bernard A. Ramundo, "Czechoslovakia and the Law of Peaceful Coexistence: Legal Characterization in the Soviet National Interest," *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 22, No. 5 (May 1970), p. 963

The law of coexistence is divided into two fundamental principles of "peaceful coexistence" and "international socialism." The principle of peaceful coexistence applies only to relationships with non-socialist states and takes into account the Soviet needs of waging the international class struggle with capitalist states. It outlaws nuclear warfare, a principal Soviet concern motivating the policy of coexistence, but otherwise permits revolutionary struggle and competition between the two camps.¹⁹⁴

The principle of international socialism arranged the status quo and put the Soviet Union on the top of the authority. In other words, the principle of peaceful coexistence licenses the Soviet ordering of socialist-camp relationships and relied on the perspective of the Soviet Union. The weakness and the strength in the policy of coexistence were the "organic and flexible" structure of the international socialism. Ramundo points out that the law of peaceful coexistence was subject to the imperative of the need to accommodate the constancy of change and the ambiguity of the principles of peaceful coexistence and was designed to be sensitive to change within the parameters of the basic policy.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, the actions of any member state could be condemned and stigmatized as a deviation from the tenets of international socialism.

Imre Nagy was removed from his office in the government and party, because Nagy was disgraced by the Soviet authorities due to his foreign and domestic policies' conceptualization based on the "Five Principles": mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, nonaggression, noninterference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence, which would encapsulate all the other principles and formulated later by the Soviet Union. The principle of international socialism would function according to the national interests of individual socialist states as well as their collective interest in building Communism. The Hungarian Revolution proved only the latter, the need to take action in order to protect the interests of socialism.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 965

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

The occupation in Czechoslovakia and the legal rationale justifying “fraternal assistance” had represented the double standards in peaceful coexistence and socialist internationalism. Although the law of peaceful coexistence decries the use of force in international relations, it does not outlaw the use of nonnuclear force. Such force may be used to wage a “just war” such as self-defense, national liberation and resistance against aggression.¹⁹⁶ Therefore, in both crises the Soviet Union accused imperial influence and present provocation, which would facilitate and lead counterrevolutionary forces. Another justification for the Soviet rationale was the need to protect the true interest of the Czechoslovak people. Dubcek’s leadership had been working both against the collective interest of the camp and its own people.

The doctrine argued that the forces of occupation targeted and acted against anti-socialist factions in the country. The concept “enemy of the peoples” such as imperialist agent, bourgeois nationalist, revisionist and anti-socialist had always “justified” the Soviet initiative. All “Five Principles” had no meaning in the end, when the doctrine legalized the statement “the socialist countries resolutely oppose the export and import of counterrevolution.” Anything could be labeled under the Soviet initiative “counterrevolutionary” and used as a reason to interfere and to take necessary action. According to Ramundo, the Brezhnev Doctrine had violated the principle of sovereignty by claiming that bloc relationships were strictly the internal affairs of bloc countries.¹⁹⁷ In other words, individual socialist parties or regimes had responsibilities not only to its people but also to the other socialist countries and the entire communist movement.

The Czechoslovak crisis put an end to de-centralization processes in the Eastern and Central European communist regimes. The Brezhnev Doctrine reemphasized that each individual party was responsible for the cohesion of the international socialist system. The

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 970

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 974

collective action by the “Warsaw Five” proved the uniformity and coherence of the Pact against the Western powers. After Yugoslavia and Romania’s autonomous policies, Czechoslovakia sought after independent relations with the West. Following a national and independent path was obvious violation of the socialist doctrines and mutual responsibility between the camp members.

The invasion reinforced Brezhnev’s authority and restored Soviet Union’s place in the hierarchy as the undisputed leader in the Eastern Bloc. However, passive resistance in Czechoslovakia had exposed that there was no existent influence of Western powers. The occupied troops did not face any mass resistance and it showed that the counterrevolutionary forces theory of the “Warsaw Five” was just a delusion and Czechoslovakia experienced a more active and non-violent mass civil resistance in the post-invasion period. Ironically, the Brezhnev Doctrine indicated that they acted in order to assist the people of Czechoslovakia and to save them from the imperial-counterrevolutionary factions in the party and in the society.

The world communism was damaged because of the violation of the fraternal relations between communist countries. The European communist movement was especially disgraced by the illegal intervention and many communist parties started to question international socialism and the role of the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia and Romania condemned that the Brezhnev Doctrine and indicated the bias or one-sidedness of the Soviet interpretation on legality, equality and self-determination. The invasion provided a short-term consolidation, temporary restoration of the Soviet rule in the East and Central European communist countries. However, after 1968 all hope for reform within the communist framework died and dissident movements with more far-reaching objectives started to emerge: The change could only come through people’s organizing themselves outside the structures of the party and

state. Their activities would eventually lead to the complete abolition of the Eastern European communist regimes.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Fowkes, *Eastern Europe 1945-1969*, p. 81

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