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## Intro

Welcome delegates! My name is Allee McDonald and I am the crisis director for the Prague Spring crisis committee at ClarkMunXIII.

This committee takes place during a distinct period of global history known as the Cold War. This was a uniquely polarizing and ideologically-oriented period of history that has significantly impacted our world today. Many of the events we are going to discuss occurred during your grandparents' or great-grandparent's lifetime, even if they did not witness or experience them directly. Many of the people who participated in the uprisings of Prague Spring, or the uprisings that preceded it—or even those that would follow!—were young people like you and I. I ask everyone to treat the topics and events that occur in this committee with the utmost respect, keeping in mind the real world impact that they have—or would have—had. There are lots of misconceptions about this time period and place that have come to dominate how we think about the Cold War—I hope by the end of this committee, you will have learned something new that has changed the way you think about history. Without further adieu

## INTRODUCTION

The year is 1968.

On January 5, radio speakers across Prague crackle to life and announce the news: the Central Committee has chosen Alexander Dubček as First Secretary of the Party. Tomorrow, every newspaper will be plastered with images of the man who now runs the country.

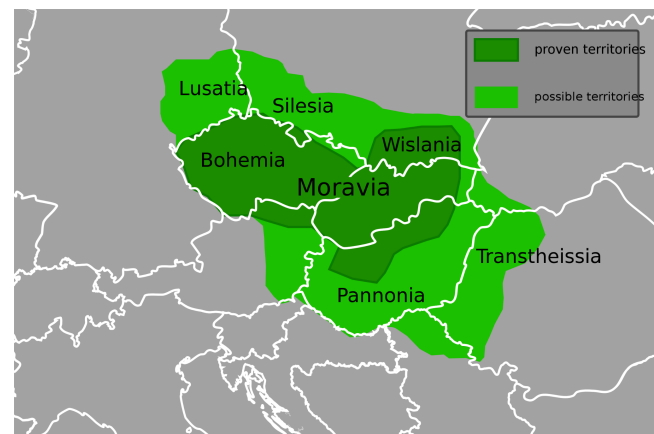
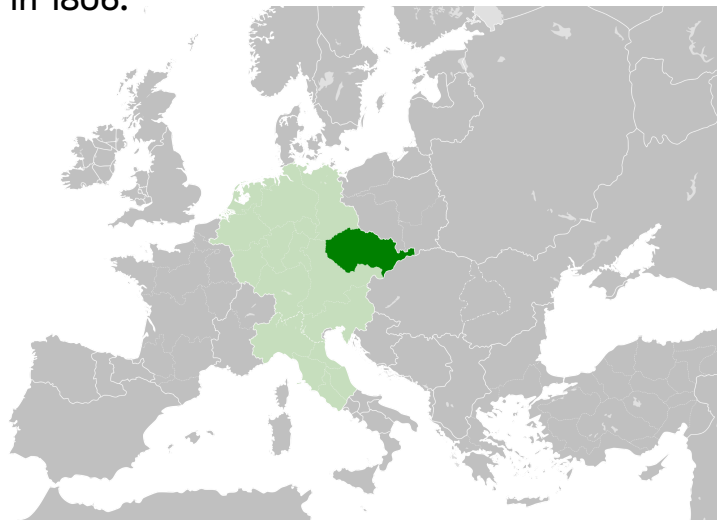
But the real question is-

- *What does this mean?*

## BACKGROUND

This committee begins in early January of 1968, in Czechoslovakia. Today divided into two nations (Czech Republic and Slovakia), Czechoslovakia was a landlocked country in central Europe. The nation was formally established in 1918, after separating from the Austro-Hungarian empire. Although a relatively 'new' country by some standards, the Czechs and Slovaks have inhabited this area of central Europe for hundreds of years. The following paragraphs provide a brief outline of the geo-political history of the country,

In the 9th century, the state of Great Moravia was established. Most of the culturally 'Czech' areas would evolve into the medieval Kingdom of Bohemia, which belonged to the Holy Roman Empire until its dissolution in 1806.



After this point, it was absorbed by the Austrian Empire. Meanwhile, Slovakia was alternately administered by the Ottomans, Habsburg Dynasty, and the Kingdom of Hungary. Although ruled under the same crown with the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, the Kingdom of Bohemia retained a substantial degree of autonomy not afforded to the Slovaks.

The 19th century saw the development of national movements all across Europe-and even the world-and this area was no exception. The Czech National Revival movement gained much more traction and generally faced far less repression than their Slovakian counterparts, although both were influential in developing a distinct sense of national identity. The idea of 'reuniting' the two groups into a distinct Czechoslovakian nation was propagated by Tomáš Masaryk, an incredibly influential politician and philosopher of the late 19th century. In 1918, alongside other political leaders, he co-founded the nation of Czechoslovakia and acted as its first ever president.

The new nation of Czechoslovakia was multi-ethnic, comprising only a slight majority of Czechs (51%). Although Czechs and Slovaks- who comprised 16% of the population-were the official constituent peoples of this new nation, multiple other ethnic groups and nationalities were present as well. Rather than<sup>1</sup>. While some were the result of redrawing national borders, other communities had long standing histories within the region. The Czech Jewish community, for example, was as long-standing as the Czechs themselves. In the 1921 and 1930 record on declared nationality of Jews within Czechoslovakia, more individuals declared Czechoslovak nationality than any other nation<sup>2</sup> The Jewish quarter of Prague was world-renowned for its prolific history, with folklore like the Golem spreading far beyond the quarter's walls. After Czechoslovaks, Germans were the second largest ethnic group within the country, respectively comprising approximately 68 and 24% of the population in 1930.<sup>3</sup> Hungarians, Rusyns, and other ethnic groups constituted the remainder.

In the aftermath of the first world war, parliamentary elections in the nation were delayed in favor of composing a constituent assembly tasked with

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Czechoslovak-history/Czechoslovakia-1918-92>

<sup>2</sup> This data is taken from a 1921 and 1930 record on the Declared Nationality of Jews in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovakia#Ethnicity>

writing the nation's constitution. The 'constituent peoples' of this assembly were exclusively Czechs and Slovaks, despite the plurality of other nationalities and ethnicities. This was changed when the constitution was finalized in 1920, establishing democracy in Czechoslovakia and granting the rights of citizenship and political participation to everyone in the nation—regardless of ethnicity, class, sex, or religion. During the interwar period, Czechoslovakia had the second largest communist party outside the Soviet Union. Their numbers only grew during the Great Depression, when economic inequality and hardship became even more pronounced.

The nation of Czechoslovakia remained independent for the next 20 years before being violently annexed by Nazi Germany in 1938. This began in the outer regions of the country known as the Sudetenland, where substantial numbers of German communities already lived. In 1939, Slovakia was granted partial autonomy as a result of the Munich agreement, and ruled as a fascist client state under the Germans. The next day, Czechoslovakian president Emil Hacha acquiesced to Nazi demands and formally allowed the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia. Eventually, the entire Czechoslovakian state was either occupied by the Nazis or ruled by puppet collaborators.

It is impossible to understate the horrific devastation of the following years. Similar to other lands occupied as part of the 'lebensraum' or 'living area' for the German people, Czechoslovakia was subject to the brutal ethnic cleansing, deportation, violence, and terror of the Holocaust. Student demonstrations across the country began in 1939, and were swiftly and violently quelled. All universities were shuttered, politicians and members of the intelligentsia were arrested en masse, and systematic antisemitic measures were codified and put into place.<sup>4</sup> Harsh persecution against the communist party led many of their ranks to take up arms as partisans and flee to the woods early within the occupation. Some maintained resistance connections within the city, and these partisans—among others—would continue to wage irregular guerilla warfare and resist the Nazis until the very end.

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<sup>4</sup>The Nazi regime did not 'introduce' antisemitism into Czechoslovakia, nor was the sentiment foreign prior to occupation. The institutional level of persecution, and the systematic measures through which it was imposed, increased sharply during the Nazi occupation. It was aided and endorsed, however, by many antisemitic or collaborationist Czechs.

In 1941, the Gestapo (German secret police) dramatically amplified their operations and began the systematic deportation of Jews, Romani, and other minority groups to concentration camps. Organized resistance against the Nazis was substantial, especially amongst targeted groups such as local Jewish communities, labor unions, and communists. With the help of the Czechoslovak government in exile, partisans successfully assassinated the acting governor Reinhard Heydrich. As reprisal, the Nazis openly and proudly massacred the villagers of Lidice and placed the entire country under martial law. Hundreds of thousands of people would be killed in the years to come, the vast majority of whom were Jewish. In the last days of the war, with news of the Soviet Army's advance, partisans and civilians alike fought to retake the city in the battle of Prague.<sup>5</sup> When the Red Army arrived, the remaining Nazi forces were defeated and the occupation came to an end.

## POST-WAR

Communist rule in Czechoslovakia did not immediately follow the arrival of the Soviets. Following the war's conclusion and the withdrawal of Nazi forces, president-in-exile Benes returned from the United Kingdom and resumed his position. Unlike in neighboring countries, the Soviet Union was not the sole driving force behind establishing communism in Czechoslovakia. In reality, communist ideology had been popular since before the outset of the war. These sentiments were only heightened after the immense destruction and traumatic devastation of the German occupation. In addition to the human cost of the war, the nation—and many of its neighbors—had been economically devastated by the conflict. Hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovaks lost their homes, jobs, property, and livelihoods. Meanwhile, much of this property ended up in the hands of collaborators who worked alongside the Gestapo in putting their neighbors or rivals in jail. Hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovakians were left unhoused; many returned from concentration camps or from the frontlines in the forest to find their homes occupied and/or no longer their 'legal property. Government agencies were sluggish in responding to the acute housing crisis, leaving people refugees in their own cities and towns.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/prague-uprising-1945>

Economic hardship was accompanied by widespread disenchantment with existing political institutions and towards democracy on the whole. Many felt betrayed by their leaders' decisions to acquiesce to Nazi demands and collaborate with the regime. The majority of Czechoslovaks also felt deeply betrayed by the Western European countries that had ceded Czech territory to Hitler at the Munich pact agreement. Disenchanted with the system that enabled the war, many Czechoslovaks—although certainly not all—were more than ready for a change. Some of the loudest-and most respected-calls came from the many communist partisans who continued their resistance throughout the war and never ceased fighting the occupation.

Upon his return, President Benes began working alongside Communist Party leader Klement Gottwald to nationalize the country's industries. The country was ruled by a coalition government known as the National Front, composed primarily of the 3 largest political parties-with the exception of the Slovak national party, outlawed for their collaboration with the Nazis. Although dominated from the outset by socialist-inclined parties, the 8 parties held seats in the Czechoslovak National Assembly. During this time, national banking and insurance industries were nationalized and the communist party gained further influence. Certain industries were under communist leadership, but the coalition ruled jointly for many years. As the popularity and organization of the communist party grew, more industries and ministries came under their control. Calls for proletariat revolution grew louder and louder, despite some members of the party advocating for gradual reform. Yet some of the more aggressive factions gained control, with an eye to the Soviet Union for backing. An aggressive publicity campaign against Eduard Benes received substantial financial and strategic backing from Soviet advisors.

This change came to a head via coup in 1948, in what is now known as Victorious February. Many Czechoslovaks—communist party members alike—were put off by the mysterious death of minister Jan Masaryk, son of the nation's founding father. This unease was compounded by growing development of 'counterintelligence' operations within the party, and further expansion and control of the secret police. Klement Gottwald was selected as president and general secretary of the KSČ, now the sole ruling body of the Czechoslovak state.

After the transfer of power, the Slovak National Council was demoted to little more than a ceremonial role. The Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) was also forcibly integrated into the new Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), in which they ultimately held very little authority. In 1948, far fewer Slovaks were members of the KSČ than Czechs—amounting to only 12% of the total party membership.<sup>6</sup> The KSS was allowed to operate as a regional body, with its own central committee and presidium, but gone were the days of Slovakian autonomy. Furthermore, anti-Slovakian sentiment among other members of the KSČ would prove disastrous in the years to come. During the political purges of the 1950s, numerous influential Slovakian communists were imprisoned on charges of “bourgeois Slovakian Nationalism”. This was more or less equated with the expression of Slovakian national sentiment—extending not only to express political beliefs, but even the use of Slovakian national symbols.

The earliest years of party activity were occupied with two goals; meeting the pressing needs caused by the world war, and consolidating control within the party. Remaining private industries were nationalized and the state began operating under a near exclusively command economy. Housing was quickly nationalized, and construction of ‘panelak’ style communal apartments began en masse. Collectivization of the countryside would take place over the next few years, using vigorous campaigns and force when necessary. This was accompanied by the development of an extensive ‘counter-intelligence’ program of observation and self-censorship, which was extended via explicit censorship laws in 1953.

The culture surrounding this movement is integral in explaining how the communist party apparatus rose to such authoritarian heights, despite the hopes of many of its founders and followers. Despite the high hopes that many Czechoslovaks had for their future, it quickly became evident that certain elements of party leadership were working behind the scenes to consolidate control. Increasing aid and advice from Soviet advisors resulted in the implementation of a Stalinist-style terror that rivaled the Soviet purges themselves. Hundreds of thousands were arrested on fabricated or ideological charges, helping Gottwald and his Stalinist circle further consolidate power.

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<sup>6</sup> Twentieth Century history of Czechoslovakia, Zdenek Suda



During the 1950s, it became far more dangerous to be an active and ardently involved high-ranking member of the party. Internal persecution of active party members was promoted and facilitated by Soviet advisors, who helped foment the sort of terror that racked their own country. Many officials also fostered an ardent dialogue and culture of antisemitism within the party and beyond, drawing upon historical prejudice and attempting to polarize the now-majority Czechoslovak populace.<sup>7</sup>

These purges came to a head with the highly publicized prosecution of 14 senior party members, known as the Slansky trials. Named for Rudolf Slansky, former general-secretary of the communist party, the defendants were accused of dramatically exaggerated charges. These ranged from bourgeoisie sympathies, to conspiracy with the state of Israel to treason against the party. The trials were highly publicized, as were the executions of 11 out of the 14 accused. The remaining three were found guilty and sentenced to life in jail.<sup>8</sup> This was the resounding death knell for any hope of a semi-free communist Czechoslovakia; secretary Gottwald had fully consolidated his power within the party, and sent a clear message to all those outside of it: “do not interfere with party affairs, and do not oppose the Party.”

## **SLOW DE-STALINIZATION**

Although Klement Gottwald and Joseph Stalin would both die in 1953, their authoritarian hold on the Czechoslovakian nation would remain tight for years to come. The frequency, brutality, and publicity of the purges mainly declined after 1953, but their impact remained. While the Soviet Union and some of its other satellites such as - acknowledged and denounced (to some extent) purges in the following years, their validity remained unchallenged by the KSČ for another 10 years. The Novotný government ignored Khrushchev’s calls for de-Stalinization at the 20th communist international convention. Instead, Novotný and allies instead implemented neo-Stalinist policies, purposefully ignoring the rising tension in the remainder of the Eastern bloc. As political unrest grew in neighboring Hungary and Poland, government officials temporarily suspended their publication imports. When the Hungarian

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<sup>7</sup> [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Slansky\\_Trial](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Slansky_Trial)

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slánský\\_trial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slánský_trial)

Revolution broke out in 1956, the national government used this as a further excuse to exercise tight control on all aspects of the state. As a Warsaw Pact member state, they officially endorsed (and marginally participated in) the Soviet Union's harsh military repression. These actions were broadcast all across Czechoslovakia, making it clear that the consequences of dissent would be severe. An official commitment to Stalinism was declared in 1958, followed by a new drafting of the constitution in 1960.

With the national government ruled mostly by hardliners eager to continue emulating the Soviet Union, the majority of everyday Czechoslovakians tried to avoid political discourse or engagement whenever possible. Repetitive, fallacious broadcasts and newspaper headlines were comparably easy to ignore in favor of relative safety. This atmosphere of fear pervaded the Gottwald-Novotný era, although inevitably would not last forever. The political continuation of Stalinist policies was extended to economics as well; the process of collectivization continued with renewed fervor, reaching near completion by 1960.<sup>9</sup>

Steadily, some of these restrictions on public life began to erode. After a decade of silence, the KSČ's first public acknowledgement of Gottwald-era injustice came in December 1962. After voting to investigate the trials at the 12th Party Congress of the KSČ, the Supreme Court retroactively declared many illegal. Although long overdue, this acknowledgement that the principle of "socialist legality" had failed was deeply impactful. Certain high-ranking party members that oversaw the trials were dismissed and publicly critiqued with unprecedented candidness. This was especially the case in Slovakia, where the press vigorously condemned the imprisonments on the basis of Slovakian nationalism. Although the judicial review could not undo the fates of those who had been executed, it did result in the release and 'rehabilitation' of many political prisoners. Many were allowed to renew their party membership and re-enter the political arena, much to the dismay of their former persecutors. However, none were restored to their former pre-trial positions. This was especially frustrating for the Slovakian communists, who felt even further excluded from the political system.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Czechoslovak socialist republic, page 71

<sup>10</sup> The

In an unprecedented move by the Central Committee, a number of reform-oriented politicians have begun advocating for a dramatic systemic reform of the current government. The party is currently viewed as corrupt and inefficient, which many reformers believe is unnecessary. Infamously resistant to change, the former First-Secretary of the Presidium, Antonín Novotný, refused to engage in any discussion of reform. His stubbornness frustrated the increasingly popular reform-minded members of the party, who eventually outnumbered his supporters. He was forced out of office just before this committee begins, replaced with the Slovakian Alexander Dubček. Dubček was chosen as the 'safe' choice, having been trained in politics in the Soviet Union. Yet he has collaborated with a number of outspoken reformers, ranging from the economist Ota Šik to the hardened Svoboda. Under his watchful eye, and with his approval, this committee has the unique opportunity to steer the nation in the years to come.

## THE EASTERN BLOC

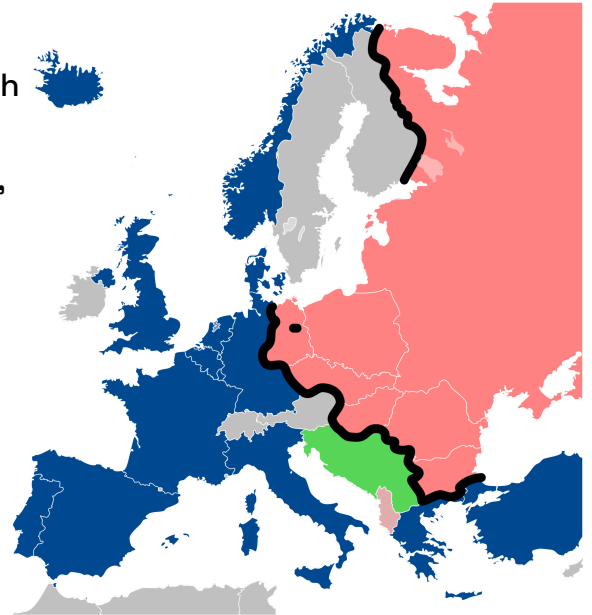
The phrase "Eastern bloc" is commonly used to refer to the network of satellite states that were, to varying degrees, politically aligned with the Soviet Union. As we will explore in this committee, being affiliated with the Soviet Union did not necessarily mean that a country was in full ideological support of the Soviet system. In many countries, satellite status was the 'natural' extension of liberation from Nazi rule by the Red Army. In some cases, this was the Extenuation of previous Russian Imperial rule –as was certainly the case for countries like Poland, which had only briefly regained its independence at the end of World War I after being partitioned between empires for over a century. Certain nations like Yugoslavia were independent of Soviet control, but were associated with the satellite states because they shared a socialist or communist



form of government. For many nations, however, the yoke of Soviet rule was heavy; most, if not all, matters of national affairs were expected to follow the blueprints and demands of the Soviet Union. This was especially true for the Warsaw Pact states, which will be explained shortly.

Affiliation and cooperation between the satellite and Eastern bloc states was further cemented with the establishment of the Warsaw Pact in 1955. Designed to act as the Soviet counterpart to NATO, this was a formal military alliance between the following countries:

- Albania
- Bulgaria
- Czechoslovakia
- East Germany
- Hungary
- Poland
- Romania
- Soviet Union



Many countries that are now independent were also a part of the USSR—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

For the purpose of this committee-and broader history in general-it is important to keep these three groups separate.<sup>11</sup>

To quickly run down:



The Eastern bloc describes all countries that were affiliated, even loosely, with the Soviet Union. Of these, many were part of a military alliance called the Warsaw Pact, which included a significantly higher degree of Soviet

<sup>11</sup> [Collapse of the Soviet Union - End of Soviet communism | Britannica](#)

intervention. A number of nations that are now independent part of the USSR at this time. As such, they had little to no sovereign control of their governance.

## **THE COLD WAR**

This committee takes place during a period of time known as The Cold War, an era which spanned the greater part of the 20th century. It is traditionally defined as beginning after the conclusion of World War II and lasting up until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The term “Cold War” refers not to one particular conflict, but rather to the period of geopolitical competition between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their affiliated allies. The word ‘cold’ refers to the fact that the two superpowers never engaged one another in direct armed conflict, but rather through proxy wars or other forms of contest.

The rivalry was deeply ideologically charged, with both sides making the claim that it was a global struggle to prove their Way of Life was superior to the other’s opposing, contradictory view. The espoused ideology of the United States emphasized the importance of a capitalist economy, a democratic government, and personal freedoms. The Soviet Union advocated for communist rule—democratic or otherwise—and equality for all. Having inherently oppositional forms of government certainly impacted the superpowers’ rivalry, but it was far from the only element at play. Pursuing political and economic interests, regardless of ideological impact, was a key factor of the competition—as with any other geopolitical struggle. This was especially true when selecting allies abroad—the US was more than willing to forego democracy to back autocratic regimes favorable to American business interests. Similarly, the real extent of equal, communal rule was often far less important to Soviet advisors than a nation’s fealty to the Soviet Union. The nature of the conflict, however, lent itself well to bombastic rhetoric and the illusion of black and white. Both sides portrayed the struggle as one of good vs. evil, survival vs. demise; this helped amplify the stakes of gaining or losing any possible sphere of influence.

This tension was raised even further by the threat of nuclear warfare. By 1950, each nation had successfully built and tested their own nuclear weapons.

As each country raced to develop the most impressive nuclear arsenal, the prospect of direct conflict became more and more daunting. The threat of nuclear warfare made the matter of their rivalry even more of a concern. Each country had a large network of allies spanning across the globe. The relative value and reliability of these allies varied, and many nations wished to stay out of the conflict altogether. For countries like Czechoslovakia, this was out of the question; surrounded by satellite states or American allies, the choice of allegiance was made quickly.

Perceived loyalty or disloyalty to the superpowers was a matter of great geopolitical significance. Both the USA and USSR were firm believers in the maxim 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', frequently arming or supporting resistance groups abroad. Since this committee is set during the Cold War, the possibility of cooperating with foreign countries is certainly an option. However, keeping in mind the complex web of international relations, some alliances will be easier to forge than others. Some countries—such as Guatemala—have been harshly punished for working with a communist state like Czechoslovakia, and may not be eager to do so again. Superpowers like the United States or UK could be sympathetic to movements that undermine the USSR, but collaboration with Soviet rivals would be seen as treason.

Geographically, Czechoslovakia straddles the boundary of the so-called Iron Curtain. Its neighbors to the west and southwest are West Germany and Austria, both capitalist countries engaged (to some degree) with the 'Western bloc'. Hungary lies to the south east, with the Soviet Union (via Ukraine) to its East. East Germany and Poland border it to the North.<sup>12</sup> Recently, people have been able to move across the Western borders with relative ease—although this has certainly not always been the case. Border controls have become increasingly relaxed in recent



<sup>12</sup> [Berlin Wall | Historical Atlas of Europe \(26 June 1963\) | Omniatlas](#)

years, allowing for unprecedented freedom of movement.

## ECONOMY

Similar to the Soviet Union, the KSČ sought to dramatically transform the Czechoslovakian economy through central planning. The first stage of this was the First Five Year Plan (1949-1953) which sought to dramatically industrialize the economy and increase the production of various goods. Heavy machinery and arms manufacturing quickly became some of the country's most notable exports. Trade with other eastern bloc countries increased significantly, jumping from 40% in 1948 to 70% by 1958.<sup>13</sup> Despite the lofty goals of the initial 5 year plan, the anticipated production capacity was nowhere near as predicted. Alongside rampant inflation, this caused the need for a radical monetary reform. In 1953, the country implemented a currency reform that wiped out many people's savings. The issuing of new bank notes was not announced until the last minute, but suspicions of imminent reform still caused a number of panics that further exacerbated inflation.

The late 1950s and early 60s found the Czechoslovak economy in dire straits. Industrial growth was the lowest of any in the Eastern bloc. Due to poor agricultural output, the importation of foodstuffs put a heavy strain on the nation's budget.<sup>14</sup> The party's leading economists and industrial planners were beginning to acknowledge the faults of a fully centralized planned economy. In 1962, the 12th party congress of the KSČ resolved to begin formally developing a new economic strategy. In 1966, the Party Congress approved a set of reforms known as the "New Economic Model". This limited the role of central planning to the establishment of 'basic targets', which would broadly define the amount of investment and production in some of the nation's key manufacturing industries.

The remaining economic planning was to be established for a maximum of one year at a time, by lower level industrial and managerial units of the

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<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy\\_of\\_communist\\_Czechoslovakia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_communist_Czechoslovakia)

<sup>14</sup> [History of Czechoslovakia \(1948–1989\)](#)

industries themselves. Price controls were loosened on most goods, although raw materials, energy, and certain imports were still highly regulated. Ceiling prices were implemented on basic commodities, mainly food items.<sup>15</sup> One key element of the program was the moderate reform in the system of wages and bonuses, previously controlled purely by the state executive. Workers councils and production units now had far more influence in wage differentiation and the price of their respective products. Although relatively popular and seemingly effective thus far, some hardliners fear that the decentralization of the economy will undermine the authority of the party.<sup>16</sup> Many labor unions and workers also feel the reforms have come too little, too late; workers committees have begun popping up in industries across the country, calling for the freedom of the press and a greater say in industrial management.<sup>17</sup> Grassroots organizing movements across the country have skyrocketed, bolstered by Novotný's dismissal and increasingly vocal about their various demands.

## **MILITARY**

In proportion to the country's total population, the Czechoslovakian military is one of the larger armies in the Eastern bloc. Numbering somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000, the Czechoslovak People's Army is a relatively modern military. The vast majority of their funding and equipment comes from the Soviet Union, though this does not necessarily translate into loyalty among the troops. 24 months of military service is compulsory for all men between the ages of 18 and 27.

The Soviet Union is Czechoslovakia's primary political and military ally, though this comes with a number of conditions. At the moment, Czechoslovakia is the only Warsaw Pact nation that does not have Soviet troops stationed in their country. The Czechoslovakian Army is eager to maintain this status, and in turn retain some degree of autonomy over their organization. However, there are rumors within the innermost circles of the party that this may soon come to an end. It is currently unverified, but some high-level party members suspect that First Secretary Novotný may have confidentially made an agreement to

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<sup>16</sup> Czechoslovak socialist republic, Zdenek Suda, 89-93

<sup>17</sup> The Revolt of the Intellectuals: The Origins of the Prague Spring and the Politics of Reform Communism



store Soviet warheads. If true, Czechoslovakia would indefinitely host a detachment of Soviet military personnel within the coming years.<sup>18</sup>

The military is becoming increasingly displeased with the level of Soviet oversight and brinkmanship of the USSR. Many high-ranking officers and strategists resent the nation's involuntary inclusion in Soviet rivalries in which they have no stake and are given no say. This is particularly true in the case of nuclear-standoffs, which they believe are particularly dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. The expectation that they will inherit the alliances and rivalries of the Soviet Union has begun to grate on the Army, and they have privately begun to implore government officials to take a more independent stand. Few people dared to voice these concerns to Novotný—nor was he interested in listening—but the change in leadership has made the Army increasingly vocal. Any military dissent is monitored closely by the Soviet Union, whose military capacity is vastly superior.

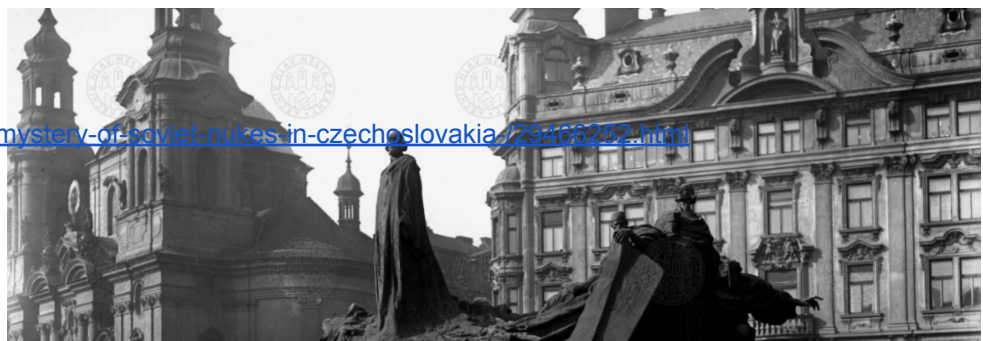
## CULTURE & THE ARTS

The arts in Czechoslovakia have a rich and diverse history. One source of national pride is the country's long-standing literary tradition, dating back to the 14th century. During the latter half of the century, a Christian reform movement known as the Bohemian Reformation was born. Also referred to as the Czech or Hussite Reformation, the movement would last upwards of 200 years and significantly impacted Czech culture and the surrounding Central European region. Although ultimately defeated by the Catholic church, the ideals and symbols of the movement remain prevalent in Czech culture to this very day. Despite the fact that the majority of the country is now Catholic—or atheist, due in part to the restrictions implemented by communist rule—the religious reformer Jan Hus is still seen as a national Czech icon.

A statue in memorial stands  
in the center of  
the Old Town, with a  
quote from Hus that is  
frequently shortened

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/the-unsolved-mystery-of-soviet-nukes-in-czechoslovakia/29465252.html>



to “The Truth Prevails”,  
the national motto of  
Czechoslovakia.<sup>19</sup>

The statue has traditionally  
been a site for political  
organization and  
demonstration—however  
abstract that may be.  
Merely gathering on the  
steps of the memorial is  
itself a significant political  
act in recent decades.

Religious texts published during this time were arguably the first in a long tradition of intersection between Czechoslovak literature and politics. During the 19th century, Czech literature played a key role in spreading the ideas of the Czech National Revival. The Czech National Revival was a cultural movement that began in the late 18th century and aimed to restore a sense of Czech identity after being conquered by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For the past two centuries, the Czech language had been suppressed in favor of German. German was used almost exclusively in government, education, literature, and among most written texts; Czech was seen as a spoken vernacular for the uneducated lower classes. The National Revival re-invigorated the Czech-language as a form of writing and celebrated traditional Czech folklore and culture that had fallen out of favor of the elite. Alongside the development of a vibrant literary scene—including authors like Jan Neruda—other art forms flourished as well. Composers like Bedrich Smetana helped create a national Czech music style, which was further popularized by world renowned composers like Leoš Janáček and Antonín Dvořák. Visual artists like Mucha further contributed to the country’s world-renowned artistic reputation.

The major artistic institutes of this time period—all major publishing houses, film studios, theater companies, etc.—are funded and nominally controlled by the state. Most every artistic discipline is organized into respective unions under

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<sup>19</sup> <https://fotoeins.com/2019/07/06/my-praha-janhus-memorial/>

the broader umbrella of the state. In the past, government standards for artistic expression were incredibly rigid, demanding full accordance with standards established by the central government. However, the last decade has seen major push backs against these restrictions. Tension between artistic and political scenes recently came to a head at the 1967 Writers Conference, which was held only 6 months before this committee begins.

During the purges of the Gottwald era—and the lingering terror that followed—literature and the arts began to develop a more pivotal role in peoples' daily lives. The few cultural publications that remained active during the Stalinist purges were some of the only serials that included and encouraged public participation and discussion. The 'literary' magazine *Literarni Noviny*, for example, notably puts literature, philosophy, and ideology into conversation with one another. As one of the few semi-free forums for political dialogue and critique, the magazine has frequently been forced to shut down or temporarily cease publication. In the fall of 1967, the Novotný administration transferred the administration of LN away from the Union of Czechoslovak Writers to the Ministry of Culture. This effectively shuttered the paper, with the vast majority of authors refusing to contribute and a mass decline in readership. Many of the original writers remain active, and have shifted to publishing in the weekly serials of the Writers' Union.<sup>20</sup>

In the past decade, 'New-Wave' style films have become increasingly popular despite the past regime's attempts at censorship. To evade outright rejection by the state, a distinct form of creative surrealism has developed within the nationalized film industry. Although frequently subversive, the creativity and production quality of these films has earned them both domestic and world renown. Czechoslovakian films and animations have earned a popular international reputation and are currently being shown in theaters all across the world. Former First Secretary Novotný was known to privately screen many 'New Wave' films in secret, including ones he attempted to outlaw.<sup>21</sup> Despite a renewed wave of repression against artists and intellectuals in 1958, increasingly creative forms of artistic expression continue to develop in the early 60s.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24776186?seq=2>

<sup>21</sup> Robin Bates, "The Ideological Foundations of the Czech New Wave," *Journal of the University Film Association* 29, no. 3 (1977): pp. 37-42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20687379?seq=1>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24776186?seq=4>

popularity of these movements among everyday people has led to increased flexibility in the interpretation of regime-standards, which some party-hardliners view as dangerous.

## **MEDIA**

During this period, all official newspapers, television, and radio stations are formally owned and funded by the state government. In the past, this meant that most news broadcasts were heavily censored and full of propagandistic language. Due to their proximity to other countries—and the abundance of radio many Czechoslovaks have access to broadcasting from the nearby western nations. To combat this, the state has tried a number of different approaches. Logistical constraints and reluctance on moral bounds make it impossible to arrest or persecute everyone accused of consuming western news media. Rather than merely trying to jam the signals of stations like Radio Free Europe, Czechoslovak radio and television stations have shifted their approach. Many stations are pushing the boundaries of what is considered ‘acceptable’ to discuss on air, helping re-introduce political discussion into daily life. As talking about politics becomes increasingly normalized, public interest in political debate has also increased.

## **POLITICS**

Currently, Czechoslovakia operates as a one-party state. Certain political parties are allowed to remain active, and may even hold seats in the National Assembly, but have little to no real political influence. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia—also known as the KSČ, an abbreviated form of its Czech name—acts as the governing party of the nation. The Party was organized into a strict hierarchy of various bodies, each directly reporting to



the next highest unit. Although elections nominally occur at the local level, the party is responsible for nominating and appointing all higher-level positions.

Despite having a president, a prime minister, and various other roles, the true director of Czechoslovakia is the First Secretary of the Presidium of the Central Committee. Until recently, this position was held by Antonín Novotný; it is now held by the former Slovakian First Secretary, Alexander Dubček.

The supreme organizing body of the state is the Party Congress, typically held every 5 years (except in case of emergency). Although they supposedly appoint members of the Central Committee, in reality this task is performed by the Presidium—the executive body of the KSČ. The Presidium itself is composed of around 10 of the highest-ranking party officials within the KSČ, and is highly contested as a result. The decisions made by the Presidium are overseen and enforced by the Party Secretariat, who also heavily influence who, what, and where changes in party leadership occur. The Presidium was responsible for appointing and electing the members of the Central Committee, which typically numbered somewhere between 100 to 150 individuals. The CC acted as the primary ruling body of the state in between Party Congresses, and were tasked with overseeing a variety of different roles. All decisions made on behalf of—or pertaining to—the state required CC approval, and all lower bodies of the KSČ reported their activities to the Central Committee. The CC has recently exercised more power than ever before—in past decades, it acted as little more than a veneer to validate decisions made by the elite Presidium. However, unified action by the CC recently forced the ousting of First Secretary Novotný—and the appointment of your new leader, Alexander Dubček. Ultimately, it is he—the First Secretary of the KSČ—who makes the final call on state policy of any form. The fact that his predecessor Novotný was ousted at all indicates the growing importance of lower organs within the party, and the increasingly loud demands for a more democratized government.<sup>23</sup>

## CHARACTER LIST

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<sup>23</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist\\_Party\\_of\\_Czechoslovakia#National](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_Czechoslovakia#National)

## **VASIL BIL'AK**

Bilak was born in what would soon become Slovakia (then Kingdom of Hungary) to a family of Rusyn tailors. He became active in the Communist Party in the 1930s before participating in the Slovakian National Uprising during WWII. After graduating from university in 1954, he began his party career as the secretary of a Regional Committee of the CPS (Communist Party of Slovakia). Here he oversaw the forced collectivization of agriculture, helping elevate his political career. One of the most conservative of the Presidium board, he is a hardline communist who sees no issue with following in the footsteps of the Soviets. He was one of the loudest voices in the 1967 writers conference debate, where he outwardly opposed what he viewed as pro-capitalist trends and a dangerous shift away from socialist principles. In the past 6 years, he has acted as general secretary of the KSS, the Slovakian wing of the KSČ. He has recently been promoted to first secretary following the appointment of Alexander Dubček to Presidium First Secretary. Spared—or seemingly willingly oblivious—to the horror wrought by the purges, he's willing to do whatever it takes to maintain the power of the KSČ.<sup>24</sup>

## **Dr. Frantisek Kriegel**

Born into a poor Jewish family in Austria-Hungary, Frantisek moved to Prague in 1926 to study medicine at Charles University. Leaving his home with very little money and only “six white shirts” that his mother had given him, Kriegel supported himself during his studies by working various odd jobs—ranging from working in a shoemaker's store, to selling sausages at soccer games, and acting as an extra in local theater productions. He became a dedicated member of the Communist Party during the Great Depression and earned his medical doctorate in 1934. In 1936, Dr. Kriegel joined the International Brigades of Republican Spain and served as a doctor on the frontlines against the fascist armies of Francisco Franco. Here he obtained the rank of major, and was later interned in France after the war's formal conclusion in 1939. Unable to return to Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, he joined a detachment of the Norwegian Red Cross traveling to China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. He later worked alongside allied units in Burma. After the conclusion of the second world war, Kriegel returned to

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<sup>24</sup> [Vasil Bilak](#)

Czechoslovakia and immersed himself in the communist party. He was appointed undersecretary general of the department of Health in 1949, but only briefly held the position before being dismissed during the purges of the early 1950s. Resuming his medical career, he would serve as a prominent doctor in Prague for the following decade. In 1960, he traveled to Cuba to help Castro's government design and construct a new health care system; while there, he witnessed the 1962 Cuban missile crisis firsthand. Upon his return to Czechoslovakia, Kriegel turned down a post in the party organization, but was elected to the National Assembly in 1964. He became a member of the Central Committee of the KSČ in January of 1966, but continued to simultaneously practice medicine in Prague. Kriegel has always been an outspoken and unwavering critic of Neo-Stalinism within the KSČ. With Dubček at the helm of the party, he has been an ardent proponent of democracy. As both an architect and eventual pariah of the communist state, Kriegel has a deeply vested desire in reforming the KSČ and is not easily swayed from his principles.

#### **LUDVÍK SVOBODA -**

A former general and rising political star, Svoboda was not always committed to the communist cause. As a young man, he attended agricultural school in southeastern bohemia and briefly worked at a vineyard. In 1915, at the age of 20, he was conscripted to serve in the Austro-Hungarian army. After being captured by the Russians, he joined the Czechoslovak League, who fought on behalf of the Entente powers. He continued his military career after the war's conclusion, additionally learning Hungarian and becoming an instructor at the Military Academy by the early 1930s. When the German occupation began, he joined an underground resistance group known as "defense of the nation". Soon after, he fled to Poland alongside thousands of other military officers hoping to organize on the Polish front. However, since Poland itself was soon occupied, this group of officers was quickly dispersed. He worked tirelessly to try and coordinate and organize armed resistance by military officers during WWII, composing and organizing battalions that operated from outside the occupied territories. He helped liberate Czechoslovakia alongside the Red Army, and was hailed as a hero for his participation on the Eastern front. This helped launch a successful political career, where he was soon appointed Minister of Defense. Unlike many of the other ministers who resigned in protest, Svoboda maintained

his position during the 1948 communist coup. He also refused to deploy the army against the many armed laborers and People's Militias that rallied in support of the coup. Although markedly 'apolitical' prior to the coup, he joined the communist party in 1948 upon their ascension to power. Despite this, he quickly fell out of favor and was rapidly demoted. After being forced out of the army, he briefly acted as Deputy Prime Minister from 1950 to 1951. Not soon after, he was arrested and briefly imprisoned during the infamous series of political purges. After being released, he was sent to work on a small cooperative farm in the Czech countryside. At the insistence of Soviet officials—including Nikita Khrushchev, whom he had served alongside in the second world war—he was permitted to return to semi-public life. He has worked as an instructor at the Klement Gottwald Military Academy for the past decade, but has expressed an interest in re-entering the political arena. He currently stands as one of the most eligible candidates for the presidency, although the position itself is little more than ceremonial. Having both the approval of the Soviet Union, a reputation as a war hero, and having suffered under the party purges, Svoboda is one of the most nationally inoffensive politicians of the time.<sup>25</sup>

### **Gustav Husak**

The son of an unemployed Slovakian laborer, Husak was born in 1913 in what was then the kingdom of Hungary, Husak joined the youth wing of the communist party at age 16. As a teenager, Husak stood out as an exemplary and ambitious student who was particularly talented in oration. While attending law school in Bratislava, he became further involved with left-wing political movements. He acted as part of the resistance movement in Slovakia that organized the Slovak National Uprising against the collaborationist government. An early admirer of the Soviet Union, in the 1940s he briefly discussed the possibility of trying to integrate Slovakia into the USSR. Yet this was little more than a passing thought, and he soon became an ardent advocate for Slovakian autonomy within the Czechoslovak state. This would earn him the accusation of bourgeois nationalism, for which he was arrested and imprisoned in 1950. Held in an Ottoman-fortress turned prison from 1954 to 1960, Husak has continually and vocally maintained his innocence. After his release, his conviction was overturned and he was officially 'rehabilitated' as a result of the de-Stalinization

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.hrad.cz/en/president-of-the-cr/former-presidents/ludvik-svoboda>



procedures. With his party membership restored, he quickly re-immersed himself in political life. Although critical of Antonin Novotný and his tendency for near-Stalinist authoritarianism, it is unclear how much reform Husak will be willing to pursue.

### **Ludmila Jankovcová**

Born in 1897, Ludmila graduated from business school in Prague in the mid 1920s. During this period, she became a member of the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD). She worked as a secondary school teacher before the outbreak of the world war. Alongside her husband, she was an active member of the resistance against Nazi occupation. Her husband was influential in forming the UVOD, the coalition of resistance groups that would begin working with the government in exile. Her husband was arrested by the Gestapo in 1941 and later executed in 1944. In the same year, she was deported to perform forced labor in Smíchov. After the war's conclusion, she began her political career by running for office in the national parliamentary elections, where she was elected to the national assembly in 1946. She was re-elected in 1948, and became vice president of the CSSD. She became part of the KSČ during the CSSD-KSČ merger that followed the February coup. She was appointed Minister of Industry in 1947, becoming the first ever woman to hold a ministry-level office. She later served as Minister of Food Industry from 1950 to 1954, before being appointed Deputy Premier.<sup>26</sup> Although she resigned from this role in 1963, she remains an active member of the KSČ congress. Although personally known to be against the death penalty and suspicious of the Slansky trials, she did not publicly speak out during the purges. Given both her personal and political history, she could very well be in favor of heavily reforming the current authoritarian system. However, it is unknown if her hesitation will outweigh her desire for change.

### **Alois Indra**

Originally employed as a railroad worker, Indra joined the communist party at the age of 16 in 1937. After the Second World War, he graduated from the Political College of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and worked as a secretary of the Regional National Committee (KNV). In 1956 he became the

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<sup>26</sup> [history-of-the-ministry-of-industry-and-trade--15288](#)

regional secretary of the Communist Party. In 1960 he moved to Prague and became the head of the planning department of the Central Committee, and in 1962 he became the chairman of the State Planning Commission. In 1963, he became the Minister of Transport, a position he currently holds. His hardline politics have earned him a less than glowing reputation among the more liberal reform-minded members of the party. His general popularity is also less than stellar; his election to congress was only successful after running for office in four districts-having failed to secure a vote in the first two. He does, however, enjoy the support of some industrial workers who enjoy his enthusiasm for the workers' cause. His opposition to the development of modern railways in Northern Slovakia has earned him the disdain of Slovakian students and reformers, who accuse him of helping to keep the region economically stunted. It's more indicative, however, of the Although disliked by many, he is still an ambitious and relatively successful politician-and he is notably close to many advisors in Moscow, who view him as a trustworthy conservative amongst a sea of dangerous reformers.

### **Věra Čáslavská**

Born in occupied Prague in 1942, Vera began her athletic career as an ice skating prodigy. At the age of 15, Čáslavská began training in gymnastics under gymnast Eva Bosáková and soon won the national junior gymnastics championship. Over the next few years, Čáslavská competed and placed high in national and world gymnastics competitions. Although using sports as a political arena is strictly discouraged, this has not prevented her from making covert protests during her time in the international spotlight. Her fierce competition against Soviet gymnasts is paralleled only by her disdain for their political influence in the country.<sup>27</sup> Young and self-assured, she is committed to representing Czechoslovakia abroad and impacting change at home. Feeling stifled by the lack of democracy in the nation she represents, she is eager to use her publicity to help push for reform.<sup>28</sup>

### **Vaclav Havel,**

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/45900544>

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/sports/olympics/vera-caslavska-gymnast-soviets-czechoslovakia-dead.html>

Born into a wealthy family of real-estate developers in 1936, Vaclav Havel's childhood was not exposed to much particular hardship. Both parents had connections to various cultural institutions, with ties to notable journalists, diplomats, and a film studio. His upbringing heavily emphasized intellectualism and rearing in the 'fine arts' of literature, theater, and beyond. After the war, the advent of communist rule suddenly placed young Havel into significantly less auspicious circumstances. Disallowed university placement due to his class upbringing, he spent 4 years at a chemical laboratory apprenticeship after completing secondary school. After this, he served the compulsory 2 years in the Czechoslovak military from 1957 to 1959. Upon his departure, he began working as a stagehand at various theaters in Prague. In the meantime, he took courses via correspondence at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts, and began writing full-length plays. His first original play, *The Garden Party*, was performed in a series of the 'Theater of the Absurd' in 1963. The play earned him international acclaim, and he began correspondence with various international theaters hoping to stage his work.<sup>29</sup> Within the country, he's become increasingly involved in dissident writers circles; he has many connections in the public and private literary scenes. Using surrealism and metaphor for his thinly veiled criticism of the government, he is an ardent supporter of reform and opponent of censorship in any form.

### **Jan Kavan**

The son of a British emigree and a party leader arrested during the Slansky trials, Kavan has been an active voice in the youth protest movements across the country. The unjust imprisonment of his father at a young age had a profound impact on Kavan, who was raised by his mother, a British school teacher. Born in 1946, he is one of the youngest members of the committee, giving him a unique perspective on the needs and desires of the country's newest politically active generation. The discipline, unity, and relatively sober nature of recent youth movements has distinguished them from others across Europe, whose goals are seen as more amorphous and naive. This has been highlighted by the youth leaders themselves, who express frustration with the condescension they've faced from western youth activists. The recent student movements in the country have also had a different character than many others across the continent, where students have been accused of 'bourgeois'

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<sup>29</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Václav\\_Havel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Václav_Havel)

influence. Most Czechoslovakian University students come from relatively recent working class backgrounds, due to the reforms implemented by the post-1948 communist government. They have serious demands and resent the political apathy of the generation that precedes them, and will not be content without serious reform in the political system.

### **Josef Smrkovský**

Smrkovský was born into a family of farmers in the small village of Velenka, located in Central Bohemia. Originally working as a baker, he soon became involved with the labor union movement, becoming secretary of the Red Trade Union in 1930. He soon became an official member of the KSČ and traveled to the Soviet Union to study political science in the early 1930s. Upon his return, he worked as a KSČ secretary in the city of Brno. At the outbreak of the second world war, Smrkovský joined the armed communist resistance against Nazi occupation and helped coordinate the reclamation of Prague. After the war he helped organize a People's Militia that helped facilitate the coup known as Victorious February. In 1949, he was named director general of Czechoslovak farms and Deputy Minister of Agriculture. Within decades, Smrkovsky went from small town farmer and baker to overseeing the seizure and distribution of assets taken from large-scale landowners. Yet this power would not last long—in 1951 he fell out of favor with the pro-Stalinist factions of the party. Despite being described as “more than 100 per cent Communist”, he fell victim to purges and was imprisoned until 1955. Although a relatively lax sentence compared to those sentenced for execution or life, his time in prison was still a formative one. After his release, he returned to the countryside and worked a number of jobs in manual labor, ranging from forestry to farmwork.. During the wave of political rehabilitation in 1963, his charges were exonerated and his party membership restored. After this, he would occupy a number of low-level positions in regional ministries before eventually becoming the Minister of Forestry and Waterworks. He vocally supported the removal of Antonin Novotný, and has demonstrated support for party reform. He is well known within and beyond the party as an outstanding public speaker and orator, capable of making excellent public announcements.

### Olga Szantova,

Born in Bratislava in the 1930s, Szantova's childhood in Slovakia was brief. Due to her father's political activism, the family moved to New York City in 1938 to avoid persecution by the Nazis. She spent a formative–albeit brief–portion of her life in New York City, where she learned fluent English. After returning to Czechoslovakia in 1946, she continued her studies until her father was imprisoned in 1951 for his continued political participation. With her hopes of pursuing journalism seemingly dashed, she began working at a local childcare center. By chance, she met a reporter from Radio Prague, who would later hire her in 1961. After briefly living in Ghana with her husband, a fellow reporter, she returned to Prague and began a prolific career at Radio Prague. Mainly working in the English-speaking “American department” of the radio, she and her colleagues have interviewed numerous Western celebrities ranging from Shirley Temple to Cliff Richards.<sup>30</sup> The recent relaxation of government censorship has made the atmosphere at the station more lively than ever, with unprecedented degrees of freedom. Yet no one knows how long this loosened atmosphere will last, and what future repercussions may await those who push the boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

### Ludvík Vaculík,

Ludvik Vaculík was born in the southeastern town of Brumov in 1926, the eldest son of a carpenter. He quickly became a member of the communist party, and worked in a shoe-making factory from 1941-1944. After the war's conclusion, he studied political journalism at the University of Political and Social Scientists. He worked as an editor at the state newspaper publishing house ‘Rudé Právo’ for over a decade. In addition to journalism, Vaculik published and wrote his first novels in the early 1960s. In 1965, he became the editor of the magazine Literarni Noviny, a paper frequently under censure for its frank discussion of ideology and politics. Vaculík began to make waves at the 1967 writers conference, where he gave a highly inflammatory speech calling for reform and radical change within the party apparatus. He is highly respected within both literary circles and party philosophers, wielding a significant degree of influence despite attempts at censorship.

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<sup>30</sup> [Szantoava.shtml](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Olga-szantova-voice-radio-prague-8560599](#)

### **Božena Macháčová-Dostálová**

Originally employed as a laborer, she joined the communist party in 1923. She steadily became more involved with the party, eventually becoming secretary of the labor union organization known as the Red Union. In 1932, she moved to Prague and worked as an editor for the communist women's magazine "Rozséváčka". She was elected to the national assembly in the 1935 parliamentary election, and held this position until the KSC was forcibly dissolved in 1938. During the war, she worked as a radio operator for a Czechoslovak-Soviet station broadcasting out of Moscow. After the war, she re-entered politics and was elected to the National Assembly in 1946 and 1948, representing the Prague electoral position. She would continue to be elected to National Assembly in each successive election, while simultaneously gaining nomination to attend the Communist Party Congress 9 through 13. In 1954, she was appointed the minister of procurement, a position she held for 2 years. In 1956, she became Minister of Consumer Industry, a position she currently holds. Her dedication to communist ideology is deeply interrelated to her commitment to women's rights. She is an outspoken advocate for gender equality and does not hesitate to speak on the concerns of Czechoslovakian women, specifically of mothers. This dedication has not always gone unchallenged—after giving an inflammatory speech against the rising cost of living to the National Assembly, she was almost arrested. She avoided imprisonment due to a special presidential request, but the incident demonstrates that her conviction to communism is rooted primarily in maintaining social welfare.<sup>32</sup> As a skilled legislator and dedicated women's rights advocate, she is open to any reform that would enable a higher standard of living for the average woman.<sup>33</sup>

### **Jiřina Švorcová**

The daughter of a construction worker and an innkeeper, Švorcová originally attended secondary school with plans to become a schoolteacher. She soon shifted course to follow in the footsteps of her older brother, a relatively popular actor within the region. She graduated from the Prague Academy of

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<sup>32</sup>[https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Božena\\_Macháčová-Dostálová](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Božena_Macháčová-Dostálová)

<sup>33</sup> [https://is.muni.cz/th/52834/ff\\_m/diplomova\\_prace.txt](https://is.muni.cz/th/52834/ff_m/diplomova_prace.txt)

performing arts in 1950 and joined the Vinohrady theater company in 1951. Although trained as a stage actress, she's tried her hand in various acting roles ranging from small-scale films to television. Her popularity in the latter has launched her to national attention, quickly becoming a household name for her roles in popular serials. Švorcová has been a dedicated communist party member for as long as anyone can remember, actively participating in local party conferences and labor union organizations. She is a staunch, dogmatic believer in the current communist administration, and vocally warns against the danger of reforming. Her ardent interest in party politics—or rather, in supporting the party—has made her a favorite celebrity among the hardline politicians.

### **Ota Šik**

Sik was born in the industrial city of Plzeň—also known as Pilsen. Like many of his peers, Sik fought in the resistance during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. He was arrested by the Gestapo in 1940, and sent to the Mauthausen concentration camp. Most of his fellow inmates were political prisoners, including future president/first secretary Novotný and the father of Alexander Dubček. After the war's conclusion, he returned to university to study politics before becoming the head of the economics institute at the Czechoslovak Academy of Science.<sup>34</sup> Trained as an economist and currently working as an advisor to the state, Sik's presence in the presidium is one of many indicators of the ideological 'thaw' taking place within the party. As one of the lead architects of the new economic plan, his policies have been making waves within the KSČ and national governance. This has made him somewhat of a controversial figure with hardliners, although his favorable relationship with Dubček ensures that his voice will be heard. He was an outspoken critic of Novotný, publicly denouncing him at a party meeting held only last month. He's also earned the attention of Workers' Councils and many in the industrial sector, who all hope to influence future economic policy. His economic reforms met heavy resistance from high-level party apparatchiks, who had little interest in losing control over their factories.<sup>35</sup>

### **Jan Fojtík**

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ota-Sik>

<sup>35</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ota\\_Šik](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ota_Šik)

Fojtik is a political journalist whose prodigious future in the party was almost cut disastrously short. After graduating from Charles University in 1951, he began working for the official party/state newspaper, “Rudé Právo”, where he quickly distinguished himself for his sharp wit and intellect. Sent to Moscow to study at the Academy of Social Sciences, his brief tenure was cut short when he committed a seemingly fatal political error. After getting heavily inebriated—a frequent vice of his—he launched into a scathing tirade against First Secretary Novotný and the chief ideologue of the KSČ. This was reported directly to the Central Committee, who hastily summoned him back to Prague. Resigned to expulsion from the party and the end of his political career, Fojtik was shocked to find that he had not been immediately dismissed or arrested. Instead, he was asked to write a series of biting anti-Yugoslav articles for Rudé Právo. He did so enthusiastically, demonstrating his loyalty and somehow earning a re-invitation to study in Moscow. Upon his (second) return, he was appointed editor-in-chief of Rudé Právo. He was commissioned as a speechwriter for various party officials, including the chief editor of the paper and First Secretary Novotný himself. Although he privately recognizes the inefficiency and chafes at party corruption, Fojtik is determined to maintain the favorable status he so-nearly-lost. When his tongue isn’t loosened by alcohol, he is an exceptionally skilled author and political mind. Unfortunately, maintaining a facade for the party has taken a toll on his conscience, leading to his frequent indulgence in vice.

### Oldřich Černík

Černík comes from a mining family, and followed in his parents’ footsteps at the beginning of his professional career. After secondary school, he attended the University of Mining in his hometown of Ostrava. He became a member of the communist party in 1945, but did not try his hand at politics until the early 1950s. He first worked as the chairman of the Ostrava Regional committee, eventually being promoted to secretary. In 1958, he became part of the Central Committee, and held various government posts in the years to come. Initially acting as the minister of fuel and energy, he later became deputy prime minister and chairman of the State’s planning commission. There he became known as somewhat of a technocrat, encouraging and enabling many of the more popular economic reforms. He is currently a candidate for the (largely ceremonial) role



of Prime Minister, which he is eager to pursue.<sup>36</sup> Historically receptive to reforms, he was a key figure behind the ousting of Antonin Novotný.<sup>37</sup> His guidance is well-trusted by Dubček, and his experience as a member of the Central Committee has given him a good sense of how to balance demands from Moscow alongside domestic concerns.<sup>38</sup>

Problems for the committee:

The goal of this committee is to steer a path for the nation of Czechoslovakia through these turbulent times.

The committee itself is composed of various actors, all of whom have some influence within the nation. While not all of these posts are governmental—eg, within the central committee—they all have an impact on the popularity and effectiveness of any decisions you may make. Just as in real life, the lines between ‘political’ and ‘nonpolitical’ actors are often blurred. While each character has significantly different ‘portfolio powers’ at their disposal for use in the backroom, every voice will be treated equally in the front room of the committee. Whether you’re representing politicians, stage managers, or ice skaters, each of you has an important role to play in shaping the future of the nation. Each of your characters has a vision of how they think the country should be run, which may or may not be shared by other members of the committee.

There are a variety of problems that this committee must attempt to tackle.

- Should the current censorship laws be abolished or reformed?

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<sup>36</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oldřich\\_Čern%C3%ADk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oldřich_Čern%C3%ADk)

<sup>37</sup> [Oldrich-cernik](#)

<sup>38</sup> [https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oldřich\\_Čern%C3%ADk](https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oldřich_Čern%C3%ADk)

- How much control should workers councils have in determining national industry?
  - Should absolute central control of the economy remain in place?
- How should the political trials of the 1950s be further acknowledged, if at all?
- Should democratic elections play a larger part in the country's governance?
- Should the government be expected to commit to the rivalries and alliances of the Soviet Union?
- Should Slovakia have greater political autonomy?

It is your job to answer these questions, but your decisions will be carefully monitored by the leaders of the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc nations. Some of the latter might be sympathetic to your cause, while others might loudly denounce whatever decisions you make.