

are baptized, and something over 30% of them attended church each Sunday. Even our own Church members in Poland (yes, we do have some) meet in relative freedom, without the police visitations so common in East Germany. Our members, about thirty of them, are concentrated in the areas of Poland which formerly belonged to Germany and Prussia. Most of them speak both German and Polish. The president of the only Branch we have there and his wife were recently given permission to travel out to Switzerland, where they were sealed in the temple. The Branch has a small branch house which was built in 1929 — the first branch house built in East Prussia. (This branch house was pictured in the March, 1969, issue of the *Era*.) The members live in relatively poor economic conditions, but they are very faithful and carry out the program of the Church as well as they can under the circumstances.

The impression should not be conveyed that life is "a bowl of cherries" in Poland. What I have been trying to stress is that there are differences between life in Poland and life in other communist countries. I have mentioned primarily positive features of life there. I could have just as easily (or even more easily) have mentioned negative features. I would estimate that in terms of the over-all opportunities and alternatives available to the Polish people, using this as a criterion of freedom, the Poles are considerably less free than we are in the United States. Even in this respect, however, there are some surprising exceptions. I suspect that a higher percentage of children from worker and farm families are able to get a higher education at universities than in the United States. I am certain this is true when the comparison is made with Western Europe. For these students and in this one respect, we would, therefore, have to say that they are freer by having more educational opportunities than some of their Western counterparts.

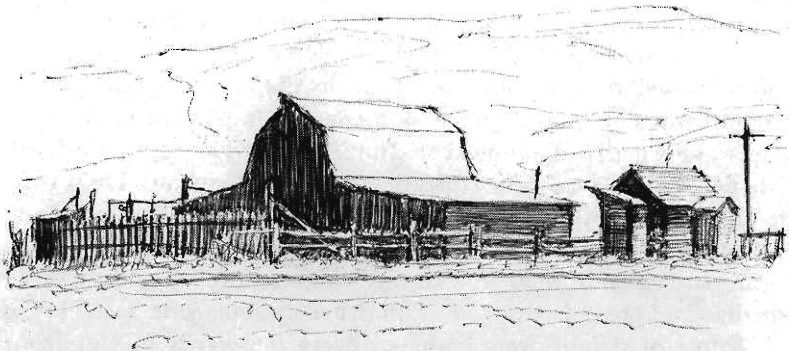
"SPRING" AND "WINTER" IN PRAGUE: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Ralph J. Thomson

Czechoslovakia is much colder and darker now than it was last year. Not that the meteorological phenomena have been all that different: Prague has consistently registered temperatures as warm as or warmer than those of 1968; nor has the sun been shining any less frequently in the Bohemian, Moravian, and Slovak lands. And yet there is an unmistakable, almost physically tangible change in social climate produced by the cold anger and frozen hopes of fourteen million once-enthusiastic participants in the socialist face-lifting of January–August, 1968. Now that the bitter first anniversary of Russian-led invasion has come and gone, political and economic barometers continue to plunge, the inescapable by-product of a people aware of its transformation from meaningful, active citizenship during the "Prague Spring" into renewed

subject-status under a harried regime increasingly influenced by cool opportunists, pro-Soviet sycophants, and icy cynics.

And somehow the new winds rustling through the Czechoslovakian Socialist Republic (CSSR) seem all the more biting when one recalls the atmosphere just prior to the Warsaw Pact intrusion. For eight months the political sun over Prague and Bratislava had been bringing forth a fragile crop of imaginative, intelligent, even bold reforms which, together, comprised nothing less than one of the most unusual social experiments in recent history: the attempted metamorphosis of a thoroughly totalitarian dictatorship



into a viable socialist society based upon the cultivation of the basic human rights and a generous measure of liberal democracy. Steeped as they are in a liberating, optimistic "free agency" tradition, it is soberly appropriate for Church members to examine the nature of those tentative fresh plants whose growth occasioned such cruel changes in the Eastern European weather of 1968-69. What conclusions on freedom, repression and the human spirit flow from this most recent in a centuries-long series of Czechoslovak political tragedies? Can L.D.S. faith in the firm reality of those spiritual intangibles comprising man's agency stand the test of seemingly contrary evidence advanced by the tangible force of the Five-Power intervention and the concrete reassertion of dictatorial controls?

THE ESSENCE OF "HUMANE SOCIALISM"

One initial, powerful truth may be drawn from the very beginnings of the Czechoslovak reform course; for as soon as the most excessive physical and institutional pressures associated with the two previous decades of Stalinist tyranny were relaxed, a spontaneous outpouring of popular insistence upon emancipatory reforms engulfed the once-deceptively passive CSSR. As a result, almost immediately following the electrifying ouster of Antonin Novotny's dogmatic circle in January, 1968, a restaffed Party Central Committee under Alexander Dubcek felt itself constrained to enunciate the essence of the "New Model of Socialist Democracy" (the post-Novotny leadership's label for its programmatic central goal of fashioning a revived "socialism with a human face"). The new hierarchy, sensing that the accumulated

tensions of Communist rule were threatening to burst the Party's carefully engineered political dam, began to open carefully selected sluice gates — at least partially — to the *instinctive* popular striving for free expression and activity.¹ The resulting Action Program² adopted by the Central Committee in April, 1968, contained many far-reaching (and—tragically—to Moscow, startling departures from old-line Communist guidelines.

Perhaps the Program's most important provisions were those which looked forward to the reintroduction of basic civil rights into the CSSR. Take, for example, that passage which specifically recommended that "constitutional freedoms of assembly and organization . . . be guaranteed without bureaucratic limitations and without granting monopolistic rights to *any* organization"—i.e., not even to the vanguard Communist Party! The section went on to stipulate expressly that such freedoms would also be available to previously harassed religious groups. True to the recommendation, freedom of speech and press guarantees were soon enacted into identifiable law. State censorship was formally abandoned in June, 1968, giving tangible legal backing to what had been established practice since early spring. Laws restricting freedom of assembly, although not formally rescinded, were no longer enforced. The results of this new relaxed attitude were striking.

To one traveling into Prague during the exciting July days of 1968, it was immediately apparent that the capital had become one vast "Hyde Park Corner." Knots of people were gathered every few yards in storefronts and on street corners, intensely engaged in unhindered discussion, not only in Czech, but in a Babel of tongues—German, Russian, Bulgarian, Polish, English, and French. Even foreign visitors—from the Communist East as well as from the West—seemed unable to resist the temptation to jump into the verbal torrent. The reality of this ferment was brought home to me with direct personal force the night of the Bratislava Conference of July 31—just three weeks before the "fraternal" military intervention of August—when I was asked by a delegation of Charles University students and young industrial workers to be the American speaker on an open forum before a massive crowd in Prague's Old Town Square. Standing on a parapet of the monument of Jan Hus's defiance of papal authority in the sixteenth century (the symbolic significance of this setting in the circumstances of Czech-Soviet confrontation was lost on no one) and following my earnest Russian counterpart, I was allowed to speak openly in a Communist state of things precious to men everywhere, regardless of social system or ideological schooling. Twenty years of enforced physical and intellectual separation were powerless to

¹I use the adjectives "spontaneous," "innate" and "instinctive" advisedly, for despite a lack of functioning organizational frameworks (Party rule had succeeded in temporarily atomizing all "intermediate associations" in Czech society), individuals and informal groups found means of venting their inherently democratic sentiments most emphatically. There is an important lesson in this inchoate, leaderless Czechoslovakian reformist urge: its very "spontaneity" would seem to confirm Gospel tenets concerning man's inborn strivings for unfettered thought and action, his "innate" sense of *independent* responsibility.

²The text was carried in the official Party newspaper, *Rudé právo*, April 10, 1968. All official quotes, unless otherwise noted, are extracted from this source. Italics throughout by the author. Translations courtesy of the Eastern Affairs Section of the U.S. Mission, Berlin.

prevent a forthright rapprochement of Eastern and Western hearts that night. Notwithstanding differing backgrounds, we found ourselves able to speak candidly to each other of the unfinished business of both societies: America's confused, inglorious hour in Southeast Asia and cancerous racial conflict; Czechoslovakia's attempted emergence from the corrupt, brutal long night of Stalinist subservience, her acquiescence in a systematic inhumanity of almost unparalleled thoroughness.

And yet, there was an unexpectedly positive accent to our give-and-take: twenty years of continuous *agitprop* had not been able to staunch the flow of admiration for certain aspects of American life, whatever its current shortcomings (and the young Czechs were not shy in pointing out the flaws); for somehow, the crowd perceived that the United States remained a land where people could be basically free. A generation that had been born and watchfully reared in the hermetically-sealed atmosphere of Communist orthodoxy and carefully schooled in anti-Western cant, revealed its yearning to extend this blessing to its own socialist homeland. A further lesson learned: If participants were talking that evening from the dissimilar background of antithetical socio-economic systems, they were still united in an inherent desire for the same integrating concept of human dignity and emancipation.

Thinking back to my visits here earlier in the 1960's, I was struck by the contrast with these July days. Conversations then with Praguers had been pleasant enough in their guarded triviality: "Pretty day today," "Where are you from in America?" But people had been reluctant or unwilling to be drawn into discussions of sensitive political and social issues. Now it was clear that they were irrepressibly anxious to speak out, that old taboos were fair game for public commentary. But for all the criticism of past and present wrongs, it was readily apparent that the theme most emphasized was a positive one: protective support for Dubcek's innovative reform program.

I recall joining one spontaneous discussion group in a small park just off the main thoroughfare of Na Prikope just as a young television producer for Radio Prague was telling of his creative emancipation since the lifting of most state censorship in the early spring. Someone in the crowd asked if he was hindered by any lingering official restrictions. He replied that he and his colleagues now proceeded with almost total editorial freedom. The group pressed him: "Isn't this risky in view of the newness of the reform? What of the tentative nature of this step by the regime and the obvious hostility to such legalized openness now being exhibited by old-line party and police elements in the CSSR? What of the heavy counterpressures from Moscow, Pankow, and Warsaw for the reinvocation of strict party censorship. Have things really changed that much? Will they *stay* changed?"

I remember his face tightening and his voice intensifying: "Things *have* changed that much. But even if they haven't, there is no going back for me or for most of my colleagues. For twenty years now we have been dammed up and dehumanized. Today, we can be legitimate professionals—and, most important, we can be honest men again. No, there is no going back for us." A bearded student from the University's philosophical faculty enthusiastically

agreed: "Our lecture halls are honest now, too. We students cannot allow a return to the suffocation of the Novotny days." "That's right! None of us can!" shouted a prematurely old laborer in a battered hat and muddy boots. I moved on to other discussion groups, impressed by the "classless" nature and variety of support for the fledgling Dubcek regime.

As the *Lednove jaro*, the January spring, blossomed out, a growing, hardy strain of *organizational* pluralism began to manifest itself also, shunting aside the previously stifling monolithism of Czechoslovakian society. Groups and clubs—some heavily political in character—were allowed to organize without harassment or significant hindrance. The most important reformist impacts were achieved by the KAN, or Club of Involved Nonparty People; the League for Human Rights, the Circle of Independent Writers; and the Club 231, comprised of victims of Stalinist-Novotny era political persecution sentenced "to sit" under the harsh, open-ended Article 231 of the "Act for the Protection of the Republic." The very names bear witness to the heady stirrings of the period.

Even the members of the trade union movement, until then a most obedient "transmission belt" of the Party's wishes, showed signs of independence by removing summarily many of their Communist-appointed managers and insisting upon their own popular choices. By the summer of 1968, scattered industrial strikes were beginning to make an appearance in the CSSR. Surprised by such phenomena in a Communist system, I went to workers and labor officials with pointed questions concerning the risks and motivations behind their actions.

With evident satisfaction the workers drew my attention back to the official recommendations of the Action Program. There, embedded in the proletarian prose were significant sections stressing the need for decentralization and democratization of the Czechoslovak economy. Although economic reforms in the CSSR had been under way since 1965–66, I was impressed by the singular wording and far-reaching substance of several passages in the document: the "right of various social groups to formulate and defend their specific economic interests," "the right of the consumer to determine his consumption," "free choice of work," and the "independence" of productive enterprises in policy questions pertaining to their own management.

Significantly, the Action Program also advocated major reductions in the authority and activities of the Ministry of the Interior, home of the once-rampant state and secret police. Laws were promised for the purpose of "eliminating provisions which put individual citizens at a disadvantage in relation to the state and other institutions." Both Party and non-Party victims of the "socialist legality" so characteristic of the past twenty years of misrule were assured of complete "rehabilitation" and "indemnification" under the terms of a hard-hitting June law providing for their return to political and public responsibility.

The new Program also urged the passage of laws guaranteeing a form of judicial autonomy, complete with provisions ensuring the full independence of attorneys and defense counsels from the state and the reduction in

powers of state prosecutors. Included was a liberal recommendation that court cases, and even administrative decisions of state agencies, become subject to genuine judicial review. And in the realm of legislative activity, encouragement was lent a National Assembly which had already begun to rid itself of its former rubber-stamp nature by evolving into a forum for sharply clashing open debate and split (!) votes. In sections reflecting the regime's confidence in its growing popular support, the Program guaranteed all Czechoslovakian citizens the privilege of unchallenged movement both within and outside the borders of the state, including the right to remain for lengthy periods, even permanently.

For all the generous, democratizing vision of progressive post-Novotny leaders in the CSSR, it is necessary to emphasize their intention never to allow their Party's leading role to become dependent upon risky popular suffrage. Thus, Czechoslovakia could never qualify as a true democracy, socialist or otherwise, as long as this artificial arrangement of one-party monopoly and self-ordained mandate continued. However, the new leadership did seem genuinely anxious to lend at least an air of democratic liberalism to the Party and to make its claim to persisting ascendancy more acceptable to non-Communists by changing the style of government and redefining certain of its operational premises.

A series of new Central Committee resolutions made public in June and August³ denied that the Party's vanguard role was a "monopolistic concentration of power in the hands of the party organs"; nor was it a "universal 'administrator' of society" with binding directives for "all organizations and



ABANDONED FARM NEAR HEBER

every step in life. . . ." Instead, the resolutions insisted: "We must see that . . . the party possesses, even on the level of primary organizations, an informal, natural authority based on the communist functionaries' abilities to work and lead, and on their moral qualities." Thus, the Party would (*must*) continue to lead society, yes—but based upon the earned "moral and

³For example, the resolutions and draft statutes of the Communist Party published in *Rudé právo* on June 2, 1968, and August 10, 1968.

political right" to do so. To be sure, there is some sophistry in these lines; still, we would have a difficult time disagreeing with Robert Conquest's point that the overall Prague reform program was a step toward "reintegrating communism into the civilized community."⁴

This, then, is what the cold drifts of Soviet military *diktat* in Prague, Brno, Pilsen, Kosice, and Bratislava have sought to bury; this is what lies squeezed and torn in the "proletarian-internationalist" ice jam presently cluttering the Moldau. The plants which grew between January and August, 1968, threatened to change the appearance of the hitherto accepted Communist field so thoroughly that Brezhnev and his comrades felt they must winter-kill the new growth through invasion. But how successful have they been?

THE POST-INVASION RESIDUE

In those heartrending first months following "the August events," it seemed that Czechoslovaks might actually have *gained* something. For all the physical helplessness and attendant harsh realities of renewed foreign occupation, they appeared to arrive at a solid formula capable at once of confounding the alien oppressor and stiffening the domestic spine: unshakable national unity. This goal, so elusive since the artificial wedding of diverse peoples under Thomas Masaryk's first Czecho-Slovak Republic in 1918, found stunning achievement under the pressure of common revulsion and fear as the meaning of "fraternal assistance" crystallized in the collective social mind. It was an inspiring, bittersweet phenomenon: a rapid, almost visceral unity binding Communists, non-Communists and anti-Communists alike; one which closed the gap between the generations, drew countryside and city together, fused the energies of intellectuals, workers, bureaucrats, and students; a unity which even bridged the broad gulf of resentment between minority Slovaks and majority Czechs.

I shall not soon forget this agitated, yet somehow dignified period. Blurred memory seems unlikely after listening to a recently "rehabilitated" Catholic priest lead his overflow congregation's prayers in behalf of then-Party First Secretary Alexander Dubcek during the first series of Soviet-Czech "normalization" confrontations following the invasion; or after watching Prague teen-agers evoke emphatically approving, if often tearful, responses from citizens twenty, thirty, and forty years their senior as they read their impassioned poetry of freedom and nationalism at the site where a fourteen-year-old boy had been cut down by Soviet bullets during the invasion. It will hardly be possible to forget those delegations of students and journalists streaming to hearty receptions in the factories, or those groups of workers gathered in the University lecture halls, their classless dialogue and crisis-spawned fraternity.

Throughout the fall and winter months of 1968-69 the common leveler of suffering joined with an anticipatory hope for a partially salvageable Ac-

⁴As quoted in Edward Taborsky, "The New Era in Czechoslovakia," *East Europe* 17, no. 11 (November 1968): 23.

tion Program in keeping this solidarity simmering. As late as October 28 (the bitterly ironical fiftieth anniversary of Czechoslovak "independence") and November 7 (the tarnished fifty-first anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution) there were massive, mixed demonstrations in support of fading spring reforms and their initiators within the Central Committee. As late as December, the vast majority of trade union members and students could threaten a crippling strike in support of then-National Assembly President Josef Smrkovsky whose liberal political career was in clear jeopardy. And solemnly, as late as January 21, half a million Czechs and Slovaks from all walks of life could be moved to line the streets of Prague in a grief-stricken renewal of this unity as the funeral cortege of a new national symbol, "Torch No. 1"—Jan Palach—threaded its way to Olsany cemetery. Most recently a dozen Czech cities seethed with several days of mass marches and pitched street battles on the occasion of the invasion anniversary in August.⁵

But such intense collective resistance, rare, dangerous, and exhausting even in the short terms where odds run so heavily against the recalcitrant, is impossible to sustain day in and day out over the long haul. Not many men rise to genuine heroism at any time in their lives; the marvel of Czechoslovakia's almost instant unity of post-August 21 is that so many heroes surfaced in such a concentrated pattern: cobblestone throwers against heavy armor, human-body barricades in front of rolling tanks, clandestine radio operators broadcasting defiant instructions, waves of marchers behind the blood-soaked Czechoslovak tricolor and the stunning spectacle of nearly 14 million passively resistant Schweikian support troops. But, again, there are few who can remain overt heroes all of their lives.

Last summer in Prague I chanced upon that same young television producer who a long year-and-a-half ago had proclaimed so fervently his unwillingness to work under conditions of renewed media control. How was he getting along? What was he doing now? With downcast eyes, he replied, "I am still with Radio Prague. It is bitter, but I've got to feed the family, you know."

And so it is. The overt heroics of August, October and January—and most recently the invasion anniversary uproar—have not been able to blot out the gloomy reality of the hovering Soviet military and political presence. "Reality"—that new key word among the bulk of a populace grown weary—is the immediate necessity of surviving from day to day in at least relative comfort and physical safety; it is clothing one's children, retaining a tolerable job, "getting along" somehow. Thus, as the weeks, then months, of confrontation wear on, we might expect those practical souls—or those less emotionally involved with August, 1968—to become increasingly susceptible to a growing spirit of resignation which could only spell capitulation.

But is this expectation warranted? Is "socialism with a human face" dead, or has it only entered into a period of dark temporary eclipse?

⁵It should be borne in mind that each of these events occurred against the backdrop of massive Soviet forces stationed on Czechoslovakian soil and hundreds of thousands of additional Warsaw Pact troops poised across the several borders of the CSSR.

Somehow, the mounting political drifts and hardening ideological ice of the past year have failed to conceal entirely the fruits of Prague's spring-like season of the soul. Heat continues to generate even now underneath the wintry mantel—to be sure, less dramatically than with last year's terrifying, purgative intensity of self-immolation; less frequently now with the smoldering solemn processions composed of all classes and ages past Jan Hus and Wenceslas in their respective city squares; only rarely now flaming out with energy provided by the burning hammer and sickle flags of 1968. Nevertheless, a steady, low heat persists: one constantly fueled by the bitterness and subtle subversion of millions of passive resisters.

Full communications censorship has been renewed, the border once more sealed against travel to the West, incentive-breeding democratization of the economy reversed; licenses of independent-minded journals and organizations have been revoked, liberal reform leaders purged, and subterranean police activities reinstated. And still the Czechs talk—in restaurants, on trams, at the office, and in the factory—openly, bitterly, mockingly of their foreign masters and domestic fellow travelers. An unassailable core of personal and collective independence flourishes in spite of the occupier's tanks, guns and strident ideological proscriptions. The Czech man-in-the-street continues to be the "unsatisfactory subject" he was under Hapsburg colonialism and Nazi tyranny.

Entering a number of Prague homes during my last visit to Czechoslovakia this past midsummer, I was impressed by the ubiquitous pictures of the now-deposed symbols of democratic socialism, Dubcek and Smrkovsky, and of the non-Communist Masaryks. Nowhere did I see portraits of Gustav Husak or Lubomir Strougal, the current Soviet-approved leadership. In several homes we were asked to join our hosts in moving prayer and spiritual discussion. My experiences during those private moments culminated in a startling new awareness: In reality, it is the Czechs who are the liberated, their masters who are the actual captives. For in the preservation of an internal "secret place" in his heart and mind, each Czech is able to remain the master of his soul and the superior of his oppressor. It is the Soviet soldier with all of his technological military advantages who is confined by cautious commanding officers to his isolated barracks for fear of provoking incidents in the hostile towns he wishes to visit on leave. It is the Soviet soldier who is taunted, scorned, defied, avoided, and ignored when he does come into town. I have seen the self-searching doubt well up in young Soviet eyes as they are exposed to this moral vilification by the physically helpless. In this subtle, yet powerful psychological sense, the Russians are at the mercy of Czechs and Slovaks!

Reflecting back, I can't forget the shouts of youthful marchers in a forbidden protest parade to the Prague residence of Soviet Ambassador Stepan Chervonenko last fall—shouts directed at Russian troops positioned in alleys and sidestreets nearby: "You've got the tanks, but we've got the Truth." Somehow, even my professional awareness of the might of Great-Power *Realpolitik* cannot drive those angry, yet assured, cries from my ears. Could it be that the Hussite scripture is right? "The Truth Shall Prevail"—eventually?