

## **Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe in the Era of Normalisation**

STIBBE, Matthew <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7269-8183>> and  
MCDERMOTT, Kevin <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8160-3441>>

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### Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe in the Era of Normalisation

*Matthew Stibbe and Kevin McDermott*

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In his underground satirical novel *The Trial Begins*, illegally brought out to the West in the late 1950s and set in 1952-53, the dissident Soviet intellectual Andrei Sinyavsky (pseudonym Abram Tertz) allowed his unnamed first-person narrator to recount the ordeal of Vladimir Globov, chief public prosecutor under a by now seriously ailing Stalin. Globov has many problems. He is due to conduct the trial of a Jewish doctor, Rabinovich, who is accused of performing unauthorised abortions, but it turns out that one of Rabinovich's patients was Globov's second wife, who no longer wants to have children with him because she has lost her faith in the future of socialism. Meanwhile, his son from his first marriage, the history student Seryozha, is spouting forbidden views about a supposed 'purer' form of communism, views that will eventually lead to his arrest as a supposed agent of the counter-revolution. The point of the story is that there is no way out for Globov that can be convincingly captured within the literary culture of socialist realism, no decisions he can make and no journey of discovery that he could go on that would reveal the rational, humane core of the Soviet system. Instead, in order to escape his dilemmas he takes refuge in the utopian aspects of communism and in the (to him reassuring, but to the reader utterly grotesque) belief that the end would justify all means. He tells his son:

Study your history but don't forget the present day. Think of what we're building! Think of what we have achieved already! – well, there you are – in the final reckoning if you see what I mean – ultimately – our ancestors were right. What they did was just.<sup>1</sup>

At his trial, alongside Yuli Daniel, for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda, held in Moscow in February 1966 after his true identity as Abram Tertz had been uncovered by the KGB, Sinyavsky insisted that *The Trial Begins* was a 'literary work, not a political document'. As he told the court, he had used the device of an imaginary first-person narrator to conjure up 'the mixture of fear and

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exaltation' in the USSR during the short period between the Doctors' Plot and Stalin's death, not to 'depict historical reality' as it actually was.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, he was found guilty and sentenced to seven years in a prison camp. In 1973 he was granted permission to emigrate to France.<sup>3</sup>

Sinyavsky's case is interesting because it tells us something about the difference between the pre- and post-1968 eras in the Soviet bloc. Before 1968 it was still possible to claim that communism was an ideal worth fighting for, even though its living present had somehow been perverted by Stalinism. This, after all, was the view of Globov's son, Seryozha. In the epilogue to *The Trial Begins*, Seryozha is depicted in 1956 alongside Rabinovich and the unnamed narrator. They are digging a ditch in a camp in Kolyma in Russia's Far East, at a time when Khrushchev's amnesties 'had virtually emptied the [Gulag] of its inmates' and 'only some ten thousand of us, dangerous criminals, were [still] left'.<sup>4</sup> Seryozha's idealistic, libertarian socialist views indeed make him exceptionally dangerous to the Soviet state, but on the other hand he is still alive, still living in the present and still shaping his own reality around his historical and literary 'finds'. A decade or so later, something of this utopian-artistic spirit was captured in the Czech writer Ludvík Vaculík's 'Two Thousand Words Manifesto', published at the height of the Prague Spring. Vaculík still endorsed socialism as a worthy 'program' for the Czechoslovak nation but noted that its headlong pursuit by force rather than democratic consent had placed power 'into the hands of the wrong people'.<sup>5</sup>

After 1968-69, however, there could no longer be any belief in a 'purer' communism. The 'utopian urge', and with it the 'importance of culture' to politics, died with the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968 and the removal of Alexander Dubček from office in April 1969.<sup>6</sup> 'Normalisation' in Czechoslovakia was intended to trump literary imagination not with feelings of terror or exaltation in face of 'The Master' (Stalin), but with more 'static, sterile and stable forms' of repression, as Václav Havel put it in his famous *samizdat* essay, 'The Power of the Powerless', written in October 1978.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the 'far-reaching political change' that the fictitious Seryozha yearned for was not just postponed for another decade or another generation, but cancelled forever – or rendered 'utterly unforeseeable', to use Havel's words.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile the present was something to forget, whether through laughter and absurdist comedy, through regular escape into the virtual capitalist world portrayed by Western film and television, or through 'opportunistic' withdrawal into the private realm of personal relationships and niche intellectual friendships.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the past, the present was not

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something that could be commemorated or condemned as if it were still a real living thing. Quite simply, it was dead, or if not dead, then, to borrow the words of Timothy Garton Ash, buried deep 'under ice', restricted to almost wholly invisible activity 'on the underside', and capable of being brought to the surface only 'if... a real thaw comes'.<sup>10</sup> Above all, to cite a metaphor unpicked by Miroslav Vaněk in his contribution to this volume, the normalisation period was characterised both at the time and afterwards by the colour 'grey', in order to contrast it negatively with the 'golden' 1960s and the 'colourful' 1990s.

This, at least, was how many dissident East European intellectuals saw things from their position in the 'shadow world' that existed outside of and in conflict with the official structures.<sup>11</sup> It is also how many young leftists in the West, successors to the '1968 generation', viewed the normalised communist regimes of the 1970s and 1980s. The German writers Heinz Bude, Bettina Munk and Karin Wieland, for instance, who were active in the house squatting movement in the Kreuzberg district of West Berlin from 1980 onwards, remembered of that time:

We were okay with the Wall. It calmed the traffic, formed alcoves, and anything that lay in its shadow that could not be used was left abandoned as empty land. As true Berliners we no longer bothered to climb up on the wooden viewing platforms. We blotted the other side out. Beyond East Berlin with its long, silent, yellow-lit streets beckoned the gigantic vastness of the East. [And] when the cold wind that blew over from there was particularly chilly, we felt as though Siberia was near.<sup>12</sup>

In the early part of the Cold War, rising German/European politicians like Willy Brandt had still refused to accept the 'normality' of Soviet domination behind the Iron Curtain, asserting instead that historically and culturally, 'Berlin lies on the [River] Spree and not in Siberia'.<sup>13</sup> However, this was worlds apart from the view presented by West Berlin-based author and '1968er' Peter Schneider in his 1982 novel *The Wall Jumper (Der Mauerspringer)*. In Schneider's critical take on the political imaginary of the West, the 'East' had become a mere figure of speech, a by-word for a 'detested social order', rather than a real place with a pulsating heart: 'Life there didn't differ simply in outward organization; it obeyed another law'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it was in the twenty years following the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia that the peripheralising view of the communist East as 'The Other Europe' or the 'last colonial empire still in existence', as the Prague-born French political scientist Jacques

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Rupnik argued in a 1988 book of the same title, really began to take hold.<sup>15</sup> To reinforce this point, Rupnik quoted from a much-read piece in the *New York Review of Books* written by the exiled Czech author Milan Kundera in 1984. 'Europe', bemoaned Kundera from the relative comfort of his new post-1975 home in France, 'has not noticed the disappearance of its [Central European] cultural home because it no longer perceives its unity as a cultural unity'.<sup>16</sup>

Yet it may also be worth developing new, less starkly binary perspectives on the post-1969 Soviet bloc and asking what was happening above the ice, the place where, according to Vaněk, 'the remaining 98 per cent of the population' who were not intellectuals or dissidents lived. In the cold and often unstimulating, but nonetheless eminently habitable spaces created by Eastern Europe's post-totalitarian communist rulers, we argue, there was still a present, or rather multiple presents, in the 1970s and early 1980s. Siberia was in fact still thousands of miles away in a cultural as well as geographical sense. Thus, as Jan Mervart explains in his chapter in the volume, the many inconsistencies in the 'normalised' party's conception of Leninist ideas about form and content did create spaces for genuine artistic creativity and a limited but still palpable degree of pluralism. Particularly for younger artists who had experienced neither 1950s Stalinism nor 1960s post-Stalinism, Husák's 'real existing socialism' could seem more like an opportunity than a threat. And although ordinary Czechs and Slovaks did experience many aspects of everyday life in the normalisation period as absurd, alienating and lacking in colour, they were also able to find alternative meanings, multiple shades of grey, and more rational, if mundane, ways of interacting with the system, as other contributions to the collection demonstrate. Vítězslav Sommer, for example, shows how dissatisfaction with shortages, corruption and environmental pollution was communicated and mediated via various party and non-party institutions at local level through taking the example of the once buoyant industrial and shoe-manufacturing town of Gottwaldov (Zlín) in eastern Moravia. And Celia Donert adds to this by emphasising in her chapter that the conservative family and gender norms of the last twenty years of communist rule were not just imposed 'from above', but negotiated from below, leading to a continuous redrawing of the dividing line between the 'private' and 'public' lives of citizens.

It is the purpose of this volume to uncover these more nuanced meanings and to understand their significance for the practice, experience and memory of communist rule in Czechoslovakia itself

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and in the wider Soviet bloc. By what means, we ask, and with what degree of success was Czechoslovakia returned to a 'normal' communist state in line with Soviet orthodoxy in the period after 1969? What role was played by the party, ideology and the security state? How important were Slovak developments, family and gender issues, cultural production, and everyday life and popular opinion? How do the chapters on the Nymburk and Gottwaldov regions by James Krapfl and Sommer illuminate the multi-dimensional and complex processes of normalisation and 'auto-normalisation' beyond the major cities? And finally what is the significance of Czechoslovakia's political relations and cultural exchanges with the USSR, the GDR, Poland and Yugoslavia?

### *Cultural and Political Influences from the 1950s and 1960s and their Forgotten Legacy for the Husák Regime*

The essays contained in the volume offer a more diverse set of interpretations than conventional Western-centric and teleological narratives of the gradual re-emergence of civil society after decades spent 'under the ice'. They demonstrate that in the 1970s and early 1980s, alternative national, regional and global futures for Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe were still possible to imagine, futures that did not necessarily entail the paths taken after 1985, let alone after 1989.<sup>17</sup> If a model civil society, able to make a clear break with the communist establishment, did not even exist by the time that Eastern Europe arrived at the *annus mirabilis* of 1989, as Stephen Kotkin has claimed,<sup>18</sup> then it becomes even more important to avoid imposing normative, black and white assumptions when it comes to analysing social processes and experiences in the 1970s and early 1980s. Normalisation meant diverse things to diverse sets of people, whether they were resident within Czechoslovakia's borders or whether they lived across those borders. It shaped the lives of hundreds of thousands of party and state officials and millions of ordinary citizens and brought forth new forms of accommodation – not all of it springing from 'uncivil' motives – as well as dissent and opposition, not all of which was 'civil', pro-Western or liberalising in nature. It certainly closed down prospects and narrowed horizons for some, but it also opened up fresh possibilities, including for transnational exchange of ideas and experiences and reciprocal cultural contacts, for others.

Our approach is in part influenced by recent histories of Cold War Eastern Europe that have challenged the idea that the political independence and cultural identity of this region was simply

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'crushed' by the post-1944/45 Soviet drive for domination and total subjugation and only set free again in 1989.<sup>19</sup> As studies by Norman Naimark, John Connelly and Peter Kenez, among others, have shown, even in the late 1940s and early 1950s the Eastern bloc countries were allowed some space for the development of cultural (if not political) expressions of autonomy.<sup>20</sup> European leaders after the Second World War, including communist ones, were conscious of their own agency and of the salience of the question of sovereignty. Already in the 1960s they were 'globally engaged', developing contacts in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia in a world order that was being rapidly reshaped by decolonisation and new forms of anti-imperialism.<sup>21</sup> The line they took in domestic affairs also mattered. In their dealings with the Soviet Union, they were able to take advantage of particular historical traditions in, and the unique geopolitical/strategic position of, their respective nations.<sup>22</sup> This was more evident still following Stalin's death in 1953 and the gradual emergence of Khrushchev as his successor. 'Proletarian internationalism' was no longer narrowly defined as love for the Soviet Union as the supposed 'liberator' of all nations but could now embrace patriotic (and not just 'realist') forms of socialism in line with nationally-inflected, pre-1945 histories and traditions. In late 1950s Hungary, for example, the government of János Kádár, while denouncing the anti-Soviet insurgents of 1956 as 'fascists' and 'murderers', allowed the rehabilitation of the hitherto largely forgotten post-First World War 'Councils Republic' under the ultra-left Bolshevik leader Béla Kun. Within the space of a few short years, the 133-day 'red' reign of terror in Hungary from March to August 1919 went from being a taboo subject, not least for Stalinists who did not want to dwell on Kun's execution during the Soviet show trials of the 1930s, to a celebrated event that became firmly rooted in the nation's (and not just the Communist Party's) revolutionary past.<sup>23</sup>

By the 1960s, according to Maciej Górný, well-developed national historiographies (including of art and literature as well as state institutions) had come to replace slavish imitations of the Soviet model in other Eastern bloc countries too.<sup>24</sup> At the end of that decade, Czechoslovakia itself had two communist leaders in a row – Dubček and then Husák – who were not only from the Slovak half of the country, but were generally sympathetic towards its claims for greater cultural, and to some extent, national autonomy. Some of this survived into the 1970s and helped to boost support for the normalisation process as a means of maintaining socialist political control while meeting legitimate claims for economic and cultural equality between nations, as Adam Hudek shows in his contribution

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to this volume. In order to advance socialist ideas in the post-Stalinist era, it was deemed necessary to allow nationally-distinct 'historical narratives, rhetoric, style, [and] strategies of argumentation' to (re-)emerge, albeit while staying broadly within the framework of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>25</sup> This could be seen in particular in the production of new textbooks for use in schools and universities. Other cultural items, including modern film and literature, popular songs, consumer products, youth tourism and public understandings of 'hooliganism', crossed borders within the Eastern bloc and allied socialist countries such as Fidel Castro's Cuba and Ho Chi Minh's North Vietnam, and did so in a much more open and extensive manner in the 1960s when compared to the 1950s. In particular, the traffic was no longer just one way, from Moscow to its satellites; rather, multilateral forms of cultural exchange and transfer within and beyond the 'second world' were now firmly on the agenda.<sup>26</sup>

In the sphere of Warsaw Pact diplomacy too, as Laurien Crump proposes, the period after 1955, and especially after 1960, witnessed a 'paradigm shift' towards greater pluralism, with the six non-Soviet members of that alliance able to act increasingly as respected junior partners rather than mere puppets.<sup>27</sup> Each one was able to develop particular, and at times maverick, perspectives on issues such as the German question, the Sino-Soviet split, the Vietnam war, nuclear non-proliferation, the Arab-Israeli conflict and (in the case of Romania and to a lesser extent Hungary) even on the Prague Spring. The year 1968 was clearly something of an exception, at least as far as the five-nation march into Czechoslovakia is concerned. Certainly, there was to be no emancipation from Soviet-style communism for the peoples of Eastern Europe until the late 1980s; until then, they remained firmly within the Kremlin's orbit. Nonetheless, as Rachel Applebaum has shown specifically in the case of Czechoslovakia, the unequal relations of power between Moscow and other Eastern Bloc countries did not rule out the development of overlapping and durable understandings of socialist internationalism and the forging of genuine friendships at all levels of political, economic and cultural inter-change.<sup>28</sup> For instance, the liberalising effects of several years of relatively open travel arrangements for young people and migrant workers across the Czechoslovak-Polish border were arguably brought to a head in the early weeks of the Prague Spring, when students at the University of Warsaw – protesting against the increasingly authoritarian and anti-Semitic direction of their own government under the once reforming party leader Władysław Gomułka – reportedly chanted: 'Poland awaits her own Dubček!'.<sup>29</sup> When they were beaten up by the Polish security police and members of

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'workers' militias', this was seen in many parts of Europe and across the ideological frontiers of the Cold War as a deliberate attack on efforts to create a more humane version of socialism.

To take another example, student organisations in Yugoslavia publicly expressed their outrage that 'today, in a socialist country, it is possible to tolerate anti-Semitic attacks' and to use 'such undemocratic means' to solve 'internal conflicts'. Poland, they claimed, was now a country where 'Marxist thought is persecuted', a reference to the imprisonment of opposition left-wing intellectuals Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski in particular.<sup>30</sup> Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, had since the mid-1960s become a beacon of hope, a sign that a mutually-created, free and equal socialist world beyond the straightjacket of Soviet power politics and militarism might still be within reach – even for Soviet citizens themselves.<sup>31</sup> These transnational hopes did not simply disappear after 1968-69, although they did take on new forms. Meanwhile, at a more local level, the border regions between the ČSSR and Poland, and between the Czech lands and the GDR, were themselves sites of increased social contacts in the run up to 1968 which, at least indirectly, also threatened exclusively national or state-bureaucratic visions of communism and its future development.<sup>32</sup> And at the opposite end of a very long political spectrum, neo-Stalinist critics of the Prague Spring inside Czechoslovakia also sought out connections not only with like-minded figures and movements in their own country, but across the border with Poland and throughout the Soviet bloc.<sup>33</sup> In other words – and to quote Rachel Applebaum again – while national frameworks remained important from the mid-1960s onwards, particularly for oppositional writers and intellectuals and in some cases even for regime-loyal cultural functionaries, it is important to recognise that East European citizens during the communist era 'share[d] a "common world" – a world they built together'.<sup>34</sup> This applies regardless of where they stood politically on issues such as the Prague Spring, Czechoslovak federalisation, the Brezhnev doctrine or the meaning of 'socialist internationalism'.

Our aim in this volume is to apply these insights, drawn mainly from studies of the pre-1969 period, to the far less well understood 1970s and early 1980s. We wish to challenge, or at least nuance, commonplace assumptions about the normalisation period, in particular the Garton Ash metaphor about the political aims of 1968 having simply been 'frozen into immobility' or buried under 'a thick layer of ice' before the advent of *glasnost* and *perestroika* after 1985.<sup>35</sup> For the last three-and-

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a-half decades, this standard trope has dominated Western historiography to the exclusion of more sophisticated understandings. As recently as 2018, for instance, British historian Sir Ian Kershaw, with a direct nod to Garton Ash, wrote in his masterful account of Europe since 1950:

In Czechoslovakia, far more than was the case in the GDR or Bulgaria (not to mention Romania), the advent of Gorbachev opened up the gulf between the regime and wide sectors of the population (above all intellectuals) – a breach that had never healed, even if not openly apparent, since the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968... Political stability had been sustained by ritual conformity of the many, ruthless repression, and surveillance of the dissenting minority. But persecution had failed to silence the dissidents completely.<sup>36</sup>

And in her 2020 biography of Václav Havel's British playwright friend Tom Stoppard, literary critic Hermione Lee made the same point in even starker terms. All we need to know about the 'puppet' Husák regime in the 1970s and early 1980s, she wrote, is that it 'presided over a society coloured by fear, apathy and suspicion', leaving citizens with no other option but to 'tr[y] to get on with their lives by keeping their heads down'.<sup>37</sup>

The problem with this interpretation, we would argue, does not lie in what Kershaw, Lee (and others) say about the small number of outright dissidents, but in what they fail to say about the bulk of ordinary Czechs and Slovaks for whom 'ritual conformity' or 'keeping their heads down' could have multiple meanings, depending on shifting personal and political priorities and changing local, national and transnational contexts. Thomas Lindenberger's notion of 'Eigen-Sinn' (self-will), which he applies to understanding the often obstinately self-interested behaviour of East German citizens towards the centralised party-state in the GDR, can also be applied, we maintain, to Czechoslovak society after 1953 and again after 1969. Here too post-Stalinist dictatorial methods had their limits, and the communist regime typically had to secure its (slender/transient/fragile) legitimacy through complex forms of negotiation and persuasion rather than relying on straightforward societal obedience towards police and governmental authority.<sup>38</sup> Politics, in other words, was not frozen. Indeed, as an alternative to the 'under the ice' metaphor, we would point to some surprising affinities with American society in the 1830s and 1840s, an era when 'the people' were already the unignorable subjects of history but not yet its sovereign creators, its movers and shakers, and also an era in which talk of revolution, or

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sudden, violent political change, was rare. Of American citizens at that time, the French aristocrat and political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville wrote:

...whatever profession [they] may embrace and whatever species of property they may possess, one characteristic is common to them all. No one is fully contented with his present fortune; all are perpetually striving, in a thousand ways, to improve it. Consider any one of them at any period of his life, and he will be found engaged with some new project for increasing what he has... Violent political passions have but little hold on [them]... The ardour that they display in small matters calms their zeal for momentous undertakings.<sup>39</sup>

With the one obvious and short-lived exception of the Solidarity movement in Poland in 1980-81, this description might equally well apply to East European citizens in the 1970s and early 1980s. Before we pursue this line of argument any further, however, and before we integrate it into our broader interpretations of normalisation, it is first essential to appraise normalisation in its domestic Czechoslovak guise. This can only be done by looking at the traumatic events of the Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968.

### *The Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact Invasion, January-August 1968*

The Prague Spring was a bold experiment in the midst of the Cold War to elaborate a historic 'Third Way': a form of democratic socialism distinct from Western liberal capitalism on the one hand and the rigid norms of Soviet Marxism-Leninism on the other. It was a peaceful attempt by Czechoslovak reform communists to democratise, modernise and thus legitimise the existing system under the potent slogan 'socialism with a human face'.<sup>40</sup> For leading reformers, the innovations had definite limits – they represented precisely 'democratisation', not a conscious route to a fully-fledged 'democracy'. Their architects, after all, were communists, not liberals. This difficult and contradictory process began in earnest after the appointment of the forty-six-year-old Slovak Alexander Dubček as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa* – KSČ) on 5 January 1968 and was brutally curtailed eight months later by Soviet-led Warsaw Pact tanks. Dubček was not a radical reformer, but he soon became the personification of the Prague Spring, a 'heroic', almost mythologised figure. We do not have sufficient space here to discuss the origins of the Prague Spring in any detail, but suffice it to say that five inter-related factors in the crisis

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of Czechoslovak communism culminated in the events of 1968: economic stagnation beginning in 1962-63 and the piecemeal efforts to overcome it; long-standing tensions between Czechs and Slovaks; the over-centralisation of power; cultural ferment and disaffection among intellectuals and students; and a widespread moral belief in the rule of law over the rule of fear. These corrosive issues crystallised in the course of 1967, producing deep and bitter divisions in the party leadership and society.

What actually occurred in Czechoslovakia between January and August 1968 that aroused the wrath of Soviet and other East European leaders? First and foremost was the highly controversial and unprecedented decision in early March to abolish primary censorship of the mass media. Almost immediately state-run television, radio and newspapers began to discuss a host of hitherto taboo subjects, including radical proposals for a future multi-party system and Soviet involvement in the judicial crimes of the Stalinist era. By the summer, the Kremlin was accusing the Dubček leadership of permitting the publication of outright anti-Soviet articles and cartoons. Several other initiatives tore at the heart of Moscow's ingrained conceptions of the socialist order: the founding of non-communist, potentially anti-communist, political groupings; the demotion of loyal pro-Soviet party, state and security officials and their replacement by untested reformers; the likelihood of formal recognition of the rights of minority factions inside the KSČ, seriously undermining the Leninist ideological canon of 'democratic centralism'; the moves to circumscribe the vast powers of the secret services; the extensive political and civil rehabilitation of many thousands of victims of Stalinist illegalities; the mooted military reforms that could subvert the unity and coordination of the Warsaw Pact; the perceived shift to a more neutral foreign policy, epitomised by improved links with the (West) German Federal Republic; the erosion of political trust between the Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders, notably Dubček and Brezhnev;<sup>41</sup> and, not least, the activation of a spontaneous and unpredictable actor in the form of popular opinion and an embryonic civil society, which threatened to push the reforms way beyond the limits set by party and governmental authorities. The crucial dilemma for KSČ reformers was how to democratise public life and involve citizens in the management of the state *without* jeopardising the party's monopoly of power. It is fair to say that, unsurprisingly, no adequate solution to this conundrum was found during the short eight months of the Prague Spring.

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Ultimately, however, it was the Soviets' profound geopolitical fears that underlay their decision to intervene militarily on the night of 20-21 August 1968. For did not the logic of a democratised system and an open mass media in Czechoslovakia signify the emergence of 'anti-socialist counter-revolutionary forces' both inside and outside the Communist Party? If so, could Dubček or any successor be relied on to overcome the 'rightist elements' and maintain the party's leading role in the future? If not, surely Czechoslovakia would be 'lost' to socialism and the threat of 'spill-over' to other East European socialist states, including the USSR itself, would be palpable? If so, would not the cohesion and unity of the entire Soviet bloc be plunged into turmoil, the inviolable gains of the Second World War be forsaken and the historic struggle between 'socialism' and 'capitalism' end in victory for the latter? The stakes were thus extremely high.

'Operation Danube', the codename for the largest deployment of armed force in Europe since World War II, was militarily competent, but politically seriously misjudged. The Soviet plan was that the overwhelming show of strength would rapidly pacify the population, Dubček and other prominent reformers would be replaced by pro-Moscow 'healthy forces', led by Vasil Bil'ak and Alois Indra, who together with three other hard-liners had written the infamous 'Letter of Invitation' requesting Soviet 'fraternal assistance', and a so-called 'revolutionary government of workers and peasants' would be formed to bring Czechoslovakia back into the communist fold. In the event, the occupation was almost universally condemned by both the party and people and met with mass passive resistance. The KSČ Presidium voted seven to four against the machinations of the Bil'ak-Indra group, who were popularly regarded as traitors, whereupon the Kremlin had to improvise and transport Dubček and the entire Czechoslovak party leadership to the USSR to 'negotiate' what became known as the 'Moscow Protocol'. Under the terms of this enforced secret agreement signed on 26 August, key aspects of 'normalisation' were adumbrated: functionaries who acted against the leading role of the KSČ were to be removed; full party control over the media was to be restored and 'anti-socialist' clubs and organisations closed down; the fervently pro-reform Extraordinary 14th Party Congress, which had convened clandestinely in Prague on 22 August, was declared null and void; and Warsaw Pact troops were to remain on Czechoslovak territory until 'the threat to socialism' had been 'eliminated'.<sup>42</sup> The Soviets also made it clear that several radical reformers, soon to be dubbed 'counter-revolutionary rightists', had to be rapidly dismissed from their positions of power. However, a few concessions were

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secured. Most significantly, it was accepted that Dubček and other leading moderate reformers would, temporarily at least, remain in office to oversee the implementation of the Protocol and initiate the early phase of normalisation.

In the fluid months after the invasion, Dubček was in a deeply invidious position. He speculated that once Czechoslovak politics and society had been 'consolidated', largely in line with Soviet expectations, aspects of the Prague Spring reforms could be salvaged, and Moscow might be persuaded to recall the occupying Warsaw Pact forces. The strategy was not entirely misguided. As Krapfl and Sommer demonstrate in their contributions, from autumn 1968 to well into 1969, political, social and cultural life remained deeply contested with recalcitrant reformers, intellectuals, students and many industrial workers fighting a losing battle against the encroachments of the burgeoning pro-Soviet and 'realist' factions. However, by their prevarications, willingness to jettison like-minded comrades and acceptance of piecemeal measures reversing virtually all the post-January innovations, Dubček and other prominent reformers like Prime Minister Oldřich Černík played a crucial role in the post-invasion 'pacification' process. In sum, early normalisation was both highly contested and, in its later stages, an unedifying spectacle of reluctant retreat and compromise which served to disarm, disorient and dismay the vast bulk of Czechs and Slovaks and thereby blunt popular resistance to the occupation. 'Realism' – a growing recognition that Soviet demands had to be met if worse was not to befall the country – gradually prevailed over principled defiance.

To be sure, significant acts of opposition such as Jan Palach's tragic self-immolation in January 1969, widespread anti-Soviet protests after Czechoslovakia symbolically defeated the USSR twice in the world ice hockey championships in March, and violently suppressed demonstrations marking the first anniversary of the invasion in August continued to rock the political establishment. But the unintended outcome of this perceived 'chaos' was that many vacillating party reformers and centrists began to seek a new firm style of leadership, epitomised by the power-hungry Slovak party leader Gustáv Husák, to extricate the country from the on-going political and social malaise. In this toxic atmosphere, an anti-Dubček coalition in the KSČ elite had coalesced by early spring 1969, the *coup de grâce* occurring at the Central Committee plenum on 17 April. Here, the overwhelming majority of delegates abjectly voted to accept Dubček's resignation and replace him as First Secretary by Husák. The latter's great attribute was that he successfully portrayed himself as a 'pragmatist', a

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man of action, a forceful 'anti-Stalinist' who had been persecuted in the 1950s, had supported many of the reforms of 1968 and hence could bring cohesion to a bitterly divided party and society that yearned for stability after months of crisis fatigue. He had also become 'Moscow's choice': normalisation was about to begin in earnest.

### *Normalisation: Meanings and Interpretations*

It is no easy task to define the term 'normalisation', not least because it signified different things to different actors, altered its meaning over time and begs the perplexing question: what is a 'normal' communist system? That said, conventionally, normalisation (*normalizace* in Czech; *normalizácia* in Slovak) has been construed as the attempt by hard-line pro-Soviet Czechoslovak communists to reconstruct the *status quo ante*, a supremely retrograde undertaking designed to wipe the Dubčekite reforms of 1968 and the 'spirit of January' from the two nations' collective memory. As several of our contributors make clear, normalisers insisted on the reinforcement of the party's leading role in politics and society, the removal of prominent reformers and oppositionists and by 1970 the purging of the KSČ as a whole, which saw the exclusion of approximately 327,000 party members (21.7 per cent);<sup>43</sup> the re-imposition of censorship of the media, culture and academia; and a return to a tightly centralised planned economy. Another key component of normalisation, as Kieran Williams illustrates in his chapter, was strict recentralisation of the party's authority over a revamped state security service (StB), enabling it, albeit with 'superficial success', to monitor and harass dissident initiatives such as Charter 77 without reverting to the terroristic methods of the Stalinist period. In these measures, Husák's regime closely resembled a 'normal' Soviet-type system as defined by the Kremlin under Brezhnev. In short, the two decades of normalisation are all too often depicted as a 'timeless' unchanging era of politico-cultural stagnation and stultifying repression, resulting in ritualised conformity and public cynicism, apathy and opportunism.

But this essential truism does not mean that the communist authorities were totally incapable of generating more productive and strategic impulses or of satisfying, in part at least, demands for social and material advancement. It is our contention that the post-1969 Czechoslovak state was not simply coercive, destructive and immobile. For a start, as Michal Pullmann emphasises in his contribution, the Husákite normalisers portrayed themselves not as 'triumphant neo-Stalinists' hell-

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bent on a return to the pre-1968 dark days,<sup>44</sup> but as quasi-modernisers in search of a rational and stable 'socialist modernity' in which citizens could hope to realise a moderately prosperous, rounded 'quiet life' rooted in shared values and norms. Second, regardless of the constant public lies intoned by the normalised bureaucracy, Czechs and Slovaks were not prevented from forming living bonds in and with the existing communist system and shaping their own heterogeneous realities around these bonds. And third, politics at the topmost layers did not 'freeze' after 1968-69 either. Hudek's chapter, for instance, shows that the 'Slovak question' remained dynamic and involved continuous negotiation and renegotiation both within Slovakia itself and in the latter's relations with the Czech half of the federation. And at federal level, as Martin Štefek uncovers in his contribution, even the highest body in the ruling KSČ, the Presidium, was riven by factional in-fighting, a state of affairs that was also reflected in struggles that took place lower down the party hierarchy. Neither were the Czechoslovak state and judicial authorities as united and uniformly vindictive as is commonly perceived, an argument already put forward by Peter Bugge in his case study of the semi-independent Jazz Section of the Musicians' Union, published in 2008.<sup>45</sup> Even the *modus operandi* of the normalised state security service underwent a certain benign change, engaging in what a leading dissident called 'civilised violence': secret police officers could still ruin people's lives, but they now dressed in suits, called suspects in during working hours and shook their hand after a 'friendly' chat over a cup of coffee.<sup>46</sup>

It should also be recognised that the dominant negative trope of normalised Czechoslovakia privileges the viewpoint of the persecuted, a small fraction of society composed overwhelmingly of intellectual 'dissidents' and disgraced ex-reformers. But were there no beneficiaries of normalisation? Was there no measure of popular legitimacy? Aside from the cocooned members of the political, bureaucratic and security elites, Husák's regime endeavoured to meet the social and consumer aspirations of broad sections of the population, not least the industrial working classes, on whom state ideology notionally rested. 'Let's hope the workers don't get pissed off', Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal is rumoured to have said.<sup>47</sup> To be sure, this prosaic aim was never fully achieved; indeed, standards of living generally worsened from the late 1970s onwards as inflation, scarcities and economic bottlenecks increasingly took hold, engendering endemic public discontent and sullen resentment. But, as argued by several of our contributors – Donert, Pullmann and Vaněk among

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others – we should not overlook the impressive array of social welfare legislation and mass housing construction of the 1970s and 1980s, which undeniably improved the lot of many families, albeit largely inspired by gender-conservative impulses and political pragmatism. In the words of one otherwise unsympathetic observer, ‘the size of financial support given from public funds [to children, mothers and families] can be the envy of every country in the world’.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, artificially low prices for basic commodities (notably beer), public utilities and rents were widely appreciated, even taken for granted, and the condoning of semi-legal practices such as moonlighting, bartering and bribery eased the burden of everyday life. The much-vaunted tacit ‘social contract’ between state and society, whereby economic and social well-being was guaranteed by the former in return for the political acquiescence of the latter, and state violence was kept at ‘civilised’ and largely inconspicuous levels, may be overdrawn, but it doubtless partially accounts for the almost total lack of overt popular resistance after 1969. In terms of popular reception of the regime, we must be aware of geographical differences: on the whole, the process of normalisation was perceived more positively in Slovakia than in the Czech lands. This is well illustrated in Hudek’s contribution and confirmed by opinion polls conducted in the post-communist era which revealed that surprisingly high numbers of Slovaks looked back favourably on the years 1969-89, some even regarding them as the most successful era of the entire twentieth century.<sup>49</sup>

Another important insight is that a distinction should be drawn between normalisation as a ‘process’, which relates largely to domestic affairs in Czechoslovakia and, as Krapfl shows in his chapter, took place at least partly in the ‘semiotic realm’; and normalisation as a ‘period’, which also allows us to make comparisons with other East European countries and seek connections and transfers across borders.<sup>50</sup> If we adopt this approach, we are able to identify normalisation’s asymmetrical, contested and contingent nature. When viewed as a process, a striking conclusion is that normalisation was not simply designed and enforced ‘from above’ by party, state and security elites, but was often the product of negotiation and interaction ‘from below’ involving lower party and state organs, institutional authorities, social organisations and a range of scientific and technical experts. To take just two examples: first, as graphically demonstrated by Krapfl and Sommer in their case studies of Nymburk and Gottwaldov respectively, the early ‘consolidation’ phase in late 1968 and 1969, which aimed above all at removing reformists from regional party and state hierarchies, was

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implemented by a combination of central and local normalisers, the latter operating in party and government structures, major enterprises, trade union branches and the press. Second, even at the highest echelons of power, as Štefek shows in his contribution, the political and institutional model of the 1970s and 1980s was 'neither monolithic, nor completely sealed', and nor was it totally under the control of the Kremlin. Rather, 'policies were the outcome of highly intricate balancing acts' between a variety of interested parties at multiple levels, including the central KSČ apparatus, regional party structures, ministries, the State Planning Commission, the management of large factories and the trade unions.

Taking normalisation as a period, we can identify two main phases, the first between late 1968 and 1970-71, often referred to as 'consolidation', and the second encompassing the whole of the last two decades of communist rule. During the first phase, the meaning of the term 'normalisation' was wide open. The months after the Warsaw Pact invasion and well into 1969 were times of profound flux, when normalisation was up for grabs: was it to denote the preservation of moderate reform, or a return to neo-Stalinism, or something in between? For leading party reformers and the vast bulk of the population, it signified the restoration of 'order' as a precondition, not for the total elimination of the Prague Spring innovations and a purge of the KSČ, but for the rapid withdrawal of foreign troops and the continuation of the post-January 1968 reformist road, albeit shorn of its most controversial elements. For the normalisers, on the other hand, the prime goal was to 'pacify' the party, 'stabilise' society and gradually consign the Dubčekite reforms to the dustbin of history. Although this task was largely achieved by the end of 1970, it was not as if 'normalisation' was ever fully implemented, not least because even eminent normalisers could not agree on what it entailed exactly. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, challenges remained, new tactics and strategies needed to be forged, unforeseen consequences confronted. As such, normalisation must be seen as an on-going venture, subtly evolving over time, demanding the constant attention of the Czechoslovak (and Soviet) leaderships. It was never set in stone.

Finally, in the realm of intra-bloc relations the image of Czechoslovakia underwent a kind of sea-change between 1968 and the 1970s. During the Prague Spring and the immediate post-invasion period, Czechoslovakia was officially regarded as a maverick, a 'threat' to socialism, especially in Warsaw and East Berlin. But by the mid-1970s, Husák's regime was widely viewed as one of the

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most loyal of the USSR's acolytes. It boasted political stability, exhibited relatively buoyant levels of economic growth and enjoyed improved standards of living. In these conditions, economic, social, cultural and tourist exchanges and partnerships between the states of the Soviet bloc and Czechoslovakia were renewed and transnational ties were fashioned. It is to these manifold relations that we now turn.

### *Normalisation: Cross-Border Mentalities and Transnational Dimensions*

Although our prime focus in this volume is on Czechoslovakia, we are also mindful of the transnational ramifications of normalisation, particularly for the ČSSR's nearest neighbours, Poland and the GDR, as well as for the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Some of these ramifications can still be felt more than three decades since the fall of communism. Recently, for instance, the German politician Petra Köpping, a member of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the 1980s and of the Social Democrats (SPD) since 2002, has referred to what she describes as the 'loophole mentality' (*Schlupfloch-Mentalität*) prevalent in her home state of Saxony, which she traces back to late GDR times:

Our past has turned us into habitual circumventors of state edicts wherever possible. We will always try to get the maximum out of any given situation. If there is just one corner of a city centre where there are no signs mandating the wearing of [face] masks [for health reasons], people will pull down their masks immediately, no matter how crowded the street is.<sup>51</sup>

To take another example, in the mid-1970s a joke did the rounds across the East European bloc to the effect that the Soviet Union was now the 'only country [in the world] to be surrounded by hostile Communist nations'.<sup>52</sup> This was not a reference to intellectual opposition, however, and still less to the occasional flashes of national independence shown by 'liberal' party leaders such as Edward Gierek in Poland and Kádár in Hungary, and, at the other extreme, by Nicolae Ceaușescu, the uncompromising, ultra-authoritarian communist dictator in Romania. Rather, it was a nod towards the myriad ways in which ordinary East European citizens sought to thwart, evade and sidestep state authority without challenging it violently or head on.

In fact, normalisation brought forth a range of different reactions – both from a variety of social and political actors and from within, without and beyond Czechoslovakia's borders. When it comes to

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Soviet-Czechoslovak relations, as Applebaum shows in her chapter in the volume, it is even possible to identify a deliberate transnational policy at work in the mutual desire to normalise and thereby reaffirm cultural interactions and ties of friendship between the two countries in the aftermath of the 1968 invasion. This was seen positively, by both sides, as a 'soft power' alternative to having to maintain large numbers of occupation troops in the ČSSR on anything other than a 'temporary' basis. For instance, a clear message that military invasion by Warsaw Pact armies and subsequent commitment to normalisation did not necessarily imply a full-scale reversal of the cultural policies of the 1960s was already contained in the decision on 29 August 1968 to have the Dinamo factory in Moscow organise a festival celebrating the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising against fascist rule in 1944. The importance of international and inter-personal socialist partnership in making a better, more just, virtuous and peaceful Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War was emphasised, as indeed it had been since the early 1960s, as a legitimising tool. This stood in contrast to the period of 'high Stalinism' from 1948 to 1953, when positive mention of the Slovak uprising was all but impossible and its leaders were denounced as 'bourgeois nationalists', enemies of the Soviet Union and agents of Western intelligence services.<sup>53</sup>

Equally, as Matthew Stibbe and Ondřej Klípa demonstrate in their contributions, the ruling parties in the GDR and Poland, as well as non-party technocrats and ordinary citizens from those states, found various ways of drawing political, economic and (inter-)personal uses from the post-1970 movement of people, goods and technologies across their southern frontiers with the ČSSR. They too saw advantages in clinging on to certain cultural narratives of World War II which helped to reconcile patriotism with pro-Soviet socialist internationalism. Other 'benefits' of friendly relations with Czechoslovakia included the transfer of 'good practice' in military and civil defence preparations against the West, and the exchange of information about dissident groups and suspicious individuals. These contacts were not only a transnational means of further promoting and supporting the normalisation project pursued by the Husák government. Rather, with the active, albeit self-interested support of 'fraternal' governments in East Berlin and Warsaw, cross-border ties themselves became normalised, and indeed part of the standard everyday experience of ordinary Poles, East Germans and Czechoslovaks in the last two decades of communist rule. In the somewhat different case of Yugoslavia, a socialist state but not a member of the Warsaw Pact or Soviet bloc, and furthermore a

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country without a direct border with the ČSSR, Ondřej Vojtěchovský and Jan Pelikán argue that contacts between citizens were also important. They were used, unsuccessfully, to demonstrate the supposed advantages of normalisation over 1968-style reform for Czechoslovak workers, and, perhaps more effectively, to buy the latter off by offering them a semi-realistic and partially satisfying 'window to the West'.

None of this means that we should overlook or downplay the domestic dimensions of normalisation. At many levels, as the contributions in this volume show, this remains a Czechoslovak story with bleak as well as lighter sides to it, patches of darkness as well as varying shades of grey. Certainly, the former should never be ignored. Among the many everyday problems blighting the lives of ordinary Czechs and Slovaks were the 'stalled' economic development and growing 'national indebtedness' of the county, made worse by the 'lukewarm' response of the ruling party to Gorbachev's *perestroika* initiatives after 1985-86;<sup>54</sup> the disastrous environmental outcomes produced by a regime still following mid-twentieth century models of central state planning and failing to adapt to new post-industrial technologies; the all-pervasive corruption and sense of unfair rewards for those with political connections; and the existential fears produced by the sudden (and often now forgotten) escalation in East-West military tensions and renewed talk of possible nuclear war after 1978-79.<sup>55</sup> That said, our prime aim has been to portray normalisation in a balanced, non-categorical way which, crucially, gives back agency to 'ordinary' Czechs and Slovaks and fully recognises the dynamic, complex and contradictory essence of the period 1969-89. In so doing, we have endeavoured to grant a more prominent voice to the majority of Czechoslovaks who lived their lives in real time, rather than in the suspended or interrupted historical time imagined in many scholarly portrayals of Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A. Tertz (i.e. A. Sinyavsky), *The Trial Begins*, trans. by M. Hayward (London, 1960), p. 14. First published in the Paris-based, Polish-language journal *Kultura*, and in the UK by the literary magazine *Encounter*.

<sup>2</sup> D. White, *Cold Warriors: Writers Who Waged the Literary Cold War* (London, 2019), p. 475.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 478. We are also indebted to White's book for our synopsis of *The Trial Begins*.

<sup>4</sup> Tertz, *The Trial Begins*, p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> L. Vaculík, 'The Two Thousand Words Manifesto', 27 June 1968, reproduced in J. Navrátil et al. (eds), *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (Budapest, 1998), pp. 177-81 (here p. 177).

<sup>6</sup> T. S. Brown, *Sixties Europe* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> V. Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless' (1978), trans. by P. Wilson and reproduced in V. Havel, *Living in Truth: Twenty-Two Essays Published on the Occasion of the Award of the Erasmus Prize to Václav Havel*, edited by J. Vladislav (London, 1987) [1986], pp. 36-122 (here p. 110).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>9</sup> P. Bren, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> T. Garton Ash, 'Czechoslovakia under Ice' (February 1984), reproduced in T. Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe* (London, 1989), pp. 55-63 (here p. 63).

<sup>11</sup> J. Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), esp. pp. 72-114.

<sup>12</sup> H. Bude, B. Munk and K. Wieland, *Aufprall: Roman* (Munich, 2020), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> W. Brandt, 'Berlin liegt an der Spree und nicht in Sibirien', *Schleswig-Holsteinische Tagespost*, 26 September 1952. Cited in T. Dietrich, *Waffen gegen das Volk: Der 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR* (Munich, 1993), p. 535.

<sup>14</sup> P. Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, trans. by L. Hafrey and with an introduction by I. McEwan (London, 2005) [1982], pp. 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> J. Rupnik, *The Other Europe*, revised ed. (London, 1989) [1988], p. xi.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 7. See also M. Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', *The New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, pp. 33-8 (here p. 36).

<sup>17</sup> This is also the argument made by J. Mark, B. C. Jacob, T. Rupprecht and L. Spaskovska, *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, 2019).

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<sup>18</sup> S. Kotkin (with J. T. Gross), *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> A. Applebaum, *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (London, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> N. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); J. Connelly, 'Students, Workers and Social Change: The Limits of Czech Stalinism', *Slavic Review*, vol. 56, no. 2 (1997), pp. 307-35; idem., *The Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); P. Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944-1948* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Mark et al., *1989: A Global History*, pp. 27 and passim.

<sup>22</sup> See also Naimark's latest book, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), here esp. pp. 267-72.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *Sixties Europe*, p. 153. See also P. Apor, *Fabricating Authenticity in Soviet Hungary: The Aftermath of the First Hungarian Soviet Republic in the Age of State Socialism* (London, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> M. Górný, *The Nation Should Come First: Marxism and Historiography in East Central Europe* (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> See in particular the various contributions to A. E. Gorsuch and D. P. Koenker (eds), *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN, 2013). On the cross-border transmission of discourses on 'hooliganism' and how to manage it in social and policing terms, see also M. Kotalík, *Rowdytum im Staatssozialismus: Ein Feindbild aus der Sowjetunion* (Berlin, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> L. Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955-69* (London and New York, 2015), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> R. Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca, NY, 2019).

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<sup>29</sup> T. Kemp-Welch, “‘To Hell with Sovereignty!’: Poland and the Prague Spring”, in K. McDermott and M. Stibbe (eds), *Eastern Europe in 1968: Responses to the Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact Invasion* (London, 2018), pp. 125-45 (here p. 128).

<sup>30</sup> Brown, *Sixties Europe*, p. 110.

<sup>31</sup> See also R. Applebaum, ‘A Test of Friendship: Soviet-Czechoslovak Tourism and the Prague Spring’, in Gorsuch and Koenker (eds), *The Socialist Sixties*, pp. 213-32 (here esp. pp. 226-7).

<sup>32</sup> D. Janák and Z. Jirásek, ‘Tschechisch-polnische Wirtschaftsbeziehungen im Grenzgebiet in den Jahren 1945 bis 1989’, in H. Schultz (ed.), *Grenzen im Ostblock und ihre Überwindung* (Berlin, 2001), pp. 185-98 (here p. 196); M. Stibbe, ‘Ideological Offensive: The East German Leadership, the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of August 1968’, in McDermott and Stibbe (eds), *Eastern Europe in 1968*, pp. 97-123 (here pp. 106-8).

<sup>33</sup> K. McDermott and V. Sommer, ‘The “Anti-Prague Spring”: Neo-Stalinist and Ultra-Leftist Extremism in Czechoslovakia, 1968-70’, in McDermott and Stibbe (eds), *Eastern Europe in 1968*, pp. 45-69.

<sup>34</sup> Applebaum, *Empire of Friends*, p. 198.

<sup>35</sup> Garton Ash, ‘Czechoslovakia under Ice’, p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> I. Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster: Europe, 1950-2017* (London, 2018), p. 328.

<sup>37</sup> H. Lee, *Tom Stoppard: A Life* (London, 2020), p. 326.

<sup>38</sup> T. Lindenberger, ‘Die Diktatur der Grenzen: Zur Einleitung’, in T. Lindenberger (ed.), *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte in der DDR* (Cologne, 1999), pp. 13-44 (here esp. pp. 21-6). See also K. McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia, 1945-89: A Political and Social History* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 93-4.

<sup>39</sup> A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 Vols. (1835-40), abridged single-volume edition with an introduction by P. Renshaw (Ware, Herts., 1998), pp. 323-4.

<sup>40</sup> The classic English-language works on the Prague Spring are G. Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubček Era, 1968-1969* (Cambridge, 1973); H. G. Skilling, *Czechoslovakia’s Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1976); K. Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring* (Berkeley, CA, 1984); and K. Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics 1968-1970* (Cambridge, 1997). More recent studies include M. M. Stolarik (ed.), *The Prague Spring*

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*and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: Forty Years Later* (Mundelein, IL, 2010); G. Bischof et al. (eds), *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968* (Lanham, MD, 2010); and J. Pazderka (ed.), *The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968: The Russian Perspective* (Lanham, MD, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> On 'trust', see Williams, *The Prague Spring*, pp. 35-8 and 110-11.

<sup>42</sup> Both the 'Letter' and the 'Moscow Protocol' are reproduced in Navrátil et al. (eds), *The Prague Spring 1968*, pp. 324-5 and 477-80.

<sup>43</sup> J. Maňák, *Čistky v Komunistické straně Československa 1969-70* (Prague, 1997), p. 118; and Williams, *The Prague Spring*, p. 234.

<sup>44</sup> 'Triumphant neo-Stalinism' is the characterisation of the normalised regime put forward by some post-communist Czech historians. See J. Mervart, 'Rozdílnost pohledů na československou normalizaci', in K. Činátl, J. Mervart and J. Najbert (eds), *Podoby česko-slovenské normalizace: dějiny v diskuzi* (Prague, 2017), pp. 40-78 (here p. 43).

<sup>45</sup> P. Bugge, 'Normalization and the Limits of the Law: The Case of the Czech Jazz Section', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2008), pp. 282-318.

<sup>46</sup> M. Šimečka, *The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia, 1969-1976* (London, 1984), pp. 72-9; and L. Vaculík, *A Cup of Coffee with My Interrogator* (London, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> Cited in J. Pánek and O. Tůma et al., *A History of the Czech Lands* (Prague, 2009), p. 573.

<sup>48</sup> V. V. Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77: A Study of 'Normalisation' in Czechoslovakia 1968-1978* (Edinburgh, 1978), p. 244.

<sup>49</sup> J. Marušiak, 'The Normalisation Regime and its Impact on Slovak Domestic Policy after 1970', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 10 (2008), pp. 1805-25 (here pp. 1815 and 1822).

<sup>50</sup> We are indebted to Celia Donert for the idea of normalisation as a process and period.

<sup>51</sup> 'Vielleicht waren wir zu liberal', interview with the Saxon Health Minister Petra Köpping in *Die Zeit*, no. 54, 23 December 2020, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Y. Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington, KY, 2005), p. 299.

<sup>53</sup> Górný, *The Nation Should Come First*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>54</sup> Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster*, pp. 328-9.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 307-12. See also E. Conze, M. Klimke and J. Varon (eds), *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s* (Cambridge, 2017); and Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 124-5.