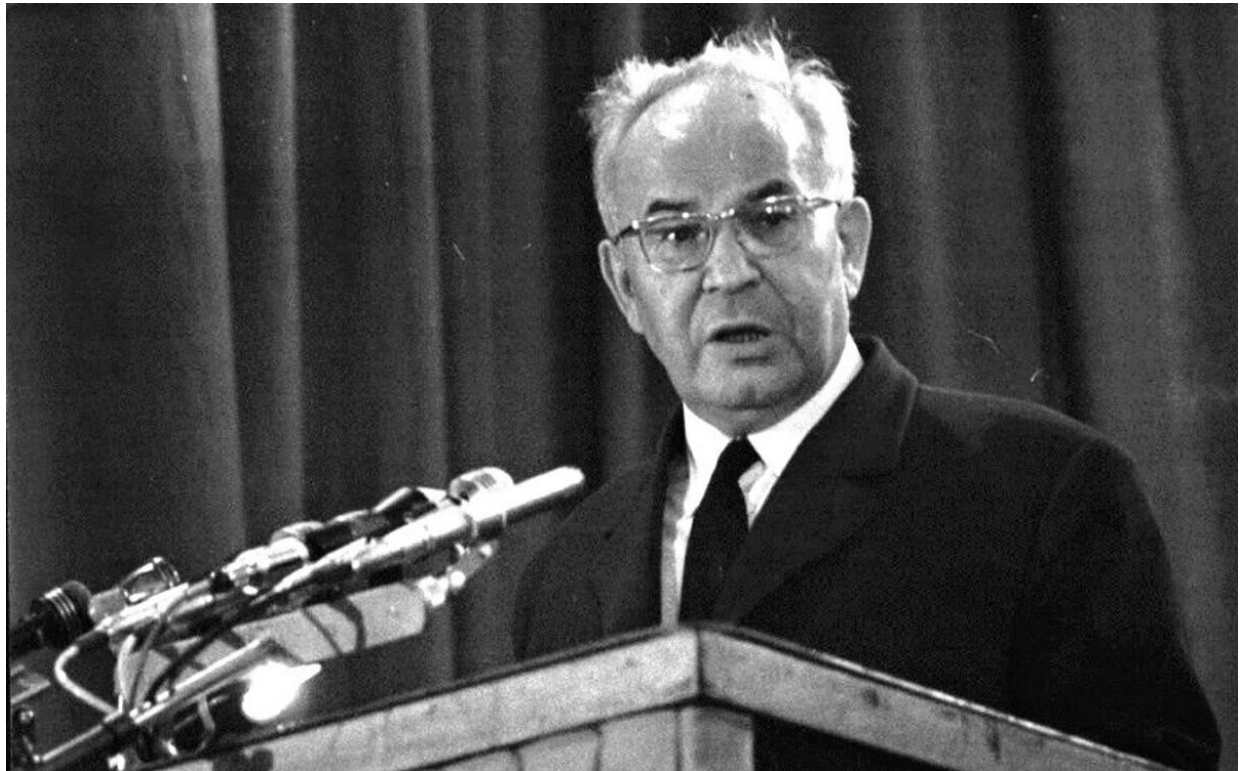


IV. NORMALISATION: WHEN TIME STARTED RUNNING BACKWARDS

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

Normalization refers to the period of Czechoslovak history after the Prague Spring. The reforms introduced by the progressive Alexander Dubcek were revoked. Dubcek himself was removed from power and replaced with the steady devotee to Moscow - Gustav Husak. His role was to bring Czechoslovakia back to 'normal', that is how the country was before the Prague Spring.

He would go on to lead Czechoslovakia for the next two decades. His time in power was marked by mediocrity, stagnation, and passive aggression.



The greatest trademark of the era was administrative terror, which evolved into a sophisticated form of social and psychological control.

It included the following control tactics:

- public shaming,
- blackmail,
- withholding of career opportunities,
- unexpected layoffs,
- career demotions,
- denial of access to education,
- housing and travel restrictions.

It did not take long for all traces of the humane communism Czechoslovakia experienced leading up to the 1968 invasion to be wiped.

All the reforms were nullified, while the borders were purposefully left open for several months following the invasion, to allow all those who disagreed with the new order to leave the country in silence. Around 200,000 Czechoslovaks departed, among them was film director Milos Forman and writer Milan Kundera. Most became political exiles in the United States, Canada, and Germany.

The large emigration wave purged Czechoslovakia of a considerable number of advanced-thinking individuals. The country would miss their skillsets and talents. Society was further screened for any saboteurs – namely intelligentsia that refused to be silent about the occupation and ensuing normalization of Gustav Husak. Heavy censorship, across all media, was once again instilled, and live TV transmission was banned to avoid inconvenient -Freudian slips that could damage the Party's official narrative.

Worse of all, the Prague Spring was ignored.

It was as if the liberation movement and the gains in freedom, including the freedom of press and travel never happened! The brutal violation of Czechoslovak national sovereignty by some 500,000 foreign soldiers was ignored by the government too. Silence befell the republic, and the people were left deeply confused by it.

The strategy the Party used to deal with the events of 1968, was sheer dis-acknowledgment. A nationwide 'denial' was imposed on the population, which inevitably made Czechoslovaks question their very own memories and judgment of reality.

Complacency and resignation set in. However, people still needed to cope with their suppressed emotions. Not allowed to express themselves, or their thoughts, many turned their suffering inward via alcoholism, or outwards via public acts of vandalism. Others fell into deep, dark, and silent depression.

To appease the potential revolt of the people, the government mobilized flashy offers of distraction:

- a microeconomic boom - the market was flooded with radios, color TVs, and refrigerators at accessible prices,
- collective company holidays in the Soviet Bloc and subsidized spa stays within Czechoslovakia,
- longer maternity leave,
- state loans for newlywed,
- generous child allowances.

This cash liquid policy could not and would not last long. The state simply ran out of money to pay for all the new bonuses.

Aside from the financial incentives to forget the past, Czechoslovaks were distracted from what was happening to them by the international competition for greatness. The space race, satellite launches into the cosmos, and the first Soviet man and woman in space were all thrilling achievements. They also helped to divert the people's attention away from the inconvenient truth that they were once again locked up in a tiny cage with their newly gained freedoms taken away.



THE RESULTS OF TWO DECADES OF NORMALIZATION

- *Stability 'where tomorrow was the same as yesterday' and people knew what to expect - wages, costs, and goods were regulated.*
- *Economic and social stagnation; innovation and critical thinking were punished and complacency, passivity, and the ability to follow orders were rewarded.*