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From “Occupation” to “Friendly Assistance”: The “Presence” of Soviet Troops in Czechoslovakia after August 1968¹

The Warsaw pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was without doubt a milestone in the history of Czechoslovakia. In the beginning, it mobilized and unified almost the whole nation against the enemy, whose status as enemy was quite apparent. But unified resistance to the occupation did not last long. It began to crumble as steps were taken to present a reinterpretation of the “occupation” as an act of “friendly assistance.” A shift in the image of the Soviet Army became a prerequisite of the normalization policy of the regime. This article identifies and explains the most important aspects of the changing image of the Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s and early 1970s and some of the consequences of these changes for Czechoslovak society. These changes occurred mainly at the level of official presentation. Nevertheless, the official politics of friendship had tangible consequences, reflected both in everyday life and the overall social and political climate.

Keywords: Soviet Troops, Czechoslovakia, occupation, normalization, friendship

Introduction

The Warsaw Pact military intervention in August 1968 and the subsequent presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia² unquestionably played an essential role in Czechoslovakia’s history. It is generally known that important changes

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2 Historians have estimated the number of Soviet soldiers who remained in Czechoslovakia after the signing of the agreement in October 1968, according to the initial agreements, at about 75,000. Antonín Benčík, Jan Paulík, and Jindřich Pecka, *Vojenské otázky československé reformy 1967–1970: Srpen 1968–květen 1971* (Brno: Doplněk, 1999), 79. The exact number was not reported by the Soviet side until the numbers for 1990–91 were made public, according to which there were 73,500 soldiers and 56,832 family members on Czechoslovak territory. Jindřich Pecka, *Odsun sovětských vojsk z Československa 1989–1991* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1996), 288. The number of garrison sites has been estimated at 33, to which one should add four airports, three military hospitals, nineteen depots, and five training grounds, though

took place in Czechoslovakia after August 1968. The regime came down hard on the population and limited civil rights and freedoms. These acts of interference ended the previous process of gradual relaxation, which had been accelerated mainly by the Prague Spring, which began in January 1968.³ In this process, called, in the jargon of the period, “consolidation” or “normalization,” the intervention played the key role. In this respect, various observers of and actors in the events of the past have pointed to, first and foremost, the reconfirmation of the limited autonomy of the Czechoslovak political elites in decision-making and their dependence on the Soviet leaders.⁴ In more general works about the normalization of Czechoslovak society, however, Soviet political and local military representatives are largely absent. Whereas the military and political aspects of the intervention⁵ and the numbers of victims⁶ are on the whole well charted, the impact in practice of the subsequent presence of the Soviet troops on Czechoslovak society and on its normalization has been neglected. This is surely also linked to the fact that we recall mostly the times during which most of Czechoslovak society, officially and unofficially, perceived the Soviet Army as an occupying force, that is, the period which began in the wake of the intervention and came to an end with the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in

these numbers could in the course of time also change somewhat. Jindřich Pecka et al., *Sovětská armáda v Československu 1968–1991: Chronologický přehled* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1996), 198–206; Benčík, Paulík, and Pecka, *Vojenské otázky československé reformy*, 51.

3 The Prague Spring and subsequent intervention of Warsaw Pact armies rank among the most significant topics of Czech history and historiography. See Věra Břeňová, *Pražské jaro '68: Bibliografie*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 2013. Of the vast amount of research on this period, I would mention at least some of the English-language works: H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Fred H. Eidlin, *The Logic of 'Normalization': The Soviet Intervention in Czechoslovakia of 21 August 1968 and the Czechoslovak Response* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Miklós Kun, *Prague Spring – Prague Fall: Blank Spots of 1968* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1996).

4 Jindřich Madry, *Sovětská okupace Československa, jeho normalizace v letech 1969–1970 a role ozbrojených sil* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994); Ondřej Felcman, *Invaze a okupace: K úloze SSSR a sovětských vojsk ve vývoji Československa v letech 1968–1991* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1995). Zdeněk Doskočil, *Duben 1969: Anatomie jednoho mocenského zvratu* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2006).

5 Benčík, Paulík, and Pecka, *Vojenské otázky československé reformy*; Antonín Benčík, *Operace Dunaj aneb Internacionální vražda Pražského jara* (Prague: Krutina Jiří–Vacek, 2013); Daniel Povolný, *Vojenské řešení Pražského jara 1968*, vol. II: *Československá lidová armáda v srpnu 1968* (Prague: Ministerstvo obrany ČR, 2010); Jiří Fidler, *21.8.1968 – okupace Československa* (Prague: Havran, 2003); Jan Pauer, *Prag 1968: Der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes. Hintergründe – Planung – Durchführung* (Bremen: Temmen, 1995).

6 Milan Bárta et al., *Victims of the Occupation: Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia: 21 August–31 December 1968* (Prague: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2008); Hynek Fajmon, *Sovětská okupace Československa a její oběti* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2005).

1990–91.⁷ “Occupation” has thus become the lens through which the presence of the Soviet Army has usually been seen since 1989. Nevertheless, the term actually had a very short life in the post-August history of Czechoslovakia, and its gradual vanishing of the term “occupation” from the political scene, the mass media, and public life was of key importance for Czechoslovak society in this period. Just as significant is the fact that the term, with all its practical implications, did not officially return until the collapse of the Communist regime in late 1989.

If we want to consider the more complex question of the presence of the Soviet Army and its impact on Czechoslovak society and normalization, it is necessary first to identify the gradual essential change in the perception of the Soviet Army since the intervention. A shift in the image of the Soviet Army became a prerequisite of the normalization policy of the regime, which was based on discrediting the Prague Spring by describing it as an attempted counterrevolution. Only if the image of the Soviet Army as an occupying force were transformed into the image of a savior would it be possible to reinterpret the Prague Spring as an attempt at counterrevolution and condemn and discredit its leading actors. The social and political changes that took place in Czechoslovakia after 1968 would have been impossible or at the very least meaningless if the image of the Soviet Army as the occupier had not changed considerably. Other contemporaneous terms, such as “right-wing opportunism” and “anti-socialist elements,” acquired meaning only if the occupation by the Soviet forces was perceived as friendly assistance, and terms such as “occupation,” “collaboration,” and “democratization process” lost their meaning. Considering that the main shift in the official perception of the Soviet Army occurred in the first two years after the beginning of the intervention, it is obvious that a lot must have happened in this period. A great deal of effort at various levels must have been expended in order for a spontaneously shared image of the occupier and enemy to change into its complete opposite in this short period. It was mainly change at the level of official presentation. Nevertheless, even that had tangible consequences, reflected both at the level of everyday life and the overall social

7 This has been occurring in the mass media during the annual commemoration of the August intervention and of the withdrawal of Soviet troops, as well as in academic writing. The most significant work undertaken thus far, which charts the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia from the beginning to the end and thus captures the changes in the attitudes of Czechoslovak politicians and society towards the Soviet Army, is Jindřich Pecka et al., *Sovětská armáda v Československu 1968–1991*. It provides a brief summary of events, negotiations, and meetings, together with articles related to the presence of Soviet troops and excerpts from a variety of archival records or periodicals.

and political climate. With the gradual change of the official image of the Soviet Army, the declared attitude toward it necessarily had to change, too. Friendship became an integral part of state policy, and as part of policy rhetoric it was implemented across society. As the pressure demanding a reinterpretation of the August 1968 events increased, opinions about different forms of contact with the Soviet Army changed as well, from despised collaboration to valued cooperation. The initial covert cooperation of politically radical and socially ostracized individuals with Soviet officers gradually developed into an officially endorsed norm. In this article, I endeavor to identify and explain the most important aspects of the changing image of the Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s and early 1970s and some of the consequences of this change for Czechoslovak society.

The sources that I use in my research are of various provenances. A special source of information, particularly for the early stage of the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia, is the collection of documents of the Government Commission of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic for Analysis of the Events of 1967–1970, which was established in the early 1990s. The collection is held at the Institute of Contemporary History in Prague. It contains records from various regions of the Czech Republic, which help the historian understand the problem at the local level in the very places where Soviet troops were based. Among the other local materials I have used are town chronicles, regional newspapers, and archive records from two former garrison towns, Vysoké Mýto, a town of several thousand people in east Bohemia, and Trutnov, a regional capital in northeast Bohemia.

The Occupation and the Community of Non-violent Resistance

When troops from the Soviet Union, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, and Bulgaria poured into Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968,⁸ most of the inhabitants of the country were shocked. The trauma that this event caused ranked with that of the other national tragedies, such as the annexation of the Sudetenland to the Third Reich in autumn 1938 and the German occupation that began in mid-March 1939. Today, it is recalled in respectful commemorations and written about in history books. The explanation for the significance of this trauma

⁸ More precisely: the East German army remained on alert in their own country and, except for a few specialists, ultimately did not even cross the frontier into Czechoslovakia. The total number of soldiers could never even be precisely determined. Estimates range from 200,000 to 500,000.

lies not only in the number of dead and wounded civilians,⁹ but also, perhaps mainly, in the great wave of non-violent national resistance that followed in its wake. What is essential, however, is that slogans in Czech and Russian¹⁰ and resolutions and declarations condemning the occupation as an illegitimate and violent intervention in the internal affairs of the state were written by almost everyone. Open political conflict with the Soviet Union was unthinkable for the Czechoslovak political leadership; nevertheless, among them, tendencies to condemn the military intervention triumphed. Thus, members of the top party and government bodies at first joined together with journalists and editors, employees of all kinds of institutions and enterprises, and students, school children, and other individuals in the nationwide protest. For having done this, they received extraordinary support. This unity experienced immediately after the August military intervention went beyond the political protests, which were ultimately doomed to failure. One finds signs of solidarity that resemble what the political scientist James Krapfl referred to, when examining Czechoslovak society in 1989, as a “sacred sense of community.”¹¹ Both in 1968 and in 1989, in addition to protesting and referring to the occupiers as the enemy, people expressed solidarity with one another, and they identified common values and basic principles of community, creatively ascribing special meaning to the August events by doing so. In parallel with the everyday danger, frustration, humiliation, and sense of powerlessness when face to face with tanks, a wave of expression welled up, which was a celebration of national solidarity and declarations of shared values. Those values were not just values of resistance, but also, and indeed mainly, prudence and non-violence. The general sharing of these values became a further source of pride at the time.¹² At this level, the actual impossibility of effectively preventing the military intervention could be recast into the positive value of non-violence, from which society could draw a

9 By mid-December 1968, the records show 94 dead and 345 seriously wounded Czechoslovak citizens. For more on this, see Bárta et al., *Victims of the Occupation*.

10 “Pochemu?” (Why?), “Sovetskie okupanty” (Soviet occupiers!), “Sovetskie fashisty” (Soviet fascists!), “Idite domoi” (Go home!), “Lenine, probud’ se, Brežněv se zbláznil” (Lenin, wake up! Brezhnev’s gone mad!), “Mnichov 1938, Bratislava 1968” (Munich 1938, Bratislava 1968), “Eto naše delo” (It’s our affair), “At’ žije Rudá armáda, ale někde jinde” (Long live the Red Army! But somewhere else), “Proletáři všech zemí, odejděte” (Proletarians of all countries, go away!), and thousands of others.

11 James Krapfl, *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou: Politika, kultúra a spoločnosť v československu po 17. novembri 1989* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009); idem, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia 1989–1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

12 “It turned out, however, that [the occupation] did not crush the good qualities of our nations; rather, it galvanized them. The whole world now admires our nations,” *Zemědělské noviny*, August 27, 1968, quoted

sense of moral superiority. The basic principle upon which solidarity was being formed after August 21, 1968 was, apart from prudence and non-violence, rejection of the military intervention. And the intervention was considered chiefly a Soviet affair.

Collaborators

Any community threatened by an external enemy seeks to defend certain values, prescribing appropriate conduct with regards to the enemy and, by contrast, condemning inappropriate conduct. This code was embodied in a number of ceremonial commitments incorporated into numerous statements, such as “We shall not be traitors,” and also in the slogans that surfaced on occasion, such as “Not a slice of bread or drop of water for the occupier!” and “Shame on collaborators!” It would be wrong to think that everyone was of the same opinion on that point, for had there been unanimity, there would have been no “letter of invitation.”¹³ There were definitely many people who were nervous about the developments leading towards the democratization of Czechoslovakia, and they felt that things were getting out of hand and moving in the wrong direction. There were also people who were afraid, insulted, and abused by developments in the weeks and months before the August intervention.¹⁴ One would be better

in *Sedm pražských dnů: Dokumentace* (1968), ed. Milan Otáhal, Vilém Prečan et al (Prague: Academia, 1990), 286; published in English as Robert Littell, ed., *The Czech Black Book* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1969); the Czech is now published online January 20, 2014, <http://www.68.usd.cas.cz/cz/sedm-prazskych-dnu.html>.

13 The so-called “letter of invitation” was signed by five high-ranking party and state functionaries, mostly members of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party: Alois Indra, Drahomír Kolder, Vasil Biřák, Oldřich Švestka, and Antonín Kapek. In the letter, they point to the danger of counterrevolution in the country and urge the Soviet side “to provide effective support and aid by all means.” Concerning the fate and importance of this letter, see František Janáček and Marie Michálková, “Příběh zvacího dopisu,” *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1993), 87–101; “The ‘Letter of Invitation’ from the Anti-Reformist Faction of the CPCz Leadership,” in *The Prague Spring 68: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, ed. Jaromír Navrátil (Budapest: CEU Press, 1998), 324–25.

14 It is probably impossible to quantify in any objective way the proportion of these people in society at the time. The sources mention various instances of people who rejected the general protest against the occupation or soon welcomed it, to a more than usual extent, as friendly assistance, or directly established contact with military representatives. The behavior of these people is often explained away as their having been members of organizations such as the People’s Militia, the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association, and local or workplace Communist Party organizations. In this connection, the Prague meeting of about 400 “old Communists,” on October 9, 1968, and the meeting held by two district chapters of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association, in the Lucerna building, Prague, to mark the anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia, are well known. Soviet delegations were present at both, and the military intervention was assessed there as having been friendly assistance.

off assuming that the voices of these people were not really heard in the turmoil of late August, and that when they were heard, these people faced threats of revenge from others.

For example, the general manager of Dioptra, a state-owned business in the town of Turnov in northern Bohemia, was with his apprentices on an excursion in Hungary when the Soviet-led troops arrived, and he openly praised the intervention. At a Communist party meeting of the factory after he returned, he was called a collaborator and was subsequently dismissed from his post as general manager.¹⁵ Today, of course, it is hard to ascertain the exact motives and facts of such stories. We will never learn what the Dioptra general manager said in Hungary or who said what about him or to him. We do not know what resentments, interests, and passions played a role. What is important, however, is that the accusations of collaboration, of improper conduct with regards to the occupiers and inappropriate opinions, could have real power and lead to tough and often officially approved sanctions. That, however, could only have been the case under circumstances in which the generally shared norm of rejecting the “occupation” was expressed by a wide range of more or less practical or symbolic acts of protest.

Occupation?!

Unified resistance to the occupation did not last long, in spite of the fact that the resistance found significant support in all of the social strata of the country. The pressure exerted by the Soviets in their power politics was relentless. The physical presence of armed Soviet soldiers, who often crudely intervened in local events, was combined with systematic pressure by Soviet politicians on their Czechoslovak counterparts.¹⁶ This pressure began immediately after the military intervention with the Soviet “abduction” of the Czechoslovak state and party leaders to Moscow. During the talks with the Soviets, the Czechoslovak delegation was forced to accept a number of compromises, including the invalidation of the Extraordinary Party Congress (*Mimořádný sjezd KSČ*) on August 22, 1968, and all

15 Ústav pro soudobé dějiny [Institute of Contemporary History, Prague – ÚSD], sbírka Komise vlády ČSFR pro analýzu událostí 1967–1970 [Collection of the Government Commission of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic for Analysis of the events of 1967–1970], Okresní zmočněc Semily [Authorized district archivist]. The astute reader certainly already suspects that the sanctions did not last long.

16 For a summary, see Ondřej Felcman, *Imáže a okupace: K úloze SSSR a Sovětských vojsk ve vývoji Československa v letech 1968–1991* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1995), or Antonín Benčík, “Intervence,” in *Sovětská vojska v Československém vývoji 1968–1991*, ed. Jindřich Pecka (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 1998), 9–23.

of its resolutions. They also had to accept limitations on the freedom of speech and association, the withdrawal of Czechoslovak demands to have the crisis put on the agenda of the UN Security Council, and mainly the de facto legitimation of the “temporary presence” of Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia.¹⁷ These compromises were confirmed by the signing of the “Moscow Protocol.”¹⁸ Of all the generally known facts, I would emphasize that among the basic demands of Moscow was a reinterpretation of the Warsaw Pact intervention and the establishment of “friendly” relations. It is clear that the designation “occupier” profoundly upset and offended the Soviet politicians. At the end of August, General Nikolai Ogarkov (1917–1994), a plenipotentiary of the Soviet Minister of Defense, in a conversation with Josef Smrkovský (1911–1974), the Chairman of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly, demanded that in their speeches the representatives of the Czechoslovak state should “speak a normal language” and not use words like “occupier,” because it prevented “normalization.”¹⁹

This was definitely not merely the reaction of a jilted partner, who jealously seeks to compel a rebel to return to his or her former devotion and compliance. The continuous push for Soviet interests in “twinning” (*družba*) and cooperation between the Soviet troops and various institutions (including factories, schools) and in personal contacts between Soviet officers and Czechoslovak citizens, officials, and institutions was mostly strategic. Not merely a matter of ceremony, it was an effective means of gathering intelligence and gaining control over otherwise unpredictable events. It is therefore no surprise that the planning of “friendly” relations became the subject of official reports of leading Soviet ideologues. For example, as early as September 4, 1968, the Chief of

17 In addition to the main actors of the Prague Spring, such as First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Alexander Dubček, Speaker of the National Assembly Josef Smrkovský, Premier Oldřich Černík, and a member of the CPCz Presidium, František Kriegel, and the delegation of Czechoslovak President Ludvík Svoboda, on the Czechoslovak side some of the authors of the letter of invitation also participated in the dramatic negotiations, such as Vasil Biřák, Oldřich Švestka, and Alois Indra. For a personal recollection of participants in the Moscow talks in August, see Zdeněk Mlýnář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu* (Cologne: Index, 1988), 267–314; published in English as *Night Frost in Prague: The End of Humane Socialism* (London: C. Hurst, 1980). For the minutes of the talks, see Jitka Vondrová, *Mezinárodní souvislosti Československé krize 1967–1970: Dokumenty ÚV KSSR 1966–1969* (Brno: Doplněk, 2011), 213–66. For an English translation of excerpts of these negotiations, see Navrátil ed., *The Prague Spring 68*, 465–73.

18 For the “Protokol z jednání delegací SSSR a ČSSR 23.–26. srpna v Moskvě,” see Jitka Vondrová and Jaromír Navrátil, *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967–1970. Červenec–srpen 1968* (Prague–Brno: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR and Doplněk, 1996), 271–74 and, “The Moscow Protocol, August 26, 1968,” in Navrátil (ed.) *The Prague Spring 1968*, 477.

19 Jindřich Pecka, “Rozhovor Josefa Smrkovského s generálem N. V. Ogarkovem 30.8.1968,” *Soudobé dějiny* 1 (1997): 158–66.

the Main Political Directorate, General Alexei Yepishev, was proposing ways for the Soviet Army to contribute to the “normalization” of Czechoslovakia to the Central Committee of the CPSU. Part of his proposal was a broadly conceived “buttressing of twinning and comradely relations with the population and members of the Czechoslovak People’s Army,” including military and political contacts with local party and state bodies, the Czechoslovak Armed Forces, social organizations, industrial and agricultural enterprises, and schools. These contacts entailed, among other things, “twinning evenings” (*večery družby*), participation of members of the local population in cultural events organized by Soviet soldiers, performances by music and dance troupes of the Soviet Army in Czechoslovak milieus, and even assistance by Soviet soldiers in farming. Yepishev recommended in particular using the Soviet fight against fascism for propaganda purposes, therefore to invite soldiers who had participated in the liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945, and to emphasize the “fighting friendship” (*bojové přátelství*) between the Soviet and Czechoslovak armed forces.²⁰ In a similar spirit, during the Moscow talks in October 1968, Brezhnev offered the Czechoslovak delegation a detailed description of his vision of comradely friendship.²¹

A turnaround in relations between Czechoslovaks and the Soviet army may have seemed unthinkable in August 1968, because any such move would have been condemned as treason and collaboration.²² Nevertheless, the fundamental consequence of signing the “Moscow Protocol” was that the united resistance

20 “Náčelník hlavní politické správy SA generál A. Jepišev ústřednímu výboru KSSS. Návrhy na činnost sovětských vojsk při zajišťování ‘normalizace’ v Československu” [Chief of the Main Political Directorate, General Alexei Yepishev, to the Central Committee of the CPSU. Proposals for Activity by Soviet Soldiers to Implement “Normalization” in Czechoslovakia], ÚSD, Sbírnka KV ČSFR, Z/S, 4. 9. 1968.

21 Apart from contacts between local politicians and local governmental bodies on the one hand and Soviet soldiers on the other, this was also meant to include exchanges between folklore troupes and the promotion of Soviet culture in general, twinning at the regional, district, and town levels, and the exchange of delegations of workers and scholars. *Záznam z jednání delegace KSČ s vedením KSSS v Moskvě 3.-4. října 1968*, in Jitka Vondrová, *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize: zůří 1968–květen 1970* (Brno: Doplněk, 1997), 116–35.

22 The author of the article “Bez kolaborantů jsou vyřízeni” [Without Collaborators, They Wouldn’t Stand a Chance], boasts in the Communist Party daily *Rudé právo*, on August 27, 1968, that even by the sixth day after the arrival of the troops the occupiers had not managed to create “collaborationist bodies and institutions,” with which they had hoped to create the impression that the intervention had been legal. That is not to say that no one was willing to collaborate; there were such people, but they stood aside because of the “astonishing spontaneous unity, the huge activity of the absolute majority of the nation, the unconcealed contempt and hatred.” “One can have no doubt therefore that collaboration with the occupiers is the worst treason [...]”

began to crumble and the first step was taken in the reinterpretation of the “occupation” as an act of “friendly assistance.”

It's Better Not To Write Anything about Them

In the Moscow Protocol, the representatives of the Czechoslovak party and government committed themselves to taking power back from the mass media “so that they fully serve the cause of Socialism” and to taking measures that “would prevent the publishing in the press and broadcasting on radio and television of speeches that could cause conflict and tension between the population and the allied troops on Czechoslovak territory.”²³

In order for the Soviets to withdraw their troops from the streets and government offices to garrisons and then eventually from the country altogether, the Czechoslovaks were expected to fulfil these terms and conditions, as well as a number of others. Shortly after the Czechoslovak leadership returned from Moscow, measures were taken to suppress the hitherto spontaneous expressions of resistance to Soviet troops. Among the most important was a government decree of August 30, 1968, which created the Press and Information Office (*Úřad pro tisk, rozhlas a televizi*). Upon its establishment, the office immediately issued orders that brought freedom of expression in line with the Moscow Protocol.²⁴ According to the instructions that were issued, one was forbidden to use the word “occupier” or “occupation,” criticize the Warsaw pact countries or their Communist parties, attack their troops based on Czechoslovak territory, or write about victims or damages caused by the military intervention.²⁵ These orders were subsequently implemented in all editorial offices throughout the country.

At a press conference, Oldřich Černík (1921–1994), the Czechoslovak premier, met with the editors-in-chief of Czech periodicals to explain the situation and called on them to heed the new restrictions. When asked what journalists were allowed to write with regards to the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries, he replied, “It’s better not to write anything about them.”²⁶

During the process of normalization, in the most basic sense of the word (in other words the withdrawal of the allied forces from public spaces

23 “Protokol z jednání delegací SSSR a ČSSR 23.–26. srpna v Moskvě.”

24 Jiří Hoppe, *Pražské jaro v médiích: Výběr z dobové publicistiky* (Brno: Doplněk, 2004), 16–17.

25 Ibid.

26 ÚSD, sb. KV ČSFR, A3, “Zpráva z tiskové konference šéfredaktorů s předsedou vlády O. Černíkem dne 28.8.1968.”

and government offices and the restoration of the usual administration of the country), this legislation assigned the main responsibility to Czechoslovak society. How the situation developed would allegedly be up to the people of Czechoslovakia. The message that the Czechoslovak political leaders took back home from Moscow in August 1968 was essentially that they should act with discipline and avoid any measures or steps that Moscow might perceive as provocative. Only this would make a return to normality possible. It was in this spirit, as an expression of the required self-discipline, that the Czechoslovak political leaders, upon their return, also presented the re-imposition of censorship and restrictions on the freedom of association. Normalization began to be the mantra to which everything was supposed to be subordinated, although the term gradually went from meaning the restoration of the basic operations of the state to meaning the shoring-up of the authoritarian regime and the imposition of limitations on civil rights and freedoms. We can clearly see that politicians thus stopped unanimously saying “No, to occupation,” and a considerable number of them soon began pointing out other threats to order and unity. Henceforth, those who were to be considered dangerous were those who rebelled too openly against the occupation. These voices against rebellion gradually gained strength. And the essential thing is that one of the two fundamental principles of national solidarity that had been so solemnly proclaimed after August 21, 1968 began to thrive at the expense of the other. Resistance to the occupation began to give way to prudence, non-violence, and self-discipline. The national solidarity that had been created by everyday politics thus gradually, but increasingly, became a caricature of the national solidarity that had grown out the August events. Nevertheless, it provided the opportunity for some continuity and, last but not least, for continuous support for the political leaders who in the eyes of the public represented the liberalization that had begun in January 1968.

A Rift

In a resolution of the November 1968 plenum of the CPCz Central Committee, the top party leadership called the rightwing, anti-Socialist forces the foremost enemies of the state and more or less officially abolished the term “collaborator,” or, rather, logically came to the conclusion that where there is no occupation, there is no collaboration: “The Central Committee and its officials will also come out against all attempts to discredit Czechoslovak comrades who honorably

promote party policy principles against any bullying they face for their openly internationalist relations with the USSR.”²⁷

With these statements, the Czechoslovak politicians quickly defined themselves as being in opposition to the rebelliously minded part of society, and they took their primary task to be the quelling of expressions of defiance. In November 1968, when university students and some secondary-school students went on strike in support of the November plenum of the CPCz Central Committee, to encourage the Committee to stay the course of democratization and maintain the gains that had been made in civil rights, the party leadership rejected their support. The student activities were condemned as “ill-considered” and the public was called upon “not to allow this dangerous situation to grow.”²⁸

Open resistance to the occupation and to the concessions made by the Czechoslovak politicians began to be politically undesirable and, as such, gradually became the target of police surveillance and repression. During the spontaneous demonstrations that were held in Prague on October 28, 1968 (the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic) and November 7, 1968 (the fifty-first anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution; both occasions were state holidays), the police intervened and took some demonstrators into custody. The events were closely observed and assessed by the secretariat of the Ministry of Interior.²⁹ The First Secretary of the CPCz Central Committee, Alexander Dubček (1921–1992), the icon of the reform process, spoke out clearly on this point: “The greatest pitfalls of the consolidation process are [...] attitudes that directly accuse the political leaders of capitulatory behavior and

27 “Hlavní úkoly strany v nejbližším období: Rezoluce plenárního zasedání ÚV KSČ” [The Main Tasks of the Party in the Near Future: A Resolution of the Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the CPCz], *Rok šedesátý osmý v usneseních a dokumentech ÚV KSČ* (Prague: Svoboda, 1969), 383.

28 “Provolání představitelů strany a státu” [Proclamation of the party and state representatives], *ibid.*, 393–94.

29 The turnaround in the public perception of people protesting openly against Soviet troops is graphically illustrated by a document from the Ministry of the Interior. Originally, it summarized serious cases of Soviet soldiers who had restricted the personal freedom of some Czechoslovaks, mainly by reacting with excessive force to an imagined or real protest, such as the shouting of abuse, the posting or distribution of leaflets, and the writing of slogans. The fact that what was originally a list of victims of Soviet military aggression could also serve as a list of potential rabble-rousers is illustrated by the names and acts of protest later being carefully and thoroughly underlined. See the report about the detention of Czechoslovak citizens by foreign soldiers, dated August 21, 1968, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekty/srpen1968/srpen-zpravy-014.pdf>.

treason, causing an anti-Soviet psychosis.”³⁰ The political leaders thus made it clear who had to be excluded from the national community.

The Treaty on the “Temporary Presence” of Soviet Troops

Dubček’s mention of capitulatory behavior and treason was undoubtedly related to other political events: as set out in the Moscow Protocol, the Treaty on the Temporary Presence of Troops was signed in October 1968.³¹ That meant an important change in developments. Under the terms of the treaty, most of the Warsaw Pact troops were withdrawn from Czechoslovakia, but, on the other hand, the “temporary presence” of Soviet troops was made legal; the secret codicil to the treaty mentions 75,000 Soviet soldiers.³² The treaty was concerned with matters such as what the Czechoslovaks were meant to provide for the Soviet soldiers, who would bear the costs for their basing, how foodstuffs, goods, and services would be supplied to the Soviet garrisons, and who would pay for them. Once adopted, the treaty shifted the problem of the basing of Soviet troops considerably towards practical matters. In the 33 locations where the garrisons were stationed throughout the country, many problems had to be dealt with, including housing, rent, administration, supplies, the movement of soldiers and military equipment, the determining of jurisdictions, and the use of energy and water.³³ For local governments, working together became an unavoidable technical necessity. And the better such collaboration took place, the easier it was to find a solution acceptable to both sides, or to obtain redress if the Soviets in some way flagrantly breached agreements. At a meeting of the chairmen of the national committees, held at the Presidium of the Government on October 29, 1968, to discuss the adopted treaty, the question was also raised by the Deputy Minister of Defense, General Václav Dvořák: “Regular matter-of-fact relations with the Soviet commanders are proving to be fruitful and are thus

30 “Z projevu soudruha Alexandra Dubčeka Hlavní úkoly strany v nejbližším období,” *Rudé právo*, November 15, 1968, 1, 3.

31 The full name of the treaty is the “Smlouva mezi vládou Československé socialistické republiky a vládou Svazu sovětských socialistických republik o podmínkách dočasného pobytu sovětských vojsk na území Československé socialistické republiky.” It was signed in Prague on October 16, 1968. For an English translation, see “Bilateral Treaty on the ‘Temporary Presence of Soviet Forces on Czechoslovak Territory’, October 16, 1968,” in Navrátil, *The Prague Spring 1968*, 533–36.

32 Benčík, Paulík, and Pecka, *Vojenské otázky československé reformy*, 79.

33 These practical matters led to the signing of other, more detailed treaties, ratified in early 1969, concerning specific aspects of the basing of troops.

helping to prevent conflicts.”³⁴ The minutes of the meeting include the opinions and local experiences that contributed to good relations with Soviet soldiers. A representative of the Municipal National Committee of Mladá Boleslav, for example, “talked about his three-week experience of the presence of Soviet troops there, with whom a detailed regimen was agreed on in the interests of the citizens and the operation of the town. He pointed out that the expansion of good relations between the Czech authorities, collective farms, and factories on the one hand and the Soviet command on the other facilitated the work and improved the status of the national-committee officials dealing with daily problems.”³⁵

Clearly, cooperation and twinning, politically required and practically necessary, could be put to practical use at the garrison bases in the service of the interests of locals as well. The fact that using Soviet soldiers for various part-time jobs gradually became quite common practice is demonstrated by an October 1970 entry in the Vysoké Mýto town chronicle: “Relations with the local Red Army garrison should no longer be unrestricted and accessible to all. Enterprises, including collective farms, have begun to use the services of the garrisons at all workplaces where they are behind schedule. Relations will henceforth be possible only by means of the local committee for garrison relations [...]”³⁶

We Want Friendly and Comradely Relations

In the Treaty on the Temporary Presence of Soviet Troops, the Czechoslovak Republic also committed itself “to endeavor to buttress friendship and collaboration” with the Soviet Union. In practice, this turned out to be no mere formality; it was a commitment that the Czechoslovak politicians were determined to keep and to demand of others.

In November 1968, the Presidium of the CPCz Central Committee received a letter for approval the contents of which were to be passed on to district and regional party committees. The letter includes the following passage: “it is fully in our interests to normalize relations with the USSR and to establish and

34 ÚSD, KV ČSFR CI/9, “Záznam o poradě konané 29. října 1968 na předsednictvu vlády.”

35 Ibid.

36 “Pamětní kniha Vysokého Mýta 1961–1973,” entry from October 1970, accessed October 14, 2013, http://vychodoceskearchivy.cz/ebadatelna/zobrazeni-publikace-usti/?adresar=CZ_225204010_0381_x00002&nadpis=CZ_225204010_0381_x00002&strana=1.

develop social relations with Soviet troops. These relations can also significantly contribute to the gradual overcoming of problems and misunderstandings [...] [W]e want these relations to be friendly and comradely.” The letter also emphasized that “Communists in particular should actively endeavor to achieve the normalization of our relations with Soviet troops.”³⁷ Such instructions gave considerable impetus to efforts to ensure that comradely friendship with Soviet soldiers where they were stationed would become one of the important tasks for party units and organizations at all levels. It was therefore a task that could not easily be avoided. Considering that basic party organizations existed in practically all institutions, offices, and enterprises and that these organizations regularly had to provide evidence and accounts of the work they had done and the tasks they had fulfilled, the space for working together was thrown wide open.

Soviet officers and agents oversaw the fulfillment of obligations stemming from the Treaty, and they did not hesitate to protest if they felt that Czechs were hampering the development of friendly relations.³⁸ Clearly, the Czechoslovak side could not turn a deaf ear to such complaints and demands for the simple reason that it had to deal with them at the highest party and government levels. The measures were not long in coming. In 1969, for example, in the north-east Bohemian district of Semily alone the state police sent nineteen people to court for the production and dissemination of printed matter, including leaflets, and for writing anti-Soviet slogans.³⁹

The Local Press

Places where Soviet garrisons were based had to find a way to deal with their presence and the associated pressures. The local press found itself in a strange position. To a large extent, it continued to obey the premier’s instructions that it was “better not to write anything about them.” The official district weekly, *Jiskra Orlická* (The Orlice District Spark), mentioned only in passing that Soviet soldiers would be stationed in the Ústí nad Orlicí district.⁴⁰ The Soviet soldiers were not mentioned again until November 5, 1968, about a month after they

37 Náměr dopisu předsednictva ÚV KSČ krajským výborům strany o vzájemných stycích se sovětskými vojsky, ÚSD, sb. KV ČSFR, DII/121.

38 “Protest vládního zmocněnce SSSR pro záležitosti sovětských vojsk dočasně umístěných na území ČSSR,” ÚSD, sb. KV ČSFR, DII/122.

39 ÚSD, sb. KV ČSFR, OZ Semily.

40 “Události těchto dnů,” *Jiskra Orlická*, September 24, 1968.

had been stationed in the area. The fact that the weekly completely omitted the massive troop movements that accompanied the deployment⁴¹ is an indication of how Soviet soldiers would be reported on in future. In an interview held on November 5, the chairman of the District National Committee assured a reader that Soviet troops would not “make claims to flats” or other housing, that they would be provided only with surplus local foodstuffs, that the soldiers’ representatives would hold talks about complying with local rules and regulations, and that the movement of common soldiers would be restricted to joint leave in closed units.⁴² By not discussing certain problems in the newspaper, the chairman of the National Committee was endeavoring to forestall fear and panic caused by the unchecked movement and behavior of Soviet troops in garrison towns. Not admitting a problem, or veiling it in impersonal administrative terms, was the general approach used in this weekly. From this local periodical we therefore learn little about the various aspects of the coexistence of Soviet garrisons and local populations. We do, however, learn how the official image of unproblematic and mutually beneficial coexistence was gradually formed in part with the use of the local press. When, on rare occasions, local newspapers did report on conflicts or incidents between Soviet soldiers and Czech civilians, it was with the aim of “scolding” undesirable Czech excesses. In the garrison town of Česká Třebová in eastern Bohemia, some panic was caused among Soviet soldiers when a young man, identified only as Mr H., fired a toy pistol near their patrol. The *Jiskra Orlická* journalist commented:

Most of the people with whom I have discussed this case condemn the behavior of Mr H., because it does not help to calm already stormy waters. [...] Similar acts, which lead to such conclusions, should disappear from daily life. They are no solution to the complicated problems of contemporary life.⁴³

In a similar spirit, the weekly paper briefly reported in May 1969 that ten young men in Vysoké Mýto had attacked a Soviet major and that “young men” had torn down a red flag from the secondary school. The mention of these

41 This included the withdrawal of Polish troops who had been based in the district since August, the clearing out of barracks and military areas by Czechoslovak garrisons, and the redeployment of Soviet troops and all their military vehicles.

42 “S předsedou okresního národního výboru: O pobytu sovětských vojsk v okrese,” *Jiskra Orlická*, November 5, 1968.

43 “Proč se střílelo?” Ibid.

cases in the crime and accident column ranks them with other small crimes, and in a similarly dry tone concludes, “All the culprits have been taken into police custody.”⁴⁴ A June issue of the weekly published an interview with the chairman of the District National Committee about the “consolidation” of the country and the “principles of the consolidation of public order.” The chairman said that it was unthinkable that “we would not intervene decisively against disorderly conduct [...], rowdyism, [...] and vandalism.”⁴⁵

The attacks against Soviet soldiers came under the category of “rowdyism” (*výtržnictví*) and “vandalism” (*vandalství*). The local press thus communicated the idea that those who protest in any way against the basing of the Soviet soldiers are a dangerous element that is disturbing the peace. The press was helping the Czechoslovak and Soviet representatives remove public references to the fact that many people perceived the Soviet military intervention as an act of political aggression. The delicate topic of the coexistence of Soviet garrisons and Czechoslovak civilians, with all the possible problems that it really entailed, was more or less avoided by the local press. Gradually, it was depicted mainly with conflict-free images and reports about friendly, comradely relations and joint ceremonies. For example, the district press devoted much more space to the peace celebrations in the garrison town of Česká Třebová to commemorate the 1944 Slovak National Uprising than it did to the first anniversary of the August intervention:

A procession of local citizens, members of the Soviet Army, and units of the People’s Militia, which had participated in operations against anti-Socialist elements in Prague, passed through the town. [...] To shouts of approval and the thunderous applause of the participants in the celebrations, the secretary of the District Committee of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association thanked members of the People’s Militia, the police, and the Czechoslovak Army, who had come out decisively against the rowdies and anti-Socialist forces in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁶

The rift between the official Czechoslovak representatives and opponents to the military intervention probably came to a peak in August 1969. The

44 “Černá kronika,” *Jiskra Orlicka*, May 13, 1969.

45 „Pro konsolidaci života země,” *Jiskra Orlicka*, June 3, 1969.

46 “Slavnost míru a přátelství,” *Jiskra Orlicka*, August 26, 1969.

demonstrations during the first anniversary of the Warsaw Pact intervention⁴⁷ were suppressed by the Czechoslovak Army, the People's Militia, and the police, without the Soviet Army having to move in.⁴⁸ The official press stood fully behind the crackdown, crudely denigrated the demonstrators, and offered readers a picture of peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Army.⁴⁹

Boycott

Obviously, not everything was as the press presented it at the time. The *Vysoké Mýto* Chronicler was not afraid to take the position of an ordinary citizen and to enumerate the difficulties Soviet soldiers were causing in the town. Foremost among those difficulties was the movement of heavy military equipment, the buying-up of goods, small incidents caused by drunken soldiers, occasional acts of petty theft, the illegal requisitioning of land by the Soviet Army, and the using up of drinking water.⁵⁰

After the resolution and official proclamation of the party and government representatives about the need to foster friendly relations with the Soviet Union and its army, it took some time before the idea was fully accepted among the locals with all of its consequences. People did not easily abandon the idea that the Soviet soldiers who were settling in their towns were occupiers. The *Vysoké Mýto* chronicler also recorded local attempts to boycott this comradeship and to resist or protest the presence of the Soviet Army. This protest was of a highly diverse nature. No Soviet films were shown in the local cinema; by contrast, admission to a newsreel about the August events in Prague was free of charge.

47 It was for a long time the last mass demonstration against the occupation and the regime that had approved the occupation.

48 The preparations for August, however, were carefully supervised by the Soviet side, as is attested to by the numerous visits by Soviet politicians and Soviet army officers at the state and the local level during the summer of 1969. Nothing was to be left to chance. At the local level, special teams were assembled consisting of functionaries of the national committees and commanding officers of the security forces, who were responsible for maintaining order in their town. SOkA Trutnov, f. MěNV Trutnov, i.č. 20, kart. 3, Zápisy z plenárního zasedání, 20. dubna 1969 [Minutes from the Plenary Session, April 20, 1969].

49 In an article entitled "Reakční síly otevřeně proti republice" [Reactionary forces openly against the republic], the national daily newspaper *Rudé právo* described the Prague demonstrations as the "rioting of hooligans and déclassé elements." This effort to discredit the participants in the demonstrations intensifies later in the article: "Most of the participants in the acts of provocation were young people, the kind about whom one immediately sees that they are not fond of work or soap, not to mention order." *Rudé právo*, August 22, 1969.

50 *Pamětní kniha Vysokého Mýta. 1961–1973.*

Even the town councilors were writing protests against the establishment of Soviet garrisons in Vysoké Mýto. A separate, especially creative part of the story involves the leaflets, pamphlets, slogans, and jokes made at the expense of Soviet soldiers. Information about various social events, such as parties and balls, were not publicly advertised in the town; sometimes they were by invitation only, so that the Soviet garrison would not find out about them and would not attend. Proposals for twinning were rejected by the institutions that were put forward for this. There were even occasional scuffles between young civilians and Soviet soldiers, particularly in pubs, when Czechs, for example, took soldiers' caps or cut off their buttons or insignia,⁵¹ verbally attacked soldiers, and shouted out protest slogans in front of the barracks.⁵²

Similar behavior, however, led to condemnation not only in the local press but also, indeed mainly, from the local political representatives, who were held responsible for the implementation of commitments stemming from the signing of the Czechoslovak–Soviet agreements. They saw the public protests as disloyalty in a situation complicated by the presence of Soviet soldiers and various, often contradictory pressures. As the chairman of the Trutnov national committee said:

Normalization in our town is being impaired by various incidents that are being provoked by irresponsible individuals from the ranks both of adults and of the youth. [...] The scenes they are making do not attest to the cultural quality of our nation, and truly discredit us. [...] Nor, however, can we passively look on forever at the gross disregard shown for commitments that our representatives accepted by signing the Moscow and Prague agreements.⁵³

The local representatives considered any protest against the presence of Soviet troops to be irresponsible because it harmed the interests of the community as a whole, for instance the eventual return to normal life in the town and the resolution of everyday problems; moreover, the protests were in opposition to views and decisions that were made at the highest levels of the

51 Ibid.

52 Státní okresní archiv [State District Archive] Trutnov, fond MěNV Trutnov [fond Trutnov National Committee], inventární číslo 57 [Inventory number], karton 18 [box 18], Zápisy ze schůzí rady, 10.12.1968 [Minutes of a council meeting], December 10, 1968.

53 SOkA Trutnov, f. MěNV Trutnov, k. 3, i.č. 19, Zápisy z plenárního zasedání, 3. prosince 1968 [Minutes of the Plenary Session, December 3, 1968].

state and party. As such, any protest had to be systematically made illegitimate and practically wiped out.

Influenced by these circumstances, open individualized protest against the presence of Soviet troops became increasingly risky, and thus moved to the anonymous level. It mainly took the form of anecdotes and jokes, which mocked the growing cooperation and comradely friendship with Soviet troops and reacted to developments in politics and society in general.⁵⁴

Breaking the Ice

The mounting pressure was also linked to gradual personnel changes in senior positions. This first took place at the state-wide level and eventually, from mid-1969 onwards, also at the regional level. They included the usual exchanges of regional and district party secretaries, which led to a series of other personnel changes in the leadership of the national committees and important industrial and agricultural enterprises. An integral part of these changes was the reassessment of the recent past, including the recanting of previous statements of support for the Dubček leadership and of disagreement with the occupation. In the “break” with the past before August 1968 and shortly afterwards, the Soviet Army played a key role. The declared attitude towards the Soviet Army became an index of the more general attitude towards political developments. It was by means of comradely friendship that the new and old established local notables demonstrated their political loyalty. For example, the new mayor of Trutnov, in a speech about the activity of the city council in February 1970, distanced himself from the pre-August 1968 political developments by criticizing the previous leadership of the district national committee for having been politically reckless (*avanturismus*), for having failed to respect the Moscow Protocol, and for having refused to “enter into relations” with Soviet Army representatives. He characterized the tearing down of a Soviet tank from a pedestal in August 1968 as an “anti-Soviet and counterrevolutionary act,” for which the erstwhile representatives of the district national committee were also responsible.⁵⁵

54 For example, the Vysoké Mýto chronicler recorded an anecdote in May 1969, which appeared after Gustáv Husák had taken Alexander Dubček’s place as First Secretary of the CPCz Central Committee in April: “We built socialism with a human face; now we are building socialism with the hide of a hippo [i.e. insensitivity].” *Pamětní kniha Vysokého Mýta 1961–1973*, entry from May 1969.

55 SOKA Trutnov, f. MěNV Trutnov, k. 3, i.č. 21, Zápisy z plenárního zasedání, 11.2.1970 [Minutes of the Plenary Session, February 11, 1970].

With similar speeches, functionaries made it clear whose side they were on, and in general they distanced themselves from the displays that were perceived negatively and proscribed, now called, for example, anti-Socialist, anti-Soviet, and rightwing opportunist. They thereby accepted the interpretation of the Prague Spring as an attempt at counterrevolution and the Soviet-led intervention as an operation to deliver the country from chaos.

The willingness to establish and develop comradely friendly relations, which had only recently met with resentment and thus been socially degraded, was gradually transformed at the official level into a positive expression of loyalty in unfavorable circumstances. This loyalty, however, now ceased to be pilloried as deviant conduct by obstinate oddballs, hardline dogmatists, and jilted individuals. Owing to gradually changing circumstances, it began to be increasingly rewarded. Together with this, the people who were previously punished for their “collaborationist attitude” were exonerated. That is also reflected in the minutes of the June 1969 plenum of the Ústí nad Orlicí District Committee of the CPCz. The minutes state that the District Committee of the CPCz “has made amends for mistakes and errors; it has restored the honor of people who were smeared and attacked for having defended international alliances.”⁵⁶ The Soviet command, the exonerated conservatives and collaborators, including the leadership of the new course, strengthened one another’s positions. Under these circumstances, the Soviet soldiers were increasingly admitted into Czech enterprises and schools and were invited to participate in the founding meetings of branches of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association.

Furthermore, the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association provides a convenient illustration of changes in the perception of the USSR and the Soviet Army in Czechoslovak society more broadly during the relatively short period since August 1968. At first, it may have seemed that the August intervention would be fatal to an organization with a pre-war tradition and a mass grass-roots membership. A number of local chapters did indeed close down, people en masse cancelled their memberships, which, anyway, they had been called upon to do by slogans chanted in the streets and on posters.⁵⁷ The Association was

56 ÚSD, sb. KV ČSFR, OZ Ústí nad Orlicí. The former managing director of Dioptra, who was dismissed in 1968 because of his “collaborationist” statements, was fully exonerated in the early 1970s. By contrast, those who had dismissed him were punished. ÚSD, sb. KV ČSFR, OZ Semily.

57 For example, “The Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association asks its members to pay any outstanding membership dues, because this friendship is now ending.” Jindřich Pecka, *Spontánní projevy Pražského jara 1968–1969* (Brno: Doplněk, 1993), 98.

eventually discredited in the eyes of the public by the contacts between several of its members and the Soviet Army soon after the intervention. In the course of 1969, when popular protest against the occupation was petering out, new chapters of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association were founded, but considering the general atmosphere this was usually done privately, almost clandestinely. Nevertheless, the change in the official course of the uppermost level of politics, which, in its attitude to the USSR and Soviet Army, was gradually projected into the mass media, as well as into local politics, also brought about a fundamental transformation in the perception of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association. The sudden growth in membership over the course of the 1970s⁵⁸ demonstrates that the Association had freed itself of the reputation of being a collaborationist organization for a handful of conservative dregs. Although its proclaimed mission was the “buttressing” of relations with the Soviet Union and also the establishment of contacts with the Soviet Army,⁵⁹ it became for many people an acceptable variant of the required public involvement and loyalty towards the political regime. One’s attitude to the Soviet Union became part of the assessment of anyone who aspired to hold a job other than manual laborer.

The fact that one registered at one’s workplace (instead of one’s home) to join a branch of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association had a fundamental impact on the growth in membership, because it became part of how one was assessed politically and occupationally by one’s employer. Comradely friendship was thus incorporated in the generally implemented cadre system, which included the regular political assessment of employees.⁶⁰ This was of course most strikingly reflected during the political vetting of party and non-

58 In early 1972, the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association had, according to its own information, 1,021,407 members in a total of 17,617 chapters. See *VII. Sjezd Svazu Československo-sovětského přátelství: Dokumenty z jednání sjezdu Praha, 16.-17. června 1972* (Prague: Lidové nakladatelství, 1972). Although this source does not state the numbers of members in 1968–69, it does mention the “intense pressure” to which the Association was subjected on all sides. The course it entered on to achieve the widest membership base turned out to be effective. At the next congress, in 1977, its central secretary stated that the Association had 2,241,617 members in 28,574 chapters. *8. Sjezd Svazu Československo-sovětského přátelství: Dokumenty z jednání sjezdu Praha, 12.-13. prosince 1977* (Prague: Lidové nakladatelství, 1978), 22.

59 “It would certainly be useful if the Soviet Army representatives gave speeches more often at our meetings, gatherings, and seminars. [...] Such meetings will have to be attended by increasingly larger numbers of members of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association and of other citizens of our towns and villages.” “Zpráva ústředního tajemníka SČSP,” in *VII sjezd Svazu, 24*.

60 Marie Černá, “Cadre Policy, Cadre Work and Screening in Communist Czechoslovakia: Simple Ideas, Complicated Practice,” *Studia Territorialia* 11 (2011): 9–28.

party members in 1969–70. One's attitude to the presence of the Soviet Army in Czechoslovakia or to the Soviet Union in general became a key topic on the basis of which the vetted employees and party members were assessed.⁶¹ This also contributed to the official reassessment of the basing of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia.

Official Images of Friendship

Contacts between Soviet soldiers (mainly officers) and the local population occurred mostly at the workplace, schools, national committees and social organizations. A delegation of soldiers, for example, was received by a factory organization of the CPCz and a branch of the Soviet–Czechoslovak Friendship Association; it was shown around these institutions, given refreshments, and then took part in a friendly discussion. Also publicized in the press were other, less formal meetings and contacts, including social gatherings of women, visits by Soviet teachers to local schools, joint programs for Soviet and Czechoslovak children, visits by Pioneers (a Communist organization for children) to garrisons, sports matches, performances by the Soviet garrison band at various social and arts events, and New Year's Eve celebrations together. Official and unofficial events occasionally overlapped. Sometimes, certain natural, spontaneous tendencies and interests could be intentionally used for similar “twinning” or “comradely friendship” ends.⁶² And it was the “informal” component of meetings, such as concerts, dances,⁶³ sports matches, and gatherings for children, which were meant to play an important role in the creation of a positive image of the Soviet Army as an ardent friend.

An important way of initiating mutual contacts was to hold public political and ritualized events, which, since May 1945, had been a tradition for more than twenty years. And though the tradition was sometimes interrupted under the influence of the Thaw in the 1960s, it offered something on which to build. One could cyclically return to the regular commemorations of events such as the

61 For the meaning of the mass vettings in the so-called consolidation process, see Marie Černá, “Comprendre le processus de consolidation: Les campagnes de vérification de 1970 en Tchécoslovaquie,” *Cahiers du CEFRES* 32 (2012): 199–233.

62 A graphic example is a sixteen-year-old girl from a secondary school in the town of Česká Třebová, who appeared as a singer with a local Soviet army band. See “Děvče v uniformě,” *Jiskra Orlicka*, March 16, 1971.

63 Music ensembles of various styles, playing for the “listening and dancing pleasure” of their audiences, were an important asset of the Soviet Army, and often were part of social events.

birth of Lenin, May Day (1 May), the Liberation (9 May), Soviet Armed Forces Day, and the October Revolution. (Indeed, since the date of the Revolution by the New Style calendar was 7 November, rather than 25 October, the whole month of November was devoted to Czechoslovak–Soviet friendship.) Many holidays and other important days were one way or another linked with the Soviet Union. The public events that accompanied them, which included parades, the laying of wreaths, demonstrations, concerts, and exhibitions, became a natural platform for public appearances by Soviet soldiers as well. Such ceremonies also contributed to the rapid change in the official image of the Soviet Army. This was perhaps most strikingly manifested during the celebrations in May 1970 to mark the Red Army’s liberation of Czechoslovakia 25 years earlier. The speeches, public appearances, and articles that appeared to mark the occasion reflect the symbolic linking of the Red Army liberators of 1945 and the Soviet soldiers of 1968. The events of August 1968 thus officially became another milestone in the history of Czechoslovak–Soviet friendship. As the newspaper of the Karosa bus manufacturer in Vysoké Mýto put it,

the friendship between the common people of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union is sprinkled with blood [...]. Do those 144,000 Soviet citizens who had to die in our country during the Second World War mean nothing? [...] In August [1968] they did not leave us in danger either; they came [...].⁶⁴

Soviet ideologues also recommended linking the Red Army soldiers of 1945 with the Soviet soldiers of 1968. With this copiously employed symbolic fusion there emerged an image of the timeless Soviet soldier-liberator and benefactor, who could not be opposed, because that would mean trampling on the memory of the anti-fascist fighters. The presence of the Soviet Army also brought repeated exaltation of the Soviet struggle against fascism.

The official reception of the Soviet Army as a savior was accompanied by a renewed wave of idealization and the promotion of the Soviet Union, Soviet culture, the land of the Soviets, and the Soviet people. *Rudé právo* journalists reported on a two-week visit to the USSR in August 1969: “The striking production successes of the Soviet workers and technicians were visible everywhere [...]

64 “Přátelství je věčné,” *Karosář*, May 8, 1970.

Many of us did not hide our admiration for the all-round progress, especially technical progress, to which we were witnesses.”⁶⁵

The rhetorical style of this official confirmation of the indestructible bond was openly inspired by the Communist culture of the pre-war period and the Stalinist post-war period,⁶⁶ which expressed love for and devotion to everything Soviet.⁶⁷ At a somewhat less lyrical level, the reestablished friendship was expressed by an emphasis on the teaching of Russian, the promotion of courses in Russian, the increased importation of Soviet arts, including film, the establishment of comradely friendship and twinning at the district, town, enterprise, and school levels, organized excursions to the Soviet Union, and many competitions in poetry recitation and knowledge about the Soviet Union, just as Brezhnev and his ideologues had wanted.

Conclusion

Every political intervention carried out by military means also involves questions of resistance, conformity, and collaboration. In this sense, the turnaround in the official image of the Soviet Army from occupier to savior is probably not exceptional in history. We might today be surprised by the speed with which it occurred. This is undoubtedly connected to certain characteristics of the system that made such a quick change possible. It may seem that in the 1960s the authoritarian regime experienced a thaw. The events after August 1968, however, clearly show that the centralist principle of government remained essentially unchanged: censorship was immediately re-imposed, a number of civil rights and freedoms were revoked, personnel changes were quickly made according to the rules of promoting nomenclature cadres and keeping an eye on them, and

65 *Rudé právo*, August 12, 1969.

66 Again, for example, the 1948 words of the first Communist President of Czechoslovakia, Klement Gottwald, were recalled about how Czechoslovak bonds with the Soviet Union were “inviolable” and how the state was “moving side by side with the Soviet Union in everything and will never do otherwise.” According to Gottwald, “the common Czechoslovak people will not put up with anti-Soviet witch-hunts and intrigues.” *Zpráva ústředního tajemníka SČSP, VII sjezd Svazu*, 13–14. With renewed force, therefore, terms such as “historical necessity,” “inseparability,” and “longevity” appeared in the political vocabulary in connection with the Soviet Union.

67 At the celebrations to mark the anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army, which were held in the district capital, Ústí nad Orlicí, in the presence of Soviet war veterans in May 1970, a poem by the Communist writer S. K. Neumann (1875–1947) was recited, which had first been published in the collection *Srdce a mračka* in 1935. It included the line: “Vám poděkování a lásku vám” [To you, thanks, and love to you]. The same title is used for the article about the events, *Jiskra Orlicka*, May 12, 1970.

mass vetting and purges were carried out. Open resistance to the intervention was quickly made illegal, and it was turned into a matter of investigation and prosecution by a strong secret police force. As soon as the political leadership of the country committed itself to the terms of the Moscow Protocol and the subsequent agreement on the temporary presence of Soviet troops, it had at its disposal a number of traditional instruments to pacify majority society and to foist responsibility on it for meeting its commitments. Since part of the agreements involved nurturing, fostering, or at least creating a semblance of friendly Czechoslovak–Soviet relations, active and public maintenance of a negative image of the Soviet Army as an occupying force was practically unsustainable in the long run.

The question of resistance, conformity, and collaboration is doubtlessly always partly a matter of personal choice. In this article, I explained mainly the wider structural or systemic aspects, which to a large extent created the framework for personal choices. In addition to informal, spontaneous, and private relations (which are more difficult to research), there were organized and official contacts. Above all, comradely friendship with Soviet soldiers or, more generally, a positive attitude towards the Soviet Union as a political commitment was integrated into the existing political and cadre system. This enabled control of the mass media, as well as supervision by the highest bodies of the state and party over the activity of subordinate bodies to ensure that they would not deviate from the centrally determined political line. Friendship became one of the criteria of the political assessment of individuals, groups, and institutions. One of the most common ways to meet such a commitment was to become a member of the Czechoslovak–Soviet Friendship Association. What membership actually entailed was determined by local conditions, as was the social inclusion of an individual. Clearly, the most frequent direct contacts with the Soviet officers took place at the level of the local and regional political élites and nomenclature cadres. An important aspect of the change in the official image of the Soviet Army was the experience of long-fostered friendship with the Soviet Union, both at the level of politics and politicians and of various institutions, as well as specific individuals. This tradition could be renewed by the usual tried and tested political rituals and by incorporating a new circumstance—the 1968 intervention—into it. This tradition included the systematic promotion and idealization of the Soviet Union and everything connected to it. The Soviet Army was then made an inconspicuous but important part of the image of the Soviet Union as benefactor, an image that had been created in a wide variety of ways.

The political consequences of the 1968 military intervention were undoubtedly far-reaching. Nevertheless, at the official level, one of the consequences of the subsequent political measures was the transformation of the image of the Soviet soldiers from the henchmen of an occupying force to saviors who brought deliverance. In the eyes of the public, their political importance was gradually but increasingly trivialized, and this shift was reflected in everyday life. They were incorporated into public political rituals, celebrations, social gatherings, and cultural events, and they became part of both the official and also the unofficial economy. In the mass media, they were often depicted in contexts and roles that were apparently not connected to politics, such as musicians in concerts, sportsmen in matches, people attending friendly discussions, volunteer workers helping out in factories and on cooperative farms. Similarly, contacts between Czechoslovak organizations and citizens and Soviet garrisons gradually lost their negative political associations of collaboration and betrayal. They became part of ceremonial acts and expressions of loyalty, which the citizens of the communist state were regularly forced to perform. These acts were judged positively by the regime, but were often considered a formality, devoid of meaning (including political meaning). The Soviet Army was thus gradually stripped of the meaning of occupier and important political actor, not only because of the ways in which it was presented in official propaganda, but also because of people's real-life experiences.

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