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## A Collaborative Work: The Role of University Students and Dissidents in Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution

Milena Rogers  
*Saint Mary's Academy*

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"You can crush the flowers, but you can't stop the spring."<sup>1</sup>

On January 19, 1969, a young student at the Charles University in Prague walked into Wenceslas Square, calmly poured a gallon of gasoline over himself, and lit himself on fire. His name was Jan Palach. Why did he choose to die in one of the most horrific ways possible? The latter half of the twentieth century was a tumultuous time for the small country of Czechoslovakia. After ending the German occupation of Czechoslovakia following the second World War, the Soviet Union orchestrated a coup d'etat through the election of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1948 as the single governing body of Czechoslovakia. For the next twenty years, the country became isolated from the West, and virtually all of free speech and self expression was vanquished. Individuals lived under a total dictatorship and had very little freedoms. In 1968, however, this changed briefly, in a period known as the "Prague Spring", under the liberating reformatory program of the country's president, Alexander Dubček, who wished to implement "socialism with a human face".<sup>2</sup> His reforms horrified Moscow's Soviet Party; feeling its power undermined, the Soviets invoked the Brezhnev Doctrine, and the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968.<sup>3</sup> For the next twenty years, until the Velvet Revolution of 1989, Czechoslovakia lay crushed under the weight of the Iron Curtain. However, despite the repression, a revolutionary uprising grew during this time period, gaining inspiration and ground from collective protests, martyrdom, and speak-out from both older dissidents and students like Jan Palach. This generational influence and the resulting mass activism enabled the

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Dubček, as quoted in Wolchik, Sharon. *Czechoslovakia In Transition: Politics, Economics, & Society*. London: Printer Publishers Limited. 1991, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Dubček, as quoted in Wolchik, Sharon, 39.

<sup>3</sup> "The Velvet Revolution: A Peaceful End To Communism in Czechoslovakia." *Tavaana.org*, accessed Dec. 5, 2016. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/velvet-revolution-peaceful-end-communism-czechoslovakia-0>.

Czech people to overthrow the once omnipotent Soviet totalitarian regime in one of history's most powerful, non-violent revolutions.

Following the Soviet liberation of a Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia in 1945, the country had a coalition government under President Edvard Beneš and Prime Minister Klement Gottwald.<sup>4</sup> Gottwald, backed by the Soviet Union's Red Army, was instrumental in leading a coup d'etat with the Communist Party in the 1948 election by infiltrating the police force with communists, threatening a general strike, and replacing the positions of twelve non Communist cabinet members who were forced to resign with a Communist dominated government.<sup>5</sup> This, combined with a sense of debt the Czechoslovak citizens felt to the liberating Soviet Union, and coupled with the looming threat of a Soviet invasion, intimidated any other democratic parties into dropping out of the 1948 parliament election.<sup>6</sup> Voters were presented with a singular candidate, and not surprisingly, the once unpopular Communist Party came out victorious.

Immediately following the 1948 election, leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party began to implement the Stalinist model of political organization, social transformation, and economic development.<sup>7</sup> Essentially, everything became centralized. Gottwald and other Communist leaders attempted to replace Czechoslovakia's existing institutional and value systems by converting to structures parallel to Moscow's.<sup>8</sup> Enacting a new constitution in May of 1948, the multiparty system that was integral in Czechoslovakia's interwar democracy was neutralized; the once prominent Social Democratic Party was forced to merge with the

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<sup>4</sup> Wolchik, Sharon, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Skilling, Gordon H., "The Formation of a Communist Party in Czechoslovakia." *The American Slavic and Eastern European Review*, Vol, 14, No.3 (Oct, 1955), pp. 346-358.

<sup>6</sup> Wolchik, Sharon, 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

Communist Party, and all others were disbanded.<sup>9</sup> This ensured a Communist victory every election cycle.

Life in Czechoslovakia changed drastically following the rise of the Communist Party. Similar to other countries in the Eastern block, Czechoslovakia became a "command economy, [in which] the state decides what goods will be produced, in what quantity and by what deadline."<sup>10</sup> This was drastically different than the laissez-faire principles which contributed to the successes of Western free market economies. Individually owned property became state owned, rendering once prosperous individuals and companies poor, and Communist officials reaping the profits. This particularly affected the agricultural sector, and through a mixture of material incentives and coercion, over 90 percent of all farmland in Czechoslovakia was collectivized.<sup>11</sup> Following the Soviet example, the Communist Party promoted social and value change by censoring and stripping away property and titles to discredit the elite, educated class, and by manipulating the education and wage system to benefit the working class.<sup>12</sup> In order to remain in power and in control, the Party relied on coercion and fear tactics, and stimulated a growth of distrust amongst the citizens. Jana Janku, who was a young adult when she lived in Czechoslovakia during the 1950's, describes the fear felt by the Czech citizens. "Nobody trusted each other. There were informers amongst people, who wanted to gain some advantages [with the Communist government], like our landlord. Nobody was allowed to leave the country, but some people risked the crossing illegally. It became almost impossible after 1949-1950, when a tall electric fence was built around the entire border with the western countries. Even movement

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 23.

within the country was controlled— when we went for vacation outside Prague, we had to report ourselves at the local office where we stayed."<sup>13</sup>

This ironclad hold gradually began to subside following Joseph Stalin's death in 1953. In 1956, the new Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev denounced the extremity of Stalinism, giving rise to a period of freedoms known as the "Khrushchev thaw".<sup>14</sup> During this period, citizens in the Eastern Bloc began to see more cultural liberalizations. Jana Janku describes the changes in the period; "a few western movies were allowed. In dance class, we were taught the Foxtrot. It required some jazzy music. All these little things were so exotic for us! There were some new things in fashion—more colors, and high heels... little things that brought joy."<sup>15</sup> The Khrushchev thaw signified to the citizens of Czechoslovakia that conditions were improving.

In 1968, Alexander Dubček replaced Antonin Novotný as the First Secretary of the Communist Party. On April 5th, Dubček published his Action Programme, a series of proposed reforms which aimed to improve economic conditions in Czechoslovakia and promised greater freedom of speech, movement, association and greater political participation by non-communist parties.<sup>16</sup> The power of the police and military against dissidents was to be limited as well. Dubček's reasoning behind his reforms was not to dispel the philosophies behind the Communist Party, but to revitalize its popularity and efficiency, wishing to implement "socialism with a human face."<sup>17</sup> State control loosened its grip on the economy, and people began to see freedom of speech,

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<sup>13</sup> Jana Janku, interview by Milena J. Rogers, November 12, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> "Kruschev's Secret Speech." *Britannica.com*, last modified Nov. 2, 2006, accessed Nov. 12, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Khrushchevs-secret-speech>.

<sup>15</sup> Jana Janku, interview by Milena J. Rogers, November 12, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, Kieran, 'Civil Resistance in Czechoslovakia: From Soviet Invasion to "Velvet Revolution", 1968–89,' in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (eds.), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Dubček, as quoted in Wolchik, Sharon, 38.

something that had not existed at all leading up to Dubček's reforms. Václav Havel, whose once affluent family had lost everything under the regime,<sup>18</sup> describes the period as one where "fear vanished, taboos were swept away, social conflicts could be openly named and described, the mass media once again began to do their job: in short, the ice began to melt."<sup>19</sup>

Over the next four months, Dubček worked in vain to convince the increasingly uneasy Soviet Union that the reforming Czechoslovakia would remain in the Eastern Bloc and that there would be no return to capitalism.<sup>20</sup> Instead, in July of 1968, Warsaw Pact nations drafted an ultimatum to the Prague government, demanding it wind back its reforms and re-impose censorship and one-party control.<sup>21</sup> The Czechoslovakian government ignored this ultimatum, thus prompting the Soviet Union to create the Brezhnev Doctrine, affirming the right of the Soviet Union to intervene in Communist countries.<sup>22</sup> In other words, if an Eastern Bloc country stepped out of line, the Soviets now had the power to use force to protect their interests. On August 21st, 1968, five hundred thousand Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia.<sup>23</sup> Knowing that the country's small military would be no match against the two thousand tanks that rolled in alongside the vast army, Dubček encouraged his people not to resist. Once again, life for Czechoslovak citizens would change drastically. However, the brief taste of freedom that the

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<sup>18</sup> Bilefsky, Dan and Perez, Jane, "Vaclav Havel, Former Czech President Dies at 75," New York Times, Dec. 18, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Havel, Vaclav, as quoted in "Central and Eastern European States - Prague Spring and After," *internationalschoolhistory.net*. Accessed Nov. 10, 2016.

[http://www.internationalschoolhistory.net/central\\_eastern\\_europe/prague\\_spring.htm](http://www.internationalschoolhistory.net/central_eastern_europe/prague_spring.htm).

<sup>20</sup> "The Prague Spring," *alphahistory.com*. Accessed Nov. 3, 2016.

<http://alphahistory.com/coldwar/prague-spring/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Glazer, Stephen G. "The Brezhnev Doctrine," *The International Lawyer* 5, No. 1 (1971): 174.

<sup>23</sup> "The Prague Spring," *alphahistory.com*. Accessed Nov. 3, 2016.

<http://alphahistory.com/coldwar/prague-spring/>.

Prague spring brought would inspire thousands of citizens, both young and old, to continue to fight.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia meant far more to the Czech citizens than simply a transition of government control, power, and limitations. Under Dubček, the Czech people became accustomed to freedoms similar to the ones they had before the rise of the Communist Party, such as an increase in freedom of speech. Frustrated at the lack of military action they could take against the powerful Soviet entities, the next twenty years of life in Czechoslovakia became a period of nonviolent, civil demonstrations; protests that would unite generations together and would result in the gradual overthrow of the Soviet dictatorship of Czechoslovakia.

Protest began to emerge in a variety of ways, even in something as innocent as sport. After Czechoslovakia defeated the Soviet Union in a highly anticipated ice hockey match in the 1969 World Championships,<sup>24</sup> celebratory celebrations turned into anti-Soviet riots. 500,000 Czechs stormed the streets, and in retaliation, the Soviet forces used the protests as an excuse to oust Dubček from office and throw hundreds of other dissidents in jail.<sup>25</sup> However, the conquest of the once undefeated Soviet Ice Hockey team inspired the citizens of Czechoslovakia, and further kindled an inextinguishable fire of revolt. The Soviets were not as unbeatable as once believed.

Inspired by the Ice Hockey Riots, enlightened by the knowledge of the true limitations and downfalls of Communism and the first hand horrors of the Soviet Union, and entranced by the change the Prague Spring briefly brought in a life of rule under the Communist Party, university students throughout the country reacted instantly to the Soviet Invasions. No

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<sup>24</sup> Soares, John. "Cold War, Hot Ice: International Ice Hockey, 1947-1980." *Journal of Sport History* 34, no. 2 (2007): 210.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

individual embodied the expression of resistance more drastically than Jan Palach's self-immolation in January of 1969. Palach, a young university student who had no history of political activism, was frustrated at the lack of resistance to the Soviet Invasion.<sup>26</sup> "After the euphoria of 1968, people had become depressed and beaten down. Palach wanted to shake them up," says Zuzana Bluh, a student leader who helped organize his funeral.<sup>27</sup> In his suicide note, aptly named "Torch Number One", Palach wrote that he wanted 'to wake the people of our country up'.<sup>28</sup> And he did. Half a million Czechoslovaks of all generations turned to the streets in protest of the Soviet Invasion following his funeral.<sup>29</sup> Although they were unable to physically resist the Soviets, by attending Palach's funeral in protest, the Czechoslovak citizens were able to convey their distress at the invasion. The authorities initially allowed these demonstrations, sensing the citizens' need to express their frustration. However, marches were soon broken up and guards were placed at Palach's gravesite to deter mourners. Within six months after his self-immolation, two other university students, Jan Zacík and Evžen Ploček, replicated his martyrdom.<sup>30</sup> The message the three young students gave their lives for was clear: do not be subdued into complacency.

Beyond the fierce nationalism towards an independent Czechoslovakia and the contempt towards the repressiveness of the Soviet Union, the motive behind the discontent of the university students was their recognition of the pitfalls of Communism.<sup>31</sup> Their university educations allowed them to better understand that human nature could never harmonize with

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<sup>26</sup> Steele, Jonathan, "Ultimate Sacrifice," *The Guardian*, Jan. 1, 1999.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> "Followers." *Janpalach.cz*, accessed Nov. 15, 2016. <http://www.janpalach.cz/en/default/jan-palach/spolecnost>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Wolchik, Sharon, 38.

Communism, unlike some of their uneducated counterparts who sympathized with the Soviet Union in the hopes that their lives would be improved. Communism may appear egalitarian in theory, but reality showed that there will always be those who rise to usurp power.

Although the young university students made up much of the physical protests, they were greatly influenced by older dissidents in the way of speeches, plays, and philosophies. The most famous dissident during this period was Václav Havel, whose fiery speeches, essays, and plays inspired thousands and enraged the Soviets. His 1978 essay, "The Power of the Powerless," which was smuggled to other Warsaw Pact countries and to the West,<sup>32</sup> appeals to Czechoslovak citizens to avoid being lulled into complacency by the false promises of Communism, and that protest could prevail in bringing down a totalitarian regime.<sup>33</sup> In the following excerpt from "The Power of the Powerless," Havel discusses the role of truth in society, and raises questions about how its power can be used.

In the post-totalitarian system, truth in the widest sense of the word has a very special import, one unknown in other contexts. In this system, truth plays a far greater (and, above all, a far different) role as a factor of power, or as an outright political force. How does the power of truth operate? How does truth as a factor of power work? How can its power-as power-be realized?

Because of his popularity and increasing moral authority, Havel was the most influential of his intellectual peers. He was therefore heavily scrutinized by the Soviets. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, Havel spent five years in and out of Communist prisons, lived under close secret-police surveillance and endured censorship of his plays and essays.<sup>34</sup> However, this

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<sup>32</sup> Bilefsky, Dan and Perez, Jane, "Vaclav Havel, Former Czech President Dies at 75," New York Times, Dec. 18, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Havel, Vaclav, "The Power of the Powerless," 1978. *History.hanover.edu*, Accessed Nov. 23, 2016. <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/165havel.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Bilefsky, Dan and Perez, Jane, "Vaclav Havel, Former Czech President Dies at 75," New York Times, Dec. 18, 2011.

backfired on the government; dissident activity is more likely to be effective in motivating rebellions under grave repercussions, especially when it is well beloved dissidents who are punished.<sup>35</sup> The Czechoslovak citizens looked to Havel and other dissidents on guidance and inspiration, found mainly in the limited free speech that was able to get past censorship. Havel, like other dissidents, as described by Charter 77 Chairman Jan Urban, was "a mouthpiece for people's dreams and fears".<sup>36</sup>

The university students were furthered influenced by the academics through the attendance of satirical plays, oral presentations, and by low occasion visitations of dissidents to universities.<sup>37</sup> Because of the crack down on any form of opposition, these linkages were at great risk to both the dissidents and the students, yet they were formed anyway. Due to a large percentage of dissidents being actors, meetings were held in local theaters, and as a result, theatre emerged as one of the most common political protests.<sup>38</sup> A play that was widely attended by university students was Vaclav Havel's 1975 adaptation of the "Beggar's Opera," performed by students at the Prague Conservatory.<sup>39</sup> The politically charged play satirized Communist Czechoslovakia by mocking the lack of individual identity and freedom, and the corruption prevalent in the government. As a result, the aftermath was disastrous. Many of the attendees were arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned.<sup>40</sup> However, through the messages that were

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<sup>35</sup> Ginkel, John, and Smith, Alastair, "So You Say You Want a Revolution: A Game Theoretic Explanation of Revolution in Repressive Regimes," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43, No. 3 (1999): 291-316.

<sup>36</sup> Urban, Jan, interview by Justine Costanza, *Aktuálně.cz*, Oct. 11, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Wolchik, Sharon, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Kavan, Zdeněk and Wheaton, Bernard. *The Velvet Revolution: Czechoslovakia, 1988-1991*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Rocamora, Carol, "Theatre; a Glimmer of Satire Amid Freedom's Obscurities," *New York Times*, Dec. 17, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

conveyed in the "Beggar's Opera" and other plays, students had a sense of intellectual support from their older counterparts.

Through these intellectual works, dissidents explored and conveyed the unease and unhappiness that the Czechoslovaks felt; but in return, they experienced heavy retaliation from the Communist government. Dissidents were arrested on charges of hooliganism and obstruction of justice, and were subjected to false trials, interrogations, suppression of works, jail time, and exile.<sup>41</sup> The Communists purged dissidents and their families in order to remain in control.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the dissidents continued their efforts.

In 1977, Havel became one of three organizers of Charter 77, a group of 242 signers who called for the human rights guaranteed under the 1975 Helsinki accords.<sup>43</sup> Charter 77 did not set out to become its own political organization or platform; rather, it served as a way to conduct a constructive dialogue with the political and state authorities on the subject of human rights and suggest remedies.<sup>44</sup> It became an internationally recognized dissident act to combat the repressions by the Soviet Union. Charter 77 was influential as well because it outlined the desires of the dissident movement: basic human rights for the Czechoslovak citizens. Although the charter did reach a broad international audience, conditions remained the same. Petitioners were jailed, and sadly, these basic human rights were not recognized.

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<sup>41</sup> Powers, Charles T., "Czech Power Party Struggle Hinted: Hesitation, Indecision Seen in Crackdown on Dissidents," *LA Times*, Feb. 12, 1989.

<sup>42</sup> "The Velvet Revolution: A Peaceful End To Communism in Czechoslovakia." *Tavaana.org*, accessed Dec. 5, 2016. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/velvet-revolution-peaceful-end-communism-czechoslovakia-0>.

<sup>43</sup> The Helsinki Accords was an agreement signed by 35 nations that addressed a range of prominent global issues, most importantly, issues regarding human rights. They were designed to improved U.S.- Soviet relations.

<sup>44</sup> "The Velvet Revolution: A Peaceful End To Communism in Czechoslovakia." *Tavaana.org*, accessed Dec. 5, 2016. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/velvet-revolution-peaceful-end-communism-czechoslovakia-0>.

Influenced by the works and organizations of the older, intellectual dissidents, many youth dissident groups were formed in the late 1980's. The first of these, the Stuha Movement, was founded by Prague university students in the summer of 1989.<sup>45</sup> Young people also formed the Independent Peace Association in April of 1988 to work for the right to free speech and the demilitarization of society.<sup>46</sup> These groups, like many others, remained heavily underground as a result of the continual mass brutality dissidents faced for speaking out. However, things began to change in 1989.

The Soviet Union gradually began to weaken in the late 1980's under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. The unsustainable system of the Communist government, crippled by the economic devastation of a costly arms race with the West, had left the Soviet Union with a weakening hold on its Eastern Block satellite countries.<sup>47</sup> Gorbachev made it clear in his 1988 visit to Poland that he had no intention of using military force to prop up the Communist regime, a striking departure from the Brezhnev doctrine.<sup>48</sup> Encouraged by the diminishing threat of retaliation, the dissident groups increased their protests,<sup>49</sup> and on November 17th, 1989, the Stuha Movement gathered thousands of university students in Prague to celebrate International Students' Day.<sup>50</sup> The gathering soon turned political, with students carrying banners and chanting

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<sup>45</sup> Wolchik, Sharon, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>47</sup> Kavan, Zdeněk and Wheaton, Bernard, 55.

<sup>48</sup> Castellano, David J., "Causes of the Soviet Collapse (1979-1991)." *Arcaneknowledge.org*, revised 2011, accessed Dec. 2, 2016. <http://www.arcaneknowledge.org/histpoli/soviet.htm>.

<sup>49</sup> Wolchik, Sharon, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Kavan, Zdeněk and Wheaton, Bernard, 44.

anti-Communist slogans.<sup>51</sup> Although the protests were peaceful, the police was called to break up the demonstrations, and 167 students were hospitalized after they were brutally beaten.<sup>52</sup>

The Czechoslovaks were outraged at the brutality. Two days later, in a theatre often used as a meeting place,<sup>53</sup> prominent multigenerational dissidents held a fiery meeting, establishing a political group called the Civic Forum on November 19, 1989.<sup>54</sup> The Civic Forum, led by Vaclav Havel, demanded "the resignation of the Communist government, the release of prisoners of conscience, and investigations into the November 17 police action."<sup>55</sup> The next day, 200,000 people took to the streets of Prague, the first of many demonstrations in the second half of November 1989 that would end Communist domination.<sup>56</sup> These demonstrations were organized primarily by the dissidents of the Civic Forum, but were united with the working people and young students. In order to raise as large of a movement as possible, dissident run theaters and cinemas soon set up printing machines to mass produce handbills and slogans, a popular alternative to government controlled mass media.<sup>57</sup> The ultimate show of solidarity came two weeks later, planned meticulously by the Civic Forum, who believed an economic standstill would be the most efficient way to disrupt the government. On November 27, millions of Czechoslovaks, 75% of the total population, walked off their jobs for a two hour general strike, bringing the nation to a standstill.<sup>58</sup> It was a stunning rebuke of the Communist Party, which

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<sup>51</sup> "The Velvet Revolution: A Peaceful End To Communism in Czechoslovakia." *Tavaana.org*, accessed Dec. 5, 2016. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/velvet-revolution-peaceful-end-communism-czechoslovakia-0>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Kavan, Zdeněk and Wheaton, Bernard, 46.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>55</sup> Bilefsky, Dan and Perez, Jane, "Vaclav Havel, Former Czech President Dies at 75," *New York Times*, Dec. 18, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Kavan, Zdeněk and Wheaton, Bernard, 62-63.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

counted on the support from the workers who went on strike. It was clear to the government that it was not just the intellectuals and university students who were dissatisfied and aware of the injustices the Czechoslovaks were forced to endure; it was the entirety of the population. The weakened Communist regime knew now that the Czech people would no longer obey. The discredited Party was forced to meet with Havel and the Civic Forum to go over the demands of the people, and on November 28, just one day after the general strike, the Communist Party officially ceded their monopoly over single party governance.<sup>59</sup> In December of 1989, the Communist president of Czechoslovakia, Gustav Husak, resigned, and in January of 1990, Vaclav Havel was elected president in the first democratic election since the 1940's.<sup>60</sup> The ubiquitous presence of the Soviet Union was removed from Czechoslovakia when in February of 1990, Havel met with Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow and successfully negotiated the withdrawal of 70,000 Soviet troops stationed in Czechoslovakia.<sup>61</sup> The people had won.

To conclude, the Velvet Revolution drew its success from the two groups of individuals who worked both separately and then together: the university students and the older intellectual dissidents, who then in turn mobilized the working class into protest. The students drew inspiration from their older counterparts, and provided the majority of protesters for the demonstrations organized in turn by the dissidents. It was an university student, Jan Palach, who broke the lull of complacency and inspired a revolution. It was a dissident playwright, Václav Havel, who articulated the suppression the Czechoslovak people experienced. Although the brutality protesters experienced at the hands of the Soviets and their fear of retaliation for any

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<sup>59</sup> "The Velvet Revolution: A Peaceful End To Communism in Czechoslovakia." *Tavaana.org*, accessed Dec. 5, 2016. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/velvet-revolution-peaceful-end-communism-czechoslovakia-0>.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Bilefsky, Dan and Perez, Jane, "Vaclav Havel, Former Czech President Dies at 75," *New York Times*, Dec. 18, 2011.

form of speak-out suppressed the revolution for twenty years, every dissident group formed, every small scale demonstration, and every intellectual work speaking out against the Communists penned under the fear of jail time resulted in a cohesive, monumental revolution. What truly made the Velvet Revolution successful was its lack of violence, resulting in its name. Contrary to many other famous revolutions in history, the Velvet Revolution demonstrations were conducted peacefully; protesters gave flowers to the police, chanted slogans, and sang.<sup>62</sup> The Czech dissidents knew that it was futile to rise up against the powerful Soviet army, so drawing inspiration from the work of Gandhi in India, they instead organized the people into unified civil disobedience, and through negotiations, not force, ensued a smooth transference of power from the Communist Party.<sup>63</sup> The power of the people, led at first by a few, paved the way to one of history's most powerful revolutions.

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<sup>62</sup> Kavan, Zdeněk and Wheaton, Bernard, 65.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 75.