

## **U.S. Media's Portrayal of the 1968 Prague Spring and Warsaw Pact Invasion**

### Significance of the Prague Spring

When Czechoslovakia exploded in reform in 1968 and experienced the shock of the Warsaw Pact invasion, most observers interpreted the Prague Spring as an isolated series of events that were unusual for that country. Analysts saw continuity between the level of Soviet control prior to the year 1968 and the re-imposition of restrictions after August 1968. The Czechoslovak reform movement was merely a blip on the horizon and was a non-repeatable event, at least in that “normalized” country. The Prague Spring invited that type of interpretation because the Czechoslovak citizenry had previously endured twenty years under Soviet-style communism. After the end of World War II, Czechoslovakia succumbed to rule by the Communist Party. The communist coup betrayed the inter-war democratic experiment that was the First Republic. Although the Czechoslovak Communist Party had a large following in the 1945-48 period, establishment of the Gottwald regime appeared to most observers as an imposition by Moscow. What followed was a clear imitation of patterns in the in the Soviet Union with respect to centralization of the economy, de-emphasis on the organs of the official government, restrictions on the press, reliance on the party as the effective replacement for the state organs of power, and assertion of cultural controls. The purges in the early 1950s were especially shocking in a nation that prided itself on a long history of civility. Little changed with the advent to power of Antonin Novotny in 1953. While Poland and Hungary in their own individual ways made efforts to modify the excesses of their communist regimes in 1956, Czechoslovakia under Novotny remained the same (Taborsky, 1961). While Tito and Yugoslavia challenged Soviet leadership within the bloc all during the 1950s and 1960s, leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party remained close to Moscow. Even East Germany began a meaningful economic reform movement in 1962 that was not duplicated in nearby Czechoslovakia. Romanian leadership in the mid-1960s became quite maverick in foreign policy. The unyielding nature of the Czechoslovak Communist Party permitted no challenges or reforms before 1968.

Most observers also perceived the Czechoslovak reforms to be unusual for the bloc in that particular time period. It is true that the reform proposals themselves were in part related to other signs of protest within East Europe. The plans for incorporation of a limited profit principle and price incentives were parallel to those adopted in East Germany at the beginning of the 1960s. Some of the political goals connected to democratization bore the marks of the Hungarian Freedom Fighters of 1956. However, in the main the Prague Spring of 1968 was an isolated occurrence at that point in time within the bloc. East European leaders such as Walter Ulbricht in East Germany and Wladislav Gomulka in Poland were very suspicious of the changes and feared they might infect their own country. The outcome of the crisis was an invasion by the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and this was the only time during the Cold War that that regional organization took such an action against one of its own members. Tito of Yugoslavia was sympathetic to the reformers, and the Romanian leadership ended up not taking part in the Warsaw Pact invasion. However, in 1968 neither of those countries stood up to the rest of the bloc in any meaningful way.

Western reactions to the Warsaw Pact invasion were muted, reactive, and unplanned. No doubt, the new foreign policy of Ostpolitik in West Germany had some impact on the Prague Spring reformers (Golan, 1973). Foreign Minister and later Chancellor Willy Brandt anchored West German foreign policy on new ties with some of the communist regimes to the east. East Germany was the initial target of this policy, and visits took place. Although the relationship with the Czechoslovak leadership never developed that fully, clearly the prospects tantalized the Prague Spring reformers. Prospects for increased trade and visits across Cold War barriers may have encouraged especially the economic reformers within Czechoslovakia to continue to press their campaign to begin rolling back central controls of the economy. On the other hand, the West was quite passive when the invasion by Warsaw Treaty Organization forces actually took place. President Johnson denounced the move, and other western leaders made similar statements. However, there was no coordinated policy to undo the reforms through active diplomacy in the United Nations or through sanctions of other kinds. With respect to American ability to respond, the timing of the invasion was fortunate from the Soviet standpoint. The Johnson Administration was preoccupied with the battle in and over Vietnam, and the presidential race to succeed Johnson was at white heat.

One significant feature of the reform process in Czechoslovakia was the impact on formal political ethnic relations within the country. The new federal law that went into effect at the beginning of 1969 was the only Prague Spring reform that survived the invasion. That law did establish some additional basic rights for the Slovaks who constituted roughly one-third of the population. For example, the Chamber of Nations within the Federal Assembly was restructured in such a way that Czechs and Slovaks played a co-equal role. Each could select 150 representatives to the body (Golan, 1979). In addition, there was to be an emphasis on placing more Slovaks in administrative positions within the federal bureaucracy. In fact, First Secretary Gustav Husak went further than that. He placed higher proportions of fellow Slovaks in the Presidium as well as in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. These changes were heartening for Slovaks but did not result in significantly more responsive policies. Such an improvement could only come about with more thorough transformation of the party apparatus itself.

In sum, the unique features of the Prague Spring period are relatively clear. It was unusual for the Czechs and Slovaks to register a challenge to Soviet authority, for they had not done so in the previous twenty years. Further, by 1968 most of the rest of the bloc was relatively passive, and the outburst of reform within Czechoslovakia was a surprise. In addition, western reactions to the crisis did not result in any significant assistance to the Czechoslovak reformers. Finally, the most positive result of the reforms internally was the improvement in formal political relations between Czechs and Slovaks.

### Methodology and Quantitative Findings

There were three newspapers chosen for the application of content analysis. They include the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Christian Science Monitor. Taken together, these newspapers provide a broad overview of national perspectives on the rapidly changing Czechoslovak political scene in 1968. A number of quantitative findings can emerge from such an examination. First, it is useful to look at the number of articles overall. These data will provide a glimpse of the relative importance placed on

each media source on the events in Czechoslovakia. Of course, the number of articles will also reveal the general significance placed by each newspaper on international events overall. Second, it is useful to look at the number and percentage of articles that begin on page one. Highlighting the events in Eastern Europe by positioning the articles about them on page one will be another indicator of their relative visibility. Third, insights can emerge by looking at the month-by-month break down of page one articles for each news source. It would be expected that each newspaper would tend to cluster most articles in the summer months, when so much was happening prior to the Warsaw Pact invasion. However, it may be more interesting to examine whether any news source placed importance on the reforms announced in the early months or in the impact of the invasion in the last months of the year. Table I and Table II include these data. The data for each newspaper is found in its index.

Table 1. Number of Articles Overall During the Prague Spring and Page One Priority by Newspaper, 1968

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>	<b>Number and Percentage of Page One Articles</b>
<u>New York Times</u>	1224(approximate)	215 (17.6%)
<u>Wall Street Journal</u>	74	50 (67.6%)
<u>Christian Science Monitor</u>	305	61 (20.0%)

In Table 1 the overall number of articles for the New York Times is approximate because of the near impossibility of counting the number of indexed articles. The method for calculation entailed counting the number of articles in one column and then multiplying by the number of columns. The small print and number of pages of references made any other procedure unworkable.

It is apparent from the above table that the New York Times presented by far the highest number of articles on the Prague Spring and related topics. The Christian Science Monitor contained about one quarter of the number of articles in the New York Times, while the Wall Street Journal had far fewer. On the other hand, the Wall Street Journal placed nearly two-thirds of its articles on the front page. When its editors chose to present information about the reform movement, they gave it full play in the publication. The other two newspapers devoted about the same proportion of front-page space to the series of events.

Table 2. Monthly Break-down of Articles by Newspaper (Number Beginning on Page One), 1968

Newspaper	Month											
	J	F	M	AP	MY	JN	JL	AU	S	O	N	D
<u>New York Times</u>	1	0	10	2	19	3	31	58	45	20	19	7
<u>Wall Street Journal</u>	0	0	0	1	1	0	11	17	11	6	2	1
<u>Christian Science Monitor</u>	0	1	3	0	1	1	14	18	14	5	2	2

All three newspapers reveal similar patterns when the examination focuses on the month of coverage. There was a moderate number of articles from March through May, the months when the leadership was enacting many of the key reforms. The number of articles became heavy in July at the point when serious Soviet warnings were being issued. A very high number of articles came out in August and September. This included the period of the actual invasion and all the related reactions and developments after that fact. October was comparable to July as the peak period of the crisis had passed. However, numerous interpretive articles appeared in an effort to provide a broader framework for readers. It is clear that the media in the United States found the drama of confrontation the most newsworthy story of the year. They may have devoted less space early in the year in the belief that the reforms were either not that meaningful or would not be likely to go that far.

### Qualitative Findings

Analysis will focus on interpretation of key themes stressed by the media sources on a month-by-month basis throughout the year of the Prague Spring. Conclusions will be based on content analysis of themes that emerged only in articles beginning on the first page of the newspapers. Those themes include the role of leadership, the reforms associated with the Prague Spring, the actual invasion by the forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and western reaction to that invasion. A final section will draw implications about the themes that dominated the media focus in the critical year of 1968.

Table 3. Coverage of Key Themes by Newspaper (Number and Percentage), 1968.

Newspaper	Key Themes				
	Leadership	Reforms	Invasion	Reaction	Total
<u>New York Times</u>	37 (17.3)	36 (16.8)	99 (46.3)	42 (19.6)	214 (100)
<u>Wall Street Journal</u>	8 (16.3)	1 ( 2.0)	32 (65.3)	8 (16.3)	49 ( 99.9)
<u>Christian Science Monitor</u>	10 (16.4)	14 (23.0)	36 (59.0)	1 ( 1.6)	61 (100)

The New York Times provided the most balanced coverage with respect to all four themes. Each of the four themes received a respectable amount of coverage. In contrast, the Wall Street Journal gave limited coverage to the reforms themselves but devoted nearly two-thirds of its coverage to the invasion. The Christian Science Monitor paid very little attention to the outside reaction to the Prague Spring but gave nearly three-fifths of its space to the invasion. When focusing on the themes themselves, it is clear that the invasion was the topic of most interest to all editorial staffs. This was a spectacular event that conjured up all the images and stereotypes of the Cold War. At the same time, it is not surprising that coverage of the invasion overwhelmed commentary on the leadership issue and the reaction by the outside world. However, it is surprising that the reforms themselves received such a small amount of coverage early in the year. The Christian Science Monitor was the only exception as it devoted nearly one quarter of its page one stories throughout the year to the changes that were being enacted by the Prague Spring reformers. Perhaps the press did not expect the reforms to develop to the extent that they did or to be so consequential as to provoke the Warsaw Pact invasion.

### January through March

During the first three months of 1968, the dominant themes receiving press attention were the leadership situation and the nature of the reforms themselves. The replacement of Novotny by Dubcek in January as First Secretary of the Communist Party did merit notice by the editors of the New York Times (January 6, 1968). It was additionally noteworthy that he was the first Slovak to become head of the Czechoslovak state. Conservative forces around Novotny continued to try to keep him near the center of power. One individual attempting to fight a rearguard action against the reforms

committed suicide, while another, General Sejma, fled to the United States after a similar effort. Dubcek dismissed two cabinet members in March after they failed to move quickly enough in rehabilitating victims of Stalin's purges. Novotny lost his final position as President in March, and the media interpreted the selection of replacement Ludvik Svoboda as an effort to calm down the leadership in the Soviet Union.

The media placed a similar weight on the earliest reforms to be enacted by the new leadership. They noted the involvement in the reforms of Czechoslovak intellectuals and students. It was anticipated that the impact of the reforms would be a lessened emphasis on ideology, increased autonomy from the Soviet Union, and a more independent policy towards West Germany. At the same time, the reform leadership obviously kept an eye on potential reactions by the Soviet leadership to these early changes and new themes. In late March Dubcek and Lenart met with Soviet leaders in an effort to allay their concerns, and publication by the Warsaw Pact of the Dresden Communique heightened concern. Although media coverage of these early months was relatively small, readers could see an prophecy of most of the key points of tension that would inflate in ensuing months.

### **April through June**

A small number of articles focused on the nature of the unfolding reform process. For example, in April the Wall Street Journal (April 17, 1968) noted that the new regime was gradually loosening state control over industry. Reports of leadership summaries of the reforms were included in one issue of the New York Times (May 15, 1968). Approval of the reforms by audiences within the communist bloc merited additional commentary. There was also some western interest in requests by students to reexamine the death of Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk in 1948. The applause of Tito and other Yugoslav leaders constituted one important story, and high support by a Czechoslovak public opinion poll for the effort to create a multi-party system was another. American support for the reform efforts was a vital additional voice.

However, the main press interest in this period was the Soviet reaction and the implications for the Cold War. Soviet troop movements in Poland and in East Germany along the Czech border were the topics of several important stories. Attacks on the reforms were also a significant part of the chain reaction of events. It was obvious that a number of newspapers within the bloc were attacking the Prague Spring reforms. Equally important was an attack reported in the Soviet press by an ideologist on the basic direction of the reforms. Additional attacks took place against the memory of Thomas Masaryk, President of the inter-war Czechoslovak experiment in democracy. Czechoslovak leaders embarked upon a series of hastily called meetings with Soviet leaders. Dubcek himself flew to Moscow to describe more fully the reforms that were taking place. President Svoboda defended the reforms in the presence of a twelve-person Soviet military delegation. Premier Alexei Kosygin came to Prague with no advance notice. On the other hand, his official comments seemed to be somewhat understanding of the changes in the process of being enacted. Finally, considerable Soviet pressure forced the Czechoslovak leadership to agree that Warsaw Pact maneuvers could take place in their country in the month of June. While the heavy emphasis by the western press on the bloc reaction is understandable in light of Cold War politics, the very limited

discussions of the reforms themselves was a disservice to readers attempting to come to terms with the new dynamic of change in East Europe.

### **July through September**

Heavy attention by the western media took place during the critical months of late summer and early fall. Since each month took on a personality of its own, it makes most sense to look at the three months one-by-one.

#### *July: Build-up to Invasion*

The number of articles dealing with the leadership situation in Czechoslovakia and with the reforms remained relatively small. Press portrayals of Dubcek presented him in a defensive light, particularly in the last weeks of the month. Under pressure from Moscow, Dubcek was able to get an informal vote of confidence from resolutions passed by Czech workers and young people meeting in cafes. On July 20 the New York Times reported that conservative Central Committee members in Czechoslovakia voted their confidence in the leader. However, by the end of the month Dubcek needed to deal with popular concern about an increasingly divided Communist Party. Thus, he spoke to the population in order to foster a sense of stability. Increasingly, it was necessary for him to communicate a sense of firmness.

Since the reforms had mainly been articulated earlier in the April Action Program, the lack of attention to the reform program by the media is somewhat understandable. Some of the non-Czech minorities continued to press their claims, and the Dubcek leadership remained steadfastly committed to the enacted and planned changes. External support for the reform course continued to stream in from expected sources. Tito asked for a meeting with the Czechoslovak leadership in Prague, and the League of Communists of Yugoslavia sent a declaration of support for the reformers. Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov praised the Prague Spring reforms as bold but also as a politically astute compromise. Thus, commitment to the path of reform rather than articulation of new ideas constituted the essence of western press perceptions.

Preoccupation with the Soviet and Warsaw Pact reaction to the internal changes in Czechoslovakia mainly characterized the interests of the West. The Wall Street Journal (July 24, 1968) was particularly interested in the military maneuvers that had an obvious connection to the Czechoslovak reforms. After completion of the Warsaw Pact exercises, Soviet troops withdrew very slowly from the territory of the Czechoslovak state. At the end of the month the Soviet leaders announced new maneuvers that would take place very close to the Czechoslovak border. Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders met in eastern Slovakia in Cierna in this atmosphere, and the talks were very apparently filled with tension. The Christian Science Monitor (July 20, 1968) depicted the relationship between the two nations as a drama or game in which each side sought the most advantage. They portrayed Moscow as continuously stepping up the "pressure," while the Dubcek leadership constantly endeavored to "parry" new Soviet thrusts. While the Soviet leaders were "setting harsh terms," the Czechoslovak leaders tried to "hold the line" and "stand firm."

The New York Times provided the most detailed coverage of the critical events of this build-up month. Early in the month, the Prague leadership resisted Soviet efforts to get them to join in all-Warsaw Pact meetings. Fearing isolation in that kind of setting,

the reformers insisted on bilateral meetings with their Soviet counterparts. In spite of their insistence, the Warsaw Pact powers met in Warsaw without the Czechoslovak leaders. Following the conclusion of the meeting, the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) sent its famous “letter” that was a stern warning to the Czechs. One Czech response to that letter was a statement by General Prchlik that the WTO treaty was not intended to be used against a member state. In the middle of the month the Johnson Administration in the United States called for negotiations between the Soviet Politburo and the Czechoslovak Presidium. Finally, the Soviet leaders pushed for such a meeting in the Soviet Union. The Czechoslovak leaders refused that setting and finally convinced the Soviet leaders to come to Cierna. In fact, the entire eleven-person Soviet Politburo made the trip. In return for this Soviet concession, the Prague Spring leadership had to remove General Prchlik from their Presidium. While this media portrayal certainly does grant the central role to Soviet pressure, it also demonstrates that Prague was able to engage in a limited kind of bargaining game with Moscow.

*August: The Month of Invasion*

All three media sources, of course, related the circumstances surrounding the August 21<sup>st</sup> invasion. The Wall Street Journal editors (August 21, 1968) chose to touch only lightly on the facts of the invasion. That newspaper described the final efforts at dialogue between the two countries, the supportive visit to Prague of Yugoslavia’s Tito, and the invasion by Warsaw Pact troops. After the invasion was completed, there were references to citizen demonstrations in Czechoslovakia as well as comments on the multiparty talks in Moscow. However, there was a relatively strong emphasis by the newspaper on the western reaction to the invasion. In their view the Cold War was intensifying with possible repercussions both in Southeast Asia and in the area of East-West trade. While President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk both gave ominous warnings about the damaging results of the invasion, it was equally clear that the American public had no interest in another heavy national security commitment at a time when the War in Vietnam was in such paralysis. There were only a few small references to the plight of the Czechoslovak leaders.

There was a somber tone in the reporting of the Christian Science Monitor. Some of the descriptions of the events bore the tone of the World War II era rather than the middle Cold War period. For instance, the day after the invasion a writer labeled the invading army as representatives of “Soviet jackboots” (August 22, 1968). An eyewitness concluded that “tanks shatter dreams” (August 24, 1968). One article described Prague as a “capital of tragedy.” There were, in addition, costs to the Soviet Union. These included a setback in relations with the West, a split among the communist parties, and the emergence of hard new questions.

Of course, the pages of the New York Times contained the most detailed coverage of the events of this critical month. Early in the month the newspaper made an effort to interpret the result of the Cierna meetings between the leaders of the two countries. In general, the interpretation of the final communique was quite positive. It appeared as though the Soviet leaders had made concessions in such a way that the Czechoslovak leadership obtained a bit more room to maneuver. Subsequent meetings in Bratislava raised hopes even further. Those talks included other members of the WTO, and one seemingly significant outcome was a reduction in the critical rhetoric emanating from

both Moscow and East Berlin. There was also discussion of splits within the Soviet leadership. Perhaps the diplomatic tenor of the Cierna and Bratislava meetings revealed a temporary victory by moderates over the hard-liners. Increasingly, neighboring countries began to take sides on the key issues. West German leaders became responsive to the prospects of increased trade with Czechoslovakia. They were willing to declare the Munich Pact defunct in order to ease the path in economic relations. Leaders from both Yugoslavia and Romania came to Prague to lend their support. Ulbricht in East Germany became more worried about the overtures from West Germany, and he came to Karlovy Vary to try to get the Czechs to reverse course.

After the middle of the month, hard-line polemics from Moscow heated up through warnings in Pravda. Following the invasion, the New York Times reported in detailed fashion on the critical audience in the outside world. They included in their pages individual articles on criticism from Romania, Tito, China, the United Nations, President Johnson, and even the Democratic Platform Committee in the United States. The key follow-up event was the meeting in Moscow among all of the key WTO countries. Gomulka of Poland, Zhivkov of Bulgaria, Kadar of Hungary, and Ulbricht of East Germany met with both the Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders in a highly tense atmosphere. The final communique emphasized the new strategy of normalization. While Soviet propaganda and self-justification continued, Czechoslovak leaders were left in the position of trying to explain what they had just agreed to to their own population.

In conclusion, it is possible to delineate somewhat different approaches to the invasion by the three newspapers. While the Christian Science Monitor presented the events as stark reminders of World War II repression and totalitarianism, Wall Street Journal writers tended to be somewhat optimistic early in the month about a positive outcome. The latter newspaper also emphasized both the impact on and the reactions by the outside world. It is not surprising that trade relations remained a concern to that particular newspaper. It is difficult to characterize the approach taken by the New York Times. In part, they tried to communicate accurately to their readers the overall parade of events. At the same time, they offered a particularly useful service of keying in on splits within the Soviet leadership as a partial cause of the wavering signals coming from Moscow. They also displayed clearly the manner in which this crisis set nations in the neighborhood against one another. Finally, the newspaper was aware of the plight of the Czechoslovak leadership in relations with its own population following the post-invasion Moscow meeting. In a word, the writers and editors were very attuned to the domestic and international political ramifications of the crisis.

#### *September: Immediate Aftermath of Invasion*

In the pages of the Wall Street Journal, there was a double focus on the futile efforts of the Czechoslovak leaders to mollify the Soviet leaders and on the cementing of the occupation. First, the resignation of Ota Sik was significant, for he had been the architect of the economic reforms during the middle and late 1960s. Czechoslovak leaders then held a series of meetings to talk over strategies that might lead to the end of the occupation. In addition, discussions took place over the nature of speeches given or permitted under the new circumstances. On at least one occasion, Dubcek toned down a speech that might have offended the Soviet leaders.

Additional steps to solidify the occupation also took place during the month. In line with Soviet expectations, Czechoslovak leaders imposed a much stricter censorship on the press. Officials also signed a document that linked more firmly the Czechoslovak and Soviet economies. Pressure from Moscow led to the resignation of reform Foreign Minister Jiri Hayek, while other Soviet statements pressed the Czechs to speed up the process of weakening the reform forces. At the same time, there was still a small amount of flexibility permitted to the Czechs and Slovaks. A certain portion of the Soviet troops pulled out of Czechoslovak cities. The Czech press was able to defend an official who had been ousted during the invasion. However, these concessions were clearly only possible in the period of flux that preceded normalization.

The Christian Science Monitor took an interest in leadership changes within the country. There were individual articles on the shape of the new team, the initial personnel changes in the Presidium, and the increasing pressures on the top leaders. With respect to the aftermath of invasion, the publication took a rather low-key approach. They noted both that the resistance had died down and that Prague had returned to outward normalcy. A number of other articles took the form of a summing up of the whole experience. One focused on “history’s lessons,” while another attempted to “tally” the “invasion score” (September 14 and 30, 1968). Such a muted tone offered a contrast to the dramatic and ponderous nature of articles printed during the previous month.

Again, the New York Times offered the most detailed look at the unfolding events of the month. They paid relatively little attention to the leadership changes and none at all to the reforms that had prompted the invasion. There was substantial interest in the process of consolidation. Discussions between Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders formed the nub of this process. Kuznetsov met in a confrontational way in Prague with Czechoslovak President Svoboda. Both sets of leaders talked about the fourteen points that made up the essence of the Soviet demands. The Soviet leadership then sent a number of advisers with their families to Prague to assist in the setting up of the new conditions. In light of the split apparent in the communist camp during the year of the Prague Spring, Moscow called for a stronger Warsaw Pact. However, there was still some uncertainty in the Soviet approach during this first post-invasion month. There was still supposedly frustration that the Czechs had not issued a clear call for help during the first half of the year. The Soviet leadership planned a big meeting in Moscow but postponed it after disagreement emerged. Finally, the Soviets debated whether it might be wise to delay the World Communist Conference until the dust had settled a bit more.

There was ample attention focused as well on the western reaction to the heavy-handed invasion. American leaders worried further about the future intensification of the Cold War. Some voices within the United States feared a set-back to arms control efforts. President Johnson thought that there was no longer any hope for bilateral talks between America and the Soviet Union. Congress expressed concern about the jeopardy to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and Democratic presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey concluded that the invasion made a new round of arms control negotiations mandatory. A number of comments focused on new danger to NATO. Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford called for greater vigilance and protectiveness of West Europe. American leaders also began to push for concrete steps that would strengthen NATO. Other international leaders such as Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant and French

President Charles DeGaulle expressed concern about the impact of the August events on prospects for détente. The heavy emphasis by this news source on the reaction of leaders and countries outside the region reflected an effort to locate the reform/invasion cycle in a broader context of ongoing international events and processes.

### **October through December**

During the last months of the year, coverage obviously slowed down as the normalization process settled in. There was fairly heavy coverage in the month of October, but November and December contained few articles and little information that was totally new or earthshaking.

A number of articles focused on the remaining issues connected with leadership. Gradually the powers of Alexander Dubcek were cut back, and one writer speculated that he might eventually give up his position as head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. There was also a growing perception that there was disagreement within the Czechoslovak leadership about the best way to copy with the reality of normalization. For example, a number of articles in the New York Times focused on the role of Oldrich Cernik as an individual who made a serious effort to work with the Soviet conquerors. He was the leader who traveled to Moscow to sign a treaty that legalized the invasion. He also gave a stern warning to the National Assembly about the risks inherent in too many anti-Soviet outbursts. Clearly, he was responsive to Soviet pressure. On the other hand, Josef Smrkovsky had been a key reformer and was able to hang on to his job through the fall. As always Dubcek played the centrist in an effort to reconcile the two camps. In the middle of December Cernik, as a reward for his compliance, received the position of Premier of the federative state.

A few articles looked backward at the reform movement and its aspirations. End of the year writers noted that the reforms had pretty much been wiped out by the end of the year, but others wondered if the Czech dream might be more “durable” than that. At the end of October, on the anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak state, the National Assembly approved the new federalization law that provided more representation to the Slovak community. This was the only reform that survived the WTO invasion. Following the legislative approval, the leaders met in Bratislava to sign the law. Some demonstrations continued through late October and early November. The occasions that prompted them included celebration of the memory of Masaryk. There were also clashes with policy and burning of flags in Prague as a protest on the occasion of the Bolshevik Revolution. University students in Prague and Brno occupied buildings in protest as late as the second half of November.

With regard to the normalization process itself, the Soviet Union required that a treaty be signed to legitimize the presence of their occupying force into the indefinite future. Although troops from the partner WTO nations began the process of leaving Czechoslovakia, approximately 100,000 Soviet troops were to remain in the country. Soviet representatives defended the invasion in the United Nations and tried to defuse international anxiety about the damage to the arms control process. Soviet press attacks on the Dubcek government continued, and in December there was a meeting in Kiev between personnel from both countries. Interestingly, the Soviet leaders had to deal at home with a more restive dissident group. For example, one Soviet dissident was able to publish in the Czech press a letter expressing shame for the actions of his government.

Within Czechoslovakia, normalization meant a temporary ban on visits to the West as well as a crackdown by the National Assembly on periodicals that continued to publish reformist ideas.

The outside world had recovered from the shock of invasion but still emitted some signals of concern. Secretary of State Dean Rusk attacked the invasion as a violation of the UN Charter as late as early October. French Foreign Minister Debre accused the Soviet leadership of creating a smoke screen by talking so much about the dangers of West German foreign policy instead of dealing seriously with the consequences of the invasion. As a result, both Secretary Rusk and German Chancellor Kiesinger made efforts to open up talks with the Soviet Union. Discussions aimed at increasing funding for NATO took on new energy and meaning. NATO solidarity was at least temporarily buoyed up as France came back within the tent. Clark Clifford, advisor to President Johnson, actually outlined a plan to make NATO stronger. NATO also issued warnings intended to deter attacks on other East European states. Campaigning Republicans in the United States talked about considering a delay in ratification of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Some observers called for development of a new strategy towards the communist bloc. Others pointed out that the invasion had contributed towards a rift within the West European communist movement. Of course, a similar split had occurred among the ruling parties of East Europe. As might be expected, Tito was the first bloc leader to push aside brusquely the new Soviet doctrine of limited sovereignty.

### **Press Perceptions of the Significance of the Crisis**

Eruption of serious reform in 1968 in Czechoslovakia surprised literally all observers of that particular country and its regime. The transfer of power from one communist leader to another in January of that year did not seem initially consequential to either internal or external audiences. There was a number of substantive reasons that explain and underscore this surprise. During the inter-war period there had been both genuine support for the communist party and a sense that the West had let the nation down. Since the 1948 coup Czechoslovakia had been a relatively quiescent member of the communist bloc. There had been no serious challenges to Soviet leadership from within the communist bloc in over a decade. Many western nations were more focused on the threat of Asian communism and reactions to it than they were on Europe. The United States was mired down in the quagmire of war in Southeast Asia as well as in the midst of a bitter, divisive presidential campaign.

Press perceptions in the United States, therefore, did not encompass much information about the reforms most central to the Prague Spring. During the first half of the year, the three news sources contained literally no page one articles that presented a discussion of the key components of the April Action Program. The emergence of a plan that implied development of a multi-party system with a full range of competitive interest groups received scant attention. The few press references made to the reforms in the early months of the year underlined mainly their foreign policy implications. Potential independence from Soviet control was more significant than the blossoming of democracy within the country. Accompanying this lack of interest in the reforms was really a low priority given to the entire Czechoslovak situation prior to the summer.

Amazingly, the increased press attention to the growing crisis in the late summer did not include many articles that sought to explore the roots of the events.

Perhaps it is easier for the press to personalize events, and this may be more true when new developments explode with force in a surprising way on the international scene. Thus, periodically there were important newspaper articles dealing with the role of leadership during the year of crisis. The press presented Alexander Dubcek as a leader of promise in late spring but as a tragic figure a few months later. Meetings of key leaders in Warsaw, Cierna, and Bratislava focused on the give and take of the bargaining process among them. Occasionally, useful articles spotlighting leadership splits within both the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia appeared. A great interest in the distinction between hard-liners and reformers was apparent. On the other hand, the press made little effort to explain to their readers the political context from which these leaders had sprung. Further, even though the August invasion marked the death knell of the reform movement, there was a common expectation until late in the year that Dubcek and his key associates would retain their positions into the indefinite future.

By April, the press clearly fastened on the Soviet reaction as the main reality and factor in the crisis. The press depicted sudden visits by Soviet leaders to Czechoslovakia as a sign of Soviet dark intentions. Correspondingly, they portrayed the Czech leadership as subject to unexpected summonses to appear before the “enforcers” in Moscow. An understandable fascination with the moves and feints of the Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops in the region lent an even graver tone to the dynamic between the two countries. Efforts to set up meetings between the two key parties as well as the meetings themselves generated great curiosity by the press. Following the invasion, press attention centered on the polemical attacks on the Czechoslovak reformers by Moscow, the presentation of concrete demands by the Soviet leadership, and the unfolding of the normalization process within Czechoslovakia.

Finally, the reaction of other countries became a topic of heightened concern at various points in the crisis. Leaders within the communist bloc received ample attention in the middle part of the year. There were numerous articles about the support of Tito in Yugoslavia for the reformers. At the same time, there was a number of references to firm Soviet allies such as East Germany and Poland. Reactions by American leaders were the subject of numerous articles, and these peaked at the time of the crisis. Official reactions by President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Clark Clifford constituted some of those. Of course, the position of the Republican Party in a presidential campaign year was a topic of a certain amount of interest. Statements and positions taken by French and German leaders were also worthy of a few press references. After the conclusion of the invasion, implications for NATO moved to the center of the stage. At some points, it seemed as if NATO was becoming a bit more united in light of the heavy-handed move by the Warsaw Pact in Czechoslovakia. Returning to the familiar threats and themes of the Cold War at the end of 1968 was a kind of answer to the surprise demonstrated by the media in the early months. The invasion was a kind of marker that yanked perceptions back to the familiar framework and context of the Cold War.

## **U.S. Media's Portrayal of the 1989 Anti-Communist Revolution**

### Significance of the 1989 Revolution

The Czechoslovak situation in 1989 was very similar to the situation of a number of other communist-ruled nations in East Europe at the time. The country had undergone twenty years of unchanging centralized rule by the Husak and Jakes regimes. "Normalization " after the invasion by the Warsaw Treaty Organization powers had made Czechoslovakia into one of the most conservative states in East Europe. In particular, there were few changes in top leadership positions during the entire twenty-year period. The Presidium and Secretariat of the Communist Party remained seemingly impervious to the process of personnel change. The leadership had abandoned the experimental economic concepts connected with the Prague Spring reformer Ota Sik. Challenges presented by Charter '77 in the 1970s met with stern resistance. However, there was some economic progress at least up until the early 1980s. Some contended that the regime had established a bargain with the population in which individuals sacrificed personal freedoms and rights and remained politically passive because of more optimistic economic prospects (Brown, 1988). Some Czechs were additionally unhappy because of their perception that Slovak First Secretary Husak had provided proportionately more political positions to Slovaks than they deserved based on their share of the population. A number of other states in the region similarly were characterized by excessive centralization, leadership stagnation, economic stalemate, and budding ethnic resentments.

As a consequence, the Czechoslovak revolution of 1989 was part of a region-wide phenomenon. In fact, it came in the middle of the East European revolutionary year. Poland was the site of the initial challenge to Soviet bloc leadership. Election results in the late summer placed a non-communist government in charge of the country. Soon thereafter Hungarian leadership opened the border to Austria with widespread repercussions for the Hungarian political situation as well as for fraternal relationships within the bloc. In early November the Berlin Wall opened up for the first time and major changes took place within East Germany. It was at the end of that month that the massive public demonstrations took place in Prague, and in early December the power transition quickly took place. Change in the Balkans came soon thereafter for Romania and in a more evolutionary way for Bulgaria, Albania, and Yugoslavia (Roskin, 1997). There is no doubt but that the reforms spread like a prairie fire within the region. In that sense, the Czechoslovak reforms received inspiration from the process of renewal taking place in surrounding countries. Probably, the mass demonstrations that were one of the unique features of the Czechoslovak revolution had a delayed ripple effect on change in the Balkans in the mid-1990s.

In addition, the outcome of the reform movement in Czechoslovakia was parallel to the results in a number of other countries in the region. The emergence of a non-communist transitional government in the nation was only the first step in a profound set of changes. Early in 1990, the new leaders established the democratic process in earnest. Totally free elections took place in the late spring, and the normal development of political parties and interest groups occurred. Just as the bloc nations had moved in lock-

step formation on so many structural and policy features in the communist era, so they all moved toward democratic patterns in similar ways at about the same time.

The West also played an indirect, but continuous and involved role in the period directly preceding the 1989 revolution. President Reagan during the 1980s had tried to develop a proactive policy that would weaken the economy and will of the Soviet Union, and the Bush Administration gave encouragement to the reforming regimes in the second half of 1989. While the Bush Administration was keenly interested in the design of a renewed foreign policy in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal, the Soviet regime was weary after nearly a decade of war in neighboring Afghanistan. As President Bush welcomed one new post-communist government after another, he claimed some credit on behalf of the United States for the actual outcome of events.

Further, the 1989 revolutions throughout the bloc tended to have severe destabilizing effects on ethnically divided states. The casting off of communist rule was accompanied in nearly every case by the eruption of deeply rooted historical rivalries. This pattern was particularly evident in Czechoslovakia at the point when democratic procedures were put in place. For example, separate political party structures emerged in the two parts of the country. Civic Forum and its spin-offs became the primary political vehicle of Czech political aspirations. In contrast, Public Against Violence initially was the principal engine of political desires of the Slovaks. Although Slovaks obtained more political rights in the new democratic state than they enjoyed during communist times, there were ominous signs that pointed to the eventual break-up of 1993 into two separate nation-states. Certainly, Czechs and Slovaks were unsuccessful in joining together in common political parties in the aftermath of the completed revolution. Further, they developed a complicated and unworkable formula for making key political decisions, including the selection of the President. Major decisions required a three-fifths vote of support within the national legislature as well as in the two legislatures anchored in the Czech-Moravian and Slovak regions. Such circumstances led to the separation into two countries in 1993. These internal pressure points surrounding the fact of ethnicity paralleled the developing time bombs that threatened Yugoslavia and Romania.

In conclusion, the key themes of the 1989 revolution in Czechoslovakia were reflector mirrors of similar dynamics affecting much of the rest of East Europe. These included the simultaneous rebellion against unchanging communist dinosaurs, the successful post-revolutionary establishment of a chain of similar democracies, the engaged and proactive role of the West, and the consequence of unraveled ethnic relationships.

### Methodology and Quantitative Findings

There were five national newspapers and four regional newspapers to which content analysis was applied. The national newspapers included the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Christian Science Monitor, USA Today, and the Washington Post. The regional newspapers selected were the Boston Globe, the Chicago Tribune, the Atlanta Journal/Constitution, and the Los Angeles Times. Each of the regional sources represents a different section of the United States. The analysis will include a brief assessment of the number of articles contained in each of the nine newspapers. These findings will display the relative importance placed on the events by each newspaper. There will also be a spotlight placed on the percentage of articles that start on page one

for each news source. Attention to the month-by-month break down of page one articles can reveal the extent to which any newspaper followed the crisis from its origin to its completion. Also, data on comparative column length of articles is available for all of these news sources, for in recent decades indices have included such information. Basically, newspapers that include higher percentages of longer articles are placing greater significance on the events being reported. Data for each newspaper was derived from its index.

Table 1. Number of Articles Overall During the Revolution and Page One Priority by Newspaper, 1989.

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>	<b>Number and Percentage of Page One Articles</b>
<u>New York Times</u> (1)	186	36 (19.4)
<u>Wall Street Journal</u> (2)	54	33 (61.1)
<u>Christian Science Monitor</u> (3)	41	8 (19.5)
<u>USA Today</u> (4)	21	3 (14.3)
<u>Washington Post</u> (5)	97	25 (25.8)
<u>Boston Globe</u> (6)	67	14 (20.9)
<u>Chicago Tribune</u> (7)	71	10 (14.1)
<u>Atlanta Journal/Constitution</u> (8)	41	12 (29.3)
<u>Los Angeles Times</u> (9)	92	34 (37.0)

Data for the five national newspapers is quite varied. The highest number of articles appeared in the New York Times, but the Wall Street Journal placed over sixty per cent of its articles on the front page. Although the Christian Science Monitor had fewer articles than either of the other two, the proportion of page one articles was comparable to that for the New York Times. Data for the two other national newspapers are widely different. USA Today had a small number of articles and a tiny proportion which began on page one. On the other hand, the number of articles in the Washington Post was higher than the number for any other national newspaper with the obvious exception of the New York Times. A full quarter of those articles began on the first page.

The data for the four regional newspapers also presents a picture of contrasts. In terms of number of articles and proportion on the first page, the leader was the Los Angeles Times. Apparently, interest on the West Coast was high in these far-off European events. While the number of overall articles was low for the Atlanta Journal/Constitution, the proportion that began on the first page was relatively high. Figures for the Boston Globe were similar to those for the national (East Coast) publications. Finally, the Chicago Tribune contained a respectable number of articles but placed very few on the front page. It seems that interest in these events was only moderate in that part of the Midwest.

Table 2. Monthly Breakdown of Articles by Newspaper (Number Beginning on Page One).

	Month												
	J	F	M	AP	MY	JN	JL	A	S	O	N	D	
<b>News-Paper</b>													
(1)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	19	15	
(2)	5	2	3	0	2	0	0	3	3	5	5	5	
(3)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	5	
(4)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	
(5)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	11	10	
(6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	3	
(7)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	
(8)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	3	
(9)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	17	14	

It is also useful to examine the months in which coverage was the heaviest for the nine newspapers. The five national newspapers all placed the heaviest emphasis on Czechoslovakia at the end of the year. This was true with respect to all the articles included as well as for page one articles alone. For the most part the mass demonstrations took place in late November and the major governmental changes in early December. Thus, it is logical that those two months entailed the heaviest coverage. Several of the national newspapers also provided some coverage in the early months of the year. For example, in the first three months of the year, the New York Times had one

front-page article, while the Wall Street Journal had ten. Coverage in the regional papers was similar. Nearly all of the page one articles appeared in the last two months of the year. In the early months of the year, the only newspaper to include a page one story was the Los Angeles Times. These findings reinforce the conclusion that the media was caught by surprise by the momentous changes that occurred in East Europe in the second half of the year.

Table 3. Column Length of Articles by Newspaper (Number and Percentage)

Newspaper	Column Length of Articles			
	Short (6 inches)	Medium (6-18 inches)	Long (18+ Inches)	Total
(1) *	79 (42.5)	56 (30.1)	0	186 (100)
(2)	NA	NA	NA	0
(3)	3 ( 7.3)	14 (34.1)	24 (58.5)	41 (100)
(4)	4 (19.0)	15 (71.4)	2 ( 9.5)	21 (100)
(5)	0	35 (36.1)	62 (63.9)	97 (1000)
(6)	2 ( 3.0)	40 (59.7)	25 (37.3)	67 (100)
(7)	3 ( 4.2)	41 (57.7)	27 (38.0)	71 (100)
(8)	5 (12.2)	22 (53.6)	14 (34.1)	41 (100)
(9)	2 ( 2.2)	25 (27.2)	65 (70.6)	92 (100)

\* For the New York Times there were 51 articles (27.4%) for which no column length was listed.

A number of newspapers clearly stand out in terms of providing a high proportion of lengthy, in-depth articles. The clear leader was the Los Angeles Times, which provided long articles in a little over seventy per cent of the cases. The Washington Post and Christian Science Monitor were only a little behind this pace, as both included lengthy articles in well over half of the cases. At the other end of the spectrum was USA Today, which included long articles less than ten per cent of the time. When the focus switches to medium length articles, the newspapers which had relatively small percentages of lengthy articles partly compensated for that situation. For instance, USA

Today included over seventy per cent of its articles in this category. Similar patterns existed for the Boston Globe, the Chicago Tribune, and the Atlanta Journal/Constitution. No data of this sort exist for the Wall Street Journal. It is difficult to interpret the information from the New York Times. While it had the highest proportion of short articles, it is also true that the Times provided to its readers nearly twice as many articles overall as did the periodical in second place in terms of numbers of articles. Missing data on some articles make further analysis of the Times difficult. Generally, there are no resounding patterns in these data. Two of the three national newspapers for which complete data exist devoted a substantial amount of space to a high proportion of articles. Three of the four regional newspapers provided moderate coverage in a high proportion of cases. Thus, there is a slight tendency for national papers to include more in-depth articles and for regional newspapers to offer moderate-length articles that mainly provided the facts of the situation.

### Qualitative Findings

Key themes emerged during the year 1989, and the media repeatedly came back to them throughout the year. The themes included the role of leadership, the protests against the old regime, the nature of the changes themselves, and the reaction of the outside world. Analysis will proceed on a month-by-month basis, and there will be a distinction made between the perceptions of the five national media sources and the four regional newspapers. The final section will outline the central findings about media perceptions of the year of transformation.

Table 4. Coverage of Key Themes by Newspaper (Number and Percentage), 1989.

Newspaper	Key Themes				Total
	Leadership	Protests	Change	Reaction	
(1)	15 (41.7)	13 (36.1)	7 (19.4)	1 ( 2.8)	36 (100)
(2)	1 ( 3.0)	17 (51.5)	3 ( 9.1)	12 (36.4)	33 (100)
(3)	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	4 (50.0)	0	8 (100)
(4)	0	1 (33.3)	2 (66.7)	0	3 (100)
(5)	6 (24.0)	5 (20.0)	7 (28.0)	7 (28.0)	25 (100)
(6)	5 (35.7)	4 (28.6)	3 (21.4)	2 (14.3)	14 (100)
(7)	2 (20.0)	0	4 (40.0)	4 (40.0)	10 (100)
(8)	3 (25.0)	4 (33.3)	2 (16.7)	3 (25.0)	12 (100)

(9)                    6 (18.2)                    5 (15.2)                    12 (36.4)                    10 (30.3)                    33 (100.1)

The most balanced coverage of all four themes took place on the pages of the Washington Post. The Wall Street Journal did not provide much coverage of the leadership issue or of the process of democratic change, while the New York Times did not provide much central coverage of the outside reaction to the changes. The number of page one stories for the Christian Science Monitor and for USA Today was so small that patterns are not meaningful. With respect to the themes themselves, the New York Times provided the highest proportion of coverage to the leadership theme, while the Wall Street Journal emphasized in numerous stories the mass protests that took place in the fall.

Among the regional papers, the striking finding again is the relatively high number of page one articles offered by the Los Angeles Times. That newspaper provided relatively balanced coverage of each of the four topics, with the process of democratic change being the favorite. Balanced coverage of themes took place also in the Boston Globe and the Atlanta Journal/Constitution. However, the former put the heavier emphasis on leadership themes, while the latter gave the stronger emphasis to the mass demonstrations and protests. The Chicago Tribune provided no front page coverage of the protests, but they did offer the highest proportion of articles on the outside reaction to the changes. In this situation in 1989, it is clear that there was really no pattern to the coverage among the regional papers. In fact each of the four regional newspapers chose to give its greatest page one emphasis to a different theme.

This outline of themes reveals principally that the coverage of the 1989 revolution did not fit any standard, cookbook formula for the nine newspapers studied. There was no sharp distinction between the coverage provided by the national media and the regional newspapers. Most important, each media source took its own independent approach towards selection of themes that deserved page one emphasis.

### **January through March**

References to events in Czechoslovakia appeared in only two national newspapers and in no regional newspapers. Mass protests in the country received the most interest. The newspaper with the greatest interest in these anti-regime activities was, in fact, the Wall Street Journal. They described the process by which the police broke up demonstrations that centered on the twentieth anniversary of the public suicide of Jan Palach. They noted the arrest of eight hundred demonstrators at one of these events (January 16 and 17, 1989). This newspaper, as well as the New York Times (February 22, 1989), reported the efforts of the authorities to punish Vaclav Havel and seven others for fomenting the protests surrounding the Palach anniversary. A key spokesperson for Charter '77 was arrested as well for inciting one of these riots. Efforts to obtain release of the new political prisoners through circulation of a petition led to a jailing of several others. A few of the articles emphasized outside reactions to these developments in Czechoslovakia. American officials criticized the country and its neighbors for human rights violations. Soviet leadership rival Yegor Ligachev visited Czechoslovakia and praised its collective farm system. Some interpreted this as veiled criticism for Gorbachev's reforms and their implications for bloc nations.

### **April through June**

Only a handful of articles appeared in the spring months, as most western observers in the press assumed that normalization had once again been established. However, the Wall Street Journal did note on May 22 that the authorities paroled Vaclav Havel after he had completed only half of his sentence. Despite this move by the regime, the Christian Science Monitor (June 16, 1989) included an analysis that concluded that glasnost had not yet made as much progress in Czechoslovakia as it had in the Soviet Union, Poland, or Hungary.

### **July through September**

A few articles appeared in August as the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 neared. Police detained dozens of Czechoslovak citizens on the eve of the demonstrations and then beat a number of them at the time of the mass protests on August 21. The press continued to portray the regime as very conservative in a region that was beginning to sense the tremors of change. The pressure for emigration to the West increased considerably in mid September. While Hungary decided to permit East Germans to go into the West, and while Poland nodded in agreement, the Husak regime in Czechoslovakia impassively made no comment. In fact, Czechoslovak authorities began to seize the passports of potential emigres. As October neared, the western press had clearly characterized Czechoslovakia throughout the year as unlikely to be caught up in changes that were affecting other countries in the region.

### **October through December**

#### *October: Build-up to Revolution*

Although attention focused primarily on other East European countries during the month of October, there were a number of articles on the situation in Czechoslovakia. Two of the regional newspapers even gave some limited coverage to that country. Early in the month, the western interest centered on the plight of East Germans who went to Prague in order to leave for the West. Thousands of East Germans were able to get to the West German Embassy in Prague and then travel by train into West Germany itself. The East German regime permitted a large number of its citizens to leave in this way, but on October 4 they banned further travel into Czechoslovakia. One story described a group of refugees who were left behind in Dresden and subsequently fought with police who forced them to stay in East Germany. Of course, the police in Czechoslovakia attempted to bloc these East Germans from getting into the West German Embassy in Prague, but the number of refugees was so large that this attempt proved fruitless. Literally all of these articles early in the month stressed the way in which the outside world reacted to the more open travel regulations that were being established in Czechoslovakia.

At the end of the month, mass demonstrations occurred on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak state. Protesters used this anniversary as a vehicle to call for both the deposal of party leader Milos Jakes and the holding of free elections. There was also an international human rights meeting held at the same time in Prague. In both cases the police crushed the demonstrations. Thus, as the month ended, the spotlight switched from Czechoslovakia's external relations with the two German states to internal demonstrations calling for a major change in the political

system. As such, these events at the end of the month pointed to the enormous changes that would take place in November.

*November: Month of the Revolution*

Two of the national newspapers gave fairly limited coverage to the momentous events in November. Obviously, Czechoslovakia was not the only nation in tumult. It is also true that the story in early November about the collapse of the Berlin Wall was a more dramatic story for western audience. That event was no doubt the symbolic end of the Cold War, and so the Czechoslovak events which came soon thereafter may have seemed to some both inevitable and a bit anticlimactic. However, the Christian Science Monitor (November 27, 1989) did carry one story about the end-of-the month demonstrations, plans for a general strike, and the agenda of Civic Forum. A few similar articles appeared on page one of USA Today (November 27 and 29, 1989). The latter new source also provided some coverage as well to the changing composition of the government.

The national newspapers that carried the most extensive coverage were the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal. In each of those three newspapers, the main story was the series of mass protests that eventually felled the regime. The New York Times described fully the daily demonstrations, the use of force by police against the demonstrators, the role of students and professors, and the magic invoked with the appearance of Alexander Dubcek. It was also clear that workers played a role in these demonstrations. For example, Prague workers took part in one general strike and read from the Declaration of Independence. The Washington Post mentioned the same events but also linked them to the widening splits within the leadership of the Communist Party. They also highlighted the role of airline employees in one of the general strikes. In sum, the emphasis was on the continuing nature of the demonstrations, on the breadth of the opposition coalition, and on their impact on the government.

Near the end of the month, the process of political change began to receive major treatment by the press. The first major concessions involved the announcement by Prime Minister Adamec on November 22 that some non-communists could join the cabinet. At the very end of the month more substantive compromises were struck. Non-communists actually entered the government; the regime dropped the requirement that Marxism-Leninism be a compulsory subject in the schools; and Civic Forum won access to the mass media. Party leaders also dropped the constitutional language that referred to the leading role of the Communist Party. Similarly, the legislature removed from the state charter the provision that Marxism was the foundation of public education.

The national newspapers contained a handful of articles about the theme of leadership. Leadership references included a description of the fall of Jakes, commentary on the rising role of caretaker Prime Minister Adamec, nostalgic references to the reemergence of Dubcek, and several articles on the ouster of the hard-liners from the cabinet. It is interesting that there were absolutely no articles in any of these news sources about the reaction of the outside world. The internal events themselves were so riveting that they drew all attention like a magnet.

There were some notable differences among the regional newspapers. Readers of the Boston Globe (November 22-27, 1989) would have learned the most about the leadership situation. Coverage of Dubcek and the decline of the hard-liners drew most of

their attention. The second most popular story for that newspaper was the protest movement, but the reforms actually enacted did not receive much coverage. In contrast, the few articles in the Chicago Tribune (November 27-29, 1989) put primary emphasis on the bargaining game at the top that resulted in important personnel changes within the cabinet. The Atlanta Journal/Constitution differed from the other two by placing the main emphasis on the mass demonstrations (November 21-29, 1989). They had four articles on the protests but only one on each of the other three themes. Finally, the Los Angeles Times was distinguished through its inclusion of the highest number of page one articles among the regional newspapers. They gave a representative amount of coverage to all four themes but concentrated on the regime changes. They described the key personnel shifts but reserved their greatest emphasis for the role of the opposition. This coverage included individual articles on the history of anti-regime groups, on the organizational skills of Civic Forum, and on the increasing role of television in the opposition movement. Clearly, each of the regional newspapers placed its own special imprint on the perception and interpretation of those far-away events.

*December: Aftermath of the Revolution*

Coverage by the national newspapers was still quite heavy in the month of December. As the need for protests and demonstrations disappeared, however, the emphasis switched to the process of making the transition away from communist authoritarianism to democratic patterns. The Christian Science Monitor (December 4, 1989) called attention to the efforts of a divided Civic Forum to form a coalition government. The Wall Street Journal (December 1, 1989) took an interest in specific steps such as the opening of the border with Austria and the repeal of laws that punished dissidents. The main thrust of Washington Post articles was on the actual governmental changes that were taking place. These included personnel changes in the cabinet, the agreement of the Communist Party to play a minority role, the swearing in of the new government, and the introduction of town meetings in certain Czech towns.

Nearly equal in importance was the focus placed by these media centers on the role of political leadership. Marian Calfa replaced Ludvik Adamec as the Prime Minister, and that seemed to be the change that led to agreement to a cabinet filled by a majority of non-communists. This event was then coordinated with the resignation of Gustav Husak as the President. Near the end of the month, there was heightened interest in both the rise of new leaders and division of offices among them. Vaclav Havel bargained with the Communist Party over the nature of electing the next President. His proposal for election by the legislature won out over the latter's suggestion of direct popular election. Havel and Dubcek ended up splitting two of the key offices. While the legislature elected Dubcek as President on December 29<sup>th</sup>, the same body chose Havel as President on the 30<sup>th</sup> of the month. The election of Havel had been coordinated as well with the resignation of Milos Jakes as head of the Communist Party.

There was only a handful of articles on protests. At the beginning of the month, demonstrations by 150,000 persons in part led to the emergence of the first non-communist cabinet. Toward the middle of the month, there was a major celebratory demonstration on the anniversary of a key march on the same date in the previous month. Coverage of reactions by the outside world was equally slim. The only major event worth noting was the joint decision by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact to condemn

their 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia as invalid. Perhaps the small number of articles on global reactions was due to the fact that the public had been observing dramatic changes in nearly all countries of the region for a number of months.

The regional news sources also divided their articles between the changing leadership patterns and the rapid series of major governmental changes. It is noteworthy that the Los Angeles Times took the greatest interest in the December events in Czechoslovakia. They covered most of the events that the national newspapers had mentioned. However, they had a unique interest in the military and defense implications of the political changes. Several articles included commentary on the reinterpretation by the Warsaw Pact of the 1968 invasion. They also included important articles both on the announced plan for removal of the Soviet troops and on the voiced intentions to reduce the size of the Czechoslovak Army and take down the fence on the West German border. Other changes such as the initial steps to dismantle state control of the economy also caught their attention. Their coverage of such matters was more extensive than that provided by the national news sources.

### **Press Perceptions of the Significance of the Crisis**

Several impressions shine through the media coverage of the actual anti-communist revolution of 1989. The priority which newspapers placed on the Czechoslovak chapter of that revolutionary year varied from paper to paper. The New York Times paid much attention to the changes, while USA Today provided little coverage. In addition, heavy coverage was not confined to the East Coast-based national newspapers. For example, the Los Angeles Times included a relatively high proportion of page one stories about the political transformation of Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, the Chicago Tribune devoted very little space to the story. Thus, there was varied coverage among the regional newspapers as well as among the national news sources. Also, there was no central theme that elicited the most media interest. Some were more interested in the mass protests, while other gave fairly detailed analysis and consistent coverage to the establishment of democratic processes. As the Cold War ended, there was no central picture like the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 that helped the media organize perceptions. This reality freed the media to treat the changes of 1989 in very individual ways.

At the same time, there is one underlying theme in press perceptions of the 1989 revolution, and it is related to the fact that the changes in Czechoslovakia came in the midst of a season of transformation in East Europe. Major changes had taken place earlier in the year in Poland, Hungary, and East Germany. Calls for a new direction were taking place in the Balkans as well. In fact, the only regimes that had not yet made any concessions to the opposition forces were those in Czechoslovakia and Romania. Therefore, the unfolding events in Czechoslovakia seemed unsurprising and almost expected. This may help explain why the press coverage possessed the features that it did.

The leadership theme received a proportionate share of attention, but many of the figures were familiar ones. Vaclav Havel was a well-known playwright and dissident, while Alexander Dubcek had penetrated the western consciousness through his catalytic role in 1968. Their central roles in the new government were thus not surprising. By the same token, to careful observers of East Europe Gustav Husak was a reasonably familiar

face. While Milso Jakes was not, his reputation as an unyielding hard-liner made it easy for readers in the United States to place him in a classification.

There was, of course, much press attention placed on the mass demonstrations. Early in the year these protests centered on the incarceration of Vaclav Havel, but at the end of the year they became the forum in which the new demands emerged. They also constituted the fulcrum of opposition that eventually dislodged the regime. However, there was a sense of inevitability in press portrayals of these mass protests. No press article voiced surprise that the Czechoslovak communist regime failed either to prevent them in the first place or to repress them when they occurred. After following the process by which East German citizens first found alternative means for leaving their country and later discovered that they could even cross over the Berlin Wall, western readers were prepared to understand why this exercise in democratic freedoms could take place in that type of system.

The press even treated the theme of the process of change in a low-key manner. Newspaper discussions of the rise of a cabinet with a non-communist majority never questioned whether such a development would take place. The articles simply contained the implicit question of when that event would come to pass. Similarly, the passing of the torch from Jakes to Havel was interpreted as a relatively routine event. So many communist leaders had given way to opposition figures during the last few months within East Europe. Discussion of elections in Czechoslovakia, along with reactivation of moribund domestic political institutions, seemed almost to be the expected, ordinary course of events. There was no genuine surprise in them.

Finally, the paucity of press coverage of the last theme of reactions outside the country is worthy of mention. There had been a significant reaction in the West to both the rise of a non-communist government in Poland much earlier in the year and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Despite the power of the daily mass demonstrations in Czechoslovakia, these protests were in a sense only another act in a play that the West had been applauding all year. It is a bit ironic that principal outside reactions came from the Soviet Union. Soviet leaders felt impelled to apologize for past violations of Czechoslovakia's freedom, and this demonstrated the extent to which they had bought into the process of more freedom for former bloc partners. Had the Czechoslovak events in 1989 been isolated ones as they had been in 1968, then they might have created more of a stir in the West. In fact, the changes in Czechoslovakia were a major surprise when contrasted with the political situation in which the nation found itself even one year earlier, but they were unsurprising when caught in the midst of a series of similar events within the neighborhood.