



President Gustáv Husák in the Tesla company, Bratislava, 1980

“[Husák] was always fond when something was done for Slovaks, and not only Slovak history. He wanted to be among the strong and was always there, either moving history himself, or history moving with him.”

Vladimir Mináč, writer

“Husák is willing to sacrifice anything and anyone including principles, promises, agenda, friends, associates, recent political partners, his word, good name and honour, just to achieve, multiply, and then retain only what he values: power and glory.”

Vilem Prečan, historian

“Let's not be under any illusion: the measures he implemented would subsequently grind him down. But then again, he wasn't bloodthirsty. Although he had an 'iron fist', he was no tyrant.”

Jozef Jablonický, historian



Dubček became the leader of the KSČ, Husák became deputy Prime Minister in April 1968 with responsibility for preparing the constitutional law on the Czech-Slovak federation. Eventually, Husák played a decisive role in its implementation. In the meantime, he was planning to return to the leading party functions. After the military invasion in August 1968, he participated in negotiations in Moscow, where he sought compromise. After returning from Moscow, he was elected as the First Secretary of the Central Committee (ÚV) of the KSS. Likewise, he was elected as a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ) and its presidium. As such, he became part of the communist leadership's power base.

NORMALIZER

Husák was increasingly abandoning reform positions and gradually converging with the 'realists' – former moderate supporters of reform. As Moscow closely monitored and valued his activities, he became the leading candidate of the Communist Party leader. He was elected First (subsequently General) Secretary of the ÚV KSČ in April 1969. Although after taking power Husák had planned to enact his own ideas in Czechoslovak politics, from the outset he found himself under pressure from the Kremlin as well as dogmatic figures of the domestic political scene. To maintain his hold

on power, he steadily agreed to cancel previous reforms and affirmed the necessity of the Soviet occupation. In 1975 he became the first Slovak President of the Czechoslovak Republic, but in subsequent years his political career assumed a downward trajectory – further worsened by his deteriorating health. After Mikhail Gorbachev became head of the Soviet Communist Party, Husák cautiously subscribed to perestroika. But he no longer had the strong political position, energy, or indeed will to push for the necessary reforms. In 1987 he resigned as Secretary-General. He remained as the President until 10 December 1989, when he appointed a Government of National Understanding and subsequently, resigned his post. He died on 18 November 1991.

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GUSTÁV HUSÁK

Communist politician and statesman, one of the most prominent but also most controversial figures of twentieth century Slovak political history. As a politician, he stood by the birth and fall of the communist regime, while also being its creator and victim. On the one hand, he was the liquidator of the first Slovak statehood, but on the other, as a nationally-oriented communist, he was the creator of the Czech-Slovak federation. For all his life, he remained faithful to Marxist-Lenin ideas, due to which he often suppressed his own opinion or was overtly self-critical. From this point of view, Gustáv Husák represents one of Slovak history's sad and tragic figures.

1930s



Graduating Gustáv Husák, 1933

1950s



Gustáv Husák was arrested by the State Security in 1951

1970s



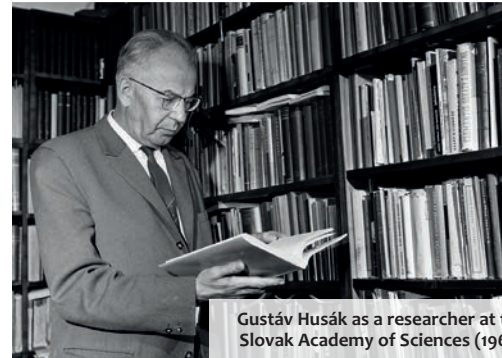
President ČSSR Gustáv Husák visiting Bratislava, 1975

1945



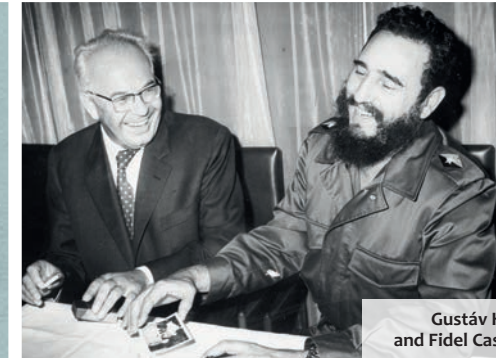
Gustáv Husák addressing the speech, 1945

1960s



Gustáv Husák as a researcher at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (1968)

1980s



Gustáv Husák and Fidel Castro (1983)

THE PATH TO POLITICS

Gustáv (Augustín) Husák was born on 10 January 1913 in Dúbravka, then a suburb of Bratislava. His social and political engagements started during his studies at a grammar school and continued at the Faculty of Law of the Comenius University. Tending towards radical leftist ideas, he joined the Komsomol communist youth organization (1929), and four years later the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). He was also involved in the student movement. These were, predominantly, the Association of Socialist Academics and the Union of Slovak Students. After graduating, he worked as a law associate, and subsequently as a Slovak Union of Freight official. In 1939 he became involved in the illegal Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), but withdrew from it by the end of the following year. Nevertheless, he was imprisoned for short periods four times by the regime of the First Slovak Republic. He then returned to the communist resistance in 1943, and together with Karol Šmidke and Ladislav Novomeský became a member of the KSS Fifth (uprising) illegal central leadership. He participated in the preparations for the Uprising, and by the autumn of 1944, he was one of its leading representatives as a member of the Presidium of the Slovak National Council (SNR), commissioner of the Interior, and vice-President of the KSS. After the Slovak National Uprising was quelled, he briefly went into hiding before

passing the German-Soviet front line en route to Moscow. It was there, in March 1945, that he participated in the negotiations on the government's programme and the establishment of the first post-war Czechoslovak government, while pushing for the new state's federal arrangement.

POST-WAR POWER STRUGGLE

The demands for the post-war federalization of Czechoslovakia met with resistance within the Communist Party. At the KSS Žilina Conference in August 1945, Viliam Široký joined the party's leadership, which weakened the power positions of the former Uprising representatives in the party. After the 1946 election – although the significant loss of the Communist Party (30 %) to the Democratic Party (62 %) in Slovakia, Husák became the President of the Council of Commissioners (the de facto Slovak Government), which enabled him to become one of the main players in the Slovak political crisis of autumn 1947. Additionally, he played a key role in the communist coup's smooth course in Slovakia in February 1948. After the coup, he was strongly involved in the persecutions of the communist regime's opponents in Slovakia, also being involved in harsh crackdowns against the Catholic Church, as well as being in favour of the forced collectivization of agriculture. Soon, however, he was to find himself the victim of this very lawlessness.

PRISON AND REHABILITATION

A campaign to find the Communist Party's internal 'enemies' posed him a mortal threat. The State Security interpreted Husák's post-war assertion of Slovak national interests (especially the federation) as separatism and an attempt to split Czechoslovakia. Husák, accordingly, faced fierce party criticism in April 1950, being accused of 'bourgeois nationalism' and was dismissed from all major state and party functions. Arrested in February 1951 after three years of investigations he stood accused in a political trial and was sentenced to life imprisonment in April 1954. In 1955, his sentence was reduced to 25 years, and in May 1960 he was given amnesty and released by the President of the Republic. Yet for the next three years he lived only as a pardoned criminal, with his difficult life situation only improving after his party and civic rehabilitation in 1963.

RETURN TO POLITICS

From 1963 Husák was a research employee at the State Law Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava. Thanks to his aura as a martyr of the 1950s and defender of Slovak interests, he gradually built up a personal reputation within the Bratislava communist intelligence and began to be perceived as a leading reform figure. After Alexander