



J. Palach's sacrifice also strongly resonated in Slovakia

"People in which there may still be sparks of humanity, human feelings, act! Hear my shout, the shout of the grey, ordinary man, the son of a nation who loved his own and others' freedom more than his own life, act! It's not too late yet!"

Ryszard Siwiec,
Polish accountant, self-immolated in protest



august 1969



The regime was prepared for ta action again: the proteste

operatives arrested the demonstrators almost immediately – five were exiled and imprisoned.

Beyond Czechoslovakia's borders a unique form of protest against the invasion was self-immolation – the first recorded case of which was Polish clerk Ryszard Siwiec. He acted during a ceremonial celebration in full public glare: at the 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw in front of 100,000 people as well as Polish party leadership and foreign diplomats. In November 1968, dissident Vasil Makuch self-immolated at protest against the invasion and to demand Ukrainian independence. In Hungary, student Sándor Bauer (inspired by Palach) self-immolated on 20 January 1969 at the National Museum (Budapest) as a protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Communist regimes in respective countries strove to present such people as suffering from mental illness or alcoholics to divert from the genuine nature of their protests. Their sacrifice and families' suffering was concealed until the fall of communism in 1989 when the truth at last emerged.

PROTESTS IN NUMBERS

- in the first two days of the invasion, **16 people** died from clashes with soldiers in Slovakia;
- the demonstration of 21 August 1969 claimed **five lives**;

- in protest against the occupation, **five people** in Czechoslovakia and **four** overseas self-immolated in 1969;
- **over 40 people** were arrested at the demonstrations at SNP Square (Bratislava) on 21 August 1969;

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PROTESTS AGAINST WARSAW PACT INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Warsaw Pact troops' invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968 led to mass protests on streets and squares by hundreds of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks in the following hours and days – which continued until August 1969. Yet such protests went far beyond Czechoslovakia's borders both in the democratic West and communist East, and even appeared in countries that had militarily contributed to the invasion.



People expressed their anger in discussions with soldiers of occupying armies



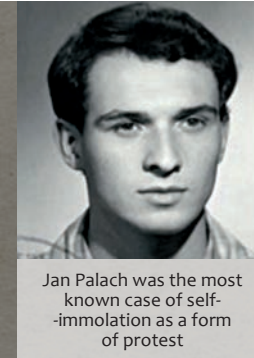
The invasion also resulted in losses of human lives



Selfimmolation of R. Siwiec in 1968



People lit candles to commemoration of the victims of the occupation



Jan Palach was the most known case of self-immolation as a form of protest



Although a military success, the occupation of Czechoslovakia was politically compromised: both because of certain reformists who had openly supported a military occupation, and also due to mass civil resistance. The latter peaked on 21 August 1968, when it progressed from passive (e.g. distributing anti-occupation leaflets, removing street signs and names) to active resistance (e.g. throwing stones or barricading streets), which led to **direct confrontation with occupying forces and the loss of many protesters' lives**. Although soldiers had withdrawn from cities by the end of August, anti-occupation demonstrations continued throughout the year.

PROTESTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The most active protesters were students, who regularly organised demonstrations such as the strike in November 1968 following the hunger strike after the self-immolation of Jan Palach in Prague in January 1969. Yet nation-wide protests accompanied every major occasion, such as the signing of the agreement for the “temporary” stay of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia in October 1968 and the communist holiday for the Great October Socialist Revolution in November. Despite the advancing process of normalization, the anti-communist mood continued into 1969.

The highest-profile protests in Slovakia erupted in March 1969 during the ‘ice hockey week’ sparked by the Czechoslovak team twice winning over the USSR at the Ice hockey world championships. Thousands went to the streets – even directly in front of Soviet garrisons – to demonstrate against the occupation and the Soviet Union. Although Soviet troops were on stand-by and ready to intervene, such response was not deemed necessary and the situation did not escalate into open riots. The Soviets nevertheless leveraged the demonstration as evidence of “counter-revolution” in order to increase pressure on the party leadership, which led to Dubček being replaced as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia by Gustáv Husák.

The protests peaked on 21 August 1969 – the first anniversary of the occupation. The regime had mobilised specially-trained and equipped security forces to act against demonstrators. With major towns’ streets and squares thronging with hundreds of thousands protesting against the occupation and normalisation process as well, Czechoslovak security forces – including People’s Militia and Army – brutally hit back. Five died in Czech. Large demonstrations were also held in Slovakia – tens of thousands at SNP Square (Bratislava), as well as large gatherings in cities such as Košice and Nitra.

A unique form of protest that strongly resonated with the public was self-immolation – in many cases inspired by Buddhist monks’

protests in South Vietnam. The first such case in Czechoslovakia was young Charles University student Jan Palach in Prague in January 1969. This was followed by Jan Zajíc (student, Prague, February 1969), Michal Lefčík (conscript, Košice, April 1969), and Evžen Plocek (communist functionary and worker, Jihlava, April 1969). Yet these tragic acts did not prevent the gradual roll-out of normalization; and civil resistance was definitively broken with the suppression of protests on 21 August 1969, the subsequent adoption of the ‘baton law’, and imposition of harsher sentences on protesters.

PROTESTS OUTSIDE CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Anti-occupation demonstrations also spread beyond Czechoslovakia, including countries directly involved in the invasion. Arguably the most resonant was a **brief demonstration held by eight Soviet dissidents at Red Square (Moscow)** on 25 August 1968. Linguists Konstantin Babitsky and Larisa Bogoraz, history student Tatiana Baeva, writer Vadim Delone, labourer Vladimír Dremluiga, poet and translator Natalya Gorbanevskaya, philologist Viktor Fainberg, and physicist Pavel Litvinov unfurled the Czechoslovak flag and banners inscribed with slogans including “For your freedom and ours!”, “Shame to the occupiers!”, “Hands off the CSSR!” and “Free Dubcek!” KGB