

## Summary

The book *The Prague Spring: The Logic of a New World. From Reforms to Revolution* focuses on philosophical and social-historical research into the Prague Spring of 1968 with the goal of capturing the specific logic of its development. Most of the authors build on contributions they published in the book *Revolutions for the Future: May '68 and the Prague Spring* (Berankova, J. N., Hauser, M., Nesbitt, N. [eds.], Suture Press, Lyon 2020), which are expanded upon here with analysis of further realities of that time, and with period and contemporary discussions. Their study of the political, economic, and legal dimensions of the Prague Spring also focuses more on the general dynamics of the Prague Spring, in which the reforms began to exceed the structure of state socialism and brought about its overall revolutionary transformation.

This thesis on the dynamic character of the Prague Spring expresses the results of our research:

*In the Prague Spring a dynamic relationship developed between the Party leadership, which formed the central power of state socialism, and activities of the society and of teams of experts that were spontaneous to a certain degree. Their relationship represents a dialectic of a special kind, in which the central power, the expert teams and society interacted, while at the same time the expressions of each preserved a certain heterogeneity. This heterogeneous dialectic caused the Prague Spring to gradually exceed the original intentions for reform, and it began to transform the entire social structure of state socialism, which had become too confining for it. The Prague Spring no longer followed the model it had created for itself. It did not intend either to establish Western parliamentary democracy and capitalism or to renew the previous forms of state socialism. The movement began with reforms initiated from above, by top communist politicians, and gradually took on a revolutionary dynamic whose final outcome remained open.*

Strictly speaking, the basic ideas of the thesis presented here are not new: we find them scattered throughout the works of historians of the

Prague Spring. H. Gordon Skilling has presented, in his monumental work *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, a great deal of historical material that testifies to the shift from reforms to revolution. What is new is our refinement of this developmental logic with the application of Jacques Rancière's political philosophy: we discover this logic in the development of the workers' councils and in the domains of legal and political thinking.

The relationship between the spontaneous movement and the Communist Party developed as a sequence of several interactive movements.

*1) The launching of reforms by the leadership of the Communist Party, which was motivated by the problems of state socialism as well as the need to strengthen the legitimacy of the entire system, by reviving ideas and principles relating to its founding event.*

*2) The reform movement from above encourages the emergence of a movement from below, which develops reform ideas or creates new ones.*

*3) Spontaneously arising ideas then exert influence on the Communist Party, which expresses them in the form of laws.*

*4) The heterogeneity of perception gives rise to an interpretational discrepancy between the spontaneous movement and the state structure. The spontaneous movement develops new ideas that diverge from the merely reformist line of changes. The Communist Party can no longer enact them into laws within the given state structure. A process is initiated in which the structure of state socialism itself changes. Reforms turn into revolution.*

This sequence took place in all the areas examined. Expert teams that formed a mediating link between the highest authorities and society or political movements from below were established at the Party leadership's initiative. The expert teams initially worked on assignments they received from the Party leadership, but at the same time they were investigating the real state of the society, economy, and judiciary, as well as reacting to impulses coming from below. By spontaneity, we mean the reality that movements from below as well as the expert teams reacted to stimuli that came from above in

a manner that departed from the predetermined line and which was so creative that no one could predict its final outcome.

Petr Kužel writes in detail about the economic domain. Šik's reform proposals evoked a spontaneous proliferation of workers' councils (Stages 1 and 2). The Communist government responds to the demands and the experiences of the councils and submits to the National Assembly a "Proposed Law on the Socialist Enterprise" that would legally establish the councils' existence (Stage 3). An initiative arises from below that aims at creating a political body that would represent all the workers' councils at the national level. This political body is reminiscent of the soviets from the period of the October Revolution, and it breaks the Communist Party's monopoly on power. A revolutionary movement toward a new political system (Stage 4) was emerging. Economic reforms were turning into a social revolution.

In the domain of legal thinking, we track a similar development. This one took place between the government and legal experts. As Jan Kober demonstrates, the government provided the impulse for the creation or strengthening of legal workplaces, which were tasked with investigating the socialist legal system and submitting proposals for reforming it. Reform proposals were created that exceeded the framework of the period's legal system with their creativity (Stages 1 and 2). Part of the Party leadership backed them politically and opened discussions about them in the highest governing bodies of the Party and the state (Stage 3). A revolutionary movement was initiated that moved toward a new understanding of law and toward the creation of a legal system that was original and innovative in many ways (Stage 4).

A similar movement also took place in the domain of political thinking. In Ondřej Lánský's chapter we read that the Party leadership gave the impetus for establishing Mlynář's research team, which was to research questions regarding the development of the political system under socialism. The team revealed a deep systemic crisis, and it formulated proposals for political reforms (Stages 1 and 2). Mlynář's team's sociological findings and political proposals were then incorporated into an official government document called the Action Pro-

gram. The reform proposals came from below – from the research team – and the political powers raised them to agenda items that the government, the Communist Party, and the state authorities were expected to adhere to (Stage 3). Mlynář's team further elaborated them, and his proposals increasingly focused on the fundamental political and social structure of Czechoslovak society. In this way, they contributed to a social movement aiming toward a change of the political system as such (Stage 4).

This sequence outlined above shows how dynamically the relationship between the central power and the spontaneous movement developed. In this far-reaching experiment, a new model of socialism developed in which the regulative function of the party-state was combined with spontaneous processes of political subjectivization. The revolutionary movement was directed toward open and unexplored territory, for which no conceptual maps existed.

The chapters devoted to individual social areas are set into a more general framework formed in the introductory chapter and the concluding epilogue. In the introductory chapter, Michael Hauser compares May 1968 in Paris and the Prague Spring on the basis of Jacques Rancière's political theory. The Paris May represents an event in which a chasm opened up between the political representation and the movement from below. The uniqueness of the Prague Spring consists in the fact that within it a relationship developed between political representation and a spontaneous movement, as the above-mentioned sequences illustrate. In his epilogue, Joseph Grim Feinberg works with a diachronic comparison that takes both the Prague Spring and November 1989 into its account. He primarily focuses on the intellectual development of dissent, which gave rise to the story of November 1989 and its supposed victory over the legacy of the Prague Spring.

This book is a contribution to the revival of the collective memory of the Prague Spring and of the nineteen-sixties in Czechoslovakia, with the goal of overcoming the state of disillusionment that paralyzes our political imagination. We are aiming here to create the conditions for new emancipatory thoughts and actions that are able to take inspiration from present and past international movements as

well as from Czech and Slovak emancipatory struggles. The Prague Spring can be a main source of inspiration because it opened the horizon to a new society as something real. Even if this horizon of a free and at the same time also just society was perceived only hypothetically, it is worthwhile to discuss it.