

*Pauer, Jan: Prag 1968. Der Einmarsch des Warschauer Paktes. Hintergründe, Planung, Durchführung.*

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Jan Pauer has written the definitive German-language account of the conflict between Prague and Moscow in 1968 that culminated in the August invasion of Czechoslovakia. He has done so by combining deep knowledge of the existing literature with a thorough study of previously classified archival documents that have come to light since 1989.

The author organizes his analysis around the process by which the Soviet preception of Czechoslovak events was shaped; the influence of other East European countries; the phases in which the conflict between Prague and Moscow unfolded, including the impact of various information networks and bilateral encounters; the recruitment of collaborators; the preparation and execution of the invasion; and the negotiations in Moscow on 23–26 August.

Pauer begins with a 30-page introductory section explaining Czechoslovakia's path to reform in the 1960s, the intentions of the reforms and their brief course in 1968. He stresses that it was a reform process rather than a revolution, and that it was instigated not only in response to systemic crisis but also out of a normative commitment to the renewal of socialism in a form better suited to Czechoslovak conditions. The *Prague Spring* itself was driven by three distinct dynamics: an attempt at selftransformation

by the incumbent élite, a social movement, and a national movement in Slovakia. His succinct, critical analysis draws out the contradictions inherent in the liberalization of a one-party political system that was ready to accomodate the representation of group interests but not unfettered pluralism or the unintended consequences of individual liberties.

The following 200 pages narrate the mounting tension in Czechoslovak-Soviet relations after December 1967. Using Soviet and East European transcripts of the many bi- und multi-lateral summits that occurred over eight months, plus Soviet diplomatic cables and Czechoslovak documents, Pauer produces a compelling account of Moscow's steady drift toward the use of force. Critical moments, such as the bilateral meeting at Čierná nad Tisou in late July-early August 1968, are recounted in vivid detail.

While Pauer does not commence his narrative by engaging the literature on the dynamics of decision-making, in the way that previous authors such as Karen Dawisha and Jiří Valenta did, he does address the matter at mid-point, on pages 198–200. His study of the new sources leads him to argue against interpretations of Soviet decision-making that emphasize outcomes as the sub-optimal resultants of the divergent interests and perceptions of interested bureaucratic actors. The Soviet Politburo is portrayed by Pauer (correctly, in my opinion) not as divided into pro- and anti-invasion coalitions, but as relatively united in its perception of the crisis, and the remedy to it, from an early stage. The emphasis falls instead on the rapid formation of an invasion coalition within the Warsaw Pact, led by the USSR and including Poland, the GDR and Bulgaria. These other East European regimes' intolerance of reform communism, the emergence of a pro-Moscow faction within the Dubček leadership, and the combined pressure on Moscow for intervention are amply described, as are the more delicate positions of Hungary, Romania und Yugoslavia.

The second half of the book is devoted to the preparation and execution on the invasion, its failure to install a new antireform regime, and the Moscow negotiations culminating in the Protocol that committed the Dubček leadership to its many previous verbal pledges to reassert control. Pauer reconstructs the conspiracy involving Czechoslovak collaborators, Soviet diplomats and foreign armies, and the reasons for its swift unravelling in the face of non-violent civilian resistance and institutional rebellions. Throughout the book, but especially in the second half, the author debunks legends and describes the conduct of the Dubček coalition in all its complexity, especially in its witting and unwitting contributions to *normalization*. In previous work he dismantled the mythology surrounding President Ludvík Svoboda, and here we see fully the essential part played by the head of a nominally independent state in helping the Soviets to salvage the occupation's political mission. Pauer is also very careful in his account of Zdeněk Mlynář's ambiguous conduct in the Soviet embassy on 22 August (pp. 246–249), about which there has been enormous controversy and misunderstanding in Czech society in recent years.

This is a meticulous and marvellous book, worthy of a broad readership.