**X CZECHOSLOVAKIA AFTER WWII**

The re-established ČSR was fundamentally different from the first republic.

**“National front”,** a union of political parties permitted by the Communists monopolized the right to political decision-making. ⮊ confiscation of private property: “nationalization” of key industries, mines, joint–stock banks and private insurance companies and food industry ⮊ 2/3 of industrial potential of the country was now in state ownership.

Peace conferences in Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (August 1945) – staking out spheres of interest of great powers; growing influence of USSR in Central Europe.

**The Marshall Plan** – ČSR accepted the invitation to the conference, but under pressure from Stalin it had to withdraw its participation.

Communists proclaimed governmental state of crisis in 1948, the sick and dying Beneš gave in; leader of the Stalinist Czechoslovak Communist Party **Klement Gottwald** (1896-1953) formed the Communist-led government. President Beneš died a broken man later in 1948, Gottwald became his successor.

End of democracy, the Soviet model introduced ⮊ “nationalization” (no recompense was paid) of remaining private businesses, forced collectivization of agriculture. Manifestation of disagreement was suppressed by police, secret police, and army; political trials, executions, concentration camps near uranium mines, demise of small shop-keepers and workshop owners, people lost their economic independence; currency reform 1953 depreciated savings in banks and impoverished broad sections of public. The state became the only employer.

In 1950 the Communist regime launched its nation-wide crackdown **“Operation K”** against monasteries (“K” for “kláštery”, i.e. monasteries), incarcerating more than 2,300 monks, and confiscating the property of the Catholic and other churches. This was part of a wide reaching mission to curb the power of the Church in the country. Many of the victims died in prisons, or served long sentences (forced labor), some priests were even executed. Marxism-Leninism declared the only official ideology, others not permitted.

**Totalitarianism:** It is the "total" in totalitarianism that gives the best clue to its meaning. The term refers to the type of government that attempts to assert total control over the lives of its citizens. This form of tyranny was a 20th-century development that was instituted to serve the goal of transforming society according to socialist principles. Totalitarian governments first appeared shortly after WWI. They lasted in various places for about 70 years before proving to be political and economic failures.

This form of government theoretically permits no individual freedom and seeks to subordinate all aspects of the individual’s life to the [authority](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/467681/political-power) of the government. Italian [dictator](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/162236/dictator) **[Mussolini](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/399484/Benito-Mussolini)** coined the term *totalitario* in the early 1920s to describe the new fascist [state](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/563762/state) of Italy, which he further described as: *“All within the state, none outside the state, none against the state.”* By the beginning of [WWII](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/648813/World-War-II), “totalitarian” had become synonymous with absolute and oppressive single-party government.

In the broadest sense, totalitarianism is characterized by strong central rule that attempts to control and direct all aspects of individual life through coercion and repression. The totalitarian states of Germany under **Adolf** [**Hitler**](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/267992/Adolf-Hitler) (1933–45) and the USSR under **[Joseph Stalin](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/562617/Joseph-Stalin)** (1924–53) were the first examples of decentralized or popular totalitarianism, in which the state achieved overwhelming popular support for its leadership. This support was not spontaneous; its genesis depended on a charismatic leader; and it was made possible only by modern developments in communication and transportation.

Totalitarianism is often distinguished from [dictatorship](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/162240/dictatorship), despotism, or tyranny by its supplanting of all political institutions with new ones and its sweeping away of all legal, social, and political traditions.

The totalitarian state pursues some special goal, such as industrialization or conquest, to the exclusion of all others. All resources are directed toward its attainment regardless of the cost. Whatever might further the goal is supported; whatever might foil the goal is rejected. This obsession spawns an [ideology](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/281943/ideology) that explains everything in terms of the goal, rationalizing all obstacles that may arise and all forces that may contend with the state. The resulting popular support permits the state the widest latitude of action of any form of government. Any dissent is branded evil, and internal political differences are not permitted. Because pursuit of the goal is the only ideological foundation for the totalitarian state, achievement of the goal can never be acknowledged.

Under totalitarian rule, traditional social institutions and organizations are discouraged and suppressed; thus the social fabric is weakened and people become more amenable to absorption into a single, unified movement. Participation in approved public organizations is at first encouraged and then required. Old religious and social ties are supplanted by artificial ties to the state and its ideology. As [pluralism](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/465174/pluralism) and [individualism](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/286303/individualism) diminish, most of the people embrace the totalitarian state’s ideology. The infinite diversity among individuals blurs, replaced by a mass conformity (or at least acquiescence) to the beliefs and behavior sanctioned by the state.

**Large-scale, organized violence** becomes permissible and sometimes necessary under totalitarian rule, justified by the overriding commitment to the state ideology and pursuit of the state’s goal. In Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union, whole classes of people, such as the Jews and the kulaks (wealthy peasant farmers) respectively, were singled out for persecution and extinction. In each case the persecuted were linked with some external enemy and blamed for the state’s troubles, and thereby public opinion was aroused against them and their fate at the hands of the military and the police was condoned.

**Police operations** within a totalitarian state often appear similar to those within a police state, but one important difference distinguishes them. In a police state the police operate according to known, consistent procedures. In a totalitarian state the police operate without the constraints of laws and regulations. Their actions are unpredictable and directed by the whim of their rulers.

Under Hitler and Stalin **uncertainty** was interwoven into the affairs of the state. The German constitution of the Weimar Republic was never abrogated under Hitler, but an enabling act passed by the Reichstag in 1933 permitted him to amend the constitution at will, in effect nullifying it. The role of lawmaker became vested in one man. Similarly, Stalin provided a constitution for the Soviet Union in 1936 but never permitted it to become the framework of Soviet law. Instead, he was the final arbiter in the interpretation of Marxism–Leninism–Stalinism and changed his interpretations at will. Neither Hitler nor Stalin permitted change to become predictable, thus increasing the sense of terror among the people and repressing any dissent.

The Marxist ideology offered the communists a deep sense of certainty in the face of political and economic setbacks. If policies designed to produce prosperity created poverty instead, an explanation could always be found: the theory had been incorrectly interpreted, the forces were not correctly aligned, the officials had blundered. Whatever went wrong, the counterrevolution, the forces of conservatism, the secret influence of the bourgeoisie could always be held responsible.

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1949 COMECON was established; 1955 Warsaw Pact.

**Communist economic strategy** was appealing to the lower classes because it gave the illusion that the global wealth would be shared evenly, improving their conditions. Introduction of **planned economy** – popular in the whole Europe, because for most people it looked better than the chaotic market economy which – as they believed – brought about the misery of 1930s and WWII.

Although the communists technically maintained political pluralism, the country was characterized by the absence of liberal democracy. The lack of democracy meant that citizens had no significant electoral methods of registering protests against government policies; because of this periodical street protests became violent. This happened in the town of Plzeň, where in 1953 police injured hundreds of individuals protesting economic discontent.

Elections were not free, but obligatory, independence of the judiciary disappeared. The membership in the KSČ conferred privileges over non-members. A group of leading functionaries had the power of decision without having any legal or constitutional responsibility. But their steps were always controlled by advisors from the USSR.

After Stalin´s death (1953) and 20th congress of the Soviet Communists (1956) ⮊ partial relaxation in the whole East block.

In January 1968 Alexander Dubček [1921-1992] was elected head of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia;

April 1968 – *“****Action Program of the Communist Party****”*: this shy attempt to democratize society while maintaining the leading role of the Communist Party *(“Socialism with human face”)* enraged the Soviet leadership, therefore it was bound to fail. The “Brezhnev doctrine” of limited sovereignty of the Warsaw Pact countries.

August 21st, 1968, Warsaw Pact armies led by the Soviet Army occupied Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovak federation was established in October 1968 ⮊ two separate Czech and Slovak republics within the federated Czechoslovakia were established.

Two students burned themselves in protest against the growing apathy and the continuing Soviet occupation of the country: **Jan Palach** (January 1969) and **Jan Zajíc** (February 1969).

Weak and broken Dubček was ousted from his functions but before that he had signed new laws sending to prison all those who were trying to oppose the Soviet occupation.

**Gustáv Husák** [1913-1991], Slovak nationalist, became head of Czechoslovak Communist Party, later (1975) president of Czechoslovakia; from a pragmatic position he collaborated with the occupation power. Together with other eager pro-Soviet members of Communist Party he was responsible for a 20-years period of the **so-called *“normalization”***(Communist Party jargon),which led to the total devastation of the country – economic, cultural, but mainly moral (1969-1989). Growing apathy; most people withdrew into their private lives *(“inner emigration”*).

The communist regime spread anti-democratic propaganda. It established a ***Department for Press and Information*** that told the Czech Radio what they could and could not say, fired hundreds of employees and jammed access to Western radio stations. *“Do not broadcast anything that could be construed as being critical of the USSR or the countries of the Warsaw Pact and their armies. Do not use the term ‘occupation’ when applied to Czechoslovakia. Do not publicize the actions of the UN Security Council. Do not broadcast information about damage caused by the presence of Soviet troops, or any information about deaths or injuries.”*

Only a few courageous people were engaged in dissident activities; most population lost all hopes that the terrible and debilitating system could possibly end.

**Charter 77** – protests of dissidents who exhorted governing circles not to violate human rights and thus to fulfill their international obligations [cf. the Helsinki Conference]. Professor Jan Patočka, Václav Havel, Jiří Hájek; some 1900 signatories by 1989.

**November 17th, 1989** – demonstration ruthlessly broken up by police, this touched off the so-called *“Velvet Revolution”.* The Civic Forum. **Václav Havel** [1936-2011] elected president.

The concept of remodeling the whole society in accordance with the west European pattern – expressed by **Václav Klaus** [b.1941], the founding father of the Civic Democratic Party.

Disputes between Czechs and Slovaks ⮊ break up of Czechoslovakia in 1993.

**1993** – Czech Republic came into being; Václav Havel elected the first Czech President.

**1999** Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic entered the **NATO**.

**2004** Czech Republic joined the **EU.**