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Report:

**The Role of Student Protests in 1968: the Soviet Invasion
Of Czechoslovakia & Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico**

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**The Role of Student Protests in 1968: the Soviet Invasion
Of Czechoslovakia & Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico**

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This report delves into the events that occurred on August 21st 1968 in Czechoslovakia and October 2nd 1968 in Mexico. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and the massacre at Tlatelolco are two crucibles that remain a significant factor in the mindset of people from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Mexico today. In my writing I draw parallelisms between these two events, that occurred mere months from each other, on different continents and had students asking one common thing from their respective governments, they wanted to be heard. The invasion of Czechoslovakia came as a surprise; the country's new leader Alexander Dubcek was relaxing the government's stronghold on the media and freedom of press was slowly becoming a reality. These advances did not sit well with Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Politburo so they made a rash decision to invade; the Soviets believed that losing their stronghold in Czechoslovakia would lead to their demise in other Eastern European countries. 1968 was also a turbulent year in Mexico, the country was poised to host the Summer Olympics and it would be the first time a Latin American country would hold that honor

so the pressure was enormous. By 1968 the PRI party held a tight reign on Mexico's government and the students wanted change, they felt social injustice was on the rise and they felt compelled to speak up. Unfortunately the government was not ready to negotiate and ten days before the inauguration of the Olympics the army marched in on a peaceful student protest and opened fire.

Both movements were squashed but they mark the beginning of the end of one party rule in Czechoslovakia and Mexico. The conclusion of the report reaches 1988 when the Velvet Revolution took off in Czechoslovakia and Mexico's presidential election had to be rigged in order for the PRI to win. After the Velvet Revolution Czechoslovakia eased into democratic elections and it continues to be a full democracy today while Mexico still struggles to obtain a democratic standing in the world.

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It is not often that Czechoslovakia and Mexico are mentioned within the same context much less the same sentence. In my mind Czechoslovakia is a far off country that ceased to exist a few years after I was born, while Mexico is one of my home countries, the country of my culture and heritage. As of late I have had a bigger interest in exploring the History of Mexico and Eastern European History has been a great interest of mine since I was a teenager. For my final report I knew I wanted to focus on events that I believe tie my two interests together. I believe Mexico and Russia today share many similar characteristics, from their comparable present day population to their long lasting one party governments. The first time I visited Moscow in 2012 I remember thinking how similar it felt to being in Mexico City. As we drove in from Domodedovo Airport the scenery was similar to the drive in to Mexico City from the Benito Juarez Airport, we passed houses of varying levels of socioeconomic development and the presence of globalization was felt with each passing advertisement for foreign brands.

During the twentieth century both Russia and Mexico were submitted to authoritarian rule under a one party system, in Mexico, the PRI party came to power after the end of the Revolution and remained in power until the year 2000. While in Russia, a form of communism headed by Vladimir Lenin swept the nation after the Civil War. The Soviet Union was established and it would remain under a totalitarian regime, masked in a communist façade, until its dissolution in 1991. During its reign the Soviet Union had many satellite states, amongst them, Czechoslovakia, and the plight of the Czechoslovaks to reach their independence resonates as a parallelism with Mexicans wanting

independence from their own government. Both countries were searching for the same thing in 1968, democracy.

Being Mexican American and having a deeply rooted interest in Russian and Mexican history and culture, it is important for me to bring a better understanding of two outstanding moments in history, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico by building a comparison of both events, crucibles to each nation, which even though they occurred thousands of miles apart, brought similar repercussions. As Elena Poniatowska so poignantly puts it, “In many ways the political, social and moral crisis that ensued has not yet been resolved”. I hope to achieve a fair comparative analysis of both of these world events, with the hope of not only gaining a better understanding of the events themselves but also providing a clear narrative of what the situation was like in both Mexico and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The year 1968 was a year that witnessed much controversy as student movements were taking off in many countries. The sixties are commonly known as an era where the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union overshadowed most of the news, and sometimes this resulted in an exclusion of news stories starring other countries and relating to the student movements around the world. Being so close to the US is partially responsible for Mexico being overlooked on a worldwide scale yet with a population that rivals the present Russian population, and a history rooted with intrigue and corruption, the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico serves as a good comparison to the invasion of Czechoslovakia headed by the Soviet Union, during the year 1968. The students in

Mexico were well aware of developments in places such as: France, Cuba, the US and Czechoslovakia. Like their counterparts around the world, Mexican students felt it was time for a rebellion and they did not want to be left behind. The students' ideology and methods were borrowed from other movements, students in Mexico began to engage in peaceful marches, handed out fliers, held meetings and would oftentimes resort to throwing sticks and rocks at police to show their discontent (Witherspoon).

Both countries in my research share similarities that make their study relevant to our understanding of parallel social movements in the context of authoritarian regimes. It is important to mention the fact that both regimes had not been properly legitimated within the general population. In particular, both regimes espoused a unity myth that may not have been properly internalized and accepted by the population. In Mexico, the population saw the idea of miscegenation as a uniting force for all Mexicans as a myth, in particular among the educated urban middle class. In Czechoslovakia, ethnic divisions between Czechs and Slovaks were dismissed as being a procommunist construction, but the population still felt them in their everyday lives.

The multiple rebellions that took place throughout the world in 1968 had one striking commonality, they were not planned, it seemed as if people around the world had just snapped. People in communist countries were rebelling against communism, while people in capitalist countries were rebelling against capitalism. It was students who were leading many of these rebellions and because of their sense of urgency and disarray, rebellions were directed through hastily called meetings and newly minted protest groups.

How else were anti-authoritarian groups supposed to work? Their ideology clearly opposed leaders, which resulted in unclear ideologies and widespread disagreement on many issues (Kurlansky).

For the most part, I wish to keep my narrative aligned to the events that occurred in Prague and Mexico City in 1968, although I will mention the events occurring in the US at that time in order to give a broader perspective of student movements. The American War in Vietnam was unlike other wars; it was not supposed to be unique, yet it was. It was unique in the sense that it was an ideological proxy war fought by what was deemed the first ever global super power, the US. It was also the first war to be televised, meaning people around the world were privy, firsthand to the atrocities of war, this in turn helped pave the way for student movements in the US. The year 1968 was a particularly deadly one in the Vietnam War, as Kurlansky illustrates, the US military was killing the same number of people or more as died during the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Back on US soil, the civil rights movement was taking off, with people uniting not only for equal rights among races but also uniting in vehement opposition of the Vietnam War. The fact that it was the first televised war also contributed to a globalized world in which student movements could more easily relate to each other. The Black Power movement was also gaining traction throughout the US and taking shape as a violent movement, people in the US were preparing for a war of races. Primordially a war between the police and Black Power advocates. Meanwhile Cold War

tensions were escalating and the future was unclear not only for the US and the Soviet Union but also for the rest of the world (Kurlansky).

Some of the questions that arose about Mexico were: Was the 1968 student movement in Mexico politically charged? Or was it mainly a way of seeking democratic vindication? Was there any involvement from Mexico's strong leftist group? What was its true meaning and what was there, really, behind the conflict? Ever since the founding of Mexico as an independent country in 1821 there have been political tensions. There has never existed a true democratic government in Mexico and by 1968 tensions were at a boiling point. Since the start of the PRI party's reign, voting for president was a formality, the next president would be the hand picked successor of the president in power (Lombardo Toledano). During the election of 1964 nothing seemed to be different, President Adolfo Lopez Mateos had set his sights on the Secretary of Government, Gustavo Diaz Ordaz as his successor. Protests arose in 1968 in large part as a reaction to police brutality but that quickly transformed and escalated into demands for expansion of the democracy, university reform, and efforts to ease poverty (Witherspoon). Meanwhile students in Czechoslovakia were joyous about the political liberalization brought about by Alexander Dubcek and his reforms in 1968. Moscow, at that time headed by Leonid Brezhnev was not joyous and put a stop to Dubcek by invading Czechoslovakia angering many Czechoslovaks. Czechoslovaks then took it upon themselves to express their opposition with various acts of spontaneous and nonviolent resistance.

Why students?

By 1968 students demonstrating on college campuses had become a widespread occurrence, in the US alone approximately thirty schools a month were erupting in some form of chaos. Protestors quickly understood that in order to be taken seriously they could not simply wield signs and host sit-ins they needed more drastic measures. Students across the world showed their discontent with their administrations, war and other things they deemed unfair by taking over buildings, refusing to attend class or other drastic acts like the students of the University of Wisconsin in Madison who planted 400 white crosses on the lawn of Bascom Hill near the administration building. They put up a sign that read “Bascom Memorial Cemetery, Class of 1968” the protestors explained that they thought the campus ought to look like a graveyard, because that is where most of the seniors were headed. The students that were out protesting in 1968 had been born after World War II, so their thoughts on war vastly differed from that of older generations. Growing up during the Cold War had the same effect on most of the children around the world; it caused them to fear both blocs. Distrust of both factions of the Cold War by youths was at an all time high. Students arriving at college campuses during the mid 1960’s had a deep resentment and distrust of any kind of authority. Since authority figures were not to be trusted, most student movements had no absolute leader, the moment someone dared declare themselves a leader was the moment they were no longer to be trusted, this led to disorganization. Another noteworthy difference between the generation of the 1960’s and its predecessor is television. This generation was the first to

grow up with television and they innately understood it in a way the older generation never would. Television became an important platform for the student movements, it gave them worldwide visibility and also helped build a feeling of community whilst fighting against oppressors, much like the way social media unites youth around the world today (Kurlansky).

The Soviet invasion of the independent Czechoslovakia was condemned around the world, yet condemnation did not lead to action and soon after the invasion the Czecholovaks found themselves, once again, under a hard lined communist regime. A little over a month after the events in Czechoslovakia the student movement reached a breaking point in Mexico City when thousands lined the streets in protest of Gustavo Diaz Ordaz's presidency, police brutality, inequality and Mexico's hosting of the 1968 Olympic Games. The massacre at Tlatelolco was not as widely reported on because the Mexican government did everything to keep the story from undermining Mexico's ability to host the Olympics. The students' movements in both Czechoslovakia and Mexico were squashed within a matter of days but their legacy remains.

In Mexico, the year 1968 culminated with Mexico City hosting the Olympic games in the shadows of violent student protests in opposition to the government. I look to analyze and to offer a comparison of two countries at a time when they were both struggling with an unhappy population and a stagnate government. In 1968 both the Soviet Union and Mexico were looking to finally cement their places in the world. The Soviet Union had gotten off to a rocky start, with the death of their beloved leader, Lenin

coming merely three years after the consolidation of power by the Red Army after a long and bloody civil war. Afterwards, a power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin ended with a ruthless totalitarian regime headed by Stalin, who viciously killed millions of Soviet citizens during his twenty-three year reign. By 1968 Leonid Brezhnev was head of a stagnate Soviet Union with a crumbling economy and a growing anti Soviet sentiment within the Soviet Union and in many of its satellite states, especially Czechoslovakia.

Meanwhile, Mexico had also suffered through a long and bloody Civil War that ended with the PRI party taking control and keeping a totalitarian regime for seventy years. Currently the PRI party is back in office after a twelve-year hiatus but during 1968 it seemed as though its reign would never be interrupted much like it was felt that the Soviet Union would never cease to exist. It was of utmost importance to the Mexican government that the Olympic games of 1968 go off without a hitch. The 1968 Olympics were a tapestry of national and international politics, racial tensions, intriguing personalities and athletic achievement. It is also important to remember that the Mexico Olympics were the first to deal with issues such as drug testing and the threat of terrorism (Witherspoon).

Olympics

It was in October of 1963 that it was announced that Mexico had won the bid for the 1968 Olympics. Nations look upon a winning Olympic bid as winning a prize but it is a prize that comes with unparalleled international scrutiny, especially when you are the first Latin American country to be chosen, the first developing country, the first “third

world” country. Mexican government officials had managed to convince the Olympic committee and the world that Mexico was stable enough and prosperous enough to host the Olympics, now they had a little over four years to prepare and prove their point. Mexico in the 1960’s portrayed itself as a seemingly stable nation, especially in comparison to other Latin American countries. In many respects this was a false sense of stability, characterized by a seemingly peaceful transfer of power from one president to the next. However, the stability of political succession came at the price of true democracy. At that time Mexico was holding presidential elections every six years, as it still does today, however back then there was one ruling party, the PRI. The PRI’s candidates had been elected without opposition since the end of the Revolution in the 1920’s. While the six-year elections gave the image of a true democracy, participation of the masses was extremely limited and most Mexicans were living in discontent, something that is still true today. Despite heavy internal discontent, the Mexican government strongly endorsed an Olympic bid, much like the present-day Brazil administration, which took it upon themselves to host an Olympic Games despite strong opposition from the populace and a president on the verge of impeachment. Mexico’s hopes for a peaceful Olympiad were dashed by the summer of 1968 when the student movement became stronger than ever (Witherspoon).

At first Mexicans openly celebrated their triumph of hosting the Olympics but their euphoria was short lived. During the years leading up to the Games there was an uncertainty that permeated Mexico. The country became increasingly wracked by

political controversy relating to one central question, was it realistic for a developing nation to host a successful Olympics? It would be easy to assume that the president of Mexico at the time Gustavo Diaz Ordaz was a fierce supporter of the Games however the opposite was actually true. Since Mexico's presidents are elected on a six-year term, with no option to reelect, Diaz Ordaz felt slighted into the Games by the previous administration. Former president Adolfo Lopez Mateos had been obsessed with Mexico's Olympic bid and successfully angled to become Chairman of the Mexican Organizing Committee shortly after he finished his term as president. Lopez Mateos saw Japan's massive investment in the 1964 Tokyo Games as a model for Mexico, however it was popular opinion that Mexico was not in a condition to buy prestige at such a price. So, even though Diaz Ordaz saw the Games as a cross to bear, he knew that under no circumstances should Mexico bow out of its hosting duties and thus give reason to all of its critics (Zolov).

For many years the image of Mexico that permeated abroad has not been an accurate one. Even today Mexico finds it hard to shake the poncho wearing, donkey-riding stigma that seems intrinsically tied with Mexican culture, especially since Donald Trump came to the forefront of US politics in 2016. One of Mexico's main interests after being selected to host the 1968 Summer Olympic Games was to shape the perception the outside world had of Mexico and Mexican culture. This is somewhat ironic since the Mexican Olympic delegation had helped secure Mexico's bid to host the Olympics by showcasing a folkloric image of the country, an image that included sombreros and

ponchos. Mexico faced an uphill battle in convincing the Olympic Committee that it was time for a developing, Latin American nation to act as host. Mexico used its rich pre-Columbian history mixed with contemporary classics such as, Mariachis to paint a picture of the warmth and charm that exudes from all Mexican people (Castillo).

As the 1968 Olympic games drew closer there started to be a noticeable international campaign to prevent the games from occurring in Mexico. Many people were convinced that the games would be a huge disaster since it was the first time a developing country in Latin America would be the host. Many critics used the 1968 Student Movement and the consequent massacre as a reason for the failure of the games. European countries argued that the student movement could give way to another Mexican revolution. The image of Mexico that surged from the European mindset was of an underdeveloped country with traces of irresponsibility and lack of culture exuding from its citizens. Mexico did not deserve to be trusted with such an important event as was the Olympics; Mexico could not handle such pressure. Mexico was a country that severely lagged behind the US and Western Europe, at least in their eyes, and sadly it continues to be seen as that country today (Witherspoon).

Mexico's perceived "underdevelopment" was an inseparable discursive component to perceptions of Mexico abroad. It rested upon Mexico's shoulders to fulfill the expectation that a third world country could advance along the spectrum of democratic, capitalist development. Mexico carried a heavy burden of representation into the 1968 Olympics and it became an explicit and intrinsic aspect in terms of planning for

the Games. What was to have been Mexico's golden opportunity to showcase its newfound modernity was instead threatening to divide the country and embarrass Mexico's government. Two years after having won the Olympic bid there were very few signs of advancement in terms of building and planning, it seemed possible that Diaz Ordaz would quit at any moment. Mexico faced not only the pressing reality of financial restraints but also the more abstract problem of credibility. Mexico had no time for internal squabbles and constantly denied any internal trouble to the world but the question of expenditure and government priorities became a rallying point for the student movement (Zolov).

Mexico's official logo for the games was a simple "MEXICO68" and it was clear that its design was meant to have a modernist feel with its sleek and subtle elegance. Along with the cool logo came dozens of "edecanes" (event hostesses) who proudly wore the logo on their miniskirts and pantsuits, from afar it was evident that Mexico was on the verge of something spectacular. Mexico was actually the first host country to give a greater emphasis on culture and bring that onto the Games as an integral aspect. The iconic use of the peace dove made reference to Mexico's self-described role as an international "peacemaker" and the arrival of the Olympic flame at the pre-Hispanic site of Teotihuacan helped accentuate Mexico's cultural authenticity. Sadly, today most of the memories left over from those Olympic games are generally associated to the tragedy at Tlatelolco or to the image of the silent protest led by certain black athletes from the US who stood with their fists up in the air as a show of defiance for the unequal treatment of

blacks in the US. The historical memory of the games tends to leave out the conflicts and challenges that marked Mexico's staging of the games. The reputation of Mexico as a whole was on the line with a successful Olympic games and when the time came to shine, Mexico faltered (Zolov).

The years leading up to the Tlatelolco massacre and the Olympics had been focused on giving Mexico credibility as a peaceful and modern country, the official motto of the 1968 Olympics said it all, "Todo es posible en la paz" (Everything is possible in peace). The student movement was proving to be disastrous to Mexican credibility and the government was not about to let all of its hard work over the past few years come stumbling down because a few hundred students were protesting. However, it is important to note that the students did not aim to sabotage the Games, in reality many youths and intellectuals who sympathized with the student movement had participatory roles throughout the Games, specifically in the cultural aspect of the Games. The protests were aimed at President Diaz Ordaz as a critique of the authoritarian nature of Mexican society rather than as an attack on the Games themselves (Zolov). However, due to the force with which the government squashed the student movement mere days before the opening ceremony the Games became intrinsically tied to the Tlatelolco Massacre.

Today the number of deaths that occurred in the Tlatelolco Massacre is still unclear, however the historical significance of the 1968 student movement is gaining interest from researchers. There is much memory from this time but little objective historical analysis, as new archival sources become available there will hopefully be a

shift towards a growing appreciation for the centrality of the XIX Olympiad. To better understand the culmination of the massacre at Tlatelolco it seems necessary to understand the Mexican mindset at that time. Did planning for the Olympics generate widespread support in Mexico? The general assumption, because of the students' unrest would be that, no, the games were strongly unsupported. Yet, as Zolov points out in his article, "the question of public support, remains one of the crucial and least understood aspects of this period; it strikes at the heart of the deeper problematic concerning the nature of the ruling PRI party's hegemony during the Mexican Miracle."

Mexico has never really had a president that was deemed handsome, the closest one has been current president Enrique Pena Nieto but his constant stumbles outshine all of his physical features. Gustavo Diaz Ordaz was elected as president of Mexico in 1964 and contrary to Pena Nieto was an extremely ugly man, one of his more prominent nicknames was "el chango" which translates to "the monkey". One thing that Diaz Ordaz had in his favor was his powerful oratory skills. Diaz Ordaz was facing a tough year in 1968 and he knew it, he would have to rely on his oratory skills to get Mexico through the Olympics without disruption. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Mexico had been embroiled in a bloody revolutionary war until a system of government was established whose primary goal was not democracy but stability, Mexico has yet to obtain a truly democratic government. The fact that Mexico had a revolving door of presidents during the 1920's helped to cement the country's current six year presidential terms without an option for reelection. For six years the president of Mexico basically had

almost absolute power, without fear of retribution since no reelection was possible and it was a one party system, there was no fear of losing an election. The power the president of Mexico was given was only limited to three things he could not do: secede any territory to a foreign power, confiscate land from indigenous people and succeed himself as president (Kurlansky). By the time Diaz Ordaz came to power this system had been around for over thirty years, so it was a smooth transition, the people of Mexico had gotten used to the authoritarian system, or better yet they had only ever been privy to an authoritarian system.

One major difference between the PRI and other political systems that had been present in Mexico before was that the PRI was not primarily violent; it would not resort to killing unless all other options had been exhausted. Diaz Ordaz was chosen as the next president by the PRI leadership after having served as minister of the interior and he was ready to put Mexico on display at a worldwide level. During the 1960's Mexico had been experiencing strong economic expansion and its political and financial stability had garnered it international praise as a leading Latin American country. Diaz Ordaz was eager to showcase how far Mexico had come since its bloody Revolution and the Olympics would be the perfect time to introduce the new and improved Mexico to the world. Mexico was counting on the Olympics to show the world that Mexico had become an emerging and successful modern country with an emerging middle class and a capital city that exuded beauty and efficiency. The Games were to be completely televised and it was to be Mexico's first big international event, nothing could go wrong (Kurlansky).

By mid 1968 it was evident that controversy was showing its face in every country and Diaz Ordaz became worried about any demonstrations during the Games. At first a main concern had been a possible boycott from black athletes from the US, where race conflicts were at an all time high after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The boycott idea gained steam after the International Olympic Committee decided to readmit the apartheid team of South Africa. Mexicans sensed disaster from this decision and convinced the Olympic Committee to once again instill a ban on South Africa, crisis averted (Kurlansky). While Mexico was concerned with the world beyond their borders, it did not dawn on the government that social unrest in their own country was increasing. Social unrest in Mexico was increasing in large part due to the unfair distribution of wealth. Kurlansky notes that by 1960 about 78 percent of disposable income in Mexico was going to only the upper 10 percent of Mexican society. This study, done by Ifgenia Martinez was the first of its kind in Mexico and it proved to be an explanation as to why many people were unhappy in a rapidly developing country. For the most part the PRI was good at suppressing any opposition and by 1968 it had managed to successfully suppress many peasant movements, a teachers union protest, and a railroad workers strike. There was really only one group that the PRI did not have under its control in 1968, the students (Kurlansky).

The students of both Mexico City and Prague in 1968 shared many similarities, mainly the fact that they were born after both the Mexican Revolution and World War II and in their minds their governments were not saviors but oppressors. The main

difference was that Mexico's fight was against its own government while the Czechoslovaks fought to free their country from the iron grip that the Soviet Union had held on it since liberating it from Germany in World War II. By 1968 Mexico was fast on its way to becoming the largest city in the world, its population was increasing at about 3 percent per year and a very large sector of Mexico's population was young and Mexico had more students in its realm than ever before. For the most part these students were well aware that they were privy to a better life than their parents, not only in the economical sense but also in the sense that they felt freer to express themselves and openly talk about their societal qualms. The students of Mexico were well aware that their country's growing economy did not benefit many of the people around them. One Mexican student, Roberto Escudero described the generational gap the following way, "There was a big difference between our generation and our parents'. They were very traditional. They had received benefits from the Mexican Revolution, and Zapata and others from the revolution were their heroes. We had those heroes, too, but we also had Che and Fidel. We saw the PRI more as authoritarian, where they saw it as a revolutionary liberator" (Kurlansky).

Compared with the US and Europe, the Mexican student movement was minuscule but even so it became an important concern for the government in 1968 mainly because of the Olympics and Diaz Ordaz not wanting anything to tarnish Mexico's reputation leading up to the Games. Diaz Ordaz was filled with paranoia and kept close tabs on the student movements evolving in Mexico, the Ministry of Interior led by Luis

Echeverria had many informants, at least one informant reporting from every student organization. Not much valuable information was obtained from these informants but one thing that did fuel Diaz Ordaz's paranoia was the fact that it was repeatedly noted in Interior Ministry files that student meetings and writings often ended with, "*Viva los movimientos estudiantiles de todo el mundo!*" (Long live the student movements around the world). Diaz Ordaz and his government were convinced that it was outside forces that were in danger of coming into Mexico and destabilizing it, and students were the most at risk of falling prey to these outside forces (Kurlansky).

Strangely enough, Mexico was one of the few countries that did not condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. By that point Mexico was too concerned with its internal issues to focus on external issues. By July 1968 the small and splintered student movement in Mexico had gained traction and on July 22nd the students were swarmed by police as they demonstrated on a street. As the students retreated the police pursued them throughout the neighborhood and would beat anyone they caught, this rampage went on for three hours, twenty students were arrested and the cause remains, to this day, unknown. This rampage gave the student movement validity and a cause that resonated with the Mexican public, police brutality (Kurlansky).

There is an eerie comparison to be drawn between the Communist Party and the PRI party that ruled Mexico during the twentieth century. If any Mexican wanted to change things, improve things or make life better in general they needed to join the PRI. In Mexico like the Soviet Union only members of the ruling political party could be

deemed true players. Whenever an opposing person or group rose to some popularity in Mexico the leader would have to be either bought out or killed, this applied equally to labor organizers and journalists (Kurlansky). I feel it is no coincidence that today both Russia and Mexico rank among the most dangerous countries for journalists.

It is unclear what the Mexican students were searching for; certainly it was not violence, which is what resulted. I believe, the students wanted to be heard, they wanted to at least create a dialogue with the government, however the government was not looking for a dialogue and with the student movement gaining traction mere days before the opening ceremony of the Olympics, Diaz Ordaz decided to violently crush the student movement.

The Events in Mexico

Elena Poniatowska's book *Massacre in Mexico* walks us through the days leading up to the October 2nd massacre in Mexico and makes readers privy to the general mood of hopefulness and enthusiasm at seeking a public dialogue with those in power. Mexico was not a communist or socialist country however it had remained stagnate ever since the PRI took office following the Revolution. Many were certain that the middle-class Student Movement would be followed by worker and peasant movements that would eventually get through to the government, sadly this did not occur. The students' efforts crashed and burned that October 2nd and to this day the events of that fateful day remain blurry and censored to the Mexican people. If the Mexican government ever wishes to reclaim the people's trust, it needs to own its part in the massacre (Poniatowska).

One of the main problems that arose after the 1968 student movement was the Mexican government's inability to acknowledge what was happening. For the Mexican government mere acceptance of the Student Movement along with the obvious discontent of many of its citizens would have amounted to the government's self betrayal. Like the Soviet system the Mexican political system was founded on the belief that the president and official government party, at that time the PRI, were the incarnation of the whole country, much like the Soviet party was supposed to encompass all Soviet citizens. Much like Russia, Mexico has never been a true democracy, shifting from Spanish rule to a short-lived empire, first under Agustin de Iturbide then Maximilian of Habsburg up until the self-styled dictator Porfirio Diaz. Mexico has constantly been trying to free itself from the grasp of authoritarian parties and leaders without much success (Poniatowska).

The movement that culminated with the march to the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* on October 2nd, 1968 did not have a defined ideology. It was a movement geared by students, mainly middle class and intellectual groups who had become dissatisfied with the government and its role in benefitting only a small minority in the forty years since the end of the Revolutionary War (Poniatowska). The *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* sits in the Tlatelolco district of Mexico City, it represents all three of the major eras in Mexican history. Legend has it, that it was at this site where the Aztecs formed their final resistance against the Spanish conquistadores led by Hernan Cortes. There lay Aztec ruins, partially excavated and nearby was a Spanish cathedral and surrounding everything was a slew of modern era apartment buildings. There, across the ruins of their Aztec

ancestors, the students gathered on that fateful afternoon to peacefully protest the harsh treatment of students by the government. The atmosphere was pleasant and enthusiastic cheers were heard throughout the night. Their families joined the students and many children were running about, the police presence that surrounded them was little cause for concern. At about 6:20 p.m. army troops moved in and sealed off all exits from the square, suddenly a military group known as the *Olimpia Battalion* opened fire on the crowd from balconies that lined the square. The crowd was trapped; there was nowhere to run. A reckless stampede ensued, crushing people to their deaths. From every side the students met death; gunfire came from bayonets, helicopters and tanks. It went on until eleven o'clock that night. The only refuge to be found was in the nearby apartments where students fled with people that took them in. Soldiers saturated the buildings with bullets and grenades, blowing out windows and wounding many people inside. The troops then stormed the apartment buildings, arresting anyone who looked like a student and anyone they suspected of trying to help them. The arrested students were beaten and groped as they were pushed towards awaiting police trucks (Witherspoon).

The number of people that died that night remains a mystery to this day. Rumors persist that the government cremated many bodies to prevent the true extent of the slaughter to be known. A fact the government has vehemently denied. The official number of deaths was thirty-eight, including four soldiers. However, it is thought that the actual number is around 300 dead. Several thousand-student leaders were taken into custody and were tortured. Years would pass before students considered public protest

again; the emotional scars that many carried made it especially hard to participate in any protests after that night. Mexico's grievous flaws came to light, shattering its myth of peace and stability while the world was watching; ironically an unofficial motto of the 68 Olympics was "Before the Eyes of the World" (Witherspoon).

The student movements in both Mexico and Czechoslovakia were unique in that students provided an ideal source of protestors. As Witherspoon states "Students are generally not of the lowest financial class, so they have the means and wherewithal to support a movement. They are educated and literate and also more politically aware than other groups." The parallelisms that exist between the movements in Mexico and Czechoslovakia are rooted in the students because both groups were seeking to establish their own identity by breaking with societal norms. What unites Mexican students and Czechoslovak students and differentiates them from other student movements such as France and the US is the self-absorbed notion with which Mexicans and Czechoslovaks viewed their own nations (Witherspoon). Change was supposed to start with them, they felt it and more importantly, they believed it.

What is noteworthy is the connection some journalists in Mexico made between the Mexican student movement and the Communist Party. This connection was made on the basis that the students' request for the release of political prisoners indicated that communists had infiltrated the student movement. However, members of the Communist Youth who advocated for a more militant movement complained that the Communist Party did not play a more prominent role in the student movement helping to disprove the

journalists' theory. Mexican and Czechoslovak students were not calling for a revolution and they did not call for a significant overhaul of the political system and both movements could have been defused at an early juncture without the use of violence (Witherspoon).

Prague Spring

The feeling in Czechoslovakia at the beginning of 1968 was one of hope; in February the Czechoslovakian hockey team had just become victorious over the previously undefeated Soviet team at the Winter Olympics in France. In Prague there was a feeling of optimism as new clubs opened and young men with long hair and women in miniskirts danced to American music playing from the jukebox. Sure, it took a few demonstrations to get the clubs open but it was worth it and for the most part non violent. While the media was still controlled by the government in Czechoslovakia, the government was actually using the press to promote the idea of a communist democracy. Alexander Dubcek is known for coining the term "socialism with a human face" and trying to gain the upper hand in a battle of wit with the Soviet Union. Dubcek came to power in Czechoslovakia after the ousting of Antonin Novotny, Dubcek was a likeable communist with a simple and eloquent message, he said "Democracy is not only the right and chance to pronounce one's own views, but also the way in which people's views are handled, whether they have a real feeling of co-responsibility, co-decision, whether they really feel they are participating in making decisions and solving important problems." People inside and outside of Czechoslovakia took him at his word, The New York times

even named Prague “the right place to be” that summer for people under thirty (Kurlansky).

Dubcek’s Rise

Alexander Dubcek was known as a reformer and wanted Czechoslovakia to advance toward political liberalism. Dubcek made his move in 1967 when the Czechoslovak economy was in decline and people were growing discontent with Novotny’s hard line government and policies. In 1967 Dubcek made a secret invitation to Brezhnev, he wanted Brezhnev to see firsthand the opposition that had formed against Novotny. Dubcek’s plan worked and by January of 1968 he had taken over the role of First Secretary of Czechoslovakia. A short time after, Antonin Novotny was ousted as president but Dubcek did not have a free hand in naming his replacement. The new president must be someone who could not only work along with Dubcek but also please Brezhnev and his Kremlin cronies. Dubcek ended up picking an unpopular president in Ludovik Svoboda, a seventy-two year old war hero who had fought along with the Soviets in World War II and was a retired general. The students were not very pleased with Dubcek’s pick and they let him know it by demonstrating in front of the Communist Party headquarters. Dubcek thought nothing of this protest and calmly told the students why he had chosen Svoboda and assured them that their newfound liberties would not be abolished. Dubcek let it be known to the students that they themselves were the guarantee that the old days would not be back. The students took Dubcek at his word, they thought it was possible to achieve democracy within the Soviet bloc (Kurlansky). Dubcek thought

he had a good understanding of the Soviet Union, however he could only guess at the inner workings of Brezhnev's government and Brezhnev's mind. Dubcek incorrectly assumed that he would be given free reign in Czechoslovakia as long as the country remained a faithful member of the Soviet bloc, his idealist reforms were ahead of his time.

By August 1968 it seemed that Brezhnev had reached a *modus vivendi* with Dubcek's leadership and observers of Soviet politics interpreted this as a victory for the Czechoslovak reformers. However days later the Soviets would march into Czechoslovakia while the world looked on incredulously, both the US and NATO had considered a Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia to be highly unlikely. The decision to invade Czechoslovakia did not result from a single Soviet actor, instead such actions were a process of political interaction among the senior decision makers in the Soviet Politburo and the heads of several bureaucratic elites at the Central Committee level. Personal interests, varying backgrounds, and previous political career experience provided good clues as to why certain decisions were made. Initially the political crisis in Czechoslovakia seemed to be only a power struggle for a more pluralistic concept of socialism conceived by Dubcek. If we look at it in terms of the Soviet point of view, the revival of freedom of the press in Czechoslovakia created a dangerous political situation which could potentially impact neighboring Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union itself (Valenta).

The Prague Spring was a different kind of revolt, it did not challenge the basic elements of Soviet national security interests and it did not proclaim that its brand of socialism would signify the loss of control by the Communist Party. Nevertheless, the Soviets saw any shift in ideas as problematic and a potential dangerous threat to their authoritarianism. Senior Soviet decision makers must have been disturbed by Czechoslovak reformism and deemed that the situation in Czechoslovakia had to be stabilized and this was to be achieved by the use of military force. At first there was hope that the military build up might serve as an instrument of psychological pressure against the Czechoslovaks. The actual decision to invade came until late August after a long process of pulling and hauling by major party officials. The ultimate decision came after it was agreed that the “deviant” ideas of reformism and federalism could spill over from Czechoslovakia into other communist nations. There did however exist a noninterventionist faction within the Soviet Union who felt that intervention would prove detrimental to ongoing foreign policy strategies and Brezhnev vacillated between both interventionist and noninterventionist factions in an attempt to identify with the prevailing one while alternating his stance several times. In the Soviet Union the prime-motivating factor behind backing a coalition was not necessarily ideological considerations but rather calculations of expected payoffs, or calculations of compatibility and conflicts of interest (Valenta).

Brezhnev ultimately backed the interventionist coalition whose aim was the removal of Dubcek and his supporters by military force. The payoff that came with this

policy was as the removal of reformism in Czechoslovakia. We may never truly know what specifically made Brezhnev make up his mind to back military intervention but we can speculate. The collection and processing of information may have had an important role here since during the Novotny era, Soviet leaders received somewhat accurate information from Czechoslovakia however with the personnel changes made under Dubcek the information channels were lost. The loss of information was a big motivating factor for the military intervention. There is evidence that points to the Politiburo's final decision to invade being based on information and estimates provided by KGB informants. Meanwhile the US was wrapped up in Vietnam, presidential elections and the civil rights movement, which led to them being either unable or unwilling to intervene on behalf of Czechoslovakia. In July of 1968 strict orders were given by the Johnson administration in regards to the behavior of the US armed forces in West Germany. US forces were forbidden from conducting any activity on Czechoslovakia's borders that might be interpreted by the Soviet's as support for Dubcek's regime. This state of affairs likely helped strengthen the case for the interventionist coalition. Dubcek's inexperience in foreign affairs was also key in the Soviet invasion, Dubcek did not expect to deal with an intervention and was highly unprepared to do so. Ultimately it was a mixture of Dubcek's inexperience and Brezhnev's desire to be on the winning side, Brezhnev could not afford to be seen as a weakling especially when it came to revisionism and anticommunism (Valenta).

The decision to invade Czechoslovakia was also the result of an atmosphere of fear and insecurity that had been increasingly evident in both the foreign and domestic policy of the Soviet Union over the three or four years previous to the occupation. Domestically Brezhnev's rule had been characterized by a revival of repressive measures against dissident intellectuals, mainly writers. Many writers at that time were condemning the action of not only Stalin but also the past actions of men who were now involved in ruling the country. Meanwhile, Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe was plagued by an irrational fear of increasing West German economic and political influence. The Soviets pressured many governments in order to prevent them from establishing official diplomatic relations with West Germany. 1968 was a year that showcased the Soviet Union's fear for its continued dominance in the Soviet Union and fear for the maintenance of Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe (Czerwinski).

The Soviet Union perceived there was danger in decreased Czechoslovak dependence especially because some Western countries were beginning to show an interest in financing some of the reforms proposed by Dubcek. The Soviet leaders decided that the reforms and reorientation of Czechoslovakia would be probable to affect the rest of Eastern Europe and even affect the Soviet Union itself. Brezhnev most certainly weighed the pros and cons of the invasion but ultimately decided that the concern for domestic control and maintenance of the East European empire won out. From the death of Stalin until 1968 Soviet policy in Eastern Europe had been

characterized by an attempt at maintaining a dominant position without the use of terror or military (Czerwinski).

The Invasion

August 20, 1968 was a typical day at Ruzyně airport in Prague and by ten thirty at night only one flight out to Ankara remained on schedule for after midnight. Before that flight took off an Aeroflot plane arrived and a group of men got off and proceeded to their waiting cars. There was nothing out of the ordinary with this particular flight, however the events that transpired afterwards are truly transfixing. All of a sudden the men that had been sitting in the airport terminal apparently waiting for the flight to Ankara, stood up and took revolvers out of their pockets. The armed group proceeded to hold the airport's air traffic controllers at gunpoint. Suddenly airplanes began to arrive at the Ruzyně airport, one after the other, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had begun (Chapman).

On August 21, at around one in the morning came an announcement from Prague Radio alerting the residents of Czechoslovakia to remain calm and to not put up resistance to the Soviet troops. By the time people were getting ready to go about their day, invading troops were already strategically placed throughout the streets. Although the Soviets probably expected some mild resistance from the Czechoslovaks, they thought that for the most part it would be an easy takeover. However, soon the invaders were stunned, when instead of being greeted with smiles, they were booed and spat at. Many of the invading forces had not taken much, in terms of supplies, expecting that

food, water, and other facilities would be provided for them, but seemingly everywhere, they were refused. The invasion meant the end of the seven months of freedom that Czechoslovakia had felt under Dubcek's government and soon Czechoslovakia would be thrust back into Soviet repression (Chapman).

Previously, when Novotny had figured out that he was losing control over his country, he reacted predictably by calling in help from the Kremlin. Brezhnev's visit did not accomplish much in favor of Novotny's government on the contrary it helped weaken it, especially because Dubcek had already invited Brezhnev, secretly. A naked struggle for power ensued and Dubcek replaced Novotny by unanimous vote. Within a short time the new leadership was rallying popular support by implementing such things as: abolishing literary and press censorship and the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinist terror trials, travel restrictions were also lifted. By April of 1968 it was becoming clear that freedom of the press was on Dubcek's shortlist, there were plans for much fairer elections and there was to be more trade with West Germany; Moscow's worst fears were confirmed. At first Moscow did not deem an intervention necessary, but contrary to Moscow's expectations, the Russian threat of intervention stiffened the spirit of independence within Czechoslovakia. Meaning the Russians actually helped solidify Dubcek's position as leader (Chapman).

When Dubcek was informed of the Soviet invasion, in the late hours of August 20th, he was incredulous. Dubcek had just reached an agreement with the Soviet government days before and refused to believe that they were now attacking him. It was

not until Dubcek witnessed the death of a civilian from his window that he realized that the Soviet threat was real. Before Dubcek could even make a phone call to the Soviet ambassador, his office was taken over, the phone cord was ripped from the wall and Dubcek along with two others were held at gunpoint. Dubcek was promptly arrested and led away by the aggressors who were most likely KGB agents. He was then tied up and placed in a car. The original plan had been to hold him until the new pro-Soviet government took office and then execute him, but things did not go as planned (Chapman).

The Czechoslovak army was meager in size compared to the invading forces, a mere 170,000 men formed the whole of the Czechoslovak army, and meanwhile the Soviet Union sent 175,000 men into Czechoslovakia. It is within this context that we can appreciate the true valor and resilience of the Czechoslovak people against such insurmountable odds. The resistance of the Czechoslovak people took many forms, ranging from spontaneous stone throwing and taunting of Russian tanks to the cunning clandestine radio stations that still aired and the defiance of the Czechoslovak leaders. Alone, each of these actions may have been completely ineffective but the people drew strength from each other and the different manifestations. While the Czechoslovak people were resisting with defiance, their fallen leaders were still very much with them in their plight. Dubcek was under arrest and incommunicated but President Svoboda managed to get a defiant message broadcast to the Czechoslovak people. In his message, President Svoboda reassured his countrymen that

there was no question of turning back; the country must remain united. The Czechoslovak army leaders then also spoke out to affirm that they would only take orders from President Svoboda. These statements represented an essential bond between leader and people. Outside of Czechoslovakia the condemnation of Soviet action was at an all time high, predictably criticism from Western governments poured in and fellow communist countries such as: East Germany, Yugoslavia, Rumania and China also showed their disapproval but what came as the biggest surprise to the Kremlin was the fierce opposition of communist parties in Western countries such as: Italy and France (Chapman).

Despite the many pleas of caution from Czechoslovak leaders the violent outbursts against the invading forces continued and it was the youth that was leading the resistance. Crowds of young Czechoslovaks would gather every night outside the Prague Radio building and from there throw Molotov cocktails and flaming rags at the invaders' trucks and tanks, sometimes they would succeed with setting them on fire. Youths proudly waving Czechoslovak flags would scrawl black swastikas wherever they could. Anything and everything was tossed at the invaders, everything from pieces of furniture to car parts, the people of Czechoslovakia, especially the youths were determined to make their unwelcome visitor feel exactly that, unwelcome (Chapman).

The Media

One of the most marked differences between the events in Mexico and Prague in 1968 was the media. For the first time global events were being filmed and transmitted across the world. What is most interesting is that this aspect of the resistance movements was improvised. In Czechoslovakia the Russians found it hard to keep up with the different television and radio studios that were scattered about Prague. It became comical how the Russians with their archaic measures, such as wire cutting thought that that would solve their media problems, however many times the wrong wires were cut resulting in no cut in transmission. The agile Czechoslovaks meanwhile moved from one building to another, factories became the main stance of the clandestine media movement because Soviet forces had been told to not occupy factories under any circumstances in order not to antagonize any of the “friendly” workers. The clandestine media presence came to a halt after the Moscow Agreement, but it was a much-needed respite and unifying force for the Czechoslovak people (Chapman). Meanwhile media coverage of the events at Tlatelolco was minimum, with the Olympics looming the Mexican government made it a point to exclude it as much as possible from its state run media channels, which were the ones most viewed by the Mexican people.

Aftermath

We can only speculate as to what would have occurred had Dubcek been able to stay in power. Dubcek had tried to satisfy the people with a small taste of democracy but the people kept wanting more and more. Demands were being heard for opposition

political parties something unheard of in the Soviet sphere and something that Dubcek knew Brezhnev would never go for. Dubcek did denounce past abuses of power by the Communist Party and stated that the aim of the government was socialism, a branch of socialism in which personal and political beliefs could not be subject to secret police investigation. Clearly, Moscow was not pleased with Dubcek and his plans (Kurlansky).

As the invading forces began to settle in they were counting on having at least one steadfast ally in Czechoslovakia's President Svoboda. As previously stated Svoboda was a soldier and after having fought for the Soviets it was expected that he would show unconditional support towards the Soviet Union at all times. However, when a pro-Soviet group visited the president in his residence, where he was being held under armed Soviet guard, Svoboda's behavior can best be described as despondent. When asked to sign a document that endorsed the Soviet presence, Svoboda shouted quite loud and clear, "get out." While most Czechoslovaks formed a deep coalition in defense of their nation one important question stood out, where was the rest of the Western World? How deeply would the West condemn Soviet action and more importantly would they be willing to take up arms in defense of Czechoslovakia? (Kurlansky).

The reaction from Washington came, to say the least, mildly. The President at that time was Lyndon Johnson, who was informed of the invasion and promptly called a meeting with the Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. The limited reaction by the US stems from the belief that the Soviet Union did not do such things anymore and Johnson was unwilling to take any deep measures from fear of destabilizing the newfound

peaceful coexistence between the US and the Soviet Union. Johnson instead opted to produce a strong denunciation within the United Nations. The UN did in fact condemn the invasion of Czechoslovakia but the Soviet Union simply used their veto power to override the condemnation (Kurlansky).

Brezhnev had come to power in 1964 and by 1968 when the invasion of Czechoslovakia took place the years of stagnation were well under way. In his article Fedor Burlatsky seeks to clarify what exactly happened to the Soviet Union during Brezhnev's eighteen-year rule. During Brezhnev's tenure there was an obvious backtrack from the reforms established by Khrushchev's thaw. The living standards of Soviet citizens were not getting better, while there seemed to be a return to old Stalinist administrative policies. Burlatsky deals with one specific aspect of stagnation, the notion of how in such a difficult period in the Soviet Union's history could such a weak leader take the helm? Unlike the previous Soviet leaders, Brezhnev did not struggle for power, his transition was smooth and seemed effortless. What helped Brezhnev not only come to power but also maintain it for so long was the people he surrounded himself with and how good he was at playing the part of tactful leader, without truly being one (Burlatsky).

It is hard to believe that Dubcek's time as leader of the Czechoslovak people would cap off at sixteen months, Dubcek would resign in April of 1969. August 1968 was the halfway mark of Dubcek's reign and it marked the turning point from the optimism and exuberance witnessed in the spring and summer to the harsh reality of ruling a country in disarray. Dubcek's eighteen months in office marked the greatest

liberty experienced in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989. During the first few weeks and months of Soviet occupation the Czechoslovak people held out hope that Dubcek would triumph and that the foreign soldiers would peacefully depart. This belief provided powerful incentives for public self-restraint, which may have unintentionally facilitated the restoration of authoritarian rule. Czechoslovak citizens were told not to exercise the freedom that Dubcek's liberalization had promised; this suspension was to be purely temporary and that is why most citizens complied (Williams).

A week after the Soviets marched into Prague, Czechoslovakia's leaders returned to the capital city and was greeted by an anxious yet triumphant public. The feeling of triumph would quickly turn to desperation when that same day, President Svoboda addressed the nation via radio and reported that not only would foreign troops remain in Czechoslovakia for some time but also that Czechoslovakia would work to fulfill the Cierna and Bratislava agreements (the contents of which were a mystery). Svoboda did pay homage to those that had died the previous week but purposely left out any condemnation of the invasion. Most Czechoslovaks took this to mean capitulation, a feeling of disappointment permeated throughout Czechoslovakia. Later that same afternoon, Dubcek took to the radio to address the people and offered them a deal. In return for the Czechoslovak peoples' good behavior and cooperation, he and other leaders would prioritize the withdrawal of foreign troops and the basic reform course would be back on track. Dubcek declared that state sovereignty (or rather, the illusion of it which they had been living in) would be restored but only if citizens were willing to surrender

their civil and political rights for the time being. Dubcek's voice was noticeably tired, helping to give a glimpse of the tough ordeal he had most likely been through the past week and his broken humility was effective and made the Czechoslovaks sympathize with him (Williams).

As opposed to the onslaught of violence that occurred in Mexico on the night of October 2nd, the violence within Czechoslovakia was more spread out. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Soviet units were roaming the streets, causing fatal accidents, harassing, detaining, and raping citizens, and interfering in the work of local government and the media. By September 9th the invading forces had killed 82 civilians, most deaths were caused by senseless violence; Soviet soldiers were often drunk and did not hesitate to fire their weapons at random. Meanwhile, public compliance in Czechoslovakia continued but was not unconditional and the citizens fully expected to be informed of all developments pertaining to the departure of the foreign soldiers and the restoration of Czechoslovak autonomy. Moscow, however, did not take the citizens' wants into consideration and by September had already launched a propaganda campaign to boost the authority of Svoboda while undermining Dubcek (Williams).

Brezhnev saw the situation in Czechoslovakia as bothersome and desperately wanted to "normalize" the situation. This meant that the achievements of socialism should be safeguarded; he had no interest in the removal of foreign troops from Czechoslovakia. According to Brezhnev the masses had to be oriented correctly, which meant that the people of Czechoslovakia needed to understand that the invasion of Soviet

forces was due to the activity of anti-socialist elements. He then revealed that the Soviet Politburo had concluded that Czechoslovakia's 'abnormal situation' was being blamed on the invasion when in reality it was the Czechoslovaks who were at fault, in particular one Czechoslovak, Alexander Dubcek. Brezhnev stated that what was happening in Czechoslovakia was a psychosis which had developed around Dubcek's personality, he added that he was all for each leader enjoying authority but he was against cults. Brezhnev saw the nationalist unrest in Czechoslovakia as an embarrassment (Williams).

The invasion of Czechoslovakia in itself did not damage the support given to Dubcek's leadership of the Party; on the contrary it actually increased its popularity enormously. In 1968 the great majority of Czechoslovaks were for socialism, but for a democratic and liberal system of socialism. Like the Mexican students, the Czechoslovaks rejected police brutality, censorship and a dictatorship by a one-party system. It seems that Mexicans and Czechoslovaks wanted the same thing, personal freedom. The socialist system the Czechoslovaks wanted was a system based on popular support, and the government was to fulfill, as closely as possible, the wishes and demands of the population. Dubcek's proposed "socialism with a human face" promised a socialist government by the people, for the people and of the people, not a far cry from what Mexicans wanted. Above all the Czechoslovak people wanted a pluralistic system, with many political lines, no censorship and a communication media free to function vigorously as a political and social critic (Czerwinski).

In line with Dubcek the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia was to be the leader only as long as it satisfied those that it led. There was to be free political competition among three or more socialist parties, the parties would be licensed as long as their programs agreed with “socialist principles”, this definition excluded the advocacy of return to private ownership. The majority of Czechoslovaks opposed the creation of a true Communist opposition party they favored instead a coalition. Unbeknownst to Brezhnev the Communist Party was heavily favored to win if such a free and democratic election had taken place in Czechoslovakia. The Communist Party would have remained in power but not with unchallenged political hegemony. It is important to understand that the Czechoslovaks were not against the socialism of Marx and Engels it was Leninist revisionism that they reviled. The Czechoslovaks wanted desperately to free themselves of the Russian system of despotism that Lenin had helped instill, a system that had little to do with the logic of social and economic development of true Marxist socialism (Czerwinski).

Conclusion

Since 1968 the presidents of Mexico have slowly allowed voices of discontent to be heard in public forums but the government remains strictly in control and democracy is not prevalent. The student movement of 1968 represents the unfolding of an inevitable historical process. The Mexican Revolution that began in 1910 was supposed to pave the way for a new form of government but by 1968 its failure was well established and Mexico’s pyramidal structure was crumbling. The massacre at Tlatelolco can now be

seen as predictable and inevitable. Mexico's authoritarian regime had no other plausible way to react; violence was necessary to suppress the students. The students of Mexico were searching for a wholeness of their society; they were calling for a public dialogue. Public dialogue represented the search for connections among Mexican society and their leader. After the events of 1968 a new order emerged in Mexico, an order based on the tensions between state paternalism and civil society. These tensions are what kept a public dialogue from happening between Diaz Ordaz and the students and these tensions are what keep a public dialogue from happening today (Braun).

Before the massacres at Tlatelolco President Diaz Ordaz called on the students to appear before him so that they could engage in some sort of dialogue, the students however, wanted a public and multitudinous dialogue with the state. The students' version of public dialogue troubled Diaz Ordaz, he sensed that he would be engulfed by it and therefore no meeting was held. Prior to 1968 political violence in Mexico was not unknown, members of the Communist Party, Trotskyists, followers of Fidel Castro and other leftist groups were known for disrupting traffic, building barricades and protesting in front of the American Embassy. But the violence of 1968 was different, the student movement gained traction after police forces had pounced with unprecedented force on routine marches. The students were especially shaken up after the police and military took over various high schools attached to the National Autonomous University, the nation's major public university. In July 1968 the military demolished a wooden ornate door of High School number 1 in Mexico City's historic downtown district. After a few

days of battle, three students were left dead, hundreds injured and hundreds jailed; the violence of the state was worse than it had been since the Revolution. The emerging student movement had participants from a wide range of backgrounds causing a rift between seasoned militants and students who were first time protesters. Few of the first time protestors came with well-formed ideas about politics, for them it was just a protest against arbitrary government actions. With such a large mass of protestors, disorganization reigned supreme, many wondered if the president knew the full extent of the massacre without really knowing themselves what had occurred that October night. Few could believe that anyone in the government would be capable to order the slaughter of young Mexicans on their own streets (Braun).

As the students protested, there was one issue that was inherent, noticeable but never claimed and that was the fact that the students saw themselves as superior to the pueblo. This feeling of superiority resulted in aggressive and vulgar public language, the protestors referred to their ruler as a cuckold, insulting his masculinity because if a Mexican man cannot control his own wife, how can he possibly lead a country? This new wave of protestors marked a vital turning point in the student movement. After such jeering and taunting the state ceased all efforts to establish contact with the students. The students' definition of "public dialogue" had become vague and the government informed the students that the sort of dialogue they were seeking had no legal precedence, even the press noted the impossibility of such a dialogue. The vagueness and informality of the students' pleas resulted in many believing that the public dialogue was merely a ploy to

keep the movement going and cause more unrest, culminating in a socialist revolution (Braun).

President Diaz Ordaz was troubled, the movement was beyond his comprehension and his most logical conclusion was conspiracy. The public dialogue sought by the students was one of the craziest ideas Diaz Ordaz had ever heard and he was sure no modern government in the world would agree to such a thing. The students wanted Diaz Ordaz and his government to take full responsibility for the assassinations that took place on October 2nd and they demanded that the government publicly accept its crimes as well as indemnify the fallen students. The students also wanted to meet personally with Diaz Ordaz in order to prove that they were moral, disinterested members of society who had not been influenced by any outside forces, including communism, to bring harm to Mexico. By the eve of the massacre at Tlatelolco there was a feeling of rejection emanating from both factions, both the students and the government were angry. Both the students and Diaz Ordaz had wanted to restore the relationship between them, they had wanted to come together and make Mexican society whole again, but they each misunderstood the other and the rift that was created continues in some ways, to this day (Braun).

The Soviets believed that the invasion of Czechoslovakia would prevent change but they inadvertently set in motion a different kind of change, a change that would eventually lead to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Soviets invaded because they were not prepared to lose Czechoslovakia from their sphere of influence under any

circumstances. The loss of Czechoslovakia would have upset the balance of power on which European security had relied on since the end of World War II. It is important to mention that Brezhnev was very confident that his invasion of Czechoslovakia would not be met by US intervention. Brezhnev had received assurance from President Johnson that the US would not intervene, Brezhnev was also aware of a meeting between Henry Kissinger and Czech foreign minister Jiri Hajek. In said meeting Kissinger confirmed that the division of balance that existed was advantageous to both sides, it would create great conflict and dire consequences to alter the existing balance. (Davy)

The suppression of the movements in Mexico and Czechoslovakia was merely a short-term solution. In Czechoslovakia the invasion transformed popular feeling, prior to the invasion people were mostly supportive of the leadership and remaining in the Warsaw pact. After the events of 1968 hatred for the Soviets was so intense that Czechoslovakia could no longer be considered Moscow's steadfast ally. The invasion helped cement the eventual downfall of the Iron Curtain, unbeknownst to them. The invasion of Czechoslovakia revealed to the world how the Soviet Union had become little more than an incarnation of old imperialist Russia. The altered perception of the Soviet Union caused it many losses of allies and brought about a high skepticism of true Soviet intentions (Davy).

The 1960's were a tumultuous time in the world and communism was at an all time high in popularity. The invasion of Czechoslovakia impacted communist movements around the world. The Prague Spring had given left-wing parties hope that

communism had finally found a way towards the realization of libertarian ideals, but the Soviets promptly crushed these hopes and simultaneously deprived themselves of the loyalty of many communists. This gave rise to attempts at extracting concessions from regimes instead of a reactivation of the idealist remnants that once inspired them. Soviet leaders did not foresee what the full extent of the loss of ideological authority would be. One of the Soviet leadership's worst mistakes was its lack of interest in the evolution of socialism for their own political gain especially since after the invasion of Czechoslovakia the potential alliance of Western communists was lost. The invasion of Czechoslovakia caused a disagreement between the East and the West over the meaning of détente, the invasion made both cultural and political freedom seem harder to achieve. If the Soviet Union had to use tanks to impose its will on a friendly and dependent country even after controlling the statewide media for twenty years, it was a clear sign of failure for the Soviet Union and its policies within its sphere of influence. It is plausible to conclude that the invasion of Czechoslovakia began the Soviet Union's downward spiral, which eventually concluded with the dissolution of it in 1991. Dubcek's reforms offered a chance at democratic change within the communist framework; maybe his plans would not have fulfilled everyone's expectations but his fight for freedom remains admired to this day (Davy).

As students, the Mexicans and the Czechoslovaks saw themselves as distinct from workers and peasants, they felt greater obligation to serve their nations (Braun). After each country's ordeal there was silence. In Mexico, President Diaz Ordaz would never

regain the full support of his followers and few were able to forgive him for shedding the blood of Mexico's youth. In Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubcek's rule was winding down and with him the hopes of many but the disillusionment would turn to resolution and within twenty years the Velvet Revolution would grant both the Czechs and the Slovaks their freedom.

In both Mexico and Czechoslovakia the protestors in 1968 had not challenged the right of the government to govern, on the contrary they had appealed for their governments to govern more. In both countries the old order emerged in a renewed state and it would take two decades for protestors to rise again and demand more from their governments. On Christmas day 1991 the Soviet flag, adorned with the hammer and sickle, which had become so intrinsically tied to communism, was lowered over the Kremlin for the last time. The Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Prior to Gorbachev's resignation as President of the Soviet Union and the subsequent rise of the Russian Federation, Czechoslovakia had already been through its Velvet Revolution in 1988. In 1988 the students of Czechoslovakia once again took to the streets in protest of the one party Communist government. The culmination of the Velvet Revolution was Czechoslovakia's first democratic election since 1946. 1988 was also an important year in Mexico, it was a year of presidential elections and the PRI had been losing popularity ever since the disastrous events of 1968. The presidential election of 1988 was centered on the issue of political legitimacy that had been popularized in 1968 (Rohter). The PRI's candidate was forty-year-old Carlos Salinas, who had been a student during the 1968

movement. Salinas' main opposition came from Cuauhtémoc Cardenas who represented the left wing PRD party. Salinas was named the victor but over the years there has been a widespread reassurance of the election being fraudulent, even former Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid admitted in his autobiography that the election had been rigged in order to secure a win for the PRI party.

Czechoslovakia is now known as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, two separate countries that have both been a part of the European Union since 2004 and have experienced consistent economic development while maintaining their status as a full democracies (Kekic). The Czech Republic has risen as one of the top performers from the former communist bloc. Meanwhile the PRI was finally defeated in the 2000 elections with Vicente Fox of the PAN party winning the presidential election however Mexico has continued to struggle with a flawed political system causing many to believe that true democracy will never be achieved.

This study is important because we explore and highlight the emergence of parallel movements in seemingly disconnected countries. However, well-educated students look for ideals and improving society in similar times, while the state seeks to repress and maintain the status quo. This is still relevant today as youth movements in multiple countries led to the now known Arab Spring have upended some regimes; or the emergence of multiple new civil rights movements in the US against local governments that have caused furor in the political debate. Understanding how these movements arise and what makes them legitimate may help address issues effectively in a constructive

fashion. For a regime to survive it must maintain its legitimacy to the population. Therefore, they must accommodate legitimate concerns from the social movements of the day. Eventually, regimes that are not legitimate will crumble; but lives will be lost in the struggle.

Although 1968 was a tumultuous year around the world and many student protests occurred, the similarities between Mexico and Czechoslovakia continued to resonate for years to come. In 1968 Mexico and Czechoslovakia were two countries trying to come into their own, their student populations, especially, were looking for a voice. The protests in Mexico and Czechoslovakia differed from others in that the protesters were actively seeking for a regime change into democracy. Even though the protests in both Mexico and Czechoslovakia were squashed within days and people, for the most part, retreated from publicly protesting, the silent majority was there, stirring and waiting for the moment to strike again. For both countries that moment came in the late 1980's, for the first time since the beginning of the PRI's regime, Mexicans rallied around a candidate from a different party and had realistic hope of achieving victory in the 1988 presidential election. Meanwhile in 1989, Czechoslovakia was swept up in the Velvet Revolution, people were beginning to openly express their discontent with their country's living standards and advocating for economic reform. With Mikhail Gorbachev in power in the Soviet Union, his *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms helped give the people of Czechoslovakia hope for a reformation of their political order and for restructuring their economic system.

The presidential election of 1988 in Mexico City was won by the PRI party, but it was speculated that the results were rigged. Speculation turned to veracity when, years later, ex President Miguel de la Madrid attested to the fact that the election had been rigged and all ballots were burned to remove any evidence. Czechoslovakia achieved victory after the Velvet Revolution with the election of Vaclav Havel as President and the subsequent end of the communist regime. In 1992 Czechoslovakia was officially dissolved in favor of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and both remain democracies to this day. The 1980's were make it or break it for Mexico and Czechoslovakia, if political change was going to occur it was a prime moment, the world was changing and they sought to change with it. Communist led countries were toppling and economic liberalization was affecting the manufacturing industry causing countries like Mexico to experience economic growth. Czechoslovakia made it in the 1980's while Mexico frustratingly continues its search of democracy today.

Czechoslovakia and Mexico in 1968 were countries separated by distance, language and culture, among other things, but they were united by the ideology and principles of many of their citizens, making them prime candidates for comparison. Although Mexico, the Czech Republic and Slovakia vastly differ today, they will always share a comparative history in the events that helped shape them as the countries they are today.

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