The Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia

- In 1968, Czechoslovakia was ruled by Novotny – a strong communist, who slavishly followed Stalin’s policies, refusing to introduce Khrushchev’s reforms.
- As a result, the country’s economy fell into serious decline, with a decrease in standard of living, so many citizens demanded democracy.
- Brezhnev (now the leader of the USSR) was convinced by Alexander Dubcek that he would be supported, and so he was elected as First Secretary on 5th January 1968.
- The result was the PRAGUE SPRING - a period of 7 months where Dubcek introduced major political reforms such as abolition of press censorship, the lifting of travel restrictions and trade with the West.
- This encouraged the opponents of Communism, leading to even more radical reforms, spreading democratic policies.
- The USSR now feared the loss of control of Czechoslovakia to the west, until the 21st August 1968, where Soviet forces invaded Czechoslovakia (tanks were already their due to military exercises).
- Brezhnev felt he had no other choice, as the country was too important to the Warsaw Pact, centrally placed in Eastern Europe, and it had a very strong industry.
- Thousands of soviet troops entered the country to attempt to regain control, and although less than 100 were killed, anti-communist broadcasters filmed the events from the air, where buildings and tanks were set on fire with petrol bombs.
- Dubcek and others were arrested and taken to Moscow, replaced by communist officials.
- Brezhnev justified his actions using the “Brezhnev Doctrine”, stating that the USSR had the right to invade any Eastern European country whose actions threatened the security of the eastern bloc.
- Furthermore, if a capitalist country threatened the security of one of the Warsaw Pact nations, the USSR had the right to intervene.
- As a result of the invasion, the Soviets regained control of Czechoslovakia, reverting to strict Communism led by Husák, although demonstrations occurred until 1964.
- The invasion worsened US-Soviet relations, but there was a deal that the US would not intervene here if the Soviets did not intervene in Vietnam.
- Many West European states condemned Soviet actions, and they lost what little influence they had over these countries.
- There was an increased rivalry between China and the USSR, and China formed an alliance with Romania and Yugoslavia, the leaders of which also condemned the invasion.
- Albania left the Warsaw Pact, but the USSR did not react, being preoccupied elsewhere.