



Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubcek

Alexander Dubcek, Jiri Hochman

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Like my parents, I sought only the modest goal of a safe job and a small house where my wife and I could raise our children. But that, I think, was almost everybody's little dream, and for most people it still is... When Alexander Dubcek died on November 1, 1992, people on all continents mourned the loss of a hero. While global leaders paid respect and homage to the man from 1968, the common people knew they had lost one of the strongest voices in the ongoing struggle to build democracy and autonomy for all smaller nations. It was Dubcek's ill-fated experiment in "socialism with a human face", known abroad as the Prague Spring, that destroyed most of the world's illusions about the Soviet system and his vindication in the Velvet Revolution of 1989 provided the new Czechoslovakia with a living democratic tradition. Alexander Dubcek was the son of two Slovak-American idealists. Born in the same village house as the founder of Slovak nationalism a century earlier, he was raised on a socialist commune in Soviet Central Asia. Dubcek's story leads readers through the guerrilla battles of World War II and the tangled modern history of the Slovak people. The climactic chapters of the book unroll in a tension-filled point counterpoint of negotiations, threats, and maneuvers, as Dubcek and his reformers scramble to secure their changes before the Soviets and their allies can counter-attack. When the attack did come - a brutal invasion and a bungled palace coup in the early morning of August 21, 1968 - Dubcek found himself kidnapped by the KGB and hijacked to the Kremlin. Paratroopers burst into my office and closed and blocked the windows and connecting doors. It was like an armed robbery. Without thinking I made a move toward a telephone on my desk, but one of the soldiers aimed his tommy gun at me, grasped the phone, and tore the cable out of the wall. After the death of the Prague Spring we follow Dubcek's life in exile as a forestry worker, to his role as a catalyst for Eastern European liberation in the early days of perestroika. Alexander Dubcek finished compiling his memoirs only a month before a car in which he was riding plunged down a ravine in Bohemia. In the weeks before, he had been picked repeatedly in public opinion polls as the over-whelming favorite for president of the emerging Slovak Republic. Known to the world as the conscience of Czechoslovakia, he seemed poised to become the voice of the youngest nation in Europe. That voice lives on in these memoirs, bearing witness to the hopes and heartbreaks of a man, and the twin causes of social justice and self-determination.

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