

21ST AUGUST

1968 – 1969 – 2019

On the 21st August 1968 our country was attacked by the invading army lead by the Soviet Union. This was the largest military event since the end of the Second World War. The communist leadership of the country backed down before the Soviets. The régime sanctioned the occupation and began steps to maintaining the peace in the country. The pressure on the citizens of the country grew. The normalization elicited even the extreme act of Jan Palach and his successors. The Communist leadership expected that the first anniversary of the occupation will again lead to civic protests. In August 1969 the Communist power concentrated into the big cities an unprecedented presence of the army, SNB/VB and members of the People's militia. The actions of these armed bodies brought about the wounding of many and even five deaths.

The responsibility for these actions against the citizens falls to the leadership of the Communist party. They carry full responsibility for the fact that Czechs shot Czechs. The shots killed mostly young people: the youngest was barely 14 and found himself at the demonstration by mistake. The perpetrators were never found, let alone punished. The strategy of the régime then in power was to move against anybody who came to hand at the event and beat and lock up enough people to send a message. So that the others might be afraid and peace might reign in the country. On the 22nd August the so-called "baton law" was passed, which legalized harsh interventions against demonstrators and introduced other extreme recourses. In recent weeks a similar model of "beat up, lock up, scare off" is being applied by Russia against citizens peacefully demonstrating for free elections. Attempts are again being made to introduce a new censorship – prohibit access to foreign internet from Russia, calls for the retraction of footage of Russian intervention in demonstrations from YouTube. These steps deserve condemnation.

The government in power in our country is being indirectly controlled by the Communist party, on whose parliamentary support the government depends. A party which did not condemn the acts of the KSČ. A party whose leading functionaries publically relativize the acts of the iniquitous communist régime and belittle their gravity. This state of affairs is fully the responsibility of the blackmailable and criminally suspect Prime Minister and the president who supports him.

What do the events of the years 1968-69 mean for us today? How do they affect us? How can we approach them so that they might be a source of strength for us, and not a source of frustration? How can we come to terms with the sense of past treachery, powerlessness, and the fact that the responsible people then were never sought out and placed before court of law? And how can we come to terms with the injustices that we see today, when it seems that some people seem to get away with anything?

In the case of historical events we perhaps do not so much need to punish the guilty as openly and loudly name everything: what happened, who played what part in it and what it caused thereafter. We need to remind ourselves of historical events in public debates and meetings such as this one. But we also need to talk about them with people around us. Ask those close to u show they experienced these events, or how they were affected by them in later years. To ask, listen, tell our stories. To face courageously not only bad feelings, but perhaps even failure and a sense of guilt. To see and admit what we or those others had to face, and how each one of them came to terms with it.

Let us be brave and not be afraid to talk openly among one another both about the time of communism and about what we are grateful for and what we mind today. When we comprehend the connections between historical events, we can better come to realize the connections between current ones. And such understanding can lead us from unease to real change.