

Josette Baer

# **Alexander Dubček Unknown**

**(1921–1992)**

## **The Life of a Political Icon**

With a foreword by Jan Pešek  
and  
oral history interviews  
with Pavol Dubček and Ivan Lалуha



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This study is dedicated to my husband Peter who has been supporting my research for years, in academic and psychological terms. One could not wish for a better friend.



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## Foreword by Jan Pešek

This year in August, the Slovaks and Czechs remember what happened fifty years ago: the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968 and its brutal end by Warsaw Pact troops. The Czechoslovak Spring has been well researched, or so the knowledgeable Western reader might think. This latest biography of Alexander Dubček by the Swiss political scientist and historian Josette Baer, a renowned specialist on Czechoslovak and Slovak history and political thought, presents a new approach to the political history of Slovakia and Czechoslovakia. As the first non-Slovak historian, Baer investigates two crucially important chapters of Slovak history that so far have been under-researched: the years of the Pre-Spring from 1963 to 1968 and the years of the so-called Normalization (1969–1989).

The liberalization of the Czechoslovak Communist regime began in 1963 with Dubček's election as First Secretary of the Slovak Communist Party KSS; the Czechoslovak Spring originated in Bratislava and, with Dubček's election to First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party KSČ in January 1968, the way for the reformers was free. Baer focuses on Dubček's career in the KSS in the 1960s and his dissent in the 1970s. After the Communist Party had relieved him from all functions in Party and state, Dubček, the former most powerful politician of Czechoslovakia, found employment at the State Forestry in Bratislava. The State Security Service StB monitored him and his family every day, exerting psychological terror to the maximum. The Normalization regime under General Secretary KSČ and President in personal union Gustáv Husák wanted to delete Dubček and his reform course from Czechoslovak collective memory – an endeavour that was not only unsuccessful but

would backfire in November 1989: the Communist Party was brought down in 10 days by the people, who had not forgotten Dubček and his attempt at Socialism with a Human Face.

Baer's biography closes important gaps in international and interdisciplinary scholarship about the Czechoslovak Spring. Her book is a must-read for everybody interested in the history of Central Europe in the 20th Century and the history of European Communism alike.

Jan Pešek, Bratislava, August 2018