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## Eric Pickles admits Communist past

Eric Pickles, the chairman of the Conservative Party, has admitted an interest in Communism in his youth, studying the works of Leon Trotsky and Karl Marx.



# Eric Pickles admits Communist past

**Eric Pickles, the chairman of the Conservative Party, has admitted an interest in Communism in his youth, studying the works of Leon Trotsky and Karl Marx.**



Eric Pickles MP was disappointed by Soviet tanks in Prague in 1968 Photo: OLI SCARFF

By Alastair Jamieson

8:00AM GMT 23 Nov 2009

The right-winger said he had only joined the Tories as a teenager in protest at the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

In a radio interview, he confessed to reading Communist literature when growing up in Keighley, West Yorkshire, in the 1960s.

He read the Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital and even compiled a school project on Marx but was disillusioned by the USSR's violent response to the Prague Spring, the liberal reforms introduced by Alexander Dubcek, the Czech leader.

In a BBC Radio 4 programme discussing the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall on political beliefs, Mr Pickles told interviewer Anne McElvoy: "I was a pretty serious young chap. For my 14th birthday I got Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution as a present — and I read the damn thing.

"I was massively inclined that way. It was part of my upbringing."

The 57-year-old MP for Brentwood and Ongar said he was disappointed by the response of Britain's then Labour government, under Harold Wilson, to Soviet aggression.

"I was 16 years old in 1968 when Dubcek's Spring was crushed. I was very interested in Dubcek and thought it was the natural evolution of communism. So I felt a tremendous shock when the tanks rolled into Prague.

"I thought the British government was useless, in the way that only a 16-year-old can think the British government is useless. And I thought: 'What's the most outrageous thing I can do to protest? I know, I'll join the Conservative party'."

The programme, to be broadcast on Monday at 11am, also features an interview with shadow Education Secretary Michael Gove, a former journalist who admits he was on the picket line in a regional newspaper dispute when the Wall fell.

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