



Eastern Europe – Fifty Years Ago

A Press Review by a Hungarian Refugee

Soviet Dominance Lamented by Czech

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N.Y. Times

November 19, 1968

Gromyko Seeks to Assure West; Steps for a Relaxation Urged

By JONATHAN RANDAL

Special to The New York Times

BUDAPEST, Nov. 18—Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko expressed the hope today that the "first violins of the NATO orchestra will realize that a relaxation of tensions also corresponds to their interests."

With one notable exception, he sought to reassure the West about Soviet global intentions. Mr. Gromyko spoke at a news conference held shortly before 66 Communist parties began working out details for holding a world conference to bolster unity.

The meeting is expected to fix a date early next spring for the conference, originally scheduled to begin in Moscow Nov. 25. Western Communists' condemnation of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia caused a postponement of the world meeting.

Mr. Gromyko's remark about NATO "first violins" came when he was asked about statements at the recent North Atlantic Treaty Organization meeting condemning the invasion and warning against any similar action against Yugoslavia or Austria.

While indirectly criticizing statements designed to "increase tensions," Mr. Gromyko said: "I would like to hope that a more realistic approach and more realistic aims would also prevail in NATO's military quarters."

Moderate on Other Issues

The Foreign Minister, who ended today a six-day visit to Hungary, was equally moderate about neo-Nazism in West Germany, United States involvement in Vietnam and the Middle East situation.

However, Mr. Gromyko avoided substantive comment on Secretary of State Dean Rusk's statement of the alliance meeting expressing concern for Yugoslav, Rumanian and Austrian sovereignty.

Specifically, he did not clarify whether Yugoslavia, which is not a member of the Soviet bloc, was subject to Moscow postinvasion doctrine limiting sovereignty of members of the "socialist commonwealth."

The United States had been fully informed and there have been "no changes in our position in that respect," Mr. Gromyko said.

He referred to statements by Soviet leaders, especially that of the party chief, Leonid I. Brezhnev, at a Polish party congress last week. Observers considered Mr. Brezhnev's statement purposely vague.

In discussing Vietnam, Mr. Gromyko turned aside a Hungarian journalist's suggestion that the United States' halt in the bombing of North Vietnam represented a "great victory for the Vietnamese people" and eschewed the current hard-line Communist condemnation of United States "imperialism."

The Soviet Union views the bombing halt and the peace talks in Paris as an "important and outstanding result" that "can be the basis for further steps in the right direction to solve the problem," Mr. Gromyko said.

The Soviet Government, he added, hopes that United States will act not only to avoid a deterioration of the situation but



Associated Press

Andrei A. Gromyko

also will take "radical steps" toward a settlement.

A solution, he said, must involve a full withdrawal of United States troops and the creation of a situation "whereby the Vietnamese people, and only the Vietnamese people, will solve their own problems in their own interest."

In what some observers interpreted as criticism of Communist China, Mr. Gromyko said, "All Governments that are for peace and against war must facilitate a solution of the Vietnam problem in this, and only this, spirit."

The Foreign Minister sought to strike a reasonable stance on the Middle East and to counter suggestions the Soviet Union was trying to worsen the situation there.

He pointedly denied a Hungarian questioner's suggestion that the situation in the Middle East had reached a "dead end" and proclaimed Soviet sincerity in finding a solution "satisfactory to both parties."

N.Y.

Times

November 20, 1968

Hungary Offers Plans for Red Parley

By JONATHAN RANDAL

Special to The New York Times

BUDAPEST, Nov. 19—Hungary today proposed a compromise aimed at satisfying Soviet desires to hold the postponed world Communist conference next spring and at papering over dissident objections caused by the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Western Communist sources predicted that the preparatory committee of 66 parties meeting here would approve the Soviet-backed suggestion.

Presented by Zoltan Komoscin, a member of the Hungarian Politburo, the compromise called for the standing eight-party working group to meet here in February to prepare conference documents for yet another preparatory meeting on March 17.

Unlike the four preparatory committee sessions held here since February, the March meeting would take place in Moscow. If the documents were then approved, the world conference itself would take place in the Soviet Capital in April or May.

The compromise represented a face-saving formula for the Rumanian and Western parties, whose condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia forced postponement of the world con-

ference. It was originally scheduled to begin Nov. 25 in Moscow.

Earlier unconfirmed reports hinted that the Kremlin and its Eastern European allies were pressing for a definite spring date for the world conference regardless of Western Communist objections.

Such a course would have further underlined Soviet desire to affirm control of the world movement by facing dissidents with the choice of either toeing the lie or breaking ties with the Kremlin.

Dissident opposition to the holding of a Communist unity conference, first proposed in 1964, has waned considerably since the sharp condemnation immediately after the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Since the October meeting here, the Kremlin has cited the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement legalizing the presence of Soviet occupation troops in Czechoslovakia as evidence of its goodwill. Significantly the Czechoslovak situation has not been mentioned at the meeting, which began yesterday at the Gellert Hotel, informed sources said.

Some Western Communists expressed fear that without more delays the conference, originally designed to condemn

the Chinese Communists, might be used to attack their own autonomous national policies.

The dissidents want the Kremlin to explain its new doctrine of limited sovereignty for the "socialist commonwealth," which the Russians have used to justify intervention in Czechoslovakia.

The Western parties have objected that the Soviet doctrine undercuts their efforts to prove to voters that they would respect Western democratic practices if they took power. The parties also fear that Kremlin demands for loyalty to Moscow put into question their own insistence that each party has the right to follow its own "road toward Communism."

Times Nov. 25, 1968

PRAGUE AIDE LEAVES FOR COMECON TALKS

PRAGUE, Nov. 24 (UPI)—
Frantisek Hamouz, a Deputy
Premier and the Czechoslovak
representative to the Council
for Mutual Economic Assist-
ance, known as Comecon, left
here today to attend a meeting
of the Communist-bloc organi-
zation's executive committee.

Mr. Hamouz has been to
Moscow at least four times
since the Soviet-led invasion of
Czechoslovakia Aug. 20-21.
Government sources here have
said that Moscow has been
seeking a series of harsh eco-
nomic commitments from the
Czechoslovaks.

Among them was a demand

for an increase of 15 per cent
in Czechoslovak trade with the
Comecon countries, which in-
clude the five Warsaw Pact
members that participated in
the invasion. These are, in ad-
dition to the Soviet Union, Po-
land, East Germany, Hungary
and Bulgaria.

An important step in that di-
rection was taken a week ago
with the signing in Moscow of
a protocol that called for a 10
per cent increase in Czecho-
slovakia's trade with the Soviet
Union.

Another basic Soviet demand
was for an end to the emphasis
on light industry, which the
Czechoslovaks had sought to
develop before the invasion.



Victor Zorza

Russians Crack Whip to Get Bloc to Accept Economic Plan

Pass
Nov. 27, 1968

LONDON—The economic summit meeting which the leaders of Communist countries have repeatedly postponed, because the problems on its agenda are so intractable, is at last to be held next month.

The Kremlin has often tried to persuade its allies, with scant success, to collaborate in something like a Communist common market. Now, the atmosphere created by the invasion of Czechoslovakia has enabled it to crack the whip more effectively—at least, to the extent of driving them to the conference table.

Whether these allies have been sufficiently intimidated to accept the Kremlin's economic dictation, which would tend increasingly to restrict their political independence, remains to be seen. But it is already clear that by acquiescing so readily in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, they have undercut their own capacity to resist.

The economic integration of the Communist countries has been held back by the fear of virtually all the East European members of the bloc that they could be squeezed dry between the two industrial giants—the Soviet Union and East Germany. None of them has ever put this fear into so many words, at least not publicly.

But the learned discussions of integration in the economic journals make it clear that the development of the most modern and therefore the most profitable industries ought to be largely concentrated in the countries which have already advanced furthest along this road, that is, in the Soviet Union and East Germany.

ONLY RUMANIA has protested against the political and economic discrimination implicit in this. The others have been less outspoken, but the objections to various aspects of integration published in their papers from time to time make it clear that they, too, have reason for anxiety.

They all want integration, but only of the kind that would favor their own economic development. None of them was prepared to give up its sovereignty to the "supranational" economic agencies which Nikita Khrushchev wanted to set up. The joint economic plan which he tried to impose on them was abandoned when Rumania made it clear that it would leave Comecon rather than submit to it.

Comecon, which stands for Council for Mutual Economic Aid, has tried repeatedly since then to find some painless form of integration, but without any real success. Because Czechoslovakia found that membership in Comecon was not conducive to the modernization of its own industries, it tried to reorient its own economy towards the West.

For this, it had to pay with the loss not only of its economic but also of its po-

litical sovereignty. Once again it was the Soviet Union and East Germany that led the cry for the invasion, though for political rather than for economic reasons. If the Czechoslovak experiment had succeeded, the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe would have crumbled — and East Germany would have been the first to fall.

IT IS ONLY against this background that one may make some sense of the cryptic announcement by Walter Ulbricht, the First Secretary of the East German Communist Party, that he has sent a memorandum to other Comecon governments calling for a "new form" of cooperation in the wake of the invasion. This, he told the Polish Party Congress, was being "imperatively" demanded by the "sharpening of the struggle between imperialism and socialism."

But, even though the Prague government is not now in a position to oppose the economic regimentation of the Communist world, Ulbricht is not having it all his own way.

He gave some clues to the contents of his memorandum when he told the East German Central Committee that there was a "serious dispute" on this question not only with the Czechoslovaks, but also with other Communist leaders. He mentioned Yugoslav and West European Communists in this connection, but it is obvious from the context that the dispute is really with some of the other East European countries which fear his "new form" of cooperation as much as the old.

"We will ignore the ridiculous talks about national autonomy," he said. Those who doubted the ability of the Soviet Union "and other socialist states"—meaning, of course, East Germany—to reach the highest scientific and technological levels were now "seeking support and help from the imperialist powers."

THE KREMLIN has proclaimed a new law of class struggle to justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and now Ulbricht was doing the same to justify the doctrine of economic isolation from the West.

Under this "law of class struggle between socialist and imperialist states," he explained, the members of the "socialist commonwealth" had to solve the important scientific and economic problems "by their own efforts, with their own resources." What this means is that the "law" discovered by Ulbricht would militate against the extension of economic and scientific links of the kind that many Communist countries have been trying to establish with the West.

It would also make it necessary for them to accept the domination of the Soviet Union and East Germany in this sphere, because only these two countries are in a

position to satisfy a little of the hunger which has been making the other East Europeans turn to the West.

Hungary, at the other extreme from East Germany, has also sent a memorandum to its Comecon partners. The Hungarians agree that integration is necessary, but they insist that the Comecon countries cannot afford to isolate themselves from the world economy. Hungary has thus taken up the torch where Czechoslovakia had to put it down, in matters of internal economic reform as well as external. Hungary is now pressing for the convertibility of the East European currencies, just as Czechoslovakia was pressing until recently, so that Budapest should not remain forever tied to the Soviet economic chariot.

EVEN POLAND, which now forms the hard reactionary core of the "socialist commonwealth" together with Russia and East Germany, has repeatedly asked for convertibility. But before the Comecon countries can exchange their rubles for dollars, and buy in the West the modern industrial equipment they cannot get from Russia, they will have to put their own currencies in order.

At present, there is a purely nominal exchange rate which means, in the words of a leading Polish economist, that the domestic prices of goods provide no indication of their value when they are being sold by one Comecon country to another. "As a result," he wrote in the Warsaw Economic Journal, "we do not know which goods we are producing more cheaply than other countries, or more expensively."

There is thus no real competition between the industries of the various Communist countries, because there is no price yardstick that could show convincingly which competitor is the more efficient. There is even less competition with Western producers. Soviet industrial productivity is less than half of that in the United States, and Soviet agricultural productivity is only a quarter of that in America.

Economic contacts with the West, which would lead to greater trade and ultimately to something like real competition, would therefore be quite as beneficial to the Soviet Union as to its allies. This is the direction in which Soviet economic thought was moving before the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Now political considerations have intervened to strengthen the isolationists both in the Soviet Union and in the Comecon countries.

But the pull of economic interests which was so effective until the invasion remains powerful enough to bring the Soviet Union back to the course it was following before Ulbricht discovered the new "law."

Soviet Dominance Lamented by Czech

Washington Post Foreign Service

PRAGUE, Nov. 28—The remarkable speech that follows was given last Friday at a closed meeting of Czechoslovak cultural organizations. Jiri Lederer, the speaker, is editor of Listy, the weekly published by the Czechoslovak Writers Union. The text was obtained through private channels.

In June, the magazine published the Two Thousand Word Manifesto, a call for more freedom which caused a sensation here. Signed by a number of prominent Czechoslovaks, the Manifesto drew attention because of its unorthodox ideas and its publication by an unofficial group which included many Communist Party members.

At that time, Listy was known as Literarni Listy. The magazine has been in repeated difficulty over its outspokenness and its name has changed, though its format remains identical and it is still generally called by its old name.

Lederer began by referring to this country's invasion last August by five Warsaw Pact powers:

"In my opinion, Aug. 21 was no mistake. It was not a miscalculation. It was not the result of misinformation. Aug. 21 has its hard logic in the practices of a society which is called the socialist camp.

"The principle and decisive factor within this camp is the Soviet Union, one of the superpowers. The socialist camp is regulated in accord with the needs and interests of this superpower. The instrument for realizing these needs is the well-known principle of organization called democratic centralism. According to this principle, decisions are made at the center and then announced for the approval of those outside . . .

"The socialist camp is shaped like a giant pyramid, composed of one big one and several small ones. On top of this huge pyramid is a power center which determines life in the socialist camp—the leadership of the Soviet Union. Though other international power systems have been abolished, in ours the smaller pyramids are in fact subjugated to the main power center. Each small pyramid has its top—the Party leadership in each country. This leadership is supposed to arrange things in its own country so it can rule and be held responsible for all the spheres of civic life, politics, economics, the press, everything. This is the only way the system can remain closed. . .

"The 20th Soviet Party Congress in 1956, with all its complexities, shook the pyramid but did not shake the principle of chain of command. As soon as someone tried to break this chain, this had to be corrected, sometimes with the use of an army as in Hungary, or through political means as in Poland.

"The post-January develop-

ments in our country went further—they tended to break the chain within our own small pyramid. Different spheres of civic life reached a fairly high degree of freedom. The press enabled public opinion to play a political role. People began to behave as free citizens, and that was the greatest shock to the Stalinist mode of socialism.

"In Czechoslovakia, the pyramid started crumbling as the date for our 14th Communist Party Congress approached. And as this Congress would clearly have brought about a breakup of Stalinism and the creation of a pluralitarian socialist society, as we know it from the program of the Italian Communists, the logical thing happened—Aug. 21.

"When I consider our pre-August feeling that this couldn't happen because it would damage the interests of socialism in the world, I notice how much we failed to study the logic of Polish and Hungarian events in 1956 . . .

"The events of 1956 should clearly have told us the decisive element is the interests of the superpower. All politics, all ideology is subjected to these interests and is shaped by them. This is why they make so much fun of our socialism with a human face, or democratic or humanist socialism. They keep telling us socialism doesn't need adjectives because there is only one socialism.

"This is to tell all heretics that either they will respect the needs of the so-called socialist camp—that means in the end the needs of the Soviet Union—or go back to the tested Stalinist structure of society, or you will continue to be traitors, heretics, revisionists . . .

"So what shall we do now that they want to transform us into a pyramid? If we look at the past 150 years of history of our nations, since the first Czech and Slovak renaissance, it has never been as difficult as it is now. We know what we do not want—that is contained in our main resolution. But what do we want? And let's not ask for anything unreal. We have to accept the reality of the present world in which we live. We are a small people of small actions. Our country is no longer an arena for heroic deeds . . .

"The main role, therefore, may be played by culture and not the first time . . . Only culture is capable of keeping us the way we are. It can help us multiply the moral and political victory against military superiority. Scientists, artists and journalists, whether they want it or not, are the main hope of the people.

"We should be as hard-headed as a ram and create a society that is economically, politically and ethically prosperous so that we are no longer encased in a pyramid. If we should say to ourselves all is lost, then all would be lost. If we say to ourselves nothing can be done, then nothing will be done."