



Eastern Europe – Fifty Years Ago

A Press Review by a Hungarian Refugee

Czechs' Opposition to Occupation Reflected in Many Small Pinpricks

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Rumania and Yugoslavia Fear Subversion Instead of Invasion

LONDON—While the excursions and alarms that spread across Eastern Europe in the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia are slowly dying down, new dangers are beginning to stir under the surface.

In one of those sharp reversals of policy that are characteristic of Communist regimes, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia are suddenly making friendly noises at each other. Rumania is promising to play its full part in the Warsaw Pact and in Comecon, the two organizations whose military and economic domination it had so recently denounced. Marshal Tito makes speeches deploring any attempts to "overdramatize" the international consequences of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which sounds almost like a self-criticism of his own earlier speeches. The Moscow papers congratulate Yugoslavia on its independence day, almost as if they had not denounced Yugoslavia's notion of independence a week or two before.

What is happening?

The answer seems to be that, now that the fear of further Russian invasions has abated, a new fear of Soviet internal subversion is causing the more exposed East European countries to look to their political defenses. Once again Czechoslovakia is the testing ground.

The Kremlin's attempts to split the Czechoslovak leadership, and to strengthen the conservatives until they are in a position to turn out the progressives, can now be discerned fairly easily on the political stage in Prague.

WHAT DOES NOT show up so readily is that the Kremlin is pursuing something like the same tactics in Rumania, and that this is causing Party leader Nicolai Ceausescu and his closest associates considerable concern. The Soviet Union has made several attempts in the past to split the Rumanian leadership in the hope that this would help to return Rumania to the fold.

The Soviet foreys were usually signaled to the public by speeches in which Ceausescu denounced attempts by unidentified foreign Communist parties to appeal to a section of the Rumanian Party over the heads of the properly constituted leadership. The last such warning came shortly before the dismissal from the Politburo of Alexandru Draghici, the former head of the security police, on the grounds that he had abused his power.

Ceausescu, who had beaten the Kremlin to the draw on that occasion, is now sounding the alarm again, which means that the Kremlin is once again on the make.

Ceausescu denounced in a speech to the National Assembly "any interference in

the internal affairs of another Party" in general, and, in particular, "any act of supporting certain groups of isolated members of another party." Each Party, he insisted, had the right to take any measures it considered necessary to defend its unity in the face of foreign interference which was "incompatible with the principles of internationalist relations among parties."

PARALLEL WITH this threat to the unity of the Party and the leadership, Ceausescu sees also a danger to national unity in a country whose difficulties with its national minorities have often been exploited by neighboring powers in an effort to divide and to rule.

About one million Hungarians comprise the most important national minority in Rumania, which acquired Transylvania from Hungary after the First World War. Hitler returned this area to Hungary, but after the second war it went back to Rumania. There have been dark hints that if Rumania does not behave itself, Transylvania could once again be detached and given to Hungary. The Rumanian leaders take the threat seriously enough to have initiated recently a policy of national reconciliation with the Hungarian minority, which has considered itself in the past—with some justice—to suffer from discrimination.

Since the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Rumanian government has sought to give new vitality to the Socialist Unity Front in which a more important role is assigned to the Hungarian minority, and it is working hard to remove the stigma of national discrimination. A new law has been passed to allow Hungarians whose names have been Romanized to revert to their former names.

All these are familiar danger signals in the cockpit of nationalities which has given the word "Balkanize" to the world's languages. The area abounds in frontiers which have been changed so frequently in the past 100 years, to the accompaniment of war cries and bloodshed, as to remain an ever-present danger to stability only a little below a seemingly firm political surface.

WHEN MARSHAL TITO extended an olive branch to the Kremlin at his press conference, he also announced that the Balkans were no longer a flashpoint, as they had been before the war, but a factor for peace. At the same time, however, he complained that neighboring Bulgaria did not recognize the right of the Macedonians "to their independence as a nation," and reiterated the firm support which Yugoslavia as a whole gave to its constituent republic of Macedonia.

The trouble with Bulgaria on this issue has dragged on for years, flaring up whenever external factors—such as the frequent outbursts of Soviet-Yugoslav hostility—encouraged the Bulgarians to revive their claims. After the Czechoslovak invasion, Bulgarians went so far as to threaten to protect socialism by force in Yugoslavia if this became necessary—or so, at least, President Tito said at the time. Perhaps he has forgotten now.

But it is more likely that he has changed his tune precisely because he realizes that the Kremlin could easily start fishing in the troubled Balkan waters—without bothering to invade Yugoslavia—if Belgrade proves too obstreperous.

In the same speech, Marshal Tito made light of the recent disturbances in the Kosmet area, when members of the Albanian minority protested against what they regard as national oppression. This, too, had been "overdramatized," he said. Perhaps it had. But it was a reminder that the Kremlin, by exploiting the national discontent of the Shiptar minority, nearly a million strong, could kill two birds with one stone—causing a great deal of difficulty both in Yugoslavia and in Albania.

ON BALANCE, the invasion of Czechoslovakia has strengthened the progressives in the Yugoslav leadership. The Party congresses now being held in the various Yugoslav republics are electing new men to leading posts, and are sending some of the old Party warhorses to well-deserved pastures. The national Party congress next March could confirm this progressive trend by approving new policies to match the new leaders.

But the conservatives are beginning to fight back. There are those who regard the runaway liberalization of Czechoslovakia as a warning of what could happen in Yugoslavia, and they are urging a policy of the "strong hand" to make sure that the Communist Party remains in power.

They are not politically very strong at the moment, and they are not Russian stooges. Similarly, those Rumanian leaders who believe that their country should cooperate more closely with Russia are not necessarily in Moscow's pay.

But the strengthening of these factions could lead, ultimately, to the kind of results in these countries that the Kremlin sought—and failed—to achieve by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Ceausescu's warnings, and Marshal Tito's abrupt change of tone, show that they are aware of the dangers, and that each is trying to escape, in his own way, from the Kremlin's friendly attentions.

The Washington Post

Dec. 5, 1968

Czechs' Opposition to Occupation Reflected in Many Small Pinpricks

By Karl E. Meyer

Washington Post Foreign Service

PRAGUE, Dec. 4—In small ways, Czechoslovakia tries to assert its national identity despite the overwhelming pressure of a continuing Soviet presence.

Here were the developments today covered by Czechoslovak media:

- Radio and television broadcasts continued to pound away at the "illegal" circulation in Czechoslovakia of Zpravy, the occupation-force propaganda sheet that has become a matter of diplomatic discussions between Prague and Moscow.

- The official news agency Ceteka quarreled with a statement by Victor Bojchenko, director of the Soviet travel agency Intourist, that it is possible to travel privately by car to Russia across all borders the year round.

Ceteka said that, according to information supplied to it by the Ministry of Interior's Visa and Passport Department, Soviet frontier authorities do not allow Czechoslovaks to travel to Russia by car on the basis of normal invitations. Only those crossings arranged through official tourist agencies are allowed.

There has been much

speculation here about why Soviet authorities have banned private car travel by Czechoslovak visitors. One theory is that the Soviet Union does not want Russian-speaking Czechoslovaks who live in border areas to discuss politics with their Soviet neighbors. Another is that Russians fear Czechoslovak scrutiny of troop deployment near the border.

Trial is Publicized

- Extensive publicity was given to further hearings in the rehabilitation trial of Gen. Heliodor Pika, executed in 1949 for alleged high treason.

The trial is embarrassing to Russia because there is widespread belief here that Pika was condemned after a show trial in order to discredit all World War II resistance movements not controlled by Moscow.

- The official Communist Party newspaper, Rude Pravo, carried an article stressing the need to "respect a different view" in considering the resolution adopted by the Central Committee in November. The resolution in effect said that Party leaders erred in granting Czechoslovakia too much freedom before the August invasion.

"To have one's own opinion is no crime," the article

commented. "We all remember the times when people were not only locked up for doubts and different views, but also executed."

This view runs counter to that held by pro-Moscow dogmatists who believe that dissenters should remain silent once the Party has spoken.

Objectionable Phrases

- A leading liberal Communist, Cestimir Cisar, chairman of the Czech National Council, said one of the Party's tasks was to "further deepen socialist democracy and underline the humanistic character of our social system."

Such phrases are among those to which Moscow has taken exception—particularly "socialist democracy."

- Ceteka reported that Prague critics deemed as the season's theatrical hit, "The Flies," by Jean-Paul Sartre. The press had earlier reported Sartre's comment that not a single intellectual in France approved the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

All of these small gestures point to a rising determination here to test Moscow's willingness to honor its part of agreements asserting that Russia would let Czechoslovakia handle its internal affairs, even after the invasion.

The Washington Post

Dec. 9, 1968

Czech Hard-Liner Power Bid Reported

By Karl E. Meyer

Washington Post Foreign Service

PRAGUE, Dec. 8—A month ago today, progressive members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee were alarmed to learn that their conservative opponents were planning a putsch within the ruling group.

The putsch was to have taken place at the time of the November meeting of the 190-member Central Committee, the first to be held following the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia on Aug. 20 by five Warsaw Pact powers.

However, conservatives reportedly made a double miscalculation. They mistook expressions of sympathy and encouragement by Soviet authorities for a willingness to intervene actively in their behalf.

Secondly, the conservatives misjudged the support they had within the all-important Interior and Defense Ministries, and among

Party activists. What was to have been a coup ended, at the Nov. 14-17 plenary meeting, in a compromise which saw conservatives make important but not decisive gains.

Information of this attempted putsch was obtained today from highly reliable sources who gave a connected account of the otherwise bewildering events of the past few weeks.

These sources make the point that the continuing and so far insoluble problem for Moscow is that the presence of Soviet troops makes its ideological supporters look like Quislings. Awareness of this has made Soviet leaders modify their tactics—though the aim of curbing this country's experiment with liberalism remains unchanged.

Three Phases

Well-placed observers distinguish three different tactical phases in the Soviet attempt to impose its will.

News Analysis

The first tactical phase, at the time of the invasion, was based on the grievous misjudgment that openly pro-Soviet Communists could be installed in power by Soviet troops.

Within days after Aug. 20, it became apparent to Moscow that such extreme pro-Russians as Drahomir Kolder, Alois Indra, Vasil Bilak and Vaclav David had a popular following that could be squeezed into a telephone booth.

The pro-Russians were quickly dropped, and the next Soviet tactic was to quietly encourage a putsch based on an alliance between less-discredited conservatives and an emerging centrist faction.

Soviet Policy

This alliance was to triumph at the November plenum. Although it encouraged this plan, the Soviet Union was unwilling to intervene overtly because the Central Committee meeting

coincided with two other events.

The first was a meeting in Budapest at which the Soviet Union was earnestly seeking support for a long-sought and much-postponed conference in Moscow of world Communist Parties. A crude act of intervention in Prague would have killed hopes for getting the big French and Italian Parties to agree to this meeting, now scheduled for next May.

Second, the election of Richard M. Nixon as U.S. President introduced a new imponderable. Moscow did not want to become involved in a new Prague imbroglio at the very sensitive time when Nixon would be choosing a new government, including a Secretary of State.

Present Tactic

Hence the Russians, these sources believe, have switched to a third and in some ways more ominous tactic. Outwardly, Soviet-Czechoslovak relations will be "normalized."

But the real purpose of the new tactic, these sources believe, is to maintain constant Soviet pressure behind

a facade of "normalization," using every device of infiltration, manipulation and subtle bullying, with the ultimate aim of getting rid of Communist Party leader Alexander Dubcek and his main supporters.

At the same time, the common view is that Dubcek retains the trust of Czechoslovak workers, and that his ouster is the one event that would most probably set off a general strike. Among factory workers, Dubcek's reform program has become linked to resistance to the Soviet invasion.

The more hopeful Czechoslovaks take the view that the mood of activism and outrage among workers will not diminish, and that in the end the Soviet Union will find that even its third tactic has failed.

The less hopeful fear that workers will lose their interest in politics and their faith in Dubcek as the demoralizing occupation continues, forcing progressive Communists to sound more and more like "realists." It is on this slow erosion that the Soviet Union seems to be counting at this moment.

S42 1968 Dec. 13

Czech Strike Threatened In Support of Smrkovsky

PRAGUE (AP) — Czechoslovak workers today threatened a general strike for the first time since the Soviet invasion in August.

Prace, newspaper of the nation's trade unions, carried a letter from Prague workers threatening the use of "all means available to the working class, including a general strike," if the progressive president of the National Assembly, Josef Smrkovsky, is ousted from the Communist party leadership.

The paper reviewed recent Soviet actions snubbing Smrkovsky and expressed fear that his position was being undermined.

University students also planned strikes and other protest actions if Smrkovsky is ousted.

Smrkovsky was missing from the list of leaders who attended a reception last night at the Soviet Embassy honoring the 25th anniversary of the Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship treaty. The assembly president was among the local leaders who signed a congratulatory telegram to the Soviets, but the Soviets left his name off their reply.

Smrkovsky also was not present at the Soviet-Czechoslovak summit meeting in Kiev last weekend. He pledged in a television speech earlier this week that he would not quit his office.

Meanwhile, the Communist party's central committee met for the second day to approve Premier Oldrich Cernik's new economic program slowing down reforms and tying the economy of the occupied nation closer than ever to the Soviet Union.

Reliable sources said there would be no changes in the top party leadership at the meeting, despite persistent reports that the position of First Secretary Alexander Dubcek is weakening.

These reports said the more conservative Cernik may replace Dubcek as party leader in the first half of 1969.

Reports also circulated that the Soviets would withdraw their remaining troops before the world Communist meeting scheduled for Moscow in May.

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"Czechoslovakia's interest," he said, "quite naturally leans toward a development of economic relations with the Socialist countries, and especially with the Soviet Union."

Cernik endorsed a party decision last month that called the economic reforms planned before the August invasion impatient and adventuristic. "An economic reform cannot be carried out hastily," he warned.

Cernik made clear the reforms would continue on a far more cautious basis than the one proposed by former Deputy Premier Ota Sik, an exile in Switzerland.

Sik's program called for steps to free industrial enterprises from central planners and move them toward a free market economy stressing incentive, profits, and prices based on supply and demand.

"It is necessary to make enterprises relatively independent," said Cernik. "It is also indispensable to ensure sufficiently strong application of the regulative function of the state economic policy."