



Eastern Europe – Fifty Years Ago

A Press Review by a Hungarian Refugee

Czech Unions Back Students Goals

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Czech Unions Back Student Goals

By Kenneth Ames

Special to The Washington Post

PRAGUE, Jan. 21—A congress of Czechoslovak Trades Unions which opened here today with more than 1300 delegates expressed support for demands recently made by the nation's students.

Rudolf Pacovsky, a leading union official who made the main speech, emphasized that the union movement, representing several million workers, "wishes to participate in drafting election laws." He added that "the method of electing deputies to the Czech National Council has certain shortcomings" and trades unions wish "to have a share in formulating the political aims of the Czech Socialist Republic."

Cautioned by Cernik

Premier Oldrich Cernik, addressing the congress, was again the advocate of moderation. He said there would be no toleration of diversion from the government's present path. Nor could there be immediate elections, as demanded by the students, he said, because it takes considerable time to prepare for elections.

Cernik said there was no intention to slow down political activity of the nation, "but it is necessary to react constantly against extremist forces." He called for understanding of the November Resolution, the document taken to Warsaw by Cernik and Party leader Alexander Dubcek for approval by Kremlin leaders then attending a Polish Party congress.

Union Chiefs Elected

The trade union movement, now emerging as an important political force, is distinguished by the fact that its leaders have been freely elected by members in the past few months, in contrast to other Party and government bodies where leaders have been appointed.

Student delegations who tried to force their way into the opening session of the congress were turned away but were invited to attend Wednesday when they will be permitted to speak.

This was symptomatic of the growing solidarity between the large student force in Czechoslovakia and the workers' unions which have identified themselves with the growing student protest.

Doctors in Pilsen tonight were still fighting to save the life of 25-year-old Josef Hlavaty, the second youth to at-



Czech students carrying floral wreaths led Monday's memorial march in Prague to Jan Palach, the 21-year-old

Charles University student who died three days after setting himself afire to protest the Soviet occupation.

United Press International

tempt suicide by burning himself. His condition was described as serious and there was doubt he would survive.

Meanwhile, plans were made for the funeral of Jan Palach, the first student burning victim. It will amount to almost a state occasion. His coffin will lie in state Friday and Saturday in the carolingium part of Charles University and will then be carried in a massive cortege through Prague streets to a suburban cemetery.

Student leaders who Monday met with government members expressed themselves dissatisfied with steps taken to meet their demands. They have asked that their conditions be met by the date of Palach's funeral or further demonstrative action will be taken.

A statement from the university philosophical faculty said that "Palach acted for those who see no way out and who see no possibility of political work in a country where

citizens are deprived of their fundamental rights."

The students, like the trades unions, went on to insist on a proper electoral law "and democratically elected organs . . . All this is impossible without sovereignty and decisiveness on our part."

Demands Repeated

Repeating demands for banning the Soviet occupation newspaper Zpravy, removal of censorship on internal matters and immediate fixing of election dates for all Czech national bodies, they declared that these matters do not require Russian approval.

Recent developments in the trade union movement indicate that there is no significant gap between the aims of the student movement and organized labor.

Karel Polacek, the trade union chairman, said: "We can assure the public that the trade union movement will do all possible for realization of the hopes of citizens. We be-

lieve working people . . . will support the students and will find means of achieving solidarity which will not harm our common interests and aims . . . We shall not wait with folded arms for the miracle which would fulfill our targets."

Other Viewpoints

This view was not shared by the Czech Bureau for Party Affairs, which described student demands as untenable. "The state and Party leadership," it said, "is constantly confronted by new and further demands which are often from a social viewpoint unfulfillable. It would be irresponsible to bind oneself to their acceptance."

Students were also criticized by the Slovak Party Presidium.

Tass Assails Czechs' 'Antisocialist' Acts

MOSCOW, Jan. 21 (UPI)—The Soviet news agency Tass today criticized the "antiso-

cialist" nature of the Prague demonstrations that followed Jan Palach's suicide.

Tass said, "Certain groups of people passing through the streets of Prague gradually united into a demonstration, shouted antisocialist slogans and violated normal life."

The big protest parades occurred Monday. Without explanation or detail, Tass said, "On Saturday in Prague there were certain actions which are directly opposite to the efforts . . . to consolidate the situation in the country."

The news agency warned: "The appropriate organs of Czechoslovakia will not tolerate that these efforts be thwarted."

(A youth who burned himself in Budapest yesterday was named by Budapest Radio today as Sandor Bauer, a 17-year-old industrial apprentice. He is in serious condition. The radio, monitored in Munich and reported by Reuters, said Bauer attempted to commit suicide two years ago.)

The Washington Post

January 22, 1969

An 'Open Letter' From Warsaw

By Neal Acherson
London Observer

LONDON — Two young university teachers, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski, who were imprisoned in Warsaw last week, got off relatively lightly.

They received 3½ years each. The prosecution wanted seven and eight years, and failed to pin on them the charge of working for "a hostile organization" (which meant in their case the Trotskyist Fourth International).

They were found guilty of belonging to a "secret organization." This is the student group which the Polish press calls the Commandos, and which is supposed to have organized the student riots last March. Four more alleged Commandos are now on trial on the same charge.

But the real charge against Kuron and Modzelewski is a document — a 56,000-word dossier called Open Letter to the Polish

News Analysis

Workers' Party. The two teachers wrote it three years ago, and they have already served prison sentences for it once.

Plan for Revolt

Ferocious, sometimes brilliantly penetrating, and sometimes naive, it is a description of what goes wrong when an industrial society is mesmerized by economic growth at the expense of liberty, and it is a program for workers' revolution.

The Open Letter, copied and now circulated across many frontiers, has been almost more influential outside Poland than inside. The new generation of rebellious Warsaw students reveres its anger and idealism, but finds its aim—a republic of workers' councils with a shoal of working-class political parties and no professional army

—as unrealistic as it is beautiful.

But this program has a appeal to the Western new left, burning to break through the crystal walls of prosperity and inspire satisfied working classes with the vision of direct democracy. In Eastern Europe, by contrast, it is the analysis of what socialist society is really made of that attracts readers.

The Letter is about Poland. But what these two are saying is almost as disagreeable for developed Western societies and even in certain ways, for Czechoslovakia.

Workers Never Free

They are saying that the ordinary employe becomes even less free and more helpless when free capitalism gives way to centralized communism or to state involvement in industry.

They further believe that decentralizing the economy, as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, by giving managers

power which politicians used to hoard, is doomed as well. The technocrats will be liberal only in name.

Communist society today, according to Kuron and Modzelewski, has three elements: the central political bureaucracy, the technocrats and the workers.

This bureaucracy, they consider, is a class. It may be more concerned with its own preservation than its own enrichment, but it confiscates the surplus value of a man's work just as the old capitalist class used to.

Instead of lining its pockets with the profit, it ploughs the surplus back into production for production's sake. The worker gets as little as it is practical to pay him, plus the minimal welfare services he needs. This is the old Stalinist system of centralized Party rule and heavy industrialization.

But the reformed, decentralized economy—the pattern of profit-and-loss accounting and managerial responsibility which Prof. Ota Sik was trying to give Czechoslovakia—does not really change anything.

Bureaucrats Control

In the West, the political rulers are not a class in themselves because they run the state for those who own the economy. But under modern communism, the new generation of managers is still subject to the central bureaucracy. Wrote Kuron and Modzelewski:

"The bureaucracy is inclined to pay well, to give managers and bosses the privilege of a high level of consumption in order to bind them more tightly to its

system. But it does this only in its own interests. It does not represent the technocrats. It buys them."

Once the industrial base has been built, a crisis develops. This, they say, is what happened to Poland in 1956. Industry must now sell its products to the consumer, yet the bureaucracy is afraid of the necessary rise in wages.

Then a new conflict will arise between the bureaucracy and the technocrats, who demand "a high level of consumption for privileged sections of society." This prophecy came true in Czechoslovakia.

But even a workers' council system in factories does not stop the technocrats and their political employers from exploiting the workers. Real workers' democracy means workers' control of the state or nothing, and "revolution is inevitable."

Something astonishingly similar is taking place in Czechoslovakia now. It is the factory workers who have taken over the leadership in the struggle against Soviet pressure.

But this is bringing them into conflict with their own rulers as well, the enlightened liberal politicians and managers of last year's reforms. The workers do not just want the Russians out; they are asking for political power for the working class.

Probably they will be coaxed or pushed back into line. But Kuron and Modzelewski in their cells will be straining their ears towards Czechoslovakia, and mentally revising their notes.



Mourners line up to file past the coffin of Jan Palach at Charles University in Prague.

Sobbing Czech Thousands File By Palach's Closed Coffin

PRAGUE (AP) — Thousands of sobbing, wailing Czechoslovaks filed past the closed coffin of Jan Palach today.

The coffin of Palach, who set himself afire for the cause of freedom, rested alongside a statue of Jan Hus, who died at the stake in defense of truth in 1415.

Large crowds gathered in narrow Zecenzy Ulice, the Ironworkers' Street, to enter the main building of Charles University where the coffin rested. Mem-

bers of the university faculty stood near the catafalque.

The 21-year-old university student set fire to himself on Wednesday Jan. 16, to protest the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. He died three days later.

The coffin will be on view through tomorrow morning. Then students planned a massive memorial observance in advance of private funeral services in the afternoon.

Student leaders said they ex-

pected 400,000 students in the capital for the ceremony. Prague Radio said the leaders told the worried interior ministry they could not guarantee there would be no incidents.

The students made public appeals for a calm, dignified memorial. They said any violence could "entirely destroy our hopes for socialism with a human face," the motto of the liberal reform wave which Soviet troops invaded the country to reverse.

The closed coffin, of light wood embellished with metal, was placed in a small open courtyard in the Carolinum, the university's central building.

Scores of children, freed from school to pass by the coffin, were among the first to enter the building. Long lines of people stretched for blocks down the street. Student monitors and police were on hand to direct traffic.

On Wenceslas Square the har-

dy band of youths who have displayed Czechoslovak and black flags day and night since Palach's death remained on station in front of the statue of St. Wenceslas.

Wreaths and condolence telegrams piled up at the philosophy school where Palach was a student. However, hunger strikers were gone from the fountain where he set himself afire. The interior Ministry denied rumors that they had been arrested.

(An automobile mechanic in Prague poured gasoline over himself today and ignited it, the Czechoslovak news agency CTK said. Emanuel Sopko, 23, was drunk and had no political motive, CTK said. He suffered minor burns. It was the 11th self-burning in Europe since Palach's immolation and the seventh in Czechoslovakia. All but Palach and Sando Beyer, a Hungarian, have survived.)

Meanwhile Ota Sik, former

deputy premier and author of the economic reform program last year, and Edward Goldstuecker, former head of the Czech Writers' Union, attended a meeting of the Czech national council yesterday.

Both returned from self-exile Wednesday night but friends said they would be leaving the country again in a few days. Sik is doing economic research in Switzerland, and Goldstuecker is teaching in Britain.

The Washington Post

Jan. 25, 1969

Vatican Said to Clear Comment on Burnings

VATICAN CITY, Jan. 24 (AP)—A Vatican Radio broadcast praising the Czechoslovak youths who set themselves on fire was made at the direction of Pope Paul VI's Secretariat of State.

This was confirmed today by well-placed sources in the Vatican press office and in Vatican Radio.

The broadcast Thursday caused shock not only in Vatican circles and the Italian press but at Vatican Radio itself.

The broadcast compared the acts, including the suicide of Czech student Jan Palach, to the sacrifices of the early Christian martyrs and said the acts "deserved the gratitude" of the world. While Palach's suicide was in protest against the Soviet occupation, the Czechoslovak government said subsequent immolation attempts were not politically motivated.

There was some speculation that the broadcast had not been cleared with higher Vatican authorities. But this was denied by sources in Vatican Radio.

They explained that the normal practice is for news commentary of any importance broadcast by the Jesuit-run radio station to be cleared by officials in the Secretariat of State.

It was further explained that in this case the commentary was not only cleared but that the idea for it originated in the Secretariat and that the draft of the commentary was edited and corrected there.

(Sandor Bauer, 17, who set himself on fire in Budapest near where the first shots of the Hungarian uprising were fired, died today, UPI reported from Budapest. Witnesses said he had given no motive for his immolation.)

Soviet Press Backs Tough Czech Policy

By Anatole Shub

Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 29—Open Soviet pressure on Czechoslovakia increased sharply today, indicating decisive Kremlin support for a crackdown on elements resisting "normalization."

The Soviet press, which had been relatively brief and gingerly in its treatment of Prague events in recent weeks, opened up today in fashion reminiscent of the crises last July and August.

The official news agency Tass charged that student Jan Palach, who burned himself to death in Wenceslas Square ten days ago, "did not want to die."

In a long dispatch for Thursday's Soviet papers, Tass alleged that Palach had been drawn into a group organized by "certain quarters conducting subversive antistate activities," and had been reassured that the fuel he used would cause only "cold flame."

Tass also dwelt on the suicide by gas of Blanka Nachazelova, implying that she had been forced to kill herself by the same group. The Soviet agency quoted the alleged text of letter left by the girl—which, as Western and Czechoslovak papers noted, had begun circulating among pro-Soviet circles in Prague before it was ever shown to Czechoslovak journalists.

Tass attacked Western propaganda, which "tries hard to call in question the authenticity of the letter." The Soviet agency found "surprising the position of some organs of the Czechoslovak press" which "seek to spread doubts, mislead Czechoslovak opinion and artificially maintain an uneasy atmosphere."

Approve Crackdown

Tass approvingly reported the Prague Interior Ministry's measures begun last weekend to "restore order," including the arrest of "several dozen hooligans." It also indicated advance approval of measures to prosecute leaders of youthful demonstrations since Palach's death.

In another long dispatch, Tass summarized and extensively quoted a speech made last Friday to the workers militia in Prague by Lubomir Strougal, head of the Communist Party's Czech Bureau.

Strougal, former Minister of the Interior under deposed dictator Antonin Novotny, was appointed to his present post after the Soviet occupation prevented a Czech Party congress. Strougal is considered, along with Slovak Party chief

Gustav Husak, a reliable executor of the orthodox policies favored here.

Strougal's speech to the workers militia sharply condemned "extremist" elements, call for firm Party discipline, criticized the Czechoslovak mass media and declared that friendship with Russia was the decisive criterion of Party policy. A similar speech by Husak to Slovak trade unionists was reported more briefly this morning.

'Revisionism' Attacked

Among the other signs of heightened pressure were a Pravda article by Gregory Glezerman, vice rector of the Soviet Central Committee's Academy of Social Science, who attacked economic "revisionism" in general, Czechoslovak economists in particular, and Professor Ota Sik by name. Sik, father of the ill-fated Czechoslovak "new economic model," reappeared briefly in Prague last week before returning to research work in Basel, Switzerland.

A very similar article in the weekly Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta (which went to press Monday) made many of the same points but did not mention Czechoslovakia or Sik.

The rash of new articles on the Czechoslovak situation was generally believed to reflect a Soviet Politburo decision taken within the past few days.

Prague sources have reported a stern Soviet letter to the Czechoslovak leadership last Friday. There have also been Moscow rumors of a joint letter by the Soviet Party and its four hard-core allies who joined in the Aug. 20 invasion (East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary). However, there has been no confirmation of such reports, or indication of the precise nature of Kremlin demands.

Kosygin Still Absent

Diplomats noted with interest that the new turn in Soviet policy came in the continued absence of Premier Kosygin, last seen in the capital on Dec. 20 and officially said to be vacationing.

Some analysts believed that Pravda's attack on economic "revisionism," which contained explicit criticism of the Chinese and implicit condemnation of the Yugoslavs and Rumanians, could also be interpreted as unsympathetic to the economic reform ideas propounded by Kosygin and his followers in 1965 and 1966. Kosygin was widely reported to have opposed the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

[A report issued by Tass today said that Kosygin was present at a lunch at the Kremlin for visiting South Yemen President Qahtan Al-Shaabi, Reuters reported. But Tass later released another story on the luncheon, dropping Kosygin's name from among those present. A Tass editor said the original story was wrong.]

Comecon Reported in Stalemate On Trade and Currency Issues

By DAVID BINDER

Special to The New York Times

BERLIN, Jan. 30—Communist sources said today that the 22d meeting of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or Comecon, had concluded here with a stalemate on key issues: projected currency convertibility, price coordination and centralized direction of trade with the West. The stalemate was largely brought about by political considerations in the strife-torn Communist movement, the sources said.

Comecon was organized 20 years ago as a means for integrating East European economies under Soviet direction. The present members are the Soviet Union, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Mongolia. Yugoslavia is represented by observers.

The delegates commemorated the Organization's 20th anniversary in a ceremony at East Berlin's Congress Hall.

Emphasis on Bilateral Trade

They applauded a general economic upswing in the region and the establishment of several joint projects such as an electric-energy network, a railroad-car pool and a steel trust. But observers noted that the prime emphasis remained on bilateral agreements, including trade on a barter basis.

The sources cited a lack of currency convertibility as a principal obstacle to closer ties between Comecon countries. The Hungarian delegation, among others, was said to have pressed for an agreement to make all East European currencies convertible on the basis of the Soviet ruble.

This was successfully resisted by the East Germans, who were described as feeling that their country, the richest in the bloc, would end up paying the bill for poorer Comecon members.

The East Germans apparently insisted that until the others followed their example in establishing the true costs of numer-

ous industrial and agricultural goods there was no sense in attempting to achieve convertibility. The currencies of the Comecon countries are arbitrarily fixed at artificial rates. Another price-deforming factor is the practice of state subsidies for rent, bread, potatoes and, until recently, even bird baths in East Germany.

While winning the day on the convertibility issue, the East Germans and their economic allies, the Poles and Russians, lost a struggle to promote tighter central controls over Comecon countries' trade with the West.

These relatively more prosperous countries of the so-called "northern tier" of Eastern Europe were opposed on the trade integration issue by Rumania and Hungary.

A similar stalemate developed between the more heavily industrialized northern members and the lesser-developed southern members over an East German proposal to initiate stronger regionwide planning controls.

The sources said the East Germans, Poles and Russians had decided to postpone a confrontation on the key issues, partly because of the spirited resistance of the Rumanians and Hungarians and partly because they did not want to raise additional problems for the international conference of Communist parties scheduled for May in Moscow.

The Moscow meeting, originally planned for last November, was postponed because of dissension in the international movement over the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia last August.

According to East Berlin sources, the economic issues will be taken up later in the year at a meeting of governmental and party leaders of the Comecon members. The meeting had been set for last spring but was postponed because of developing tensions over the reform policies of Czechoslovakia.