



Eastern Europe – Fifty Years Ago

A Press Review by a Hungarian Refugee

Crackdown in Prague

1968.04.1-15.

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Wash. Post. apr. 1.

1969

Russians' Barracks Damaged by Czechs

By Dan Morgan

Washington Post Foreign Service

PRAGUE, March 31—The Czech Interior Ministry revealed today that anti-Soviet demonstrators, celebrating their country's ice hockey victory over Russia Friday, not only damaged the Soviet Aeroflot airline building in Prague but also Russian barracks outside the capital.

The condemnation, which implicated "provocateurs, of-

fenders and criminal elements" for their anti-Soviet "hysteria and vandalism" was considerably more severe than the one issued over the weekend by the Czech government, to which the powerful Ministry belongs.

Its publication, along with a virulent attack in the Soviet Party paper Pravda charging the Prague leadership with irresponsibility in tolerating the incidents, was a blow to those Czech Party and government officials who had detected growing Soviet readiness to support the present regime and try for a broader understanding.

Given this background of support for Alexander Dubcek and his regime in the last three weeks, the Soviet Party reaction was puzzling to observers here and seemed to contradict an apparent desire by some Soviet elements to play down the Friday incidents.

Reliable informants said today that the Soviet Ambassador here issued a formal government protest Saturday to Premier Oldrich Cernik.

ng Shape

he taking different forms in various locales. The main ones are:

- A move by Sens. Kennedy, Cooper, Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.) and Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.) to form what tentatively is being called a "National Committee for Common Sense" led by perhaps 10 authorities from science, business, the ex-military, Negro and women's groups to counter Pentagon arguments.

nt is See MOVEMENT, A5, Col. 1

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THE WASHINGTON POST Tuesday, April 1, 1969 A 17

Czechs Damaged Soviet Camps

CZECH, From A1

But this protest has not been published in Czechoslovakia or in the Soviet government paper Izvestia.

Informants said the protest was considerably milder than the attack that appeared in Pravda, though it was said to have warned that Moscow held the Czechoslovakia authorities responsible and that if necessary Soviet troops would be used to protect Soviet property.

The warning was clearly geared to the possibility that a similar massive demonstration might occur if Czechoslovakia won the world ice hockey championships match against the Swedish team Sunday in Stockholm. But the Czechoslovaks lost and the city was quiet.

Friday's demonstrations brought tens of thousands of jubilant fans into Prague streets.

The tendency of the Czech government, aside from the Interior Ministry, and of the Soviet government press to play down the incident was taken by observers here to indicate a desire in some Moscow circles to avoid a new and ugly confrontation over Czechoslovakia that would focus world attention there once again, just when the Kremlin is trying to placate world Communist Parties about the invasion and stress socialist solidarity in respect to the Chinese threat.

Smrkovsky Is Target

The Pravda attack particularly singled out an old favorite target of the Kremlin, Josef Smrkovsky, chairman of the National Assembly, for alleged involvement in the Friday incidents.

The press, radio and televi-

sion was also blamed for whipping up nationalist emotions.

Tonight the Presidium of the Assembly issued a statement in defense of Smrkovsky, noting that he had been at a meeting and his limousine was only drawn into the downtown area by huge jams of traffic converging on the area after the victory.

The stage was thus set for a repeat of the January showdown in which the Soviets failed to strip the liberal Smrkovsky of his positions in the top leadership. At that time he was saved by massive support in the Czechoslovak trade unions.

The Interior Ministry report made no mention of Smrkovsky's alleged presence at the demonstrations, but it said that demonstrators had done \$130,000 damage to the Aero-flot building and that there had been "gross violations of public order" elsewhere.

Attack on Barracks

At the Soviet garrison town of Mlada Boleslava, 30 miles from Prague, "window screens were broken in barracks and Soviet representatives were attacked by abusive language."

At Usti nad Labem in northern Bohemia a building housing the Soviet command was also said to have been severely damaged and Soviet vehicles set on fire.

The Interior Ministry listed a number of injured policemen. But observers reported some confusion by authorities on how to proceed during the Prague celebrations, at which they were vastly outnumbered. One group of riot police was unloaded in the Aero-flot vicinity, only to climb back into their trucks a few minutes later.

The report and the aftermath have been of interest to

observers because the Czech Interior Minister, Josef Groesser, has been under fire in the press and from progressives for allegedly tolerating conservative activity in the Czech lands, including the distribution of the occupation newspaper "Zpravy."

From Moscow, Reuters reported on the Pravda attack as follows:

Pravda said the Prague incident was "an organized, carefully prepared nationalist outburst with definite political aims."

It took place because the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the Prague authorities had not condemned a demonstration a week earlier after Czechoslovakia's first victory over Russia in the championships, the newspaper indicated. It added that besides ransacking the airline office, the demonstrators built fires on Wenceslas Square with airline documents.

The article was seen here as the toughest Soviet indictment of Prague leaders for many months and its tone recalled similar complaints before the Soviet invasion last August that said the Czechoslovak leadership was too soft with "anti-socialist forces."

The importance of the article was underlined when it was issued in full by the official Tass news agency.

Smrkovsky Again

Concerning Smrkovsky, Pravda said:

"Some newspapers touchingly noted that none other than J. Smrkovsky, who, as is known, has involved himself in such actions more than once, took part in the mob scene in Wenceslas Square.

"Once again he appeared

among the participants of an anti-Soviet outbursts".

The article noted that after the earlier demonstration "the Czechoslovak authorities did not come out against these unhealthy and dangerous phenomena."

It also rejected a Czechoslovak assertion that the first demonstration was spontaneous.

The demonstrations and the events preceding them "show convincingly that definite people are directing all these provocative actions," Pravda said.

[There were reports in Moscow that visas for at least some foreign journalists were being held up by the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry as result of the Friday outburst.]

E. Germany Eases On Security Talks

Reuters

EAST BERLIN, March 31—The East German Council on State today said a European security conference could help West and East Germany reach agreement on easing tension between them.

In a resolution on the recent Warsaw Pact meeting in Budapest, which proposed the conference, the Council also called on West Germany to participate in a preparatory meeting for the conference.

The wording of the resolution, quoted by the East German news agency ADN, was milder and the tone more optimistic than previous commentaries on the subject.

It contrasted with a speech by East German head of state Walter Ulbricht ten days ago to the all-party National Front in East Berlin, in which he said the proposed conference could not take place unless West Germany recognized East Germany.

Wash. Post April 2, 1969

Moscow Steps Up Pressure Over Czech Demonstrations

Soviet Investigators Arrive

Reminiscent of Last August

By Dan Morgan

Washington Post Foreign Service

By Anatole Shub

Washington Post Foreign Service

PRAGUE, April 1—Moscow today intensified pressure on the Czechoslovak regime in the wake of Friday's anti-Soviet disorders by sending a deputy foreign minister here, reportedly to launch a Soviet-led investigation into the causes of the disturbances and the responsibility for them.

The arrival of Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semyonov, along with the announced visit yesterday of Soviet Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, indicated to observers that the Kremlin has decided to make use of the incidents to weaken their liberal opponents here.

Tens of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks in a number of cities, including Soviet garrison towns, demonstrated after their country's win over the Soviet Union Friday at the ice hockey championships in Stockholm. The Soviet Aeroflot airline office in Prague was wrecked, and the Czech Interior Ministry yesterday reported damage to Soviet barracks as well.

According to the Czechoslovak news agency, Ceteka, Semyonov was met here by Oldrich Kaderka, deputy chief of relations with other Communist Parties, and by Deputy Foreign Minister Jan Basniak. The usual special emissary for Czechoslovak affairs in the Soviet Union, Vasily Kuznetsov, was in the United States for Gen. Eisenhower's funeral.

Sources said Semyonov was here to make a full assessment of the incident, with the help of Soviet investigators, and determine whether the Party apparatus acted as a trustworthy ally in its efforts to prevent anti-Soviet actions.

On Saturday, Soviet Ambassador Stefan Cervenenko is reported to have told Premier Oldrich Cernik in a note that the destruction to Soviet property was a breach of the Oct. 18 Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty in which the Prague leadership accepted the occupation and took responsibility for protecting the visiting armies.

The note has not been published in Moscow or Prague, which is taken by some observers to mean that there are still elements in both governments that want to handle the issue quietly and discreetly, thus avoiding a new confrontation that would again focus world attention on Soviet suppression of the country.

The seriousness of the situation was indicated by the fact that Cernik dealt with the disorders during a special session today of the Federal and Czech Communist Party Presidium.

The government information office today warned all newspapers not to respond to attacks against the Party leadership in yesterday's Pravda. The information office said polemics with the occupying

powers was banned under the Oct. 18 treaty.

This morning, several papers retorted to the Pravda article, including the youth paper Mlada Fronta and the trade union paper Prace. The latter noted that those who have taught that sports have political significance should not be surprised when politics is read into sports results.

The Union of Czech Metal Workers, which in January defended Federal Assembly Chairman Josef Smrkovsky against Soviet attacks, will meet Thursday. Pravda charged that Smrkovsky was involved in the demonstrations. Smrkovsky has denied the charge.

Against this background of renewed friction between Moscow and Prague, Czech Interior Minister Josef Groesser was called before a committee of the Czech National Council (parliament) for a hearing. Under the federated form of government instituted last year, there are both Czech and Slovak governments with their ministries and parliaments, as well as the Federal—or Czechoslovak—government.

According to delegates attending the Council session, the Interior Minister was sharply attacked for his issuance of an exhaustively detailed report of damage to Soviet facilities during the disorders.

The report was embarrassing to the Federal leadership. Soviet newspapers and officials have seized on it to indicate that the leaders are not in control in Prague.

Sources said Groesser also was questioned as to why police were not under orders to defend Soviet property more vigorously. Observers have testified that police seemed uncertain how to proceed Friday night.

Groesser is the No. 1 target of Czech progressives. Cestmir Cisar, chairman of the Czech National Council has called for his resignation. Groesser also is facing a Party investigating committee on charges that he violated the Party line when he spoke out against federalization of the Czechoslovak state in a speech Feb. 8.

Warsaw Pact maneuvers presently are being held in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and Soviet Defense Minister Grechko visited the Russian barracks in Milovice yesterday.

Japan Road Toll Up

TOKYO, April 1 (UPI)—The National Police Agency said today 3506 persons died in traffic accidents throughout Japan in the first three months of 1969, an increase of 449 over the corresponding period last year.

MOSCOW, April 1—Is this August all over again? That is the question diplomatic observers here were asking as they anxiously watched the Soviet military in Czechoslovakia.

Once again, as last August, Soviet and allied troops are "routinely" maneuvering in and around Czechoslovakia. This morning, Soviet Defense Minister Andrei Grechko arrived at the main occupation headquarters of Milovice, some two hours north of Prague. A visit by Grechko to Soviet troops poised on the Czechoslovak border Aug. 16-17 foreshadowed the Aug. 20 invasion.

Vladimir Semyonov, an experienced Deputy Foreign Minister, arrived in Prague today as well. Observers here were wondering whether his presence is needed to manage whatever the Soviet Politburo has in mind politically—avoiding the August mismanagement by Soviet Ambassador to Prague Stepan Chervonenko.

Observers noted that the political climate was being prepared for some kind of action. Today's Komsomolskaya Pravda continued the attack on Czechoslovak press and information media over the anti-Soviet demonstrations last Friday night in Prague and other Czech and Slovak towns. The Prague Aeroflot office was ruined, and Soviet army barracks at Mlada Boleslav stoned, in the wake of demonstrations celebrating Czechoslovakia's second straight hockey victory over the Soviet team in the world tournament at Stockholm.

The youth paper attacked Mlada Fronta, Lidova Democracie, Prace, Zemedelske Noviny, Svobodne Slovo, Smena-Reporter "and other newspapers and magazines," as well as radio and television. The demonstration, said the Soviet organ, had nothing in common with sports enthusiasm, but "was a pre-arranged nationalistic manifestation with far-reaching political aims."

Observers considered even more significant than this attack an editorial in the Hungarian Communist Party organ Nepszabadsag, approvingly quoted by the Soviet news agency Tass tonight. Nepszabadsag, which has shown an ability to tack with oncoming Soviet winds, declared that the "nationalist wave" in Prague "poses a danger not only to Czechoslovak-Soviet ties, but also to Czechoslovakia's ties with other socialist countries." The Hungarian paper repeated the accusation made by Pravda yesterday that Czech progressive leader Josef Smrkovsky was among the demonstrators—a charge Smrkovsky had denied.

Nepszabadsag concluded that hockey is played on slippery ice, but "there is no doubt that those who dared this time in Prague to emerge onto Flo

the ice of a foul political game... have slipped badly. Using sports language, the time has come to send them off the field."

Soviet hardliners have complained since the January Prague demonstrations in favor of Smrkovsky and after the suicide of Jan Palach that the Kremlin had accepted any compromise with the Svoboda-Dubcek-Cernik-Smrkovsky leadership in Prague. "Once we intervened," they have told Westerners, we should have cleaned up the whole cesspool once and for all."

A Soviet delegation of Party control specialists, led by Politburo member Arvid Pelshe, arrived in Prague Feb. 27 and spent two weeks in the country—mostly conferring with Vasil Bilak, Alois Indra, Milan Jakes and other conservatives. Some observers believe the delegation's main purpose was to review the Czechoslovak Communist Party's cadre or personnel files in preparation for a purge.

While most observers considered the situation grave, some felt obligated to note at least two ironies in Soviet press treatment. Although Pravda and Komsomolskaya Pravda complained bitterly about the wreckage of the Aeroflot office in Prague, nothing has yet been done to repair the damage done to the Chinese Embassy in Moscow by Soviet demonstration last month.

Komsomolskaya Pravda also complained that Czechoslovak television jammed the Soviet national anthem after the Russians beat Canada in Stockholm. However, Soviet television completely cut off the Intervision telecasts of both losing games with Czechoslovakia within seconds of the final buzzer, presumably to avoid both the Czechoslovak anthem and the pro-Czechoslovak demonstration of the Stockholm crowds.

New York Times Apr 3 1968

to Vietnam.

Crackdown in Prague

The presence of the Soviet Defense Minister, Marshal Grechko, in Prague makes evident enough the kind of brutal pressure Moscow employed to extort yesterday's surrender from the Dubcek leadership.

Last July, before the Soviet invasion, Mr. Dubcek and his colleagues denied Moscow's charges that the country was threatened by anti-Socialist forces whose stronghold was the nation's communications media. But yesterday's Czechoslovak Presidium statement accepted all the Soviet charges as fact, announced a crackdown on dissidents and—most shameful of all—followed Pravda's example in tagging Josef Smrkovsky as the key villain behind recent anti-Soviet demonstrations.

The truth, of course, is quite different. Communist party leader Dubcek, Premier Cernik and most of their top associates are out of prison and in office today only because of the heroic nonviolent resistance the entire Czechoslovak nation put up after Russian troops invaded that country in defiance of every canon of international law. The real "crime" of the press and electronic journalists now being denounced is that they have courageously articulated the outraged feelings of the Czechoslovak people within the limits of existing restrictions.

The crackdown threatened yesterday will—if fully implemented—reinstitute Stalinist terror in Czechoslovakia, pushing the clock back more than a decade to the worst years of the Novotny era. If that is attempted, however, those carrying out this repression will have to overcome resistance from the unions, students and other groups. That resistance can only be overcome by using Soviet troops and tanks in the murderous fashion employed in Budapest in 1956. But the resulting political damage to Moscow would be enormous, with the Chinese as the prime gainers. And a new wave of Soviet terror in Czechoslovakia could well doom the oft-postponed world Communist conference now scheduled for Moscow in June.

At this time of crisis with Peking, a more rational Soviet policy toward Czechoslovakia would call for conciliation and concession—a policy aimed at reknitting the ties of friendship and mutual trust sundered last August. But apparently such statesmanship is beyond the frightened men who now rule in the Kremlin and who still do not understand that the desire for national freedom cannot be extinguished, no matter how much force is employed.

New York Times Apr 5 1964

Hungary Warns of Czech Risks

From News Dispatches

BUDAPEST, April 4—A prominent Hungarian Communist official today described the current political situation in Czechoslovakia as "dangerous," and pledged his country's support to "facilitate the consolidation of socialism in Czechoslovakia."

Zoltan Komocsin, head of the political committee of the Socialist Workers Party, said in a radio speech, "Our alarm is intensified because we do not see the consistent and resolute measures that are demanded on the part of the Party and the state leadership of Czechoslovakia by the present situation."

He said, "As before, our Party and Government are ready to facilitate the consolidation of socialism in Czechoslovakia and the overcoming of difficulties towards this aim."

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Soviet Assails Tito Press; Prague Scores Newsmen

Moscow Paper Charges Yugoslavs Print Hostile Material on Russia

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN
Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, April 5 — A Soviet newspaper today levelled against Yugoslavia some of the strongest criticism seen here in more than a decade.

An article in Sovetskaya Rossiya, an organ of the Communist party's Central Committee, ostensibly was an attack on Yugoslavia's press for publishing anti-Soviet material. But it was interpreted by Yugoslav diplomats as a direct rebuke to the Government of President Tito.

Sovetskaya Rossiya, which is the party's newspaper for the Russian Republic, largest in the Soviet Union, has been in the forefront of a campaign for ideological purity in the Communist press.

Publication of today's article suggested that relations with Yugoslavia now might be as bad as those that existed in the fall of 1956, following the Soviet quashing of the Hungarian revolt, when Imre Nagy, leader of the revolt, took refuge in the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest.

Mr. Nagy was arrested and

Czechoslovak Journals Criticized for Balking at New Censorship

By ALVIN SHUSTER
Special to The New York Times

PRAGUE, April 5—The Executive Committee of the Communist party's Presidium issued a scathing attack on the mass media today for balking at the restoration of tight censorship.

The ruling eight-member committee accused journalists in the press, radio and television of insincerity, protection of "antisocialist forces," defiance of party policy and irresponsibility.

Stressing earlier charges by the 21-member Presidium that journalists had helped stir up anti-Soviet feelings to a point of crisis in recent weeks, the committee made clear that the party would not brook any sign of resistance to the decision, made under Soviet pressure, to reimpose prepublication censorship.

The angry declaration was touched off by a response to the party's decision by the Czechoslovak Union of Journalists. The union's statement indicated opposition to prepublication censorship and said journalists preferred to con-

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The Evening Star April 8 1969

Europe: The Communist Voices Point to Change

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is certainly different. There are many problems, but, with one or two exceptions, it is not grim. The people — and that means the common people — seem to prefer socialism. They merely want to make it better. Basically, that is what all the conflict is about today.

One of many signs that blossomed overnight in Czechoslovakia expressed that feeling in a language that everyone could understand. It said:

SOCIALIZMUS, ANO
OKUPANTI, NE

'Attractive Features'

A student from Prague, who has participated in all the demonstrations, put it this way: "Despite all our failures and disenchantments, we have in our system some attractive features."

A Polish agricultural leader had spoken more truth than polemics when he said that in his socialist country, 85 percent of the agrarian land was privately owned.

"And the peasants," he said, "decided this for themselves, and we accepted it and we allow the peasants to live according to their wishes. If you evaluate a system, what is important is the acceptance of the system by the masses of people, and this policy is accepted."

Nationalism Retained

The people in Poland and the other countries also retain their basic nationalism. They are Poles or Czechs or Yugoslavs or Hungarians before they are anything else.

One patriot, who had been in the West and decided to return, has suffered for it. But he never intends to leave.

"No," he said, "I am needed here. I never regret that I decided to go back to my country."

And no matter how many people favor a socialist society, organized religion still flourishes and grows. That is particularly true in the largest of the countries visited, Poland.

In a village back in the Carpathian Mountains, a Polish highlander with magnificently

chiseled features told of a conversation with a party official. The official was praising progress being made, the benefits of the system and the perfection of communism, especially the Russian variety.

"What do you think you are going to do?" the highlander said he replied. "In 20 years do you think you can destroy what it has taken the best people and the best minds to create in the 2,000 years since Christ was born?"

If his words linger afterward, there are some you recall with distaste.

The most unfavorable impression invariably comes from the officials. As a group, they tend to be suspicious, stubborn and highly impressed with their positions and power.

Dedicated Officials

The most disagreeable are the really dedicated party members. They are usually dogmatic, unsmiling, terribly serious — and terribly sure they are correct. With them, you still hear the echoes of the old Cold War language.

"We live in an atmosphere of an ideological fight," one said.

"The students are the match to many things, but the true power is in the working classes, in the masses," said another.

Even more doctrinaire was one man who addressed himself to the student "problem" and intellectual challenge found in every country.

"One of our tasks," he said, "is to form opinions of the students in the spirit of socialism and to liberate their initiative through proper challenge. The forms are various."

Proper Methods

He spoke disparagingly of those students who tried to change the system. "The students imagined they could improve socialism," he said. "Obviously it can be improved — but not by the way of complete freedom or abolishment of censorship and the other things they talk about. Anybody who has his eyes open and who thinks sees many things that can be improved,

but it must be done through proper methods."

His view, one can only hope, will not be that of the future.

I would prefer to remember a retired scholar. "The duty of my generation," he said, "is to give to the younger generation the tradition of human rights. I must give the young people what I feel. It is like a relay race. Perhaps they will drop the baton, but it is still my duty to give it to them."

Longing for Comforts

At the moment, with new restrictions being imposed in Czechoslovakia and censorship replacing free expression there, such wishes may seem hopelessly naive.

Other aspects of life in the socialist countries are uninspiring. After a while — and despite the good restaurants, the courteous service, the still-splendid museums and galleries, the active cultural life in each country, the genuine friendliness of most people — an American begins to yearn for more efficiency. He wants, not surprisingly, what American critics say is one of our least admirable aspects. He wants more material comfort.

From a distance, his country becomes more and more attractive. Washington, in April, takes on a fine remembered glow.

Impressions of America

Yet the return at Easter time ironically invokes only ugly memories. It is the anniversary of Martin Luther King's murder, and your colleagues are not speaking of events overseas — they are talking apprehensively about what's going to happen in Washington one year after the riots.

If you wanted to, you could almost believe the East Europeans had been right when they consistently held up their unflattering impression of the America they saw from aboard. Of all those incidents, none had more of personal impact than one in Budapest.

In the midst of a lengthy, and mainly pleasant, conversation, one government man suddenly stood up as if he just

remembered something. He walked to a bookcase, fumbled a bit, and returned with a newspaper clipping.

Words vs. Deeds

It was a Mauldin cartoon, showing a book entitled, "The American Way of Life." Rifles, pistols, nooses, whips and daggers protruded from it; blood dripped from its pages. The official laid it in front of me without a word. It had been printed when Robert Kennedy was assassinated.

In different forms and tongues, that same kind of expression was repeated all over Eastern Europe. It wasn't a matter of politics or attempts to prove national superiority or governmental systems. Like many Americans, those people simply can't understand the discrepancy between America's words and deeds.

You might try to respond with a lame, "But that is only one part of the American way of life," or "It's only a small part of our life," or "barbarism and inhumanity are no strangers to any people, in any time"; but you do not.

Another theme that is repeated again and again concerns the common belief that Americans, whatever their worth, do not appreciate how much Europeans have suffered. That lack of understanding, the people say, makes Americans more unyielding and less tolerant of others seeking to live in their own way.

Universal Tragedy

To a large degree, they are right. Scarcely a person, young or old, can't tell of some catastrophe affecting him and his family during the war. Yet no matter how ghastly, stories often fail to strike home.

A visit to Auschwitz, which is preserved intact as a museum of horror, crematoriums, gas chambers, cell-blocks, displays of human hair, spectacles, shoes, and

suitcases left by the victims removes any doubt about the suffering. ("It's the biggest cemetery in the whole world," our guide had said. "Four million people died here.")

If that past still affects the present, and it does, it is equally hard to fathom the future. Of all the voices, one stands out. He was a student in Krakow. Last year he had participated in student demonstrations. He will not do that again.

"Be a Member"

"Most of our young people say I don't agree with the government policy, but I do agree with the socialist system," he said. "But we know we can't fight in the conventional way. We must change the policy of the government and change the political situation. And the only sensible way I know how to do that is to go into the party. Be a member. This way, we can change the policy. This way, we can take over in our own time."

"That is why I am a member of the Polish Worker's party."

But that is all high politics and personal intrigue, a matter of the moment. One sight transcended all of these. It was a glimpse of a more enduring quality — and more of a reason to hope for the future — than all the political

discussions put together.

In the old market square in Krakow, a place that has seen a series of invasions and wars over the centuries, women still sit at small tables, in fair weather and foul, selling flowers. The people there say they have been doing that for centuries now.

Wash. Post-Apr 13

1969

Gaiety Shields Czech Burdens

Prague Shows Few Signs of a Nation Under Occupation

By Dan Morgan

Washington Post Foreign Service

PRAGUE, April 11—In the capital of Czechoslovakia it sometimes seems hard to realize that this is an occupied country living, as a member of the intelligentsia told friends this week, "on the edge of the knife."

One reason may be that a great many Czechs and Slovaks are trying in their own ways these days to escape from, or simply ignore, the grimmer realities of life.

On Easter weekend, Wenceslas Square was again filled with crowds leisurely enjoying the first spring weather. They laughed and cheered at one point as three shiny West German Mercedes cars, which were to be raffled off at a trade fair, rolled through, each with a pretty blond sitting on the hood.

In the home of a Czech family the same weekend, the talk was of summer vacations abroad, while the teenage son was wondering where he could obtain a catalogue of Western automobiles.

New Hit Movie

Moviegoers, meanwhile, are laughing and applauding the new hit movie, "The Joke," which tells how the hero gets even with the old girl friend who denounced him for insufficient Marxist-Leninist reverence.

Each night, the Viola night club is packed with students, writers and film directors as a jazz band blares out a beat.

"Don't ask me about politics," said one writer the other day. "My book is coming out in Vienna next week."

As if the state security organs and watchful Soviet agents did not exist, Czechs stubbornly insist on continuing to meet Western friends, sometimes in downtown hotel lobbies, sometimes in more out of the way back rooms of local cafes.

And in a little park the other night youths strummed on guitars, oblivious to the fact that a few hours earlier in an editorial office not a block away a journalist had smiled sadly at visitors, spoken of the need to "keep going some-

News Analysis

how, and then gone off to face probing questions about his activities by party comrades at the Central Committee building.

Press Control Tighter

Such things offer a glimpse of the reality of Czechoslovakia, but they are hidden from the sight of most ordinary people, and the once gossipy press, under tight control, is finding it harder to give clues as to what is going on.

There are few reminders of the "serious situation" which the party leaders say the country faces.

Only rarely does a lone three-quarter-ton Soviet truck tour the city. Occasional armed Czechoslovak army soldiers, in twos and threes, are about the only reminder of the leadership's pledge to use all necessary means to put down repetitions of the massive anti-Soviet unrest that swept the country March 28 after the ice hockey victory over Russia in Stockholm.

In fact armed soldiers, so much a part of the scene in Moscow and East Berlin, not to mention Hitler's Nazi protectorate in Bohemia, are little in evidence.

Politics Discussed

Nor does a visitor in Prague these days find the reticence or caution about talking politics prevalent in those capitals. Politics, in fact, is the main dish at lunchtime, along with the best palacinky pancakes and knedliky (dumplings) in town, in the basement restaurant of the Union of Journalists building.

The talk and the fun and the growing tendency to let things go until tomorrow make up the mask on the fact of the country now.

Some Western observers attribute an element of escapism to the destruction of the Soviet Aeroflot airline building by demonstrators on March 28.

And if desperation is leading to a flight from reality on the most superficial levels, visitors also note a tend-

ency by Czechs and Slovaks to extend this somewhat to the political level as well.

Look to Outside World

Writers, minor officials, journalists, even scientists and professors, have been hoping out loud in conversations that events in the outside world may yet be the salvation of the reforms which to them seem unlikely to be saved by anything the Czechs and Slovaks themselves do.

China the alleged "split in the Kremlin," the influence of the progressively minded Italian Communist Party, the June world Communist conference in Moscow and the influence of America with the Kremlin leadership are all being grasped at as factors which may yet save the day.

Since the seven-power Communist appeal at Budapest last month for a European security conference, an increasing number of Czechoslovaks mention this as a way out.

According to this line of thought, the settlement of the European and German questions could lead to reduction of NATO and Warsaw Pact troops—i.e., withdrawal of troops from Czechoslovakia—and the creation of a climate that would permit Prague to resume contact with Western Europe.

Troop Reduction Plans

Czechoslovak officials who have studied the history of the European security idea note that the Communist countries, including the Soviet Union, have pledged themselves to work for the dissolution of military blocs and withdrawal of foreign armies from allied territories—a commitment which presumably would apply to the Red army in Czechoslovakia as well as the American 7th Army in West Germany.

A famous American journalist visiting here last week quickly noticed the current tendency to look for help outside and coined a phrase — "Czechocentrism."

This hoping against hope sometimes finds tragi-comic outlets.

Japanese businessmen touring small towns recently

tell of being cheered by local citizens who mistook them for Chinese.

On the other hand there have been indications from diplomats here that outside factors are playing a slight role in at least allowing the Czechs and Slovaks to enjoy some of the same qualities of living they had before last August. These indications point to the fact that Washington and Moscow have spoken of Czechoslovakia in private talks.

U.S. Help Doubtful

But to trained diplomats here the idea of American salvation seems far fetched. And the idea of American pressure on Moscow received little or no encouragement from a top-level senatorial and congressional delegation visiting Prague for a day this week.

Is the hoping a form of political escapism, to match the pleasurable kind being indulged in at the Viola and on the Wenceslas Square?

"Yes to a certain extent," said a Czech journalist this week. "But then you must realize that when a patient is very ill he must think about life if he is to recover."

And in the heart of Prague, on the outdoor balcony of the Jalta hotel—which Der Spiegel magazine claimed this week was a center of intrigue and spying for East and West—the Czechs and foreigners sipped their Wiener cafes and lemonade and thought about life, and summer.

N.Y. Times
Wash Post April 13 1969

PRAGUE RETRACTS WORD THAT SOVIET IS SENDING TROOPS

Communique on Build-Up Is
Broadcast, but Withdrawn
on Radio 2 Hours Later

'CHANGED FACTS' CITED

Arrival of More Russians
Would Aid Conservatives
at Key Talks Thursday

By ALVIN SHUSTER
Special to The New York Times

PRAGUE, April 12—The Government announced today—and then denied—that the Soviet Union would send more troops to Czechoslovakia.

Nervousness and confusion followed first a Prague radio broadcast at 3 P.M. that the troops would be coming and then a broadcast at 5 P.M. that the earlier Government communique had been withdrawn "in view of the changed facts."

What happened in those two hours was the subject of intense speculation. There was no explanation from the Government.

Some observers did not rule out the possibility that the Soviet Union was in fact dispatching soldiers here to supplement about 70,000 remaining after the Soviet-led invasion last Aug. 20-21.

Denial Considered Ominous

Other observers suspected a shift in signals from Moscow in those two hours. And some observers saw the denial as perhaps more ominous than the original announcement.

This thinking — which was not based on any solid information—was that the Soviet Union had succeeded in those two hours in getting the Czechoslovak party leadership to accept new demands, perhaps including the removal of one or more progressive leaders.

An announcement of the arrival of more Soviet troops would bolster the pro-Moscow forces in the Czechoslovak party's Central Committee, who are known to be hoping to use the latest crisis here and the fear of new Soviet intervention to force changes in the leadership at the Central Committee meeting scheduled Thursday.

A Warning About Tanks

It would also underscore the warning reported to have been conveyed to party leaders here that new anti-Soviet outbursts would bring a return of Soviet tanks to the streets.

Such demonstrations could occur, for example, if some progressives were replaced during what is clearly building up as the most crucial Central Committee meeting since the progressives under Alexander Dubcek seized power 15 months ago, replacing Antonin Novotny

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PRAGUE RETRACTS WORD OF BUILD-UP

Continued From Page 1, Col. 1

as First Secretary of the Communist party.

The 3 P.M. announcement on the Prague radio, described as a communique of the Government:

"In accordance with the agreement on the temporary stationing and distribution of Soviet forces on territory of Czechoslovakia approved by the Czechoslovak Government Oct. 16, 1968, and ratified by the National Assembly, there will be introduced in April, 1969, parts of Soviet forces and technical quipment to supplement the number of soldiers as stated in the mentioned agreement. The introduction of the Soviet forces will be carried out by rail to garrisons where Soviet armies are located as determined in advance."

Then, at 5 P.M., the radio said:

"It is announced from official places that the broadcast of a communique of the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic about the supplementing of Soviet forces on the territory of Czechoslovakia is in view of the changed facts unsubstantiated."

Activity at Headquarters

The "official places" were described by informed sources as the Federal Government, not the party. There was some activity around party headquarters at the Vltava River tonight, suggesting a meeting of either the 21-member Presidium or its eight-man executive committee.

The treaty referred to in the first broadcast permitted Moscow not only to station troops in Czechoslovakia for an indefinite period, but also to move troops freely in and out of the country. The treaty was a major Soviet policy objective, since Prague had resisted such a plan before the invasion.

Soviet troops have been "temporarily" stationed in East Germany, Poland and Hungary since World War II.

The broadcasts about troops a few hours after it was

Czechoslovak Defense Minister. Since his arrival here March 31, along with Vladimir Semyonov, a Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Prague has been flooded with unconfirmed rumors of Soviet troop movements. Such reports intensified today with travelers telling of some troop shifts outside this city.

Responding to pressures applied by the Soviet officials, the Czechoslovak Government ordered censorship of the mass media and initiated party disciplinary measures against journalists. There are increasing signs that these steps have not satisfied Moscow.

It was reported by one source here that Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin told Vladimir Koucky, Czechoslovakia's Ambassador to Moscow, earlier this week that the efforts by the party leadership here to reassert its powers to control antisocialist forces had fallen far short. Today, Tass, the official Soviet press agency, reported with obvious approval the bitter attack on the leadership last night by Gustav Husak, the Slovak Communist party chief and a member of the Presidium.

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