

# CZECHOSLOVAK NEWSLETTER

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## THE KOHOUT CASE

The Czech writer Pavel Kohout has been stripped of his Czechoslovak citizenship, he was informed by the Czechoslovak embassy in Vienna on October 8.

Kohout, author of Poor Murderer and the model for the hero of Tom Stoppard's Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth, left his native Czechoslovakia with his wife Jelena last October 28 to serve as director of the Burgtheater in Vienna. The Czechoslovak authorities granted them a one-year exit visa on the understanding that Kohout would avoid political activity while he was abroad. On his arrival in Vienna Kohout stated that, while he did not renounce anything he had said or written in Czechoslovakia, he preferred to speak out on political matters in his homeland. While he was abroad, he said, he looked forward to attending the opening of productions of some of his plays and to the publication of his novel The Hangwoman (banned in Czechoslovakia, but to be put out in English by G. P. Putnam's Sons early next year).

On October 4, three weeks before the expiry of their visa, Kohout and his wife drove to the Austro-Czechoslovak border at Nová Bystrice. There they were stopped by Czechoslovak border guards and kept waiting eight hours. Their car was then pushed back to the Austrian side of the border and they were advised to contact the Czechoslovak embassy in Vienna. At the embassy on October 8 Kohout was handed a letter, dated October 1, informing him that he (but not his wife) had been deprived of his Czechoslovak citizenship for having contacts with Czechoslovak exiles and giving interviews to several Western media.

This action by the communist government of Czechoslovakia elicited wide critical comment in the West. In response to Austrian criticism, the Czechoslovak embassy

in Vienna issued a statement that Austria was endangering good relations between Vienna and Prague "in the interest of subversive activities" and that "Austria needs good relations with Czechoslovakia more than vice versa." Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky called the statement "a mixture of ignorance, naïveté and arrogance," and declared that his country would not cease to press for compliance with the provisions of the Final Act of Helsinki. Even the government in Prague realized that its embassy had made a faux pas. Chancellor Kreisky told Parliament in Vienna on October 9 that the Czechoslovak foreign ministry had informed the Austrian ambassador in Prague that the "anti-Austrian hysterics" of the embassy's statement were not the work of the Czechoslovak government.

Meanwhile, Willy Brandt, chairman of the West German Social Democratic party and former chancellor of West Germany, called the Czechoslovak government's decision to annul Kohout's citizenship an arbitrary act of state and a sign of political weakness that were not in keeping with détente or the spirit of the talks he had had in the spring of 1978 in Bonn with Gustáv Husák, the president of Czechoslovakia and secretary general of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Brandt affirmed that Kohout had behaved correctly during his one-year stay in the West and had avoided public statements of a political nature. He denied charges that Kohout had told Dieter Lattmann, a Social Democratic Bundestag deputy, that he would take over responsibility for contacts between the Czechoslovak opposition at home and that abroad once he had returned to his native land. A spokesman for the West German Free Democratic Party, the junior partner in West Germany's governing coalition, termed Kohout's expatriation an arbitrary act that "reflects conditions in Czechoslovakia" and is proof that "the authorities in Prague are unprepared to tolerate critical citizens."

The Czechoslovak media, for their part, have engaged in a campaign denouncing Kohout for "pathological careerism" and as "the author of some of the filth and slander spread against Czechoslovakia in the West." Radio Prague on October 8 called him "a traitor, opportunist, and champion of right-wingers in Czechoslovakia." "After the defeat of counterrevolution" (that is, the suppression of the attempt at democratization in 1968), the radio intoned, the playwright had tried in statements to Western journalists "to give the impression that talented artists were supposedly being persecuted in Czechoslovakia." The following day Rudé právo, the main daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, gibed: "Kohout did not mind taking Judas' gold for slandering socialism and his homeland."

The Kohout case is yet another instance of the oppressiveness of the communist regime in Prague. In a country where the communist government's actions against freedom and human rights in all areas of life have earned it the sobriquet "Biafra of the Spirit," the leading newspaper has dared to denigrate a man who decried the persecution of talented artists at the very moment when members of Charter 77, who did no more than call on the government to respect its own laws and the international accords it has ratified, are being put on trial in Prague (p. 8 & Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 6/33 [June 1979], p. 2). In such circumstances even the French Communist Party daily, L'Humanité, was constrained to deplore Prague's actions in its October 8 issue.

## RELIGION UNDER COMMUNISM

Front organizations have always been the favored instrument with which communist governments manipulate their own citizens and attempt to influence the gullible in the West. Religion is no exception. In June 1978 the Fifth All-Christian Peace Congress in Prague, attended by representatives of Orthodox, Protestant and other churches from both East and West, appealed for disarmament and support for "wars of liberation" in the Third World (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. III, No. 8/9 (23/24) [September 1978]). The Roman Catholic church took no part in it.

This year the nominally Catholic, pro-government Pacem in Terris organization, in cooperation with the Soviet-oriented Berlin Conference of European Catholics, sponsored a new international gathering in the High Tatra mountain resort of Dolný Smokovec (East Slovakia) on September 12 and 13. With "The Responsibility of Catholics in the Political Process of Détente" on the agenda, church dignitaries and laymen from 14 European countries attended it. This year too, apart from Czechoslovakia's so-called peace priests, the Catholic church would have no part of it.

One of the peace priests, Canon Jan Mára, wrote in Katolícké noviny, a government sponsored weekly, on September 9: "Catholic peace efforts have faced difficulties because many responsible persons in high church office have had serious reservations about cooperating with those whose world outlook differs from their own." The meeting expressed its support for "the socialist states' peace policy" and for next year's follow-up meeting in Madrid to the Helsinki Conference on European Security and Cooperation, but no protests were heard against the imprisonment of priests, the lack of religious literature and the general persecution of religion in Czechoslovakia.

About the same time this international assembly was taking place in the mountains, there was a new wave of arrests of Roman Catholic priests and laymen in Czechoslovakia. Among those detained was a prominent Catholic layman and university professor, Dr. Josef Zvěřina, who spent 14 years in prison and was rehabilitated only during the Prague Spring in 1968, when he became a lecturer at a theological college. (During his years in prison, he once shared a cell with Gustáv Husák, then in disgrace, now president of the republic and secretary general of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.) Purged again after the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, Zvěřina was an early signer of Charter 77.

Some of those now detained, including Zvěřina, were later released, but books, manuscripts and documents seized during the police raids were not returned to them. Zvěřina and the Rev. Jiří Kaplan, from whom some 370 books were confiscated, and a Slovak, Rev. Pavel Michal, have been charged with the illegal sale of religious literature, an offense that carries a penalty of up to three years in prison.

## FOREIGN TRADE PROBLEMS

Much less is known about the economic difficulties that confront the Soviet Union and its East European satellites than about the state of the economy of the

free world, about which there is an abundance of bad news in the Western media. But in the first half of 1979 production in the Soviet bloc was below expectations, according to a report in the September 17 issue of U.S. News and World Report. In the Soviet Union industrial output, scheduled to increase during the six months by 5.7% over the same period of last year, rose only 3.5%. Poland fared even worse; growth was only 0.6% against a planned 5%. Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and East Germany also fell short of their targets, the weekly reported.

The government-controlled press of Czechoslovakia confirms the newsmagazine's observations. Failure to fulfill economic plans has serious implications for Czechoslovakia's foreign trade, which has always been vital to the health of the nation's economy.

The Czechoslovak media until the beginning of this year always followed the official propaganda line that the country's economy was immune to inflation and recession because Czechoslovakia is part of the "world socialist system." As Rudé právo, the main daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, put it: "The continuing strengthening of Comecon and the successes the community has achieved are convincing proof of the superiority of socialist production and of real socialism over capitalism. . . . This is clearly demonstrated by our uninterrupted high level of growth, with no setbacks, with full employment, with the settlement of pressing common problems, with an assured supply of raw materials, fuel, new technology and consumer goods, and with the improvement in our transportation system."

As the present year progressed, however, the propaganda line has been changing. Pravda, the daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party, had to concede on July 23: "We, too, have problems. . . . Our own energy resources cannot meet the growth in demand; we are having to import fuel and electricity. . . . The cost of imports is going up steadily; so is the cost of mining our coal." Rudé právo commented grimly on July 17: "There is an impression in many quarters that the rise in the world price of fuel is of no concern to us [but] we have to import raw materials, fuel, and even some foodstuffs. . . . for which we must pay considerably more than in the past, and we can expect no reversal of this trend." The August 2 issue of Nové slovo, the Slovak party Central Committee's political and economic weekly, reported: "The first half of 1979 was one of the most complicated periods in the Six-Year Plan. . . . Not only was the fulfillment of it uneven, but it was also marked by considerable deviations from the planned targets."

While it is realized that foreign trade makes an important contribution to improving the situation, emphasis is still on trade with the Soviet Union and the other Comecon countries. At the same time, one can sense an undercurrent of apprehension that no real improvement is possible without better trade relations with the West. Already a year ago Pravda of Bratislava was criticizing the European Economic Community for not responding favorably to a Comecon proposal to conclude a general treaty between the two economic groupings. It complained that the EEC had replied only generally that both organizations would continue to pay attention to balanced development of their trade, but that it had offered no concrete suggestions beyond this.

Rudé právo's July 17 article said it was to Czechoslovakia's advantage that

two-thirds of its foreign trade was with the Comecon countries. Yet Hospodářské noviny, the economic weekly of the Czechoslovak party Central Committee, noted on August 10: "Though more than two-thirds of Czechoslovak foreign trade is with the socialist countries, the other third is the cause of great concern [because] the changes in world prices also have repercussions on the trade among the members of Comecon where, even if a little later, prices are now approaching world levels." The July 23 Pravda report observed: "Our exports are increasing, mainly to the socialist countries on the basis of long-term agreements, but this growth . . . is slower than is required to offset the imports we need." The same problem was brought into focus by Život strany, the Czechoslovak party Central Committee's biweekly for party members. An article in No. 18, 1979, said: "Terms of trade have developed unfavorably for us in recent years because import prices have outstripped export prices. The situation is made worse by the recession in the West which has made it harder to sell our products there." According to the August 10 issue of Hospodářské noviny, exports to the socialist countries in the first half of 1979 were 50.5% of the year's target, and to the Soviet Union 53.4%, but exports to the "capitalist states" were only 44.3% of the target for the year.

Notwithstanding the "superiority of the international socialist economic system," the official media have been unable to explain why Czechoslovakia's economy should be lagging even when its trade with the socialist states is up to par. There can be no doubt, however, that at the root of it are the return to rigid, Soviet-style, centralized command planning and the oppressive climate since "normalization" crushed the "Prague Spring" of 1968. This was well illustrated in the Charter 77 "Theses on Consumption" (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 7/8 (34/35) [July-August 1979], p. 2), and certainly extends to foreign trade.

Hospodářské noviny reported on June 22 that this year's international consumer goods fair in Brno had had fairly good results, including the conclusion of contracts worth 353 million crowns with nonsocialist countries, but "this volume masks many problems, shortcomings, complexities, and even the danger that not everything is well in this sharply competitive sector." The journal implied quite unmistakably that Czechoslovak products are having a hard time to compete in the free market. Representatives of the consumer goods industry, interviewed by Hospodářské noviny, bemoaned the fact that it was not keeping up with development elsewhere. Raw materials are in short supply, labor morale is low, the quality of products and services is inferior, and manufacturing and packaging technology is out of date. "There is a shortage of proper containers without which sales to customers from the capitalist countries are unthinkable," it added.

A country once renowned for the high quality of its consumer products, textiles, shoes, glass, chinaware, furniture, costume jewelry and leather goods is unable to compete to earn the hard currency needed to buy modern equipment and materials. An article in Nové slovo of July 21 reported that in 1977 more than half the television sets and a quarter of the shoes exported were returned by their foreign buyers because of quality defects. The "socialist division of labor" coordinated by Moscow through Comecon has destroyed Czechoslovakia's consumer goods industry by its emphasis on heavy industry dependent on the Soviet bloc. The communist establishment is not blind to what is happening. Rudé právo commented on July 17: "After all, none of our citizens wishes to see our economy and standard of living standing still or deteriorating." Yet this is precisely what they fear is happening.

## CZECH LITERATURE TODAY

A book could be written about the atrophy of Czech literature under the regime of President Gustáv Husák, but the following facts and analogies may give some idea of its extent.

It is true that fiction and poetry by contemporary authors are published in Prague; the regime from time to time publishes statistics to illustrate the fact. Yet the situation can be compared to an America in the first half of this century in which the White House is in the hands of a man like the late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin. Authors such as Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens among others would have been banned. Some sort of American literature would, of course, have existed, but would it have been the literature that has left such an indelible mark on the fiction and prose of the twentieth century? Some classics, by authors long safely dead, would also have been published — carefully selected: a little Edgar Allan Poe, Harriet Beecher Stowe (in millions of copies), Mark Twain (but not The Mysterious Stranger, which would have been deemed too pessimistic, as it once was by a Prague censor), Nathaniel Hawthorne (but not The Blithedale Romance — "antisocialist"), and a handful of others.

Such are the conditions that now prevail in Czechoslovakia. With that environment, today's Czech literature falls into a number of quite clear-cut categories.

Published Authors

- 1) Second-rate run-of-the-mill writers and hacks are now in their heyday. Penmen who under normal — as opposed to "normalized" — conditions would rightly pass unnoticed by literary critics are suddenly finding, to their amazement, that sycophantic regime literary "experts" are writing "scholarly" papers about them.
- 2) Competent authors, who were publishing serious literary works before the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, now choose one of the customary escape routes open to able writers in a dictatorship: they apply themselves to children's books, historical novels, or detective stories.
- 3) First-rate writers have either undertaken self-criticism or adapted their viewpoints to conform with those of the party Central Committee. There are just four authors in this group: Vladimír Páral, Ladislav Fuks, Jiří Šotola and Bohumil Hrabal. A fifth, the poet Miroslav Holub, published his self-criticism some years ago, but he has not been allowed a single book in print to date. Páral is the most typical of these pseudoconverts. Before the invasion of 1968 he published several novels about life in the industrial town of Ústí. In them he portrayed such elements as the prefabricated apartment houses and the monotony of work in factory and laboratory as symbolic of the mechanical, herded life of modern industrial civilization. Soon after the invasion he began publishing a new series of novels about the same town and environment in which the same symbols were now transmogrified to accord with socialist realism. The prefabricated apartment houses cease to symbolize despair but represent instead the joy of collective living; the tedium of the

laboratory technician's drudgery is metamorphosed into the poesy of chemical reactions in a test tube.

These writers sometimes find themselves the objects of political manipulation. When, for instance, Hrabal, the author of Closely Watched Trains, reached his sixtieth birthday, a Czech émigré magazine in the West published an article on his work. The cultural affairs section of the party Central Committee at once had second thoughts about political exiles celebrating "their" Hrabal. (He had become "theirs" by virtue of a lukewarm and meaningless self-criticism.) A government limousine was sent immediately to his home in the village of Kersko, where two plain-clothesmen literally dragged him out of his bed, hustled him in front of a television camera, and broadcast an interview with him on the spot. Their questions were uncomfortably political; a literary occasion it was far from being. Viewers said Hrabal looked ashen and mumbled his replies unintelligibly.

The seriousness of published writers' topics can also be illustrated by analogy. Suppose Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn had dealt, not with black slavery, but with contemporary Americans' bad table manners. The novel would undoubtedly have been hilarious, for Twain was a superb humorist, but it certainly would have lacked something. However witty, the book was unlikely to have become a world classic.

#### Unpublished Authors

1) Some authors have simply lapsed into silence and take no part in underground publishing or literary activities.

2) Other authors publish their books and essays underground in typewritten versions known as "padlock editions" that circulate clandestinely. They are the foremost men of letters of today. They include names well known in the West: Ludvík Vaculík (The Guinea Pigs), Václav Havel (The Memorandum), Pavel Kohout (Poor Murderer), Jiří Gruša (The Questionnaire), Ivan Klíma, Alexandr Kliment, Jan Skácel. They and others unknown in the West are producing works that publishers in any other country would be proud to put out.

3) Authors in exile include a number of writers who rank among the most eminent in Czech literature today: Milan Kundera (A Farewell Party and The Joke), Arnošt Lustig (Prayer for Kateřina Horowitzová and Ditta Saxová), Jan Beneš (Second Breath and Blind Mirror), Jan Drábek (Death of the Rosenkavalier), Zdena Saliarová (Summer in Prague), the playwright and actor Pavel Landovský, now a star of the Vienna Burgtheater, and Jaroslav Vejvoda in Switzerland.

The exile authors and the writers of "padlock editions" have much in common, not least the fact that their works are being published by émigré publishing houses: Sixty-Eight Publishers in Toronto, Index in Cologne, Konfrontation in Zürich, Accademia Cristiana Cecoslovacca in Rome, and several lesser ones. For the first time in the history of modern occupations of Czechoslovakia, writers living at home do not find themselves at a distance from their friends and peers who have emigrated. On the contrary, they are cooperating in the cause dearest to both of them: the survival of Czech literature.

Josef Škvorecký

[Editor's Note: Josef Škvorecký left Czechoslovakia after the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 and now teaches at the University of Toronto. He and his wife Zdena Salivarová, both of them writers, set up the Czech-language Sixty-Eight Publishers in the same Canadian city.]

#### DISSIDENTS CONVICTED IN PRAGUE

After hearings lasting less than two days, a Prague court on October 23 convicted six members of Charter 77 and the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS) on charges of "subversion of the republic." Petr Uhl, a mechanical engineer, was sentenced to five years; playwright Václav Havel to four and a half years; Dr. Václav Benda, philosopher and mathematician, to four years; Jiří Dienstbier and Otta Bednářová, both journalists, to three years each; and Dana Němcová, a psychologist, was given a two-year suspended sentence. Five others arrested with them last May (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 6/33 [June 1979], p. 2), Jarmila Bělíková, Albert Černý, Ladislav Lis, Václav Malý and Jiří Němec, remain in pretrial detention.

In a statement on October 24, a spokesman for the U.S. State Department, Hodding Carter 3rd, said: "We cannot agree that the acts which the defendants were accused of committing were in any way criminal or that they warranted punishment. . . . We are and will continue to be concerned about violations of human rights wherever they occur. . . . In the case of Czechoslovakia, we are particularly disappointed, given its past tradition and experience of democracy and respect for law and the rights of individuals. The human rights of Czechs and Slovaks and their freedom to exercise these rights have obviously been a matter of interest to some of Czechoslovakia's neighbors, who have had more than a little influence over the internal affairs of the country, in particular during the past eleven years" [i.e., since the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and other Warsaw Pact forces in 1968].

#### Protest in New York

A protest demonstration was held in New York on October 24 outside the building housing the Czechoslovak United Nations delegation. Sponsored by the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee and the P.E.N.-American Center, the demonstration was joined by representatives of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and other Czechoslovak organizations. Dr. Ilja Hulinský, the Czechoslovak ambassador to the United Nations, refused to receive the two American sponsoring groups' representatives: Arthur Miller, a member of both; Robert L. Bernstein, chairman of the Helsinki Watch Committee; and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and Joseph Papp, both members of the P.E.N.-American Center. They therefore delivered to the mission the following protest letter:

"The Helsinki Watch Committee and the P.E.N.-American Center protest the conviction yesterday in Prague Municipal Court of six fellow monitors of the Helsinki Accords. . . . In view of the international concern surrounding the trial and the refusal to permit international observers to attend, we request that a transcript of

the trial be made public.

"The conviction of these six monitors violates the Czechoslovak Government's commitments under the Helsinki Accords and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We urge that the five monitors who received prison sentences yesterday be released on bail pending appeal.

"We are confident that following a full, fair, and public review of trial proceedings the trial judgment would be reversed. These defendants should be freed to resume their defense of human rights and their monitoring of the Helsinki Accords signed by the Czechoslovak Government."

Petition of the Two Sponsoring Groups

The P.E.N.-American Center and the Helsinki Watch Committee have circulated the following petition:

"Free the Imprisoned Czechoslovak Human Rights Activists:

"Otta Bednářová	Journalist; Television Editor
"Jarmila Běliková	Psychologist
"Dr. Václav Benda	Philosopher; Mathematician Charter 77 Spokesman
"Albert Černý	Actor
"Jiří Dienstbier	Journalist; Broadcaster Charter 77 Spokesman
"Václav Havel	Playwright; Charter 77 Spokesman; Cofounder of VONS
"Dr. Ladislav Lis	Attorney
"Václav Malý	Catholic Priest
"Dana Němcová	Psychologist
"Dr. Jiří Němec	Psychologist; Philosopher
"Petr Uhl	Engineer; Economist

"In the spring of 1979 these eleven men and women, all professionals and leaders in the human rights movement in Czechoslovakia, were arrested.

"The activists are members of Charter 77, the group formed in 1977 to evaluate the Czechoslovak government's fulfillment of its human rights obligations under domestic law, the Helsinki Accords, and other international agreements. All are also members of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS), a Charter subgroup, organized in 1978 to 'monitor the cases of people who have become victims of arbitrary actions by the police or judiciary.' The majority of the more than 1,000 Charter signers have been dismissed from their jobs or subjected to continuous harassment since the group's human rights manifesto was first published in 1977.

"The eleven were charged with 'subversion' under Article 98 of the

Czechoslovak Penal Code. On October 22, Otta Bednářová, Václav Benda, Jiří Dienstbier, Václav Havel, Dana Němcová and Petr Uhl were tried on this charge. On October 23, all six were found guilty and received varying sentences up to five years.

"Their detention by the Czechoslovak government, in violation of both the Helsinki Accords and the International Covenants, offers further proof of the pattern of human rights abuses which motivated the formation of the Charter two years ago.

"We — the members of P.E.N.-American Center and the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee — call for the release of these eleven men and women. We call on the government of Czechoslovakia to honor its international commitments by allowing its citizens to play an active role in the protection of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

"We call on the governments and citizens of all the Helsinki states to join with us in our efforts to obtain the release of these imprisoned Czechoslovak human rights activists."

Signed by:

Dr. Christian Anfinson	Don Fraser	Joseph Papp
Edward Albee	Dr. Alfred Freedman	Barbara Scott Preiskel
Dore Ashton	Dr. Willard Gaylin	Phillip Roth
Patricia Barnes	Allen Ginsberg	Kirkpatrick Sale
Donald Barthelme	Jack Greenberg	Oscar Schachter
Eric Bentley	John Gutfreund	Orville Schell
Robert L. Bernstein	Nat Hentoff	Alan Schwartz
Bruno Bitker	Lawrence Hughes	Richard Sennett
José Cabranes	Karen Kennerly	Harvey Shapiro
Earl Callen	Edward Kline	Jerome Shestack
John Carey	Winthrop Knowlton	Beverly Sills
Joseph Chaikin	Jerzy Kosiński	Susan Sontag
Dr. Kenneth Clark	Jeri Laber	Michael Sovern
Robert Crichton	John D. Leonard	Rose Styron
Adrian DeWind	Leon Lipson	William Styron
E. L. Doctorow	Bernard Malamud	Diana Trilling
Frances Farenthold	Robert McKay	Kurt Vonnegut
Bernard Fischman	Arthur Miller	Robert Penn Warren
Frances Fitzgerald	Toni Morrison	Glenn Watts
Paul Flory	Daniel Nathans	Michael Weller
Hon. Marvin Frankel	Aryeh Neier	Jerome Wiesner
	Osgood Nichols	

Declaration of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia

On October 22, 1979, after five months of imprisonment, the Czechoslovak communist regime brought before a Prague court six of the eleven imprisoned members of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted and signatories of Charter 77.

The regime of Gustáv Husák decided on this step in spite of numerous protests by foreign governments, organizations, political parties and personalities of the Western world who singularly declared the actions taken by the Prague regime against Czechoslovak dissidents as contrary to international conventions pertaining to human rights and especially as contrary to the Helsinki Agreement.

In the polemics concerning the meaning of the Helsinki Agreement which have taken place between the West and the East, the Prague regime has repeatedly stated that it is respecting human rights because the East guarantees to its citizens their so-called social rights, and has belittled the position taken by the Western countries stressing respect for traditional, political, cultural, and religious rights.

For obvious reasons the indictment the Husák government prepared against the six dissidents could not very well accuse them of calling for the observance of human rights. It had to consist of something sinister, namely, a fabricated story according to which the six were guilty of antistate activity because of their contacts with periodicals in the West and of becoming an instrument in the creation of a "counterrevolutionary fifth column under the protection of foreign patrons," including NATO. These were the words with which an editorial in Rudé právo, the official organ of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee, defined the guilt of the six on October 20.

By convicting them, the Prague regime has turned its back on the whole of international public opinion which since May of this year has been protesting against the unlawful attitude of the Czechoslovak government. The Prague regime is mistaken in its belief that its arrogant and irresponsible policy will stifle the opinion of the noncommunist world.

The Czechoslovak people back home and the Czechs and Slovaks who live in exile vehemently protest against this newest step of the Czechoslovak communist government and express their solidarity with the victims of Prague's socialist pseudo-justice. We are reminding the world that the Czechoslovak communist government, by deciding to bring the dissidents to trial, has in fact condemned the Helsinki Agreement.

#### COUNCIL'S THANKS TO THE POPE

The Council of Free Czechoslovakia has sent the following letter to Msgr. Giovanni Cheli, permanent observer of the Holy See at the United Nations:

"The Council of Free Czechoslovakia, the umbrella political organ of Czechoslovak exiles, is taking the liberty of asking you to convey to His Holiness Pope John Paul II the gratitude of Czechs and Slovaks in Czechoslovakia and in exile for his straightforward message concerning respect for human rights and human dignity when he delivered his historic address before the U.N. General Assembly. The Pope's words will give strength to all who are fighting for these rights and especially to all those who are being persecuted for their support for this just cause."