

CZECHOSLOVAK NEWSLETTER

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AFTERMATH OF THE OCTOBER ACTIVISTS' TRIAL

"We know of no human state where a publicly declared intention to abide by the constitution is taken a priori to be an intention to overthrow the system."

(Charter 77 Letter to
President Gustáv Husák)

The absurdity of the legal procedures by which six human rights activists were brought to trial in Prague in October continues to draw fire. The Charter 77 letter, quoted above, to Gustáv Husák, president of Czechoslovakia and secretary general of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, continues: "There is no example in the world of organs of government accusing someone of antistate activity because he first sent a complaint to them."

The six convicted members of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS) were also accused of the crime of rendering material aid to the victimized. On this the letter comments: "We know of no civilized country where an intention to defend those unjustly prosecuted is held to be a misdemeanor, a confession of guilt." It is as though the Husák regime wished to exclude itself

from the community of civilized nations and withdraw into isolation to protect itself from the international obloquy against its policy of violating its own laws and international law as well.

The Prague government, according to unofficial reports, had proposed a joint action against human rights activists to the other Soviet-dominated states of Eastern Europe, but was rebuffed by Hungary, Poland and Rumania. János Kádár, first secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, even contemplated raising diplomatic objections in Prague, it was said. (He had received a protest against the Prague trial, signed by 184 Hungarian intellectuals [Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 11, p. 4].) Only Moscow gave Husák its full backing, but to little effect. The Czechoslovak party Central Committee's daily Rudé právo on November 7 reprinted an article from the Soviet party Central Committee's daily Pravda, attacking Western reaction to the trial. "Every state has its own laws that have to be observed," and outside criticism of the trial must be regarded as interference in Czechoslovak domestic affairs, it carped.

The governments in Moscow and Prague seemed stunned by the vehemence and the extent of international reaction and that of East European dissidents. They were particularly stung by Washington's statement that the trial was a provocation against the community of civilized nations. Resentment was expressed that not only the Western media but also the Western governments had responded negatively to the trial. Pravda commented that it was "incomprehensible that the anti-Czechoslovak campaign has been joined by certain Western governments that are planning sanctions against the country." It professed to be disturbed that "the campaign is being helped by some left-wing forces in the capitalist countries," without daring to admit that those forces included most West European communist parties, not least those of Italy, France, Spain and Britain.

Rudé právo reported on November 6 that Italy's Red Brigades were said to have threatened terrorist action against "Czechoslovak citizens, for example, in Italy, West Germany, Great Britain, France and Switzerland." (No mention, of course, was made of the fact that the Red Brigades had been given arms and training by official Czechoslovak bodies [Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. III, No. 5, p. 1].) On November 8 Rudé právo claimed that Italian terrorists had threatened Czechoslovak diplomats as part of a campaign by the United States and other NATO countries: "Italian right-wing circles are well aware that the activities of the terrorist band are under the control of the [American] Central Intelligence Agency, but there is more to it. . . . These actions completely unmask the mechanism of the dangerous 'games' played by the West's reactionary forces. With some of their West European partners, militaristic circles in the USA are now preparing a large-scale assault against détente. With their plans to instal new American medium-range missiles in certain West European countries, they would like to reverse the process of détente and resume full-scale arming."

The absurdity of Czechoslovak communists' thinking was well illustrated by the continuation of the article. "The attacks on Czechoslovakia made last week by the reactionary psychological-warfare centers of the West, with the sanction even of some government authorities, are a stimulus to the darkest forces in their social systems — the terrorist organizations. . . . The slanderous statements by official bourgeois spokesmen are a gross interference in our domestic affairs and violate the principles of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference [on Security and

Cooperation in Europe]. . . . Even more disgusting is the allegation that terrorism against the socialist countries is not terror but the 'assertion' of human rights."

Nové slovo, the ideological weekly of the Slovak Communist Party, pretended on November 1 that the West would not have reacted so forcefully were it not for the influence of émigrés. "Some Czechoslovak émigrés, enemies of our country and of socialism in general, use and abuse everything. . . . They consider themselves experts on our country and especially on the work of our government and society. They have to give service to the masters who feed them. Their interpretation of freedom and law is based on the ideology of bourgeois democracy. [They are] those who left their country after February 1948 and particularly the émigrés who left after August 1968, after their struggle for a so-called democratic model of socialism had been defeated. . . . They subscribe to theories of freedom that even permit criticism of the president."

Nettled by Western reaction, the communist government of Czechoslovakia has countered with ridiculous allegations that the Red Brigades are tools of the CIA, that "two shots have been fired at a Czechoslovak diplomat in Washington" (the US State Department confirmed that on November 8 pranksters in a random act of hooliganism had fired BB pellets at a car driven by a Czechoslovak assistant military attaché), that the West was guilty of "violations of the Helsinki Accords," and even the unthinkable — that it permitted criticism of a head of state.

WESTERN REACTION TO THE TRIAL

(Continued from Vol. IV, No. 11)

The United States

The Council of Free Czechoslovakia has received additional letters from Senators Frank Church, Edward M. Kennedy and Charles H. Percy, and Representative Edward J. Derwinski.

Senator Church, chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, wrote: "A little more than a year from now, the Helsinki Accord signatories will be meeting for the second review of progress toward the goals set out in the [Helsinki] Final Act. Many of us hope that the discussions in Madrid will be constructive. . . . Confidence, however, cannot be strengthened in one area of the Helsinki undertakings — the military sphere — when it is being continually undermined in political matters. . . . Czechoslovakia's action this autumn undercut that confidence as they demolish the hopes that blossomed in that country eleven years ago during the Prague spring. Czechoslovakia and its patron, the Soviet Union, which also systematically flouts its Helsinki pledges, now face a choice as to the atmosphere they want to create for the Madrid meeting."

Senator Kennedy noted: "The sham trial and the appalling sentences of up to five years' imprisonment are harsh commentary on a country that once produced such great democrats as [Tomáš G.] Masaryk and [Eduard] Beneš."

Congressman Derwinski of the House Subcommittee on International Relations has inserted the Council of Free Czechoslovakia's October statement (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 9/10, p. 10 f) into the Congressional Record. In an associated statement of his own, he said: "We must, therefore, strongly protest this latest example of Communist repression. In so doing, we shall also -- at the Council of Free Czechoslovakia -- remind the world that the Czechoslovak Communist Government, by deciding to bring the dissidents to trial, has in fact condemned the Helsinki agreement."

The Prague trial has also been condemned by Lane Kirkland, newly elected head of the American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations.

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA on November 8 unanimously adopted a resolution "expressing concern for prisoners of conscience in the USSR and Czechoslovakia." It appealed to the United States government "to convey this concern to the governments of the USSR and Czechoslovakia to assure the protection of their human rights."

Western Europe

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher deplored the Prague verdict and said her government was examining what action it might take in its relations with Prague. This message was also conveyed to Vlastimil Ehrenberger, the Czechoslovak minister of fuel and power, who was visiting London at the end of October. The British opposition Labour Party called for the creation of an international fact-finding committee to investigate human rights in Czechoslovakia.

The governments of the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden and West Germany, the European Parliament, and European political parties of all hues joined various human rights groups in deploring the trials.

A petition initiated by a member of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia was sent to Danish Prime Minister Anker Joergensen, who promised to take the matter further with the Czechoslovak government. The European Movement at its meeting in Madrid adopted a resolution censuring the violation of human rights in Czechoslovakia. The resolution was sponsored by the Spanish delegation, which represented all Spain's political parties, including the communists.

A protest letter signed by 154 prominent Austrian politicians and cultural and scientific figures was sent to President Husák. Vienna's Burgtheater presented a special program to express its sympathy with the Czech playwright Václav Havel, one of the six condemned men. Selections from Havel's plays were read by Czech playwright Pavel Kohout, recently deprived on his Czechoslovak citizenship (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 9/10, p. 1 f), and by Austrian actors. A similar event was later held in Munich, also attended by Kohout.

The International Metalworkers' Union, meeting in Geneva, called the Prague trial "a severe blow to Western unions supporting détente."

No important West European news medium (newspaper, magazine, radio or

television) failed to deplore the trial. Under the headline "What Prague's Show Trial Showed," The Economist of London on October 27 declared: "Above all it showed that after years of repression the spirit of democratic reform still lives — and even lives with hope." Le Monde of Paris wrote on October 25: "More than a quarter of a century after Stalin's death, sixteen years after the rehabilitation of Rudolf Slánský, executed in 1952, and of Gustáv Husák, now the party chief, eleven years after the crushing of the Prague spring, people are still being arrested and convicted in Czechoslovakia for the sole reason that they exercise the civil rights guaranteed to them by the constitution."

HUMAN RIGHTS MESSAGE FROM MOSCOW

Andrey Sakharov and fellow human rights activists in Moscow have issued a call, made public at the end of November, to Polish and Czechoslovak groups to unify their struggle for human rights. According to reports from Vienna, Charter 77 spokesmen have already replied to them that they accept the principles of cooperation outlined in the plea. The call from Moscow said:

"In sending you this letter, we hope it will be the beginning of more regular contacts and of integration of our efforts in the struggle for human rights in Poland, Czechoslovakia and the USSR. We hope that, in getting better acquainted through our letters, proclamations, documents and articles, we shall come to realize that we share common views and that our work is based on principles that stand for the need to observe human rights at all times and in all places without regard for ethnic and state boundaries. You can learn our views best from the Khronika tekushchikh sobytiy [Chronicle of Current Events], Informatsionnyy byulleten' [Information Bulletin] of the Working Commission for the Investigation of Abuses of Psychiatry for Political Purposes, the documents of the Committee for the Defense of Believers, and the documents of the Moscow Group to Monitor the Helsinki Agreement in the USSR.

"Basic principles are to be found in Document No. 69 of the Moscow Helsinki Group, which was submitted for signature in the USSR as well as elsewhere, and in a joint statement of the Soviet and American groups monitoring implementation of the Helsinki Accords. The latest document of the latter calls on all groups defending human rights in other countries whose governments signed the Final Act to subscribe to the joint statement.

"At the same time we believe it useful to come forward with a joint statement by human rights defenders in Poland, Czechoslovakia and the USSR, and to point out in this statement that a common approach to human rights exists in our countries.

"Considering the specific relationship that exists between the Soviet Union on one hand and Poland and Czechoslovakia on the other,

we have an obligation to fight in common against abuses of human rights in our countries.

"We also believe it is natural for all of us to come forward in behalf of human rights activists persecuted anywhere."

CZECHOSLOVAK-AMERICAN RELATIONS AT A LOW EBB

A State Department spokesman in Washington has described the trial of human rights activists in Prague as a provocation to the community of civilized nations.

Students of Czechoslovak-American relations since World War II cannot escape the impression that the government in Prague does not want to maintain normal diplomatic relations with the United States. Incomprehensibly, every time there is a chance for improved relations, Prague comes up with some new difficulty.

Relations have always been based on an affinity or even identity between the philosophical foundations of the democratic system common to both nations. Lively cultural and economic relations have always flourished. The people of Czechoslovakia resent the present state of affairs as humiliating, particularly during the current so-called Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship. Apart from Albania, no other East European state has worse relations with Washington than Czechoslovakia.

Agreement has been eluded on matters long ago resolved with all the other East European states, such as compensation for the nationalization of the property of American citizens. Commercial relations remain at a minimum, while Poland, Hungary and Rumania enjoy most-favored-nation status, and even Bulgaria and East Germany have shown greater interest in improving them than has Czechoslovakia. All these other states have managed to come to some sort of modus vivendi with Washington, proof that the fault lies in Prague, not Washington.

The New York Times observed on November 24 that "nowhere in Eastern Europe is Moscow's dominance more keenly felt" than in Czechoslovakia. The system has stripped the Czechoslovak population of any power to determine its government's policy, so that the former cannot be held to blame for the current situation. The Czechs and Slovaks have always admired the United States, with which they have traditionally maintained close ties. Czechs and Slovaks at home as well as abroad condemn the policies of President Gustáv Husák's neo-Stalinist regime. It harms Czechoslovakia and its economy, and burdens its future with a heavy mortgage.

CRACKDOWN ON CATHOLIC LITERATURE

The Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted on September 20 issued its communiqué 135, which describes the persecution of Catholics in

Czechoslovakia. The following is the abridged text.

With a mandate from the Prosecutor General dated August 28, 1979, State Security organs launched a drive on September 10 against active Catholics and independent Catholic literature in Prague, Brno, Olomouc and elsewhere.

According to available information, the following have been detained: Josef Adámek, retired, of Olomouc; František Lízna, practicing priest without a state license, signer of Charter 77, of Olomouc; Jan Krumholc, worker, of Radíkov, near Olomouc; Josef Vlček, priest, of Olomouc; and Rudolf Šmahel, priest, of Uherské Hradiště. They were indicted under Article 118, Section 1, of the Penal Code against unlawful business activity for allegedly copying and distributing religious literature. At Krumholc's apartment, for instance, more than 300 copies of History of the Roman Catholic Church in Bohemia and Moravia were confiscated, along with religious pictures and photographs, and copying equipment and material. The search took place in the absence of the apartment tenant, who was being held in detention at the time. Besides religious literature, 6,000 crowns were seized from Adámek.

Jan Krumholc and his wife were imprisoned for similar activities in the 1950s, serving eight and eleven years respectively. They are presently taking care of two adopted children, aged four and five. Adámek, a father of twelve, is in failing health.

Also detained, but later released, were Dr. Josef Zvěřina, a signer of Charter 77, and Jiří Kaplan, both of Prague; Dr. Mečislav Rázek of Brno; Josef Brtník of Sivice, near Brno; Svatopluk Krumholc of Olomouc; and Dr. Silvo Krčméry of Bratislava. All are expected to be brought to trial.

The document names eight other persons whose apartments were searched, and reports that an even larger number were interrogated. It also lists the names of the State Security officers involved in the crackdown.

APPEAL TO POPE JOHN PAUL II

The Vatican received a letter in early November addressed to Pope John Paul II by 350 Czechoslovak Catholics complaining of violations of religious freedom. The letter said the church and believers in Czechoslovakia were suffering, and asked the pontiff to speak out about the situation. It claimed that the state was abridging religious rights, and reported that in September many Catholic priests and laymen had had their homes searched and been detained for questioning. The police, it said, had confiscated religious literature, including copies of last March's papal encyclical Redemptor hominis.

Tribuna, the Czechoslovak party Central Committee's ideological and political weekly, on November 29 denounced the report of "invented cases of oppression of church believers in Czechoslovakia," and accused "reactionary circles" in the

Vatican of stepping up their anticommunist campaigns abroad by their support of Charter 77. Tribuna denied that anyone in Czechoslovakia was infringing the freedom of believers or the right of churches to hold services.

ANOTHER WRITER STRIPPED OF CITIZENSHIP

The Czech writer Milan Kundera, who has been teaching since 1975 at the University of Rennes in Brittany, France, received a letter on November 22 from the Czechoslovak ministry of the interior, informing him that he has been stripped of his Czechoslovak citizenship. Kundera, the author of a number of novels that have been translated into several languages but are banned in Czechoslovakia, recently gave interviews to certain French magazines and newspapers, in particular the left-wing weekly, Le Nouvel Observateur, and the daily, Le Monde. He deplored the cultural situation in Czechoslovakia and underscored his belief that his country has deep-rooted ties with Western Europe, not the East. Kundera was the 1973 winner of France's Médicis Prize, awarded for the best avant-garde prose writing whose author has not gained the renown his talent deserves, for his novel Život je jinde, published in English in 1974 by Alfred A. Knopf under the title Life Is Elsewhere.