

CZECHOSLOVAK NEWSLETTER

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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| Milan R. Štefánik's Centenary | p. 1 |
| Preparations for Madrid | p. 2 |
| The 34th Comecon Council Session | p. 4 |
| Charter 77 Response to the I.L.O. | p. 5 |
| "Love Thy Troubled Country" | p. 7 |
| William Saroyan in Prague | p. 7 |
| News from Normalized Czechoslovakia | p. 8 |

MILAN R. ŠTEFÁNIK'S CENTENARY

July 21 was the hundredth anniversary of the birth of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Slovak patriot, Czechoslovak statesman, and cofounder with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Štefánik was born in the village of Košariská in West Slovakia, near the Moravian border, in an area that contributed much to the history of the Slovak nation in its struggle against the magyarizing efforts of the Hungarian government in Budapest. He studied at the Technological University of Prague, where he became a political disciple of Professor Masaryk. There with other young Slovak patriots (Pavol Blaho, Vavro Šrobár, Milan Hodža, and Anton Štefánek among others) he formed a group of activists around the magazine Hlas (The Voice). Their goal was to stimulate Slovak forces and literally save the Slovaks as a nation.

After graduation Štefánik went to Paris to work with the French astronomers Camille Flammarion and Jules Janssen. He worked at the Meudon observatory, led astronomical expeditions up Mont Blanc, went to Tahiti to observe Halley's comet, and visited astronomical centers in Washington DC, and Wisconsin. The author of several papers published in French scientific journals, he established a considerable reputation as an astronomer.

A naturalized French citizen, he volunteered for service in the French army after the outbreak of World War I because his fragile health would not allow him to be drafted. He joined Masaryk, Eduard Beneš and other Czechs in the Czechoslovak resistance movement, the aim of which was to secure the establishment of an independent state for the Czechs and Slovaks. In due course he became the Slovak deputy chairman of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris, headed by Masaryk. He publicized the Czecho-Slovak cause in

the international arena, and helped to organize the Czechoslovak army abroad, the Czechoslovak Legions, which fought against the Central Powers in France and Italy, and the Bolsheviks in Russia. By recognizing Masaryk as the leader of the movement, Štefánik succeeded in unifying the Czechs' and Slovaks' resistance abroad against the separatist efforts of some Czechs, notably the protsarist Josef Dürich, and radical Slovaks, who opposed the formation of a common state with the Czechs. He was instrumental in securing the Allies' recognition of the Czechoslovak Legions as an Allied combat force.

Štefánik died in an airplane crash outside the Slovak capital of Bratislava on May 4, 1919, as he was returning from Italy to his liberated country as its minister of war.

In recognition of his tireless work for his new country, a grateful nation erected a monument to him on Bradlo, the hill that rose above his birthplace, where every year until 1938 young Slovaks would gather to honor his ideals of cooperation between the two equal nations of Czechs and Slovaks. The communist government banned these celebrations because of Štefánik's staunchly anticommunist stand. He had told a meeting of Czechoslovak legionaries in Russia that Bolshevism was the negation of creative force and appealed to them to fight against it.

In 1968, during the period of liberalization, young people in Slovakia constrained Alexander Dubček's government to permit the resumption of the celebrations at Bradlo and to restore Štefánik to his rightful place in history. Rehabilitation was demanded for his legionaries, who had fought for the Czechoslovak cause in World War I.

The Warsaw Pact invasion put paid to the process of democratization, and the cofounder of the republic became an unperson once more. The hundredth anniversary of Štefánik's birth went unmarked in Slovakia and throughout Czechoslovakia. But everywhere in the free world Czechs and Slovaks remember the great statesman. T. G. Masaryk and M. R. Štefánik remain the symbol of the unity of Czechoslovak statehood, which will outlast communist oppression.

PREPARATIONS FOR MADRID

Violations of the provisions of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe are commonplace in Czechoslovakia. Free communication with relatives and friends in the West is virtually impossible. The receipt of books and magazines, including religious publications, is strictly censored — and censored. Foreign journalists are denied free access to the country. Those who dare to challenge the regime's violations of its own laws are promptly jailed. British professors, invited to lecture on classical philosophy at private meetings, have been interrogated and deported. Only those cultural, scientific and social contacts directly organized and controlled by the regime are tolerated.

Aware of criticism, Prague has begun to prepare its answers for the follow-up review conference due to open in Madrid on November 11. In an article in the Bratislava weekly Nové slovo [The New Word], published by the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party, Deputy Foreign Minister Miloš Vejvoda explained on July 3 how Czechoslovakia has

been implementing the Final Act in cultural and scientific relations. "We have exchange and cooperation in all spheres of culture, from music, literature, fine arts and theater to film, television, and exhibitions. . . . They are all based on agreements. . . . Czechoslovakia presently has 67 cultural agreements with various countries, including 23 agreements and two cultural exchanges with signatories of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Most recently, agreements have been concluded on our initiative with Portugal, Spain, West Germany, Malta, Iceland, and elsewhere."

Vejvoda complained unhappily, however, about the United States and Canada: "In spite of enduring efforts, it has been impossible to put cultural and scientific agreements into effect with all the signatories of the Final Act. Our proposals have been left unanswered by Canada and the United States, despite the fact that a Czechoslovak-American cultural agreement was signed in 1976."

The minister lauded controlled cultural contacts because they avoid the dangers of "spontaneity" and "misuse": "The agreements we have been seeking are of great significance from the point of view of reciprocity and planning, but they also stimulate the spirit of Helsinki by eliminating casual contacts, spontaneity, and woolly situations that are open to misuse."

The most successful events, according to Vevjoda, have been tours by philharmonic orchestras, participation in various festivals, and international book fairs, but he expressed disappointment in international cooperation in the cinema, especially the Cannes Film Festival. What he failed to mention was that "normalization" in the Czechoslovak film industry after the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion had purged all the leading figures in the industry and reintroduced into motion pictures the crudest form of "socialist realism."

Vejvoda boasted about how many official Czechoslovak delegations had taken part in European cultural and scientific events, but he overlooked the fact that thousands of Czechoslovakia's best-qualified cultural and scientific workers have been forbidden to work in their professional fields or to travel abroad. He did not mention the first-rate Czech authors who can only publish underground, in exile publishing houses, or in Western translations. He did, however, frankly admit the real purpose of organized and controlled cooperation: "Our cultural relations and the exchange of cultural values and people have a profound political significance. The right atmosphere has to be created to foster détente in political and military areas as well. Cultural exchanges . . . are an integral part of our foreign policy. . . . Our communist party sees to it that such activities are well balanced, touch every walk of life, and are streamlined in the spirit of socialism and real humanism."

The minister concluded: "On the eve of Madrid our balance sheet is rich, active, and full of creative work, and is replete with our efforts to meet the obligations we undertook at the Helsinki conference. Yet this would not be enough alone. Our cultural exchanges are a permanent part of the policy of our socialist state because they serve the noble ideals that socialism is gradually bringing into effect."

THE 34th COMECON COUNCIL SESSION

The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) held its thirty-fourth meeting in Prague on June 17-19. All ten members (Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, Rumania, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam) sent delegations headed by their prime ministers, except Cuba whose representation was led by First Vice-President and Deputy Prime Minister Raúl Castro. Yugoslavia, an associate member, was represented as a "limited participant," and Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen all sent observers. The session was chaired by the prime minister of the host country, Lubomír Štrougal.

The agenda included three main items: A report, presented by Rudolf Rohlíček, chairman of the Comecon Executive Committee and Czechoslovakia's permanent delegate, on Comecon activities since the thirty-third session and the implementation of measures to improve cooperation among members; a report by Nikolay Baibakov, chairman of the Comecon Committee for Cooperation in Planning and Soviet minister of planning, on the coordination of economic plans during the period 1981-1985, the implementation of long-term programs, and future plans; and a report delivered by Nikolay Fadeyev, secretary general of Comecon, on the next council session.

The final communiqué issued at the end of the meeting said: "The delegations of the Comecon states reaffirmed their allegiance to the principles and provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, and the need for an active and thorough preparation of a constructive agenda for the Madrid conference . . . to promote détente and security on the European continent [and] to develop cooperation among the European countries in all areas on a basis of equality." According to a report published in Rudé právo, the daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, on June 20, the communiqué said about matters of economy: "The coordination of planning for the next five-year plans and even longer periods is in its final stage. Preliminary results have shown that a number of complex problems of economic and scientific-technical cooperation have essentially been solved. This has set the conditions for member states' plans for social and economic development in their next five-year plans. It has been agreed that national planning organs and the Comecon Committee for Cooperation in Planning should set up machinery to coordinate plans for the fuel, raw-material, energy, machinery and industrial-equipment sectors, increase the volume of mutual trade, and improve conditions for international transportation."

The communiqué was phrased in the predictable tones of optimism to convey the impression that a unanimous consensus was reached on the key aim of "socialist integration," but the session went far from smoothly. All the member states suffer from serious economic problems, particularly in the supply of energy and raw materials, and they are not all overly enthusiastic about "socialist integration." On the latter point, they divide into two groups. The more developed states, such as Czechoslovakia and East Germany, and to some extent Rumania also, regard integration as a way to solve their energy and raw-material problems. Others prefer bilateral agreements. The Soviet Union stands between the two. Until recently Moscow was an advocate of "socialist integration," because it provided it with profitable deliveries of the industrial equipment it badly needs. Now that demands to share energy and raw materials have been voiced, for instance, by Rumanian Prime Minister Ilie Verdeț, and the increasing prices of raw materials and crude oil have been criticized, as they were by the Czechoslovak delegation, Moscow has been

having second thoughts.

Czechoslovakia has been the staunchest advocate of "socialist integration" since Comecon was established. One reason for this was the role Moscow assigned Czechoslovakia as a supplier of industrial equipment to the other members, including equipment for nuclear plants. To fulfill this role, the structure of Czechoslovakia's industry was changed considerably. Socialist integration could help to satisfy Czechoslovakia's growing consumption of energy and materials by its machinery industry. As Svět hospodářství, No. 8, a thrice-weekly economic news bulletin put out by ČTK, the Czechoslovak news agency, put it in January 1980: "The development of international socialist economic integration remains the focus of interest for the fraternal communist and workers' parties and is of primordial interest to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia."

The Czechoslovak party and government had hoped that the latest session of Comecon would agree on concrete measures to coordinate economic plans and would assert the need to integrate energy supplies. The final communiqué, however, simply stated: "The further coordination of economic plans has reached its final stage." The session approved the work of the Executive Committee since the previous meeting, expressed satisfaction at the implementation of agreements "concluded during meetings between leading representatives of fraternal parties and member states," and "focused on complex issues for the improvement of future cooperation and the development of socialist economic integration."

The Czechoslovak and Rumanian delegations were less than satisfied. There were contradictory reports of a critical speech made by Prime Minister Štrougal. In one version the critical parts of it were removed from radio, television and press reports. Another version maintained that he had to delete the sensitive parts of the speech before he delivered it. Either way, it is safe to say, as the Yugoslav weekly NIN reported, the speeches of both Štrougal and Verdeț indicated that no agreement was reached on coordination.

The Soviet Union has its own view of socialist economic integration. Its aim is to make the Comecon member states dependent on Soviet resources and to establish multinational enterprises of a sort on Soviet territory. They are being set up with capital and labor supplied by the other Comecon members. The most important of those already under construction are the Soyuz pipeline (with 10 percent Czechoslovak participation), an asbestos plant (with three percent Czechoslovak participation), and a 750-kilovolt power line from Vinnitsa in the Ukraine to Hungary (with 10 percent Czechoslovak participation). Under special agreements plans have been made to construct iron-ore processing plants and a ferroalloy industry with Czechoslovak participation. The capital investment in these projects earns only two percent interest if it is repaid with products from them. And Soviet manipulation of their prices to a level below the world prices results in a positive benefit to the Soviet Union itself.

The evidence is that the Prague session of Comecon was beset by serious economic problems that went unsolved and are likely to increase rather than diminish in the future.

CHARTER 77 RESPONSE TO THE I.L.O.

The June 12 issue of Informace o Chartě 77 published the Czechoslovak human-rights

movement's response to the stand of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on human rights in Czechoslovakia (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. V, No. 6 [June 1980], p. 3). An abridged version follows:

We think it is again necessary to point out the glaring contradiction between ILO Convention 111 (the International Convention on Discrimination in Employment) and the practice that has obtained for many years in Czechoslovakia. Discrimination has not been directed against Charter 77 members alone; it affects a large number of Czechoslovak citizens. Tens of thousands of people have been fired for political reasons. Their opportunities to find employment in their professional fields are very limited.

There is at present a surplus of job openings in Czechoslovakia, but those regarded as "politically unreliable" may not fill them. They are a de facto ban on employment. It extends, for instance, to teaching openings at all levels, including kindergarten, to jobs in science, research, culture, the arts, even libraries, and to work in government and other public offices even at the lowest level. The equality guaranteed by the constitution and Convention 111 has been to all practical purposes eliminated. Guidelines for the hiring of staff are internal instructions not revealed to the public at large, and thus impossible to challenge in the courts. Nevertheless, they are the criteria that job applicants must meet. In "help wanted" advertisements, they are masked by the phrase "cadre conditions required." These "cadre conditions" are not set by law because they violate the constitution, the Labor Code, and Convention 111. The conditions concern applicants' political profiles, not their qualifications. Certain jobs can be filled only by party members; applicants are screened by party cells. If an applicant has been purged from party membership, even blue-collar jobs are often closed to him, lest he infect his fellow workers.

Job discrimination against those who have signed or sympathize with Charter 77, because they have asked the authorities to abide by the constitution and the law, is a patent violation of Convention 111. The Czechoslovak authorities have never attempted to answer why law-abiding citizens should be regarded as a threat to the security of the state. The Czechoslovak courts, which have upheld this attitude, violate every facet of the Czechoslovak legal system. Charter members and their sympathizers are deprived by the courts of any legal protection, and are denied compensation for unlawful termination of employment.

Under Article 3/c of Convention 111, Czechoslovakia undertook to annul any law or administrative measure or practice incompatible with the prohibition of job discrimination. It is thus distressing that the Supreme Court has upheld lower court decisions on the termination of employment which render meaningless the 1975 amendment to the Labor Code (Article 46/1/e, Act 20, 1975). By obviously broad interpretation, any organization can terminate employment because of failure to fulfill requirements for which it is not liable. Such requirements are defined by no legal measure and may apply to civic involvement, and moral and political qualities. [Original emphasis] The Supreme Court's decisions run diametrically counter to Convention 111.

In April 1980 the Federal Assembly approved a declaration on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That document asserts that all union rights are respected in Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately, it totally disregards the violation of the labor and union rights of Charter 77 members and their sympathizers, who have lost their jobs or been otherwise persecuted. They have even been purged from their unions, and all their appeals have been denied.

The unions, which told the ILO in 1975 that they "will in future guarantee practice in accordance with the Convention," took an active part in the unlawful dismissal of Charter 77 members, and have refused any kind of assistance to those who have lost their jobs for political reasons.

Violations of Convention 111 have not been rectified. We are ready to provide the ILO with documents on the violation of the Convention and to offer every assistance in this matter. We again propose that a fact-finding commission be sent to Czechoslovakia to investigate the situation on the spot, and to prepare an objective report for the ILO on job discrimination against the signers of Charter 77.

"LOVE THY TROUBLED COUNTRY"

In an editorial on the "meaning of civic duty," Rudé právo, the daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, appealed to workers on May 26 to show "civic initiative" and to maintain discipline at work, even in the absence of material incentives.

The editorial was an attack on widespread apathy at a time when Czechoslovakia is having to face serious economic problems. "For 35 years our country has been free. The Hussite heritage and the peaceful melodies of Smetana's 'My Country' resound around the world," it began. In time of trouble, the communists always appeal to patriotism. "It is an honor to be a citizen of this country, haven of security and of good and industrious people." Then the editorial bit the bullet:

"There are those among us who do not deserve to be citizens of our socialist republic. . . . A true socialist citizen professes. . . profound moral values, discipline, and love of his homeland. . . . He demonstrates his active involvement and patriotic zeal. . . . Pro forma [party] members, mere statistics, are good for nothing. All the flag-waving bleeding hearts and super patriots, who hide after the first shot. . . what use are citizens who give way to rotten sentimentality, longing for the good old days, who succumb to moods of defeatism in the face of the difficulties that are an inevitable part of the coming Eighties? What use are the craven, seduced by the slanders uttered by our class enemies? Such behavior is unworthy of a citizen of our socialist homeland. It is unconscionable to retreat into one's own microscopic ego at a time when we are struggling against numerous shortcomings, to cultivate one's personal advantage and comfort within the shell of Charterist illusions, and not to fight for the great cause like a man."

WILLIAM SAROYAN IN PRAGUE

The June 12 issue of Informace o Chartě 77 contained the following account of a visit to Prague in May by the eminent American man of letters, William Saroyan. This is an abridged version:

The Prague press reported that "American writer William Saroyan had a discussion with students of the Philosophy Faculty" of Charles University, Prague. As always, his visit was shrouded in official impenetrability so that it was impossible for the man in the street to meet him. News spread by word of mouth, however, so that by 10 a.m. on Friday, May 30, some fifty persons had gathered in the university's Department of English. Only twelve first-year women students in the Czech-English course were selected to hear him, however, and brought surreptitiously to the fourth-floor office of Professor Vítězslav Ržounek, PhD, DrSc, chairman of the Department of Czech and Slovak Literature and prorector of Charles University. The 25 chairs available were occupied by the twelve women, several members of State Security, and some uninvited guests. State Security men guarded the doors, and others waited in the corridors.

Comrade Prorector opened the meeting, welcoming the distinguished guest to the oldest university in Central Europe, and explained that the ridiculously small attendance was due to examinations "that prevented students from coming." When Mr. Saroyan was told that he would have to communicate with the students through an interpreter, his disappointment was obvious. The university rector had forbidden teachers from the department to attend.

At this point the scene was disrupted by the uninvited guests. They demanded that all those outside in the corridor should be admitted. In spite of shouts of "Nobody's there" and "Be quiet," Mr. Saroyan showed his interest, and some thirty more people were allowed into the room. They had to stand, however, because Comrade Prorector refused to move the meeting to a larger auditorium. Mr. Saroyan noticed with satisfaction that the new arrivals knew English. A lively discussion ensued after the failure of Comrade Prorector's suggestion that "students would ask questions in English, which would be translated into Czech" — not because he could not speak English himself, but for the benefit of the students because "discussion is part of the educational process." He finally settled for simultaneous translation. When a questioner asked whether problems could be solved with good humor, Comrade Prorector exclaimed: "We also have a lot of comedies here in Czechoslovakia." To the blank stares, he explained monolingually: "Well, for instance, when we prepare a meeting with the girls, and someone turns it into something other than what we planned."

After the meeting was over at 11 a.m., Comrade Prorector went on the attack against those who had disrupted it. With the help of the State Security men, he tried to identify the interlopers and prevent them from leaving. Nor did he shy away from force. Only Mr. Saroyan's presence and fear of a scandal stopped anything worse from happening. And this on the campus of Central Europe's oldest university.

NEWS FROM NORMALIZED CZECHOSLOVAKIA

State versus Human Rights

Some 180 human-rights activists in Czechoslovakia have appealed for release of all the country's political prisoners, according to information reaching Vienna on July 17. The appeal was contained in letters sent to Federal Interior Minister Oldřich Obzina and

Prosecutor General Jan Fedes. The appeal specifically mentioned Jan Battek, a 53-year-old economist and Charter 77 spokesman, detained last month on charges of assaulting a policeman.

According to Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted Communiqué No. 185, published in the June 12 issue of Informace o Chartě 77, there are now "38 cases of persons sentenced to terms in prison for political reasons." The communiqué gave only "partial information," listing names, places of residence, and trial data, because "complete information is not available."

Destruction of the Environment

Czechoslovak dissidents regard a clean and healthy environment as an integral part of human rights. In a message from Czechoslovakia, "Bohemicus" wrote in Listy (Rome), No. 3-4, 1980: "Our lives really make no sense: we produce more to cover imports of raw materials and energy so that we may increase consumption. To import more, we have to produce more. . . . It is a squirrel in a treadmill. The wheel turns more and more, and is destroying the substance of our land. Specialists, for instance, say that our cooperation with Polish and East German power plants that burn coal has caused the virtual extinction of the forests of North Bohemia. . . . Let's hope it is an exaggeration. But we must not wait until it comes true. A growing number of children in North Bohemia are suffering from asthma and leukemia. The [Charter 77] civic movement is in no position to influence our government directly in order to alter the structure of our economy and utilize energy, raw materials, and the skill of our people more intelligently and economically. But it can help by supplying our fellow citizens with facts and information."

Religious Persecution

The public utterances of party officials give evidence of a stepped-up campaign against religious revival in Czechoslovakia (unofficial Bible-study circles, secretly ordained priests, private philosophy seminars). The Slovak press has given extensive coverage almost daily since March to the problem of dealing with religion. At the party congress in Prague, ideologist Vasil Bil'ak impressed on the delegates "the utmost urgency of atheist education." An atheist group formed at a high school in Trenčín displayed the following slogan: "There will never be prosperity until the last remaining priest has been struck down with the last remaining stone from the last remaining church."

Journalists' Mission

Pravda, the daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party, mused on the mission of a journalist on May 20: "The goal and meaning of socialist journalism is to mobilize people to fulfill their tasks, explain economic problems, show the way to solve them, help to develop workers' initiative to overcome every difficulty and shortcoming. . . . The task of journalism is, and always will be, to participate in the formulation of the socialist way of life and an activist approach to life."

The Quality of the Socialist Teacher

Pravda, the daily newspaper of the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party, wrote on June 24 under the headline "With Communist Conviction" about the quality of a socialist teacher: "Even a teacher is a citizen of the state. He may have religious beliefs. But the education of our young people is not a private matter, and it must be performed in the spirit of the principles of a socialist state, that is, in the spirit of a materialist world-view."

The article questioned whether a teacher without conviction could be an effective educator. "Hardly," it answered. "We are dissatisfied with the results of the teaching of social sciences. . . . Only those can be successful who take an uncompromising stand against all vestiges of bourgeois ideology and morality, including idealistic religious obscurantism."

Kramer vs. Kramer

The Czechoslovak media have launched an advertising campaign for Avery Corman's book Kramer vs. Kramer, which has already appeared in translated installments in the Czech Socialist Youth Union daily Mladá fronta. The newspaper described the novel as "a story of a divorced husband and the care of a child in an incomplete family. It is a probe into the life of contemporary society."

The reason for the novel's publication in Czechoslovakia is probably twofold. At a single stroke it shows some bad aspects of American life, and also — in an acceptable socialist realist way — it reflects the growing divorce rate and family problems that exist in Czechoslovakia as well.