

CZECHOSLOVAK NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE COUNCIL OF FREE CZECHOSLOVAKIA

420 East 71 Street, New York, NY 10021

Telephone: (212) 861-0916

Vol. V, No. 11 (50)

November 1980

CONTENTS

A Letter from Prison	p. 1
Czech Writers' Declaration	p. 2
Five-Year Plan Worries	p. 4
The Polish Events and Czechoslovakia	p. 6
Indictment of Prague's Religious Policies	p. 7
Council of Free Czechoslovakia Memorandum	p. 8

A LETTER FROM PRISON

Václav Benda, Jiří Dienstbier and Václav Havel, who are serving prison terms in Heřmanice jail near Ostrava [Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. V, No. 5 (May 1980)], have sent the following letter to delegates attending the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) review in Madrid:

"We turn to the delegations at the Madrid conference from a Czechoslovak prison to which we have been sentenced for our participation in the Czechoslovak Charter 77 human-rights movement and for our work in the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS), in the hope that the deliberations of the conference will indeed contribute to international détente, avert the danger of war, and help to create the conditions for the start of effective disarmament negotiations. For our part, we would like to emphasize that through our work, focused mainly on culture and science — areas that naturally link all social strata, all nations, all states —, we have tried to contribute to the preservation of peace and tranquillity in Europe and to peaceful understanding in a world that is in acute danger of self-destruction.

"Our part in the Charter 77 movement and our work in VONS were and are absolutely consonant with the Final Act of the Helsinki conference, which was precisely the inspiration of this human-rights movement, as the initial text of Charter 77 made clear. Like the delegates to the Helsinki conference, we too regard the Final Act as an indivisible whole, individual

points of which can be given neither more nor less weight than any other. We are convinced that real negotiating progress can be made only if the free exercise of human and civil rights is achieved. Political discrimination against the citizens of any country, curtailment of democratic principles, monopolization of information sources and the mass media, social discrimination, entrapment and persecution of nonconformists, suppression of religious liberties and freedom of conscience, subordination of the arts and sciences to utilitarian interpretations of ideological principles — these create tension in society and so reinforce the repressive functions of the state in the interests of those in power. Where police and other repressive bodies grow in strength and scope, representatives of the organs of state are insecure and incapable of overcoming their fears for their own positions of power. Then tension in international relations aids them under certain circumstances in justifying their repressive actions against all those who take their propaganda slogans seriously and try to turn them into deeds.

"Therefore in the interest of international détente we believe the negotiations at the Madrid conference should focus as much as possible on the issue of human and civil rights. We also think it would be in the interest of the goals of the conference for delegates to consider the possibility of establishing principles that would require the signatories of the Helsinki Final Act to submit lists of their political prisoners to a commission, to be set up at Madrid, that would investigate the legality of those prisoners' incarceration from the points of view of the imprisoning country's laws, the Final Act itself, and the international covenants on human and civil rights, and investigate the prisoners' living conditions and state of health.

"We are convinced that it is mainly through the democratization and humanization of the lives of the citizens of all countries that it will be possible to realize the goals toward which the negotiations in Madrid are directed."

CZECH WRITERS' DECLARATION

Czech writers who took part in the twelfth national convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Philadelphia November 5-8 issued a declaration on the "tragic situation" of their friends and colleagues in Czechoslovakia. The declaration, the full text of which follows, was read to more than 300 convention participants in the Sheraton Philadelphia Hotel on November 8.

"Several Czech writers now living in the West are attending the conference of the AAASS in Philadelphia. Having met for the first time since the Soviet ambush of Czechoslovakia in 1968 — in the city where the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights were conceived

— they are aware more strongly than ever of the tragic situation of their friends and colleagues in Czechoslovakia who, for the past eleven years, have known nothing but police harassment, imprisonment and persecution of all kinds and who have been deprived of their basic human right as writers by the [Gustáv] Husák regime: of their right to publish. Some, at the moment, linger in jail, notably Václav Havel, the internationally known playwright, whose plays have been produced many times also in this country (The Memorandum, The Garden Party, The Increased Difficulty of Concentration, etc.). The Czech writers who have signed this document would like to draw the attention of culturally minded Americans to his case especially. He was sentenced in a frame-up trial in the fall of 1979 to four and a half years in jail for anti-state activities which, in fact, consisted in his challenging the government to respect the Czechoslovak Constitution and the international agreements, such as the Helsinki agreement, which it had signed. After the sentence had been passed, Havel received a job offer from a well-known New York theatrical producer. Since he is a man of renown, and the winner of the Great Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1968, the Czech government offered to release him on condition that he leave the country. Havel was willing to accept if the charges against him and his five codefendants were dropped and they all were released — a condition which the Husák government would not meet since it would have lost face. It can, therefore, be said that Václav Havel remains in jail voluntarily, out of principle and out of loyalty to his less known coprisoners, a prisoner of conscience par excellence.

"However, he is not treated by the Czechoslovak authorities as a political prisoner but as a common criminal. He is assigned to hard labor which, we fear, exceeds his physical powers and, what is worse, he is not allowed to write anything, not even to take simple notes. We consider this a truly 'cruel and unusual punishment,' the horrendous nature of which can best be realized if it is compared to the conditions under which political prisoners were kept in fascist Italy. There, for instance, a man like Antonio Gramsci, the Marxist theoretician, was able to write numerous important political works in jail, as a prisoner of the Mussolini regime.

"We believe that only unceasing pressure from writers and other culturally minded persons in the West exerted against the government of Gustáv Husák can alleviate the bitter lot of Václav Havel and other Czechoslovak prisoners of conscience.

"[Signed] in Philadelphia, November 7, 1980."

Milan Kundera (Paris)
Pavel Kohout (Vienna)
A. J. Liehm (Philadelphia)

Arnošt Lustig (Washington DC)
Jelena Mašínová (Vienna)
Zdena Salivarová (Toronto)
Josef Škvorecký (Toronto)

FIVE-YEAR PLAN WORRIES

The prospects for meeting the targets of the current, sixth five-year plan and the draft of the seventh five-year plan were on the agenda of the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held in Prague October 7 and 8. Gustáv Husák, president of the republic and secretary general of the party, spoke to the committee about the political situation in Czechoslovakia, and Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal reported on the economic situation.

Husák said that the party had consolidated its ranks as a result of the purges that followed the downfall of former Secretary General Alexander Dubček in 1968. He noted, "the party has more than 1,500,000 members and candidate members. Almost 300,000 candidate members have become full members since the [party's] Fifteenth Congress." The most significant fact, he said, was that "during the last five years more than 60 percent of candidate members have been workers and more than 90 percent of them under 35 years of age. . . . Our socialist society is therefore entering the 1980s politically and economically strong and culturally advanced, with a firm place in the world." While Husák clearly wished to reassure Moscow that the Czechoslovak party has matters firmly under control and that the Polish events could not occur in Czechoslovakia, he had to concede that "it is impossible to fill all the gaps in our plans to improve our standard of living."

Well aware that people have learned to read between the lines, Husák explained: "In analyzing economic results, it is necessary to avoid extremes, neither giving in to carefree attitudes and unjustified optimism nor losing confidence in the future of socialist development in the light of present difficulties. . . ., especially the serious shortages in everyday life that have been the subject of many complaints. . . . Every care must be taken to supply the domestic market with consumer goods [and] to improve the economy's efficiency."

Economic efficiency was the watchword of Štrougal's report on "the state of preparations for the seventh five-year plan." Under that plan, he told committee members, "the national income will be one-fifth higher than at the start of the sixth five-year plan," and "the people's cash income will increase by 23 percent. Average wages will reach 2,643 crowns and so will be 15 percent higher than in 1975." Farm output will go up by nine percent. He noted: "At present one farm worker feeds roughly 15 people, while ten years ago he fed only twelve." [In the United States and Canada a farm worker produces enough for at least 55 persons. Ed.] To allay any apprehension, he assured committee members that price adjustments would affect only potatoes, chocolate, wine and liquor. He commended the fact that under the new plan 640,000 apartment units would be built, some 25,000 more than under the current plan, a not very marked improvement.

After more plaudits for the "further achievements" of the socialist economy, Štrougal got down to brass tacks with the reasons for present "unsatisfactory results." "We have not managed to improve our trade balance with the capitalist states," he acknowledged. "Our ideas for our foreign economic relations have proved to be unworkable. . . . In the future we shall have to apply intensity growth factors better because we do not want our economy to stagnate nor to live

at the expense of future generations."

The prime minister mentioned four ways to strengthen Czechoslovakia's sagging economy. The first, he said, was to make better use of raw materials, energy, equipment, and labor. "Our raw-material and energy base is very limited. [Under the seventh five-year plan] our imports of raw materials and fuels as well as electric power from the socialist states will remain roughly on the same level as the sixth five-year plan. Our exports will have to pay for our imports from the capitalist countries. The draft directives for the next five-year plan are very exigent in this regard. This is true not only for raw materials and fuels, but also for foodstuffs and agricultural materials." The growth of gross national product had slowed, he said, because of poor management and use of raw materials. "Our rate of energy consumption in industry is 20-50 percent higher than in other developed industrial economies," that is, the developed capitalist countries. As a result of absenteeism, fluctuations in manpower supply and vacation time, 287,000 workers a day were off their jobs. "The labor force is expected to increase by only 150,000 workers during the next five-year plan, compared with 280,000 under the sixth plan. But in terms of labor productivity, there is no shortage of labor in our country in comparison with other developed countries."

He then turned to "improving efficiency by speeding up scientific progress." Štrougal said that only about one-fifth of Czechoslovakia's industrial products met the quality standards required on world markets. He urged the purchase of foreign licenses and better use of inventions and suggestions for improvements, some 3,000 of which are registered every year. He complained that the "innovation cycle," which is becoming steadily shorter in the world, had not changed during the sixth five-year plan and was still as long as in other developed countries.

A third way to improve Czechoslovakia's economy was better capital investment, he said. "Party and governments officials complain constantly about unfinished projects. . . . This is intolerable," he declared. Štrougal remarked that many "components" had to be imported on credit and paid for by exporting commodities originally destined for the home market. Under the seventh five-year plan, "We estimate that the growth rate for capital investment will be only two percent a year at most. This is a substantial change, for the increment was 4.5 percent under the sixth five-year plan, and six percent under the fifth five-year plan. . . . It will be necessary to eliminate more labor units than will be created by new capital investments -- the opposite of what is presently happening, unfortunately."

"It will be necessary to increase our export capacity and enlarge our participation in socialist economic integration" as a fourth way of helping the Czechoslovak economy. "Under the seventh five-year plan," Štrougal declared, "trade with the socialist countries will be roughly balanced, while with the nonsocialist countries it will remain passive." He called for an increase in trade with the Comecon states. "Generally speaking, imports of raw materials, technology, foodstuffs and consumer goods depend on our export capability, but we have to bear in mind our present indebtedness to the nonsocialist countries. . . . We must export more [but] our exports of consumer goods have to be cut back."

Stubborn adherence to the Soviet style of centralized command planning and the

lack of incentives for either workers or the enterprises will be at the root of the difficulties Czechoslovakia will face in the 1980s. Both Husák and Štrougal acknowledged present shortcomings explicitly, and implicitly warned of harder times ahead. The purpose of what they said was to prepare Czechoslovakia's population for a lower supply of consumer goods on the market and a reduction in the growth of "social consumption."

THE POLISH EVENTS AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Together with East Germany, Czechoslovakia is in the forefront of the critics of the recent events in Poland. Western commentators have advanced various theories to account for this shrillness. One is that Moscow has assigned the two archloyalists as proxies to pressure or intimidate Poland from without in order to show that concern is not confined to the Soviet Union, which is quite happy to have others do its dirty work. Without denying the first theory, a second holds that the message from East Berlin and Prague is aimed as much at their domestic audiences as abroad. Both countries contain the ingredients of what has ailed Poland.

President Gustáv Husák told the eighteenth session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Rudé právo [Red Right], the committee's main daily newspaper, reported on October 8: "The dangerous policy of the reactionary imperialist forces headed by the United States, aimed at interfering in others' internal affairs and supporting antisocialist forces, is particularly obvious in relation to developments in Poland. We stand firm beside the Polish communists and the fraternal Polish people and are sure they have enough power to overcome their present difficulties and to ward off the onslaught of the domestic and foreign enemies of socialism."

Under the headline "Who Sows Disquiet?" Jan Lipavský, Rudé právo's Warsaw correspondent, wrote on October 28 that Solidarity, the nascent independent Polish trade union, had tried "to pressure the Polish authorities," and that its leaders "are ready to indulge in every possible risk, conflict and tension." And behind them, he added, "is an antisocial, disruptive organization."

Karel Hoffmann, a member of the Czechoslovak party Central Committee and head of the Czechoslovak Trade Union Movement, according to Radio Prague on October 29, has claimed the developments in Poland show "a whole series of features characteristic of the antisocialist forces of the crisis years" in Czechoslovakia, that is, of the reform period of 1968 that was abruptly terminated by the invasion of the Warsaw Pact powers. Central Committee Secretary Jan Fojtík, speaking at an international scientific conference in East Berlin in the latter half of October, told his listeners that "class enemies" were "trying to use the previous Polish party leadership's exposure of mistakes to rally world public opinion against communism."

President Husák and János Kádár, first secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' (communist) party, held a meeting in Bratislava on November 12 after the

Polish government decided to register Solidarity without a clause in its charter acknowledging the "leading role" of the communist party. In a communiqué issued afterwards, the two leaders "expressed their support for the efforts of the Polish United Workers' party to ensure that under its leadership the Polish working class and the Polish people repel the onslaught of antisocialist forces as well as attempts of international imperialism to interfere in Poland's internal affairs," The New York Times reported on November 14. The newspaper also reported "persistent rumors" in Warsaw that Czechoslovakia had expelled several dozen Polish workers trying to organize an independent trade union movement there.

INDICTMENT OF PRAGUE'S RELIGIOUS POLICIES

Ján Korec, who was ordained a minister in 1950 without government approval, has addressed a letter to the presidium of the Federal Assembly in Prague that indicts religious policy in Czechoslovakia. The following is an abridged version.

In 1950, after eleven years studying philosophy and theology, and after the dissolution of the monastic orders, I was ordained a priest and later a bishop in the special circumstances into which the church in Czechoslovakia has been forced. I worked as a blue-collar worker until 1960 when I was sentenced to twelve years in jail on religious charges. I was released in 1968 [during the Prague Spring] and fully rehabilitated the following year. I was then able to travel to Rome where I was received in private audience by Pope Paul VI. In 1970, after I had recovered from an attack of tuberculosis, the authorities refused my request to perform the pastoral duties of a priest, allowing me only to do limited spiritual work among nuns. This permission was withdrawn in 1974, and since 1975 I have again been working as a blue-collar worker.

This same year harassment started and I was called for interrogation by the Bratislava police for the first time. Altogether I have been interrogated sixteen times now, the last time on the basis of Article 19 of Act 40/1974, which authorizes the police to conduct investigations but only in relation to criminal activities. This last time the interrogating officer began questioning me without giving me any explanation, and when I asked why I was being subject to an Article 19 examination, I was told it was none of my business. On refusing therefore to answer further questions, I was ordered to empty my pockets. It was a humiliating moment. The law stipulates that a body search may be made only after a suspect has been indicted. An article about me in a foreign magazine about which I knew absolutely nothing was mentioned, and I was threatened for the first time with imprisonment. It was Good Friday, April 4, 1980. As usual the summons I had received was unsigned, and I do not know the names of the interrogating officers.

I am now submitting my case to you, but only because it is an example of the overall attitude toward us believers. All sixteen interrogations bore on religious life, not on me personally. My conscience requires me to convey to you ideas that I know express the deepest convictions of many people. As believers, we want to be good citizens, as the Gospel teaches us. We know that only respect for the law

may bring the peace we all need. All injustice causes bitterness and harmful tension, and unfortunately we believers live in just such tension. In my case, the bitterness was all the greater because this last interrogation took place on the thirtieth anniversary of the dissolution of Slovakia's ancient monasteries, which have rung to Slovak prayers since time immemorial and which have been a focal point of our social and cultural life. The silencing of these witness to history is an unhealed wound in the religious body of Slovakia, Moravia and Bohemia. Believers are bitter that they cannot bring up their children in the belief in God that has sustained us for centuries. They are humiliated on their jobs and by interrogations. They have been unable for years to own religious books, not even the Holy Bible, the catechism or missals. Many are still given problems because of their religious belief, despite the fact that Act 120/1976 permits the practice of religion in public and private, individually and collectively, by both the written and the spoken word.

In these circumstances many ask whether it is not time for the authorities to protect all citizens according to the law and in the name of peace and human understanding. We are members of a nation with a thousand-year Christian tradition, part of that Christianity that has its heart in Rome. It hurts that hundreds of thousands of us are harassed at school and work because we refuse to live without God and His blessing.

The freedom to live in divine truth and bear witness is one of the basic rights of man. The Gospel word cannot be imprisoned. It is eternal truth. It lives and generates justice, respect and love, and helps to create a home for all who long for peace. This is what this country and mankind needs today. This is the deepest conviction of mine and of many other believers. We want to promote peace in justice. We want to be open to all social needs.

The first condition to achieve this is respect for the law. I think my police interrogators violated the law, especially during my sixteenth questioning. I see it as my duty to write this letter to you and beg you to consider it. I have written it in awareness of Decree 150/1958 on the handling of workers' complaints.

Bratislava, April 27, 1980

Signed: Ján Korec
Vilová 7, Bratislava

COUNCIL OF FREE CZECHOSLOVAKIA MEMORANDUM

The Council has submitted a memorandum to all the states participating in the Madrid Review Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe dealing with all the "baskets" of the Helsinki Final Act, with particular emphasis on the Czechoslovak regime's violations of human rights and freedoms. The memorandum, which was also sent to human-rights organizations in Europe and elsewhere in the Western world, includes a demand for the withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Czechoslovakia.