

CZECHOSLOVAK NEWSLETTER

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THE POLISH EVENTS AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Charter 77 Appeal to Prague

The following is an abridged version of a Charter 77 appeal to the Czechoslovak government.

A process of social renewal has been going on in Poland for several months now. Positive forces from the nation and the Polish authorities have agreed on a constructive approach to the solution of important economic and social problems that have built up over the years. These developments in Poland have been an inspiration to all those who seek a peaceful and democratic solution to the problems of the present world. They also give assurance that the Polish nation is capable of resolving a critical situation on its own. We share this view and are therefore alarmed by signs of possible outside interference in Polish affairs, especially when they appear in Czechoslovakia.

We have first in mind the attitude and content of statements by the Czechoslovak mass media, which are issuing information that their audience cannot verify. News about the renewal process has been distorted, significant facts have been omitted, and hostility is being stirred up against the Poles and their working class, and their formations and representatives with whom the Polish government and party are engaged in dialogue. Attacks have been made on the Committee for Workers' Defense and the Committee for Social Self-Defense, which maintain a positive attitude toward the Polish social system and are making efforts to resolve the renewal process peacefully. The Czechoslovak media have criticized the representatives of the Polish workers' movement and indirectly have even assailed Polish constitutional

representatives. This attitude misleads the Czechoslovak public, damages friendly relations between our nations, ignores the norms of international relations, and implies a readiness to interfere in Polish affairs by other means as well.

Our public has been alarmed by signs of the movement of military units toward the Polish border. Concern is felt lest Czechs and Slovaks should be forced to shed their own blood and that of their Polish brethren.

Relations between our country and Poland should be governed by the provisions of the Final Act of Helsinki, which our country's representatives signed. They stipulate that "participating parties will respect each other's sovereignty and individuality." They also explicitly state that "no justification must serve to vindicate the use of force or threat of force." These are also, of course, provisions of various other international treaties, including the United Nations Charter and the Warsaw Pact.

The history of our nations proves that violent interference from without has never solved internal problems. On the contrary, it has made them more intense and has burdened future generations with hatred and guilt.

We believe that an unequivocal declaration by our constitutional authorities that Czechoslovakia will in no way interfere in the free development of Poland would calm our public, support the hopeful and positive developments in Poland, and help preserve friendship between our nations.

Prague
December 14, 1980

Marie Hromádková, Miloš Reichrt
Charter 77 spokespersons
Ladislav Lis
For the collective of
Charter 77 spokespersons

Press Commentaries

Stanisław Kania, first secretary of the Polish United Workers (communist) Party, met in Prague on January 15 with Gustáv Husák, secretary general of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and two days later in East Berlin with their East German counterpart, Erich Honecker. No communiqués were issued, but it may be deduced from reading the communist-controlled Czechoslovak press that Kania's mission was to persuade Prague and East Berlin to tone down their invective against Poland, which had been undermining the Polish communists' already weak position and thus encouraging Soviet intervention. (It may equally be guessed that this is precisely what Husák and Honecker would like to happen.)

Czechoslovak newspapers have been splashed with such headlines as "160,000 Dollars Already Received: Agreement between Solidarity and the AFL/CIO"; "The CIA Union Trump Card" (describing alleged AFL/CIO and CIA involvement in "counterrevolutionary operations" in Poland); and "Directives Come from Paris."

Under the headline "The Godfathers of Solidarity," Rudé právo (Red Right), the Czechoslovak party Central Committee's daily, published on January 28 an

article describing the Polish independent labor movement as an alliance between the "so-called Confederation of Independent Poland" and the "so-called Committee for Workers' Defense." These organizations, it asserted, were "channels connected with foreign anticommunist centers." Jacek Kuroń of the Committee for Workers' Defense, Rudé právo wrote, "is instructing Solidarity to hoard food, medicine and newsprint. . . . The new union is to disorganize and paralyze Poland's economic and social system. . . . Kuroń has written that it is necessary to set up autonomous connections within the government that would eliminate the power of the party and the workers from decision-making."

The following day the newspaper reported that Jarosław Sienkiewicz had resigned from the leadership of Solidarity because "as a party member of twelve years I was not acceptable." It quoted him as saying that "in the present situation Solidarity has moved so far away from the interests of the working people that it has ceased to be representative of them," and as accusing Solidarity of political terrorism against communist party members. The daily of the Central Council of Trade Unions, Práce (Labor), published an interview on January 27 with Albion Szyszka, a spokesman for the Polish Central Council of Trade Unions, who complained that Solidarity did not want to deal with economic problems and was playing "grand politics" instead of tackling lesser but very pressing everyday issues. On February 3 Rudé právo contended that Lech Walesa's organization was demanding things "far outside its statutes." Its Warsaw correspondent reported that "the attitude of some officials of Solidarity gives the impression that their aim is to increase tensions in the country. Any pretext will do: one day it is Saturdays off, other times it is access to the mass media, registration of so-called Farmers' Solidarity, or demands for personnel changes." He referred approvingly to Trybunu Ludu (People's Tribune), the Polish party Central Committee daily, for its critical posture on Solidarity, and asked: "What guarantee is there that Solidarity will stop its pressure tactics? Friday's negotiations with Walesa's union cannot be regarded under any circumstances as the end of conflict and tension."

The Czechoslovak and East German communist parties have concerted their anti-Polish propaganda in unison. Rudé právo, for instance, reprinted an article from Neues Deutschland, the East German party Central Committee daily, on February 4: "What has long been clear to some observers is now becoming more and more evident: those people [the leaders of Solidarity] in collaboration with the leaders of the antisocialist group, the Committee for Workers' Defense, have raised the flag of counterrevolution. Step by step the instigators of the counterrevolutionary machinations have been putting into effect a plan that is to bring chaos to the country, especially in economic affairs, but refusing responsibility for the catastrophic consequences of their activities, blaming instead the party and government. . . . One should not lose sight of the fact that these forces have close links with émigré organizations, mass media and other circles in the West that are working against détente. A particularly active role is played by foreign newsmen who, in addition to propagandizing Solidarity and the so-called Committee for Workers' Defense, also function as links with counterrevolutionary centers in the West."

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(The five-day workweek has been the practice in Czechoslovakia since 1968. Miners and three-shift workers put in 40 hours; industrial two-shift workers 41

and a quarter hours; the rest of the labor force 42 and a half hours. Juveniles under sixteen put in a 36-hour week. The Labor Code of 1975 stipulates that the workweek may not exceed 46 hours. It is generally accepted, and even occasionally admitted, that in Czechoslovakia some 15 percent of work time is wasted, a figure that may reach as high as 30 percent in the building trades. Each year since 1970 the government has declared up to four Saturdays or Sundays to be workdays in order to increase working time, which has shrunk too much in its view. Different dates are chosen every year so that the extra workdays can be dovetailed with shiftwork around holidays.)

THE MADRID REVIEW CONFERENCE

No sign has been given that the Soviet bloc, including Czechoslovakia, is to soften its line in the second phase of the Review Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that opened in Madrid on January 27. Rudé právo (Red Right), the daily of the Czechoslovak party Central Committee, on January 31 offered Prague's view on "linkage." "If the negotiations are to realize any decrease in international tension," it commented, "the Madrid conference must chart a constructive course and come up with positive results. First of all it should help in the solution of the most urgent problems in present European and global relations, particularly détente in military matters. . . . [The first phase of the conference] once again proved a basic truth: it is the socialist countries that are doing their utmost to make the Madrid dialogue constructive and fruitful. The United States and the NATO countries, on the other hand, have been trying to turn the Madrid meeting into a sterile colloquy, the instrument of a hostile campaign against the socialist countries and the idea of international détente in general. They have not succeeded. Ideas of peace, European security, détente and cooperation have struck deep roots in the consciousness of the widest spectrum of people in the capitalist states. The Western governments have to recognize this fact. It is why attempts by reactionary circles in the West have failed to discredit the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. . . . None of the Western delegations has dared to speak openly against it. . . . [Recent signs] have indicated that Western reactionary circles are again trying to undermine the process of international détente. Increased efforts were made at the recent NATO meeting to interfere in the domestic affairs of the socialist countries. There are signs that some members of the new American Administration have no interest in continuing international détente. How else can we interpret that statement of Alexander Haig, the new US secretary of state, that 'there are more important matters than peace'? A disturbing increase of military budgets in Washington, Bonn and other Western capitals proves how sincere some Western countries are about the Final Act, which stresses military détente as the foremost prerequisite for future peaceful development. Yet it is not these facts alone. There are many others no less menacing. How, for instance, can the murderous campaign inspired by Washington against the progressive forces in El Salvador, the delivery of West German submarines to the fascist regime of [Chilean President Augusto] Pinochet, etc. be reconciled with the Final Act and the spirit of Helsinki?"

Council Commends Western Delegations

The Council of Free Czechoslovakia has sent letters of appreciation to the Western delegations at the Madrid conference for their condemnation of the violation of human rights in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and other Eastern European countries. The Council appealed to them to continue pressing the matter during the second phase of the conference, and to make the issue part of any final declaration that may be issued. The letters also drew the Western delegations' attention to the fact that Soviet occupation forces are still in Czechoslovakia in defiance of the Helsinki Final Act and other international accords, and asked them to place the matter on the conference agenda. The Council expressed the hope that the Western delegations would not allow the conference to end fruitlessly as had the previous review session in Belgrade.

Memorandum of the Czechoslovak National Association of Canada

The Czechoslovak National Association of Canada has submitted a memorandum on the violation of human rights in Czechoslovakia to the Canadian ministry of foreign affairs. Charles Caccia, Member of Parliament, who is a member of the Canadian delegation to the Madrid conference, sent thanks to George Corn, the Association president and a member of the Executive Committee of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia. Caccia said the delegation had found the memorandum useful, and described Czechoslovak Newsletter, a copy of which was enclosed with the memorandum, as a valuable source of information.

NEW CHARTER 77 SPOKESPERSONS

Charter 77 announced on January 13 that its spokespersons Marie Hromádková and Miloš Reichrt had transferred their functions to Václav Malý and Professor Bedřich Placák.

Václav Malý was born in Prague on September 21, 1950, the son of a teacher. After graduating from high school, he served in the army, and from 1971 to 1976 studied at the Cyril and Methodius (Roman Catholic) Theological Faculty in Lito-měřice. Once ordained, he was appointed chaplain in Vlašim (Central Bohemia), and was translated to Plzeň in 1977, when he signed Charter 77. He became a member of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS) in May 1978, and in January 1979 was discharged from his office. He worked as a laborer until May 29 that year, when he was arrested and charged with subversion of the republic under Article 98/1 of the Criminal Code along with eleven other VONS members, six of whom were sentenced to prison terms in a well-publicized trial in the fall of 1979 (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. IV, No. 11 [November 1979], p. 1). He was released from detention on December 22, 1979, but charges against him were not dropped. He has been working as a stoker since the beginning of last year.

Bedřich Placák was born on February 16, 1914. During World War II he was an

active member of the anti-Nazi underground, and served as chief physician to the Second Partisan Brigade during the Slovak Uprising of 1944-1945. In 1948 he was working as a surgeon in Mostar, Yugoslavia. He enlisted in the Czechoslovak Army in 1951, and in 1953 and 1954 headed a Czechoslovak medical unit in North Korea. After returning to Czechoslovakia, he became in 1961 a lecturer in the Faculty of Hygiene of Charles University, Prague. In 1968 he was designated professor of surgery, but was prevented from taking up his appointment by his expulsion from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, of which he had been a member since 1945. He is a cardiologist, the first in Prague to do an open-heart operation with cardiopulmonary bypass. After dismissal as department head from the Prague Military Hospital where he had been working since 1956, he practiced in subordinate positions in hospitals in Prague and České Budějovice (South Bohemia) until 1977, when he signed Charter 77 and was fired. In spite of a shortage of physicians, he has had to make his living as a common worker ever since.

Václav Malý's appointment is regarded as specially significant. He is a very able and active dissident, popular in particular among young people. His nomination is seen as proof that Charter 77 is still quite active, notwithstanding rumors to the contrary. Dr. Placák represents former communists' support for Charter 77. The new spokesmen reflect the present composition of Charter 77, which is predominantly noncommunist (Democratic Socialists, liberals, former National Socialists [not to be confused with German Nazis], Christians, and independents); its former-communist supporters also advocate a pluralistic system in opposition to the present regime.

EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF RUDOLF BATTEK

Ladislav Lis, a representative of the collective of Charter 77 spokespersons, addressed an open letter on January 19 to President Gustáv Husák, secretary general of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, about the case of Rudolf Battěk, a Charter spokesman and a member of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS), who has been detained without due process since June 14, 1980 (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. V, No. 9/10 [September/October 1980]). The letter advised Husák that a number of appeals from individuals and groups had been sent to various authorities calling for Battěk's release and the dropping of criminal charges laid against him.

Lis had begun a hunger strike on January 18 to relieve Mrs. Battěk, who had herself gone on hunger strike on January 15 after exhausting all other means to save her husband. A petition drafted on Battěk's behalf is being supported by three-day hunger strikes by volunteers in turn. The strikes are planned to go on for two months. Lis was replaced on January 22 by Vendelín Komeda, another Charter 77 member, who has also written an appeal to Husák.

According to latest reports, Battěk is in solitary confinement, forbidden to receive any visits by relatives and barred from contact with his defense attorney. His health is suffering from lack of proper medical care. The state prosecutor

recommended on January 12 that the artificially concocted charges against Battěk of assaulting a police officer should be combined with his indictment of October 3, 1979, for subversion of the republic under Article 98/1 of the Criminal Code as one of the founders of VONS.

COVERAGE OF PRESIDENT REAGAN'S PRESS CONFERENCE

Rudé právo (Red Right), the daily of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, on January 31 published the report of Milan Jelínek, its Washington correspondent, on President Ronald Reagan's first press conference:

Representatives of the American mass media, veterans of presidential press conferences, admit that they can remember nothing like Ronald Reagan's performance at his first meeting with the press in the White House. His answers were a spate of terse sentences, the content and form of which proved that the presidential office is indeed occupied by a representative of the far-right, conservative wing of the American bourgeoisie.

Ronald Reagan fired a salvo against the Soviet Union. Using crude expressions that had vanished from the vocabulary of previous incumbents, he accused the Soviet Union of plotting "world revolution," even applying such terms as "crime," "lie" and "cheating." It was as though the White House had opened its doors to the arsenal of the anticommunist demagoguery of the fifties. A number of American newsmen and foreign observers were puzzled why Reagan should treat the Soviet Union in terms that even most bourgeois propagandists of the USA avoid today. The use of such words surely does not contribute to the creation of the conditions necessary for the solution of urgent problems of strengthening peace and security, the foundation of Soviet-American relations.

Diplomats and newsmen in Washington are now looking for an explanation of the motives behind Reagan's performance. It should be noted that the press conference was not devoted to Soviet-American relations. On the contrary. Reagan was providing preliminary notes on the American budget and on planned savings, and only in answer to questions did he take the opportunity to attack the Soviet Union without explaining his foreign policy, which presently does not even exist.

The most common view in America is that Reagan was expressing his personal fanatical anticommunist beliefs, not least because he had gotten into a dispute with the extreme reactionaries in his own camp. The president has been under increasing attack by right-wingers, who are accusing him of filling his cabinet with politicians of the moderate center of the bourgeois hierarchy, and of refusing to give influential positions to "old friends." . . . He had therefore to prove to them that "Reagan is still Reagan."

It is interesting that Reagan's views on this issue are carved from the concepts of Carter's security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. It shows yet again that in spite of all the rhetoric and electioneering the American bourgeoisie retains continuity in its foreign policy.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWS FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The International Council of Jews from Czechoslovakia, which has its headquarters in London, has proposed that the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in New York should pay more attention to certain Czech publications in the United States that publish anti-Semitic information defaming Jews in the United States and prewar and present-day Czechoslovakia. Such publications are mostly inspired by émigrés who came to the United States before World War II.

NEWS FROM NORMALIZED CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Religious Persecution

Seven Roman Catholic seminarians in Bratislava have refused to give in to pressure to sign a resolution condemning a recent hunger strike by most of their fellows in protest against the activities of Pacem in Terris and efforts to compel them to join it. (The government-sponsored organization of so-called peace priests is not recognized by the Roman church as an approved spokesman for it.) The resolution would have pledged them to abstain from similar future actions. Two hundred persons in the area of Zlaté Moravce (West Slovakia) issued a public statement in support of the Bratislava seminarians, Informace o Chartě [Charter Information], Vol. III, No. 16, 1980, reported.

The Czech Motion Picture Industry

Rudé právo reported on January 28 that the Barrandov Film Studios in Prague had produced 160 feature films, three more than planned, during the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1976-1980). It had also made movies for Czechoslovak Television, and had dubbed into Czech 533 foreign films and 250-odd documentaries. A meeting of "Barrandov communists" on January 24 had voiced criticism, however, because "the ideological level had not significantly improved. There were some outstanding films, but unfortunately there were also many average and below-average ones. There is too much superficiality. . . . The second-rate quality is evident in the little interest shown by the public. . . , although films about our everyday life, its rhythm, contradictions and struggles should be among the most important themes of socialist cinema."