

CZECHOSLOVAK NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE COUNCIL OF FREE CZECHOSLOVAKIA

420 East 71st Street, New York, N.Y. 10021

Vol. VI, No. 4 (55)

April 1981

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SIXTEENTH PARTY CONGRESS

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia convened its sixteenth congress in the new Palace of Culture in Prague on April 6. (The Slovak Communist Party congress had been held in Bratislava from March 20 to 22. There is no Czech communist party. Although Czechoslovakia is a federation with two governments, that of the Czech Socialist Republic and that of the Slovak Socialist Republic, subordinate to the federal government, the party hews to the Soviet system of "asymmetric centralism" in which the Slovak Communist Party is secondary to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, just as the Ukrainian Communist Party is to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.)

In an address before Leonid I. Brezhnev, Gustáv Husák, secretary general of the party and president of the republic, denounced "international imperialism" and "counterrevolution in Poland." He told the Soviet leader and the 1,500 assembled delegates: "International imperialism is trying to weaken the unity of the socialist community by interfering in the internal affairs of individual states and to wrest certain countries out of the embrace of the socialist family, as we have witnessed in the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and are now seeing again in the Polish People's Republic. . . . The attention of the enemies of socialism has focused lately on Poland. Antisocialist forces, supported and incited by enemies of socialism abroad, are trying to bring about a counter-revolutionary reversal in this fraternal socialist country. The forces of imperialist reaction, especially in the United States, do not conceal their hope that they will succeed in weakening the socialist community. . . . Our people are following events in fraternal Poland with disquiet. This is natural. History has taught

us what it means to have a good neighbor, a reliable ally [an allusion to the 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia]. . . . We belong to the same political and defensive alliance, we have the same goals, the same friends and enemies [so] all the more are we filled with fear at the continuation and aggravation of the crisis in Poland. The Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' [communist] Party has indicated the seriousness of the situation and stressed that the foundations of socialism are being threatened by the activation of antisocialist and counter-revolutionary elements. . . . The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia pledges its support to the [Polish] communists, the working class, all who genuinely uphold socialism, and all true patriots in their efforts to repel the attacks of reaction. . . . At the meeting of the leading representatives of the Warsaw Pact states in Moscow last December and on other occasions, the forces in Poland devoted to socialism were given meaningful political backing. It has been emphasized repeatedly that the continued existence of the Polish People's Republic as a solid link in the socialist community is a factor of importance in both European and world politics. All those who are trying to misuse the events in Poland in order to stir up an antisocialist campaign must be reminded clearly that the defense of the socialist system is not only a concern of each socialist state but also a joint concern of the whole socialist community, which is determined to defend its interests and socialist achievements."

In contrast, Brezhnev's address to the congress on April 7 was relatively milder. Although he referred pointedly to the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia which led up to the Warsaw Pact invasion, he said: "It is to be believed that the Polish communists, with the support of all genuine patriots in Poland, will be able to deliver a fitting rebuff to the schemes of the enemies of the socialist system, [and] will be able to uphold the cause of socialism."

Only time will tell whether Husák's hawkish speech was prearranged in order that Brezhnev might appear as a conciliatory Big Brother, or whether he was echoing the opinion of those in East Berlin and Moscow who wish for the military solution that Brezhnev seems to be trying to avoid, just as Walter Ulbricht and Władysław Gomułka did when they were pressuring Moscow in 1968. Another cause for speculation was the absence from this year's congress of top-level delegations from the other East European states, a fact that runs counter to the usual protocol when the highest dignitary from Moscow is present.

Slogans for the Party Congress

As usual, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia published a series of slogans to coincide with its sixteenth congress. They included predictable praise for party unity, its leading role, its sixtieth anniversary, its revolutionary tradition, and the unbreakable union of workers, peasants and intelligentsia. Others proclaimed: "With the Soviet Union forever!" "International unity of the communist movement" and "May unity and military solidarity be cemented between the countries of the socialist commonwealth, the international working class, and the national liberation movement."

Rumanian Message to the Congress

The message of the Central Committee of the Rumanian Communist Party to the

Czechoslovak party congress emphasized the "peace and independence of peoples." While it made no specific mention of Poland, it urged that "everything possible should be done to settle all interstate issues by peaceful means, through negotiation alone." National independence, sovereignty, nonintervention in others' internal affairs, and renunciation of the use or threat of force were its keynotes.

THE POLISH EVENTS AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Charter 77 movement has sent a message, addressed to Jacek Kuroń, to the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) of Poland (Informace o Chartě 77, No. 3, 1981):

Dear Friends:

We regard it as our duty at this time to express our solidarity with you. We are united by a common task: to create together a just society where the common interest coincides with the free development of every man. The inception of your efforts was marked by a noble act: the defense of persecuted workers. Through your activities you have earned respect and natural authority throughout Polish society. Abroad you have inspired and given effective support to many civic initiatives. Your selfless, noble and courageous work cannot be belittled by slander or suppressed by violence. We wish you the people's continued understanding of your pursuit of your humane goals.

February 10, 1981

Václav Malý

Dr. Bedřich Placák

Dr. Jaroslav Šabata

Charter 77 Spokesmen

Reaction of the Regime

Indications of the unease of the Czechoslovak communist establishment at the course of events in Poland take diverse forms. Reports from many areas of Czechoslovakia note that shops, especially food stores, have recently been better stocked, above all in industrial regions where there are heavy concentrations of blue-collar workers. Popular rumor, on the other hand, has it that Czechoslovakia's standard of living (relatively higher than Poland's) will need to be lowered because the Comecon nations will have to bail out the sagging Polish economy. In an effort to secure the goodwill of Czechoslovakia's noncommunist population, Nové slovo [The New Word], the Slovak party Central Committee weekly, on March 12 published an article, "Communists and Nonparty People." Calling for "a strengthening of relations between communist and noncommunists," the article admonished: "Events in Poland prove what a mortal danger threatens the party when it loses influence and contact with people, when even the labor movement comes to be directed by political forces hostile to Marxism-Leninism."

TERRORIST ATTACK IN MUNICH

Rudé právo [Red Right], the main daily of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, on March 5 carried its version of West German reaction to the bombing of the Munich headquarters of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty on February 21 (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. VI, No. 3, 1981, p. 3). Under the headline "Following the Example of Bavarian Peasants? Bomb Explosion at the Munich Broadcasting Station Betrays the Hand of CIA Experts," a ČTK (Czechoslovak News Agency) dispatch from Bonn said: "Bourgeois propaganda tries hard to portray the airwave diversionaries as 'martyrs,' to generate sympathy for them, and to improve the image of the cold-war relic. . . . [West German television] even suggested that the explosion was the 'work of Eastern agents' [but] the democratic West German public cannot be fooled. Westphalian Radio, for instance, wondered why the explosion did not interrupt the inflammatory broadcasts. The incident has the stamp of the work of CIA experts. Unsere Zeit [(Our Time), the official daily of the (West) German Communist Party] wrote: 'Bavarian peasants have a time-honored way: when things go wrong, they set fire to the barn and collect the insurance money.' Maybe the Munich diversionaries decided to take a leaf from the peasants' book and profit both financially and politically."

OPINION POLL ON MADRID

Members of Charter 77 conducted an unofficial opinion poll of the reaction of the Czechoslovak public to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe follow-up meeting taking place in Madrid. A total of 166 men and women over the age of 25 were asked "What is your opinion of Madrid?" between October 1980 and January 1981. Forty-two of those questioned said the delegates "cannot agree," and eleven of them suggested reasons why. Among the latter answers were: "These are two different worlds"; "Two different cultures"; "Different concepts of the state and the role of citizens — Asiatic despotism there, European attitudes here." Another 35 respondents were highly skeptical: "It is a joke"; "Our interests are actually being represented by the Soviet Union, and that is wrong"; "It's a Great Power game: the small nations should speak up more"; "What use is it all? The powerful will prevail regardless of obligations and treaties"; "Look at Afghanistan: Russia went in and nobody will get them out, just as happened here"; "It's all useless anyway: the world's a madhouse. The politicians should take better care of the children and young people so they grow up good and honest, instead of into terrorists and gangsters."

Among the 88 who doubted the value of the follow-up conference, 21 mentioned Czechoslovakia's unfavorable position, but only eight dared to ascribe it openly to the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of the country. Twenty-two persons refused to answer, and only twelve echoed official opinion. Eight of these last parroted muddled replies, and only four clearly advocated the official line. One well-dressed man, looking like a factory manager, said: "Those human-rights prophets will get a thrashing."

RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

Persecution

All believers in Czechoslovakia, including members of its tiny Jewish congregations, have been exposed to virulent antireligious propaganda since the early 1970s. After numerous disappointments and broken promises, the Christian intellectual opposition is now united, a unity that has been reinforced by the imprisonment of such laymen as Václav Benda and such clergy as the Franciscan Josef Bárta (who was sentenced for life in the 1950s) and the Jesuit Oskar Formánek.

The situation has been aggravated by the failure of the Vatican to reach a concordat with the Prague regime. One result of Vatican policy under Pope John Paul II that has caused nervousness among the faithful in Prague and Bratislava has been recent police action against clergy and laity in Liberec (North Bohemia), Ostrava (North Moravia), and several towns in Slovakia.

Reliable sources have reported that the regime is preparing to bring to trial in Ostrava some 50 to 60 Catholic priests and laymen, some of whom were detained in September 1979. The trial is supposed to begin after the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe follow-up meeting ends in Madrid. Among those expected to be arraigned are Ing. Kaplan, P. Lizna, Dr. Malý, Dr. Razík, and Dr. Zvěřina.

Informace o chartě 77 [Information about Charter 77], No 3, 1981, reported that the Rev. Josef Bárta, 67 and in poor health, was released from jail on January 18.

Cardinal's Pastoral Letter

A pastoral letter on "the priestly mission" by Cardinal František Tomášek, the Primate of Czechoslovakia, was published in Katolické noviny [Catholic News], the weekly organ of the Czech Catholic Charities, on March 1. The letter observed that "because of age, sickness and death the number of priests [in Czechoslovakia] is shrinking, and there are too few to take their place. . . . On Sundays priests have to celebrate several Holy Masses in different places." It described the difficult conditions under which Czechoslovak priests have to perform their offices. "Some priests in their prime have collapsed from exhaustion. In the obituary of one I read words of profound truth: 'I preached the cross; I bore the cross; and I fell from prostration under the cross'." The cardinal closed the letter with an appeal: "I call upon you, my brother priests: persevere in what you were ordained for by your bishop, the successor of the apostles! I call upon you, the faithful: Hold close to your priest! . . . I call upon you, young people who hear in your hearts Christ's words, 'Follow me': Follow him as did the apostles who, we read, abandoned everything and followed him! In this way not only will you be doing a great deed but you will also become the most happy of men."

Religion under Control

The Czechoslovak regime has established two organizations under government control for the clergy: Pacem in Terris for the Roman priesthood (see also the

interview with Cardinal František Tomášek in Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. V [1980], No. 6, p. 4), and the Christian Peace Conference for the Protestant and Orthodox ministry. Ostensibly independent, both organizations in fact serve the communist cause.

The Protestant and Orthodox churches of Czechoslovakia on March 2 and 3 held a symposium on "The Idea of Peace in Church History" at the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Prešov (East Slovakia). It was attended by representatives of the two Protestant faculties in Prague — the Hus Czechoslovak Theological Faculty and the Comenius Evangelical Theological Faculty, the Slovak Evangelical Faculty in Bratislava, and the Prešov faculty.

Český zápas [The Czech Struggle], the Hussite church weekly, published on March 29 a report on the symposium's lectures "on the present struggle for peace as the heritage of the eastern tradition of Cyril and Methodius, of the tradition of the Hussites, the Moravian Brethren and the Reformation in general, and of the progressive trends of modern Catholicism."

A manifesto issued by the participants in the symposium declared that "the professors of the above faculties expressed their fears over the deterioration of international relations" caused by "the irresponsible approach of the representatives of world capitalism to the basic issues of greater justice in the lives of all the people of the world. No honest man can stay silent in the face of the growing aggressiveness of these circles and their social cynicism, reliance on force, and political blackmail."

"For this reason," it went on, "the theological faculties oppose the reversal of the process of international detente, absurd profiteering armament, the introduction of new missile systems and other nuclear weapons, and in particular their deployment in Europe. They support the well-considered and promising proposals of the Soviet Union for disarmament. Theologians of all four faculties in Czechoslovakia will therefore resist antisocialist trends and all propaganda that might lead to a worsening of international relations."

According to the participants, such propaganda is associated with "the chicanery of democrats in Western Europe and the United States and with Fascist terrorist efforts to liquidate the proponents and supporters of national liberation movements in other continents."

The manifesto made no mention, however, of the suppression of religious freedom in Czechoslovakia itself.

RICHARD PIPES UNDER ATTACK

Richard Pipes, former Harvard University professor and now a member of the National Security Council in Washington, DC, was attacked by Rudé právo [Red Right] on March 28 for saying that "nothing was left of detente," as the Czechoslovak

communist party Central Committee daily put it. Dušan Rovenský, the author of the denunciation, wrote: "Detente will continue in spite of Pipes and the idea of peace will prevail. Indeed, it was in Washington at almost the same time [as Pipes made his statement] that physicians from the United States, the Soviet Union and other countries met to warn the world of the danger of nuclear war. They expressed their deep conviction that international detente would continue. . . . Pipes obviously believes the opposite. The White House itself hastened to issue a statement that Pipes was not speaking on the government's behalf. This is an evasion, however. . . . Pipes was not speaking by chance. His outrageous utterances reflect the thinking of [American] ruling circles and the growing militaristic hysteria in the United States."

NEWS FROM NORMALIZED CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Battěk Case

The case of Rudolf Battěk, a sociologist and Charter 77 spokesman, whose health has been deteriorating steadily since his rearrest in 1980 and continuing detention without trial (Czechoslovak Newsletter, Vol. V, Nos. 2/3 and 9/10, and Vol. VI, No. 2) has elicited a number of protests in Czechoslovakia and abroad. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience.

In a letter to President Gustáv Husák on January 14, Battěk's wife Dagmar wrote: "Mr. President, my husband's principal 'offense' lay in taking seriously the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act that you signed. . . . Today, January 14, marks the completion of another year's continuation of my husband's illegal detention. If he is not released and his fate determined according to law, I am resolved to begin a hunger strike, not merely as a protest, but mostly because I feel responsible for his life."

What Young People Think

The February issue of Smena [Shift], the daily of the Slovak Central Committee of the Socialist Youth Union, published the results of an opinion poll taken among young people (apprentices, high-school and university students, blue- and white-collar workers, and farmers) from all parts of Czechoslovakia. The most important concerns of these young people were first, physical and mental fitness, and second, relations between parents and children and within the family. The newspaper's analysis of these two priorities was that they "indicate a desire for physiological and social security [and] a desire to enter the life process successfully." The third priority of those polled was "to have a reliable friend," an attitude stressed more by urban youngsters and students. Their fourth-ranking concern was "to have an apartment of one's own," again emphasized more by city-dwellers than others. Fifth place went to "having children." Though some teenagers wished they had an inside friend at a discotheque, Smena said little interest was shown in "public activities, good looks, an executive position, and ownership of a car."

Smena said that among the young women polled "first place was given to motherhood, good emotional relations with their husbands was second, home-making was third, and a woman's social position was fourth."

The results of the poll reaffirm the already established fact that young people are withdrawing into private life and giving preference to material values.

An Unusual Verdict

"The Court of Appeals in Plzeň (West Bohemia) on March 11 reversed a January 27 verdict against Petr Cibulka, a 30-year-old worker and a signer of Charter 77, sentencing him to an additional ten months in jail," Informace o Chartě 77 [Information about Charter 77], No. 3, 1981, reported. Cibulka, who had been serving a two-year sentence passed on him in 1978 for "disseminating Charter 77 materials," had been sentenced to the extra ten months for using abusive language to prison guards who had confiscated newspapers he had borrowed officially from the prison library. The Czechoslovak authorities have received many protests, including from Cibulka's mother and Amnesty International, about his case, which is one of those that has been closely monitored. The International Red Cross has also sought to intercede on his behalf. Cibulka's resilience and the public outcry in his behalf may have been partly responsible for the outcome of the appeal.

This was the first time that a court has found in favor of a dissident. Cibulka was due to have been released from jail on April 15.

Undesirable Lectures

Professor John Procope of Cambridge University was to have delivered a lecture on the evening of February 19, 1981, in the Prague apartment of Dr. Ladislav Hejránek, a former Charter 77 spokesman and philosophy professor who is presently banned from teaching. Around 5:30 p.m. several police cars surrounded the apartment building at 11 Slovanská Street, and two plain-clothesmen were stationed at the entrance to check ~~everyone~~ going in. Those who came to hear the theology lecture were told "Dr. Hejránek will be too busy this evening," and turned away. The British lecturer himself was taken away for several hours' interrogation, and was detained until he was put on a plane next morning at 9:00 a.m.

(VONS Communiqué No. 231, February 11, 1981)

Also expelled from Prague in February was Dr. Konrad Löw, professor of political science at the University of Bayreuth, West Germany, who had gone to Czechoslovakia on an official invitation of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. Because he had criticized Marxism-Leninism and the communist system in Czechoslovakia in his lectures, he was detained and deported as an "advocate of fascism."