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CZECHOSLOVAK POWER STRUGGLE INTENSIFIES

The confrontation between reformers led by new party boss Alexander Dubcek and conservatives headed by his ousted predecessor, Antonin Novotny, could get out of hand. The power struggle is no longer a purely intraparty affair because large segments of the population have become embroiled.

Dubcek's widely welcomed "action program" calls for a sharp reduction in the party's role and for the "widest possible democratization of the entire socio-political system." Conservatives fear this goes too far, and have countered with an attack on the program's weakest point, its commitment to vigorous implementation of the lagging economic reform. They have been playing on fears that reform will mean loss of jobs, rising prices, and a drop in the standard of living, and are trying to sow distrust between workers and "radical intellectual reformers," by implication including Dubcek.

Dubcek has rallied considerable support. Associations of writers, journalists, and farmers have pledged their aid. The chairman of the parliament and the key party boss of the city of Prague have deserted Novotny. Dubcek can probably count on party support in Slovakia and Moravia, but Bohemia is in doubt. He has taken steps to control the armed forces and the secret police. He has also recently relaxed censorship to a significant extent, a step that could aid his supporters. Novotny's strength lies among ideological conservatives,

industrial workers, and the bureaucracy.

The struggle could come to a head in mid-March when the central committee meets to decide on the action program. Because Novotny and Dubcek have been appealing for and receiving support from extremist wings in the regime, they may lose control of the situation, and face the risk of domestic disorders.

Soviet and East European leaders who came to Prague last week for the 20th anniversary of the Communist take-over were unmistakably reserved. Although they pretended nothing was amiss, they would seem to have cause for concern. The potential implications for internal developments in their own countries probably were foremost in their thoughts, particularly among the Poles, who are trying to squelch already emboldened intellectuals. The Poles, as well as the East Germans, are also fearful of the impact of Czechoslovak developments on Prague's relations with West Germany.

The visiting Communist leaders appeared to avoid involvement in the intraparty struggle. Few of them mentioned Dubcek by name and none of them alluded to the action program. Brezhnev left as soon as he decently could, not even staying to hear Novotny's speech. Neither he nor the others responded to Dubcek's public assurance that this "period of struggle" would become "surrounded by glory" in future years. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek regime may soon begin to give a more nationalist turn to the country's foreign policy.

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[redacted] previously expected that the government would wait about a year before striking out on new foreign policy paths, now believe that it will embark on a more flexible course in the next few months. The regime's preoccupation with domestic problems, however, and its dependence on the USSR for raw materials, markets, and defense will limit its foreign options.

Certain small shifts in Czechoslovakia's attitudes toward its Communist neighbors and the West already have become evident. For example, the failure of the Czechoslovak delegation at the recent conference of Communist parties in Budapest fully to endorse the Soviet position was, [redacted] a studied effort to preserve room for future maneuver.

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[redacted] only the strong urgings of the Poles, East Germans, and Russians brought the Czechoslovaks to support the Russian call for an international Communist meeting later this year.

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In a recent example of thawing toward the West, the Czechoslovaks have made known that they now regard cooperation with such bodies as the UN Economic Commission for Europe as essential. They believe, however, that they cannot afford politically to move too rapidly toward better relations with individual Western states, especially the US. [redacted]

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Czechoslovakia: The liberals around party leader Dubcek are well on the way toward sweeping conservatives out of the central leadership.

According to the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug, President Novotny's resignation may be expected at any hour. Quoting "well informed sources," the agency maintains that only the form in which the resignation is to be tendered remains to be resolved.

One of the candidates recently often mentioned as a replacement for Novotny is Josef Smrkovsky, party central committee member and government minister, who in the early 1950s was sentenced to life imprisonment for political crimes.

The faltering President has already signed an order removing from office two of his staunchest supporters, Minister of Interior Josef Kudrna and Prosecutor General Jan Bartuska. Novotny's action came after the presidium of the National Assembly had voiced its lack of confidence in the two and suggests that his grasp on political power has significantly weakened.

Other key Novotny supporters who have resigned in the past few days include the premier of Slovakia and the chief of the central council of trade unions. Two other secretaries of the trade unions council also resigned and four more are under fire.

Defense Minister Lomsky, another Novotny man, is under heavy fire, and his resignation could come at any time. Presumably it has been held up by the desire of the party leaders to assess Lomsky's role, if any, in the suicide of Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Janko and the defection of Major General Jan Sejna. Lomsky also appears to have Russian support.

Dubcek and the liberals are confronted, however, with conservative opponents who still have seats on the

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party presidium and in the central committee, even though some of them may have been ousted from their government jobs. After a session of the party presidium on 14-15 March, the liberals apparently forced through a decision against postponing a central committee meeting until next month. This meeting is to decide on personnel changes and the party "action program."

The liberals are increasing their hold on the powerful party central committee apparatus. During its marathon meeting, the presidium decided to turn over responsibility in the central committee for education, science, and culture to Gestimir Cisar, an outspoken liberal who for years defended the interests of intellectuals in the party and government. [REDACTED]

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Czechoslovakia: Party boss Dubcek has for the first time unequivocally associated himself with sweeping changes in Czechoslovakia.

In a major speech on 16 March, he endorsed the "democratization" process which had been set in motion after his election in January. He also implied that there are practical limits on how far this process will be allowed to proceed. He indicated, for example, that while the political system must remain Communist, it also must be responsive to the will of the people. He said that particular interest groups--such as students and farmers--must have an influential voice in decision making.

He unambiguously emphasized that Czechoslovakia will stand "firmly and unshakeably" loyal to its Communist allies and will work for international Communist unity. At the same time, however, he said that his regime will work to restore traditional relationships with the rest of the world as long as they do not conflict with its basic alliances.

Dubcek's speech identified him with far-reaching decisions made on 14-15 March by the party's presidium. These decisions go a long way toward meeting the expectations of the rank-and-file party members and the population. Detailed information on the party central committee meetings that led to the ouster of former party boss Novotny will be made available to every party member. Personnel changes will be proposed at the central committee session in late March to make it possible for the party and government to "successfully realize and pursue the new policy." The National Assembly was urged to adopt a new election law, presumably one which would be more democratic than the single slate provided by the present law.

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The presidium accepted the assurances of the armed forces and police that they will faithfully serve the country in the spirit of the law, thus implying a retreat from past use of arbitrary power. The commission investigating the defection of Major General Sejna was charged with "drawing conclusions regardless of anyone," meaning that top party and government leaders, including President Novotny, probably will be implicated. The presidium responded to demands for the "rehabilitation" and compensation of some 40,000 people who had been unjustly treated in Stalinist times. The foreign policy stance it adopted was similar to the one elaborated by Dubcek and should be acceptable to Moscow.

At the same time that these developments were taking place in Prague, the Russians seemed to be making some contingency plans of their own. [redacted]

[redacted] There is no evidence at this time, however, that the Soviets are moving any troops or that Moscow expects the Czechoslovak situation to deteriorate to an extent that would raise the question of intervention. [redacted]

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COMMUNIST REACTION TO EVENTS IN POLAND AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Fear of contamination is apparent in Eastern European and Russian reaction to recent events in Poland and Czechoslovakia.

The Bulgarians have shown unusual sensitivity, waiting eight days before reporting on the Polish student demonstrations and giving only the sketchiest treatment to Czechoslovak events. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the commentary has been factual or hostile, with Yugoslavia reporting fairly objectively, more so than Rumania or Albania. In Poland, Gomulka is disturbed enough to charge that the Czechoslovak developments are the work of "imperialist reaction and other enemies of socialism," an analysis that will not be welcome in Prague.

In East Germany, it is evident that the regime fears for its internal stability and for its position in the bloc. Public East German commentary on Czechoslovak developments has been selective, tendentious,

and misleading. As for the Polish demonstrations, they are said to have been caused by "antisocialist troublemakers" led by "Zionists and West German agents."

Moscow continues to withhold all information on the Polish student demonstrations from the public, and to describe the political changes in Czechoslovakia in the blandest terms. The regime is showing some signs of concern, however, that Western radiobroadcasts are getting through to the Soviet population with the true story of Eastern European developments. A Pravda editorial on 14 March calling for more than "passive loyalty" could lay the groundwork for more direct criticism of Polish and Czech events. It may also herald a further crackdown on intellectual dissidents in the USSR, and there are unconfirmed reports of Soviet efforts to limit gatherings of university students in Moscow and to intensify police surveillance of student activity in general.

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There has been no evidence of Russian or Eastern European military activity that can be directly related to the political unrest in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Normal seasonal training is being conducted, however, with the tempo expected to increase during the next four weeks as the end of the winter cycle approaches.

Various sources have reported that a Warsaw Pact exercise involving Soviet, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Czech, and Hungarian forces would be held in eastern Bulgaria from 22 to 27 March. Plans have been canceled, however, for a large-scale military exercise in March in Czechoslovakia--possibly a pact exercise. The cancellation was revealed on 20 March by the Czechoslovak deputy chief of staff, who said this was being done for the sake of calm and that only small units would be in the field.

In view of the recent events in Poland and Czechoslovakia, as

well as the Sejna defection, a meeting of Soviet and Eastern European representatives could be called soon to discuss and review various aspects of European security policy and the German problem. Rumania might absent itself from such a meeting, however, because its views on these issues would be at considerable variance with those of its nominal allies.

Although the implications of the absence of a Rumanian delegation would not be lost on those present, Bucharest's nonattendance might also be welcomed. Unified policies and viewpoints, for example, are of paramount importance to the East German regime in terms of its stability. Moreover, in striving for a consensus at such a meeting, the members could exert an indirect, but nevertheless effective, pressure on the Czechoslovaks, forcing them to acknowledge--at least for the time being--that their fortunes would best be served by loyalty to the USSR and the Eastern European allies. ~~(SECRET)~~

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DUBCEK WINNING POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The liberals around Czechoslovak leader Dubcek are well on their way toward sweeping conservatives out of the party leadership.

President Novotny's ouster appears imminent. The Presidium of the National Assembly on 21 March unanimously voted for his resignation. One of the candidates most frequently mentioned as a replacement is Josef Smrkovsky, party central committee member and government minister, who in the early 1950s was sentenced to life imprisonment for political crimes.

During the past week, several Novotny supporters in the regime hierarchy have been ousted or have resigned. Countless others are under fire, especially at the district and local levels.

Dubcek made his first major speech in nearly a month on 16 March. He used the occasion to associate himself unequivocally with plans for vast changes in Czechoslovakia, and made absolutely clear that he fully supported the "democratization" process that has been set in motion. He also implied, however, that there are practical limits on how far this process will be allowed to proceed. He indicated, for example, that while the political system should

be responsive to the people and allow particular interest groups, such as students and farmers, to have an influential voice in decision making, it must also remain Communist.

Dubcek unambiguously reaffirmed that Czechoslovakia will stand loyal to its Communist allies and will work for international Communist unity. At the same time, however, he said that his regime would seek to restore traditional relationships with the rest of the world as long as they do not conflict with its basic alliances. He did not exclude West Germany.

Dubcek reportedly wishes to review and probably change Czechoslovak policies toward the Middle East and North Africa. He especially hopes to reduce costly aid programs for Egypt, Syria, and Algeria, and also wants to improve relations with the US.

More and more elements of the party and the population are openly expressing their support for Dubcek. The prevailing mood is one of pride in "democratization" and pleased surprise that it has gone so quickly and so well. Many people are optimistic about the future and see no possibility of a return to the "old days." There is some worry about

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moving too far, too fast, however, and some people hope that the unveiling of the party "action program" at a central committee plenum on 28 March will serve as a stabilizing factor.

Drafting of the economic portion of the "action program" is being stepped up to allow for its consideration at the forthcoming central committee meet-

ing. Few details are available, and apparently it will deal only with the most pressing problems. This may mean that complete agreement has not yet been reached on how to expedite the economic reform. Dubcek has promised, however, that whatever happens, living standards will not be sacrificed in order to solve the nation's economic problems.

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