

UNDERSTANDING CZECHOSLOVAKIA

It is popular for Americans to condemn the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the troops of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Holland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. It is vitally important that some effort be made to understand probable reasons why that small country was invaded. The real reasons are not necessarily those announced. For example, on August 18, two days before the invasion, Pravda spoke of the resumption of "Subversive activities by antisocialist forces" within Czechoslovakia, and charged that loyal Communists were subjected to "slandorous attacks," "vicious percecution," and "moral terror."

RUSSIA CONCERNED ABOUT DEFENSES "A quick look at a map of Europe explains better than a dozen Pravda editorials the causes of Soviet alarm over ultra-reformism in Czechoslovakia. Under friendly Communist rule, Czechoslovakia is a crucial element of the Soviet Union's defense shield against the West. Even in an age of intercontinental missiles, the Russians feel more secure with a buffer between them and the capitalistic West. Under an anti-Communist Government, Czechoslovakia would be a dagger thrusting from the feared West Germany to the Soviet Ukraine, piercing the defense shield and perilously outflanking East Germany and Poland.

"A loss of Czechoslovakia would tip the present balance of power in Europe against the Communists. Soviet concern over strategic security overrides questions of ideological revisionism and experiments with democratic reforms in Czechoslovakia, no matter how fierce the polemics in the Soviet press on these issues."

— Raymond Anderson, "The Week in Review"
New York Times, July 21, 1968

Prof. Steven Muller, an East European expert, and Vice-President for Public Affairs at Cornell University, likewise has asserted that the major threat the Dubcek administration posed to Russia was military in nature. It must be remembered that the Russians are indelibly scarred by memories of nearly 10 million dead that their country has suffered from two invading German armies in this century. The collective scar contributes to a virtual paranoia about the possibilities of a third German invasion. Fear of the Germans is the main reason, suggested Professor Muller, why the Soviets are sensitive to any threat

to the strength of the Warsaw Pact. This military alliance is believed, by Russian military leaders, to be the main factor preventing future German aggression.

-- New Patriot, Sept. 1-14, 1968

Anrei A. Grechko, the Soviet Defense Minister, supported this analysis when he stated, "the Soviet Army considered the occupation [of Czechoslovakia] vital for the security of the Warsaw Pact Countries." -- New York Times, Sept. 29, 1968

IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS Dr. Albert Parry, head of Russian Studies at Colgate University, stresses ideological factors as the basis for intervention by other Warsaw Pact countries in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia. Soviet leaders feared the development of a multiparty system.

Within Czechoslovakia non-Communist political groups were gaining recognition and freedoms previously suppressed. It appeared that Czech leaders were, in practice, about to eulogize the martyred Rosa Luxemburg who censured one-party rule: "Freedom only for the supporters of the Government, only for the members of one party... is no freedom at all. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinions, life dies out in every public institution." Such freedoms seemed to be coming to Czechoslovakia, and Soviet leaders saw a series of falling dominoes: Prague to Warsaw to Budapest to Bucharest to the Soviet Union itself. Said Parry, "The restless Soviet intellectuals would become yet more restless with such tempting examples before them, and the effect on the non-Russian national groups in the Soviet Union--especially the rebellious Ukrainians right next door to Czechoslovakia--was all too easily predictable. In the Soviet leadership's mind's eye, those Communist bodies of Budapest, 1956, dangled from the lampposts all over again--and this time all over Eastern Europe."

-- "Why Moscow Couldn't Stand
Prague's Deviation"
New York Times Magazine, Sept. 1, '68

I. F. Stone put it this way: The Soviet Union "is still ruled, as under Czarism, by a system of secret police, censorship and forced labor for dissidents. This kind of rule is wholly unsuited to the Czechs... But if there is freedom in Prague, how can one go on denying it in East Berlin, in Warsaw, in Kiev, in Moscow itself?"

This is the question the Russians have answered by their brutal occupation of Czechoslovakia. Perhaps the [Czechs] cannot hope for freedom until it has been won in Russia itself."

-- I. F. Stone's Weekly, Sept. 9, 1968

TECHNOLOGICAL DISPARITY AS A THREAT In addition to the ideological factor mentioned above, Stone seeks a "second disparity," "the technological gap between the Germans and the Russians" behind the Czech occupation. Both Germany and the Soviet Union continue as "rivals for the control of the lands between them."

Stone says, "The Czechs are badly in need of capital goods after two decades of exploitation by the Russians and mismanagement by the Communists. Russian industry is not yet advanced enough to provide the hard currency to obtain them elsewhere. The nearest and the easiest place to get the goods and the credits is in West Germany. The Russians fear more than anything else German influence penetrating the old cordon sanitaire. So the Czechs must share not only the political backwardness but the poverty of the Russians."

-- I. F. Stone's Weekly, Sept. 9, 1968

INTERNATIONAL IMMORALITY A large group of people of "different professions and varying political philosophies" issued a public statement in which they raised their voices "against the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia just as [they] have condemned the American war in Vietnam--and for the same reason. In Czechoslovakia the Russian Government used the pretext that it had been invited in by certain leaders to 'save socialism' just as in Vietnam the U.S. argues that it has been invited in by Messrs. Diem, Ky and Thieu to 'save freedom.' In both instances the true reason for the use of military force has nothing to do either with socialism or freedom but geopolitical purposes.

"It is precisely because we have opposed the war in Vietnam so long that we now oppose the invasion of Czechoslovakia for in both instances a great power is trying to enforce its will on a weak nation for its own purposes. We are all the more saddened by this new crime against small states because we had hoped after the Soviet terror in Hungary in 1956 the leaders of the Kremlin would have learned a lesson. For 12 years indeed it seemed as if Hungary might never be repeated but to our great sorrow it has.

Moreover there seems to be a growing rhythm of international

immorality. Soviet leaders have invaded Hungary and Czechoslovakia so they can impose their type of 'socialism' while American leaders invade Vietnam and the Dominican Republic to impose their form of 'democracy.'

"One crime supplements the other and each one strengthens the precedent by which the strong try to dominate the weak.

"This precedent must be broken and the world brought to the realization that it can only avoid nuclear cataclysm if the great powers forswear the use of military power to resolve political issues.

"We salute the valiant people of Czechoslovakia whose nonviolent resistance has captured the imagination of people everywhere, not the least those who live in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself.

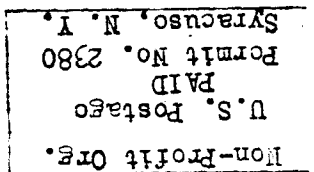
"And we urge Americans who almost unanimously challenge the Soviet right to place its tanks in Czechoslovakia to reassess their own position on Vietnam. Isn't this what our government has been doing? Haven't too many of us who are now critical of Mr. Brezhnev been tolerant of the same type of deception and crimes when practiced by our own leaders? By all means let us raise our voices against Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. But let us even more make our voices ring with creditability and simultaneously challenge our own government for using terror and violence in Vietnam.

"We demand that the Russians leave Czechoslovakia forthwith and permit the 14 million people there to determine their own destiny. And we demand that the American government withdraw from Vietnam and permit the 32 million Vietnamese to decide for themselves how they want to be ruled."

-- Ad Hoc Committee for the Statement on
Czechoslovakia and Vietnam



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