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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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