

CZECHOSLOVAKS PUBLISH PARTY ACTION PROGRAM

The party action program approved last week by the central committee is somewhat less radical than earlier draft versions, but it lifts the party's deadening hand from the process of government through major institutional, and even constitutional, reforms.

Restrained in tone, realistic, and relatively free of cant, the revised program emphasizes the necessity for thorough preparation before permanent institutional forms are adopted. The importance of the action program lies in its being a binding guide for the party, which will have to work cooperatively with the population rather than rule autocratically as in the past.

Though disappointing to the radical reformers in some aspects, the action program guarantees personal rights and liberties, including freedom of assembly, speech, and religion. It calls for a qualified freedom of the press and the right to travel abroad. The most important change it recommends is that the National Assembly assume its constitutional position as the "supreme organ of state power" and "really decide on laws and important political questions." The assembly will soon draft implementing legislation.

Party organs are no longer to do the work of state bodies, meaning that the huge central committee bureaucracy, which has constituted a "government-within-

a-government," will probably be cut back severely in responsibilities and size. Non-Communist parties are to be given greater independence and a share in creating state policy.

The program recommends, too, that the courts be freed from "political factors," and become independent of the state prosecutor's office. Furthermore, the state security service will be prohibited from interfering in internal matters, especially politics. It will, however, continue to engage in its counterintelligence activities.

The program also calls for constitutional changes which will result in a federated Czechoslovak state, with Slovakia thereby getting its long sought after self-government.

In its compromises, the action program reflects the continued presence in the central committee of numerous party conservatives, who fear changing the status quo too quickly. In emphasizing that the party will continue in its "leading role," the program's drafters hoped to allay Soviet fears that the Communists will lose political control. The program will be reviewed at the next party congress, which will probably be held in 1969, a year earlier than normal.

In its brief foreign affairs section, the program makes clear that the nation's self-interest will dominate the making of policy in this field.