

Czechoslovakia: Prague has let it be known that it will not support the recent East German efforts, backed by the USSR, to hinder access to West Berlin.

This is the first time since the new regime's "action program" was issued that the Czechoslovaks have taken a position on a topical policy issue at variance with their Communist allies.

According to the Czechoslovak news agency, the party's main daily, Rude Pravo, yesterday called on the four powers responsible for West Berlin to reaffirm their commitments to the city "distinctly, exactly, and sufficiently loudly." In an apparent reference to the East German bans on travel to West Berlin, the paper added that such a reaffirmation would exclude or greatly limit the "dangerous freedom in ideas as to what can and cannot be allowed" and would "help peace in Europe."

Rude Pravo pointed out that the controversy on Berlin access officially concerns the East Germans and West Germans, but added that it "basically" concerns the Soviet Union and the Western powers. Yesterday, however, the Soviet daily Pravda continued Moscow's expressions of support for the East Germans, describing the travel ban as "legitimate and necessary."

The Prague newspaper also implied, somewhat ambiguously, that Moscow might be trying to take advantage of US preoccupation in Vietnam to extract some sort of compensation in West Berlin. While it appears that the Czechs were merely trying to drive home the point that they are not interested in having a Berlin crisis, such an innuendo is certain to be resented by Moscow.

The Rude Pravo article, which generally reflects the views of the Czechoslovak leaders even

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if it was not necessarily cleared by them, doubtless will worsen already strained East German - Czechoslovak relations. Pankow claims that it alone controls civilian access to West Berlin, and will regard the article as interference in East German affairs.

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