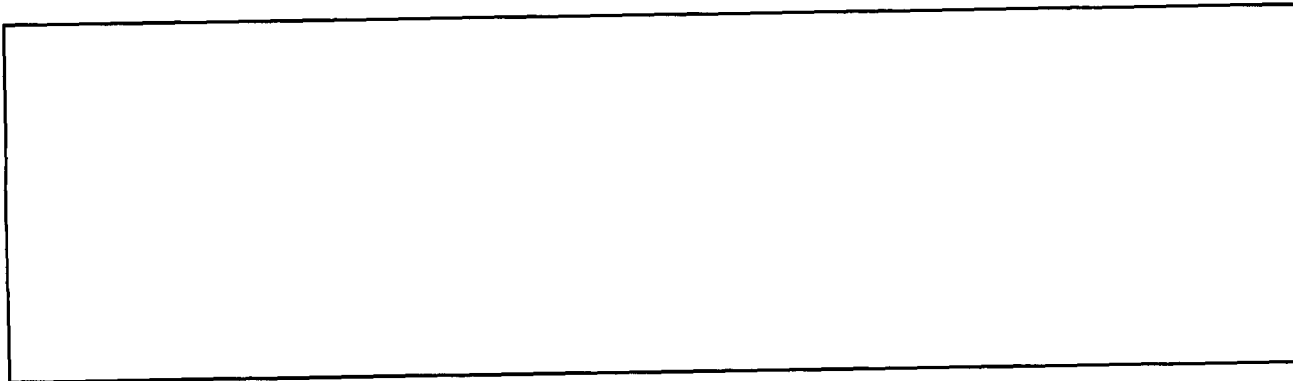


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MOSCOW BUILDING UP PRESSURES ON CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The USSR's growing impatience with the liberal trend in Czechoslovakia was dramatically emphasized this week when Moscow convened a meeting of its closest allies, probably to consider means of applying pressure on Prague.

The meeting in the Soviet capital of party leaders from East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary underscored their dismay over the Dubcek regime's unorthodox trend in Czechoslovakia. The meeting itself was a form of psychological pressure and implies that the leaders in attendance may be prepared to act in concert, perhaps through economic measures, to bring Prague into line.

Soviet leaders had earlier-- and for the first time, publicly--

admitted their concern over developments in Czechoslovakia. Moreover, they directly criticized Czechoslovak press accounts that the USSR was responsible for the death of Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Masaryk in 1948. The Soviet criticism came only two days after party leader Dubcek returned from inconclusive bargaining sessions in Moscow and while Foreign Minister Hajek was consulting with Soviet leaders.

Dubcek frankly stated in an interview on 6 May, that the Soviet leaders had "expressed anxiety" lest the "democratization process" in Czechoslovakia go too far. Although he reported that the Soviets received "with understanding" the Czechoslovaks' explanation of internal developments, the

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subsequent Soviet actions indicate that Moscow doubtless did not find Prague's assessment sufficiently reassuring.

Pravda for the first time informed its readers of the Soviet leadership's concern by quoting Dubcek on 8 May. In an official statement on 7 May, TASS had commented in critical fashion on Czechoslovak and Western newspaper speculations that Soviet advisers were directly implicated in the death of Jan Masaryk.

The week's events clearly suggest that Moscow has doubts that Dubcek can control events in Czechoslovakia. Dubcek's succumbing to liberal pressures to convene an extraordinary party congress, at which conservatives can be ousted, was probably one immediate cause of Soviet doubt.

Dubcek's statement upon his return from Moscow also indicated that a Czechoslovak request for economic aid was not immediately answered by the USSR. His remarks indicated that Moscow may have linked Soviet economic assistance to a political concession by Prague. The subsequent chain of events suggests that Dubcek may

have rejected this Soviet ploy in such a fashion as to further irritate Moscow.

If Soviet and East European economic measures are used against the Czechoslovaks, Prague's probes for credits from the West probably will be accelerated. Assistance would probably be sought first from international organizations, a consortium of Western leaders, or private Western business firms in order to avoid the political implications involved in accepting aid from individual Western countries.

So far, the Czechoslovaks have stuck to their positions in the face of outside concern. Even before the Moscow meeting, however, there was growing fear among the leaders in Prague that the Soviets might exercise pressure in a more forceful fashion.

The Czechoslovak reaction to the attempts at intimidation by the USSR and its dwindling array of allies is likely to be stiff. Nevertheless, conservative elements will be emboldened to step up their attacks against Dubcek, thus complicating his effort to hold out against the USSR's growing pressures.

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