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CZECHOSLOVAKIA MOVES AHEAD ON REFORMS

Czechoslovakia this week took some important steps toward reform despite continuing Soviet pressure designed to forestall or prevent implementation of Prague's action program. Czechoslovakia also solidified its relations with Hungary by renewing a 20-year friendship and mutual assistance treaty and again hinted that it is prepared to improve relations with the West.

On 15 June, party leader Dubcek signed an agreement that will enable the other political parties within the National Front to join with the Communists in formulating and implementing state policies. Although the Communist Party will retain its "leading role," the agreement "confirms" that power "must not be a monopoly of any single party," and provides that each member of the front will have the right to develop its own program according to its own requirements.

By concluding this agreement, the Czechoslovak party has cast off the traditional Communist view that the front must act only as a "transmission belt." The Soviets, who earlier had objected to such a conception of the front, probably regard this agreement as an unacceptable "revision" of Marxism, but have yet to comment.

Discussions in the National Assembly suggest that the Czechoslovaks will accept the forma-

tion of even more political parties so long as they operate within the framework of an enlarged National Front. The constitutional-legal committee of the assembly also recommended that local and national elections be further postponed until after a proposed Czech-Slovak federative arrangement is effected. Elections probably will take place sometime in 1969.

The Czechoslovaks earlier took legislative action, based on other aspects of the party's action program, which will not sit well with Moscow. National Assembly committees discussed a bill designed to remove nearly all travel restrictions and approved another that provides for the "rehabilitation" of persons unjustly imprisoned or killed. In addition, the government ended one aspect of its control over the publishing industry by abolishing the Center for Book Culture and also granted permission for the Greek Catholic Church, which had been "abolished" in 1950, to resume its activity. Moreover, the cabinet directed the appropriate ministry to present a new and presumably more liberal bill to end press censorship.

On 14 June, Moscow made its first public attack on a high-ranking Czechoslovak party official. A candidate member of the Soviet central committee, writing in Pravda, accused Cestmir Cisar, a Czechoslovak party secretary, of being a

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"revisionist" and "opportunist." The article, apparently misrepresenting a speech Cisar made on 6 May, suggests that the Soviets withheld their criticism until they believed it necessary to remind Prague of its promises to preserve the essentials of Communist control.

In Budapest, both Dubcek and Premier Cernik were again equivocal concerning Prague's intentions toward West Germany, but both held out the possibility that diplomatic ties eventually will be established. Dubcek urged acceptance of a "realistic arrangement" between the two Germanies, but added that it is in Prague's interest to "normalize" relations with Bonn. He also said that Prague demands "nothing else" from Bonn than that it "break with the heritage of nationalism" and that it ensure that neo-Nazi forces not gain preponderance.

Cernik had earlier stated that Czechoslovakia wants to improve its economic ties with European Common Market members, but he stopped short of suggesting that Prague is seeking relations with the EEC. Prague is

also reported to have taken the initiative toward making significant improvements in its relations with Austria.

Early in the week, Soviet Marshal Yakubovsky, the Warsaw Pact's commander, arrived in Czechoslovakia to assume control of the command-staff exercise now under way. Just before leaving for Prague, Yakubovsky said that only communications troops would be in the exercise and as of 20 June, no Pact combat troops had been detected moving into Czechoslovakia. He also said that the exercise would take place in Czechoslovakia, Poland, the USSR, and East Germany, and would involve units from these four countries and from Hungary.

This was the first indication of East German involvement and contradicted a Czechoslovak Defense Ministry spokesman's statement earlier in the month that East Germany would not participate in the exercise. The confusing pronouncements point up the ad hoc nature of the exercise, the motive for which appears more political than military. [REDACTED]

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