

USSR-Czechoslovakia: The Soviet decision to talk with Dubcek and the party leadership on Czech soil is a concession, but so far Prague has made no official response.

The TASS announcement yesterday set no date, saying only that the Soviet politburo expected to meet with the Czechoslovak presidium in Czechoslovakia. The Soviets, who have thus given up their earlier insistence that the Czechoslovaks come to them, still insist on a full-scale confrontation. Moscow probably hopes that a show of determination and solidarity on the part of its 11-man politburo may cause some of the Czechoslovaks to waver. The Czechoslovak presidium's 11 members comprise a fair representation of liberals, moderates, and conservatives.

Czechoslovak officials have consistently indicated that Prague would talk with the Soviets, but Prague radio has added that all Soviet troops must be gone first. It is possible that the Czechoslovaks will delay responding to the Soviets' latest proposal until they are satisfied on this score.

The Soviet proposal arrived in Prague even as the Czechoslovak leadership was discussing its terms for a series of bilateral meetings with the Soviets and other Eastern European parties, apparently as precursors to a Soviet - Eastern European summit meeting. Prague's presence at such a top-level gathering was demanded by the leaders of the USSR, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria in a joint letter sent to Prague on 15 July.

At that time, the Czechoslovaks in effect rejected a summit gathering, saying that they agreed to one in principle, but only after thorough preparation. It is possible that the Czechoslovak leadership is attempting to buy time with such preparation, hoping to convene first its own party congress ]

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[on 9 September. This congress will be dominated by liberals and moderates and can be expected to jettison conservatives and to elect a more homogeneous reform-minded leadership. Such a leadership probably would feel stronger in subsequent dealings with the Soviets and other hostile Eastern European parties.

Despite an apparent willingness to meet the Czechoslovaks half way on talks, Moscow continues to build a case for intervention. A Pravda editorial yesterday lodged familiar charges against Prague. Unlike such editorials in the past, this one failed to express confidence in the ability of "healthy elements" in Czechoslovakia to stem the tide of counterrevolution.

According to sketchy news reports, the Soviets also delivered a protest to the Dubcek regime yesterday over allegedly growing Western influence--especially West German--in Czechoslovakia. Quoting "informed Czechoslovak sources," Reuters reports the Soviets have again demanded that Prague allow the stationing of Soviet troops on the Czechoslovak West German border.

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