

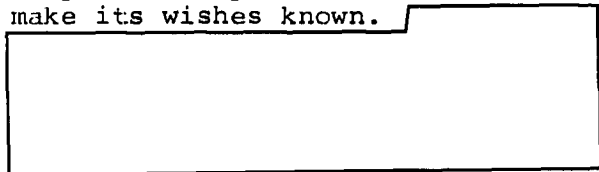
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CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERSHIP FACES ADDITIONAL CRISES

The Czechoslovak leadership succeeded in maintaining effective control during the major crisis created by the suicide of student-martyr Jan Palach. Dubcek, however, is challenged still by several other pressing political and social problems, any of which could generate a new crisis.

The regime, fearing uncontrollable civil disturbances, took extraordinary security precautions for the Palach funeral, which included putting the civil and security police and the armed forces on alert. Some popular leaders appealed to the people to refrain from demonstrating, and the students policed themselves in order to make the funeral a solemn and dignified affair.

Soviet troops remained in the background during the crisis last week, and Soviet press commentary was relatively low-key. There have been other indications that Moscow would give priority to private diplomatic channels to make its wishes known.



The Soviets also charged separately that foreign newsmen had too much freedom in Czechoslovakia. Over 20 Western journalists were expelled this week as a consequence, allegedly for gathering political and military information while pretending to serve other interests.

The Palach affair contributed to the storm brewing in the party leadership which has been split by conservative-liberal infighting. The conservatives, led by Slovak party chief Gustav Husak, dominated the 16-17 January party plenum, and are said to be trying to form an opposition bloc in the central committee. A strong, intelligent, and dynamic leader, Husak is said to be seeking a coalition of Slovaks, Czech conservatives, and some centrists to challenge openly the Dubcek leadership at a central committee showdown in March. The conservatives apparently see Lubomir Strougal, the Czech party bureau chief, as the key to their success. He reportedly controls enough votes to upset the present balance between the conservative and liberal factions.

Interwoven into this factional struggle are undercurrents of frictions between Czechs and Slovaks emanating from the newly introduced federalization plan, which on 1 January divided the country into separate Czech and Slovak republics and gave the Slovaks near-equality with the more numerous Czechs. Some Slovak officials are now pushing for a completely separate and independent state--they even contemplate a foreign ministry--and their "nationalistic" ideas have generated a full scale "war of words" between the Czech and Slovak presses. Ironically, the new Federal Assembly met on 29 January to put the finishing touches on the last major steps for implementing the federative arrangement.



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