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CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERS ACT TO ASSUAGE SOVIET FEARS

Dubcek and other top party leaders, apparently with a new cohesiveness, have begun the arduous task of trying to convince the Czechoslovaks that they must comply with the new restrictive domestic policies introduced last week. The regime also seemed to be searching for ways to maintain its popular support despite new Soviet pressures for the kind of clampdown that doubtless would alienate the population.

The authorities, nevertheless, are applying the most unpopular restriction--press censorship. They reshuffled the editorial staff of the main party daily, Rude Pravo, suspended or confiscated some weeklies, and appointed a new government censor. Journalists who are Communist Party members have been warned that they face disciplinary proceedings if they attack party policy. This is only a half

measure, however, for there are many non-Communists in the media. Some organizations, like the trade unions, are hoping to avoid the imposition of outside censorship by agreeing to scrutinize the content of their own publications.

In a major speech last week, Dubcek tried to justify the new restrictions by acknowledging that the recent anti-Soviet demonstrations had precipitated the most serious political crisis since the invasion, and he hinted that the Russians had lost their patience. He warned that another anti-Russian outburst would mean the end of his regime, the demise of the reform program, and the return of Soviet occupation troops and tanks to major urban areas.

Many Czechoslovak organizations have reaffirmed their support of the present leaders and reluctantly approved the new restrictive policies. Progressive



Prague Celebration of Hockey Victory Over Russians,
Which Led to Violent Anti-Soviet Eruptions on Night of 28-29 March

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trade union leaders agreed to try to calm the situation, and announced that for the first time since the invasion they will contribute to Dubcek's "normalization" efforts by exchanging delegations with the trade unions of the invasion powers.

The rank and file workers, however, have threatened a general strike to protest anticipated price increases--if they are announced. Students in Prague also plan to strike in the near future over newly imposed press censorship. The workers might call a general strike in this situation, too, if there are harsh reprisals against the students.

Czechoslovak leaders have enough time, however, to try to mollify the students and workers, but may have difficulty because of the regime's growing credibility gap. In an effort to discourage further public anti-Soviet provocations, Interior Ministry officials took immediate security precautions, and small, armed Czechoslovak military units joined reinforced police patrols.

The leadership also has moved to shore up its popular support in the faction-ridden Czechoslovak Army. President Svoboda last week made four trips to key military posts, probably to use his immense prestige to try to ensure that the armed forces will remain ready and willing to follow the regime's directives. As a sop to Moscow, however, Prague cracked down on anti-Soviet dissidence in the armed forces and plans to punish mili-

tary personnel who took part in anti-Soviet disturbances.

Despite the complications it has imbued into the domestic situation, the recent crisis proved once again that when the chips are down the top leaders--all moderates--can stick together. Even Slovak party chief Husak, a "realist" who at times has been highly critical of the party leadership, is said to have rallied support for Dubcek and to have stiffened the backs of wavering moderate and progressive leaders, who seemed ready to be stampeded into accepting Soviet demands for a harsh crackdown.

Regardless, Dubcek again is walking a tightrope. He must persuade Moscow that he will no longer drag his feet in responding to its directives. At the same time, to maintain his regime's stability, he must cater to progressive groups such as the workers, students, and intellectuals. Meanwhile, Dubcek's propensity to temporize, which at present he seems unwilling to abandon, appears likely to generate new crisis situations.

Moscow welcomed the proposed restrictive measures and gave extensive press coverage to Prague's statement promising a crackdown on "concealed antisocialist forces." The Soviets made it clear, however, that they would be watching carefully to see that Prague's actions matched its words. The departure by mid-week of Defense Minister Grechko and Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov, whose strong representations had goaded Prague into action, suggests that the Soviets have been at least temporarily mollified. 25X1

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