

CZECHOSLOVAK PLENUM ELECTS HUSAK AS PARTY CHIEF

The Czechoslovak party central committee on 17 April elected Gustav Husak as first secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party--replacing Alexander Dubcek. Husak has been head of the Slovak party and is a "realist" who advocates closer cooperation with Moscow as the only possible course.

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the Czechoslovaks also succumbed to pressures to streamline the leadership to Soviet specifications by reducing the size of the presidium from 23 to 11 members--in the process removing from power 11 of Dubcek's moderate and liberal supporters.

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the central committee has abolished the executive committee of the presidium--the "inner politburo"--created last November.

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The new presidium is dominated by moderates who, like Husak, believe that the Czechoslovaks must comply with Soviet directives in order to prevent the Soviets from cracking down more harshly and narrowing the already limited maneuverability that the Czechoslovaks have in pursuing their own domestic goals. Dubcek was named to the new presidium, but the outspoken Josef Smrkovsky--the last remaining progressive in the leadership--was dropped.

Key members of the central committee apparently gathered in informal caucus on the morning of 17 April to discuss the question of leadership prior to convening the crucial plenum in the

afternoon.

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On the eve of the plenum, the Dubcek regime granted a clean bill of health to ten prominent pro-Soviet conservatives. Most of these "rehabilitated" hardliners had been branded as "traitors" and "collaborators" by the public in the aftermath of the invasion. Before the plenum, the Dubcek leadership came under strong attack for its "vacillation" from Husak,

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Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov apparently is staying in Prague to observe the proceedings and to maintain pressure on the leadership.

Security forces prepared for demonstrations. Interior Ministry officials on 16 April rounded up and questioned thousands of would-be dissidents. They detained 138 people whom they probably consider potentially dangerous

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in the present situation. The police are hoping to intimidate the people and head off trouble by removing the "antisocialist elements" they consider most likely to generate it.

Earlier this week, students in Prague staged peaceful strikes in an attempt to persuade Dubcek and his associates that they must not cave in to the Russians. Unhappily for the leadership, the student declarations were uncompromisingly anti-Soviet in tone. The students' reaction to the cen-

tral committee meeting is unpredictable.

The trade unions had also reiterated their support for progressive policies and had criticized the restrictive measures introduced earlier this month, but the union leaders have pledged cooperation with the party and will try to avoid stirring up anti-Soviet sentiments. Militant workers, however, might join the students should the latter decide to demonstrate.

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