Reactions to Czechoslovak Liberalization. - Dresden and Moscow Meetings of East European Communist Leaders. - Meetings between Soviet and Czechoslovak Government and Party Leaders. - Mr. Kosygin's Visit to Prague.

The far-reaching liberalization measures undertaken in Czechoslovakia in the early months of 1968 [see 22711 A] led to a number of meetings between the new leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the leaders of the Communist and Workers’ parties of other East European countries, in particular of the Soviet Union. The frequency of these meetings was seen by Western commentators as an indication of the concern felt by the East European nations, notably the U.S.S.R., lest the “socialist democratic revolution” in Czechoslovakia should eventually take on a non-Communist or anti-Communist character; and it was understood that assurances against such a development had been given by Mr. Dubcek and other Czechoslovak leaders in their talks with Czechoslovakia's fellow-members of the Warsaw Pact.

Apart from a sharply-worded article in Pravda, in which, however, Czechoslovakia was not mentioned by name, there was little or no overt criticism in the Soviet Union of recent developments in Czechoslovakia. In Poland and Eastern Germany, however, open criticism was expressed of the new tendencies in Prague. These and related developments are described below.

Dresden Meeting of East European Communist Leaders.

Leading members of the Communist and Workers’ parties of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Soviet Union met in Dresden on March 23 for what was officially described as an exchange of views “on the most important problems of political and economic development and co-operation.”

Among those present were, for Bulgaria—Mr. Stanko Todorov, secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and Mr. Zhivko Zhivkov, First Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers (in the absence of Mr. Todor Zhivkov, First Party Secretary and Prime Minister, who was on a visit to Turkey); for Czechoslovakia—Mr. Alexander Dubcek, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Mr. Josef Lenart, then Prime Minister, and Mr. Oldrich Cernik, then a Vice-Premier; for the G.D.R.—Herr Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, and Herr Willi Stoph, Prime Minister; for Hungary—Mr. Janos Kadar, First Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, and Mr. Jeno Fock, Prime Minister; for Poland—Mr. Gomulka, First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party, and Mr. Cyrankiewicz, Prime Minister; and for the Soviet Union—Mr. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U., and Mr. Kosygin, the Prime Minister.

The communique issued after the Dresden meeting contained the following principal points:
The parties represented had “expressed the unanimous view that in the present international situation the enhancement of vigilance is of particular importance with regard to aggressive aspirations and subversive actions which the imperialist forces are trying to carry out against the countries of the Socialist community.” It was stated in this connexion that special attention had been paid “to the growing militarist and neo-Nazi activity in the Federal Republic of Germany.”

The delegations had “proclaimed their determination to take necessary measures for the further strengthening of the unity of the Socialist countries on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism.”

There had been “a unanimous reaffirmation of determination to carry out practical measures in the immediate future in order to strengthen the Warsaw Treaty and its armed forces and also co-operation in the… further development of the economy of the countries of the Socialist community.”

With a view to discussing their common economic problems, the participants in the Dresden meeting had agreed to hold a summit economic conference in the near future.

Views and reciprocal information had been exchanged on the position in Socialist countries, and the Czechoslovak representatives had informed the meeting of “the progress made in carrying out the decisions of the January meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia”[see 22528 A]. “Confidence was expressed,” the communique added, “that the proletariat and all working people of Czechoslovakia, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, would ensure the further progress of socialist construction in the country.”

Finally, it was stated that the Dresden meeting had been “marked by a friendly atmosphere.”

The Central Committee of the Rumanian Communist Party, meeting on April 23–26, adopted inter alia a resolution strongly critical of the Dresden meeting. The resolution “noted” that the Dresden meeting had discussed “questions of direct concern to Comecon and the Warsaw Treaty, of both of which Rumania has been a foundation member,” but that the Rumanian Communist Party had not been invited to participate.

Visit of Czechoslovak Leaders to Moscow.

Following the governmental changes in Czechoslovakia and the appointment of a new Cabinet headed by Mr. Cernik [see 22711 A], a Czechoslovak delegation paid what the Tass Agency described as a “brief friendly visit” to Moscow on May 4–5 at the invitation of the Soviet Government and the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. The Czechoslovak delegation consisted of Mr. Dubcek, Mr. Cernik (the new Prime Minister), Mr. Smrkovsky (president of the National Assembly), and Mr. Vasil Bilak (First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia). Mr. Brezhnev and Mr. Kosygin participated in the talks on the Soviet side.

A communiqué on the Soviet-Czechoslovak talks was worded as follows:
“During the talks, which were held in a frank and friendly atmosphere, views were exchanged on the situation in both countries and on the activities of the C.P.S.U. and the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The two sides agreed to develop Soviet-Czechoslovak relations still further, and discussed current problems of the international situation and the world Communist and working-class movement.

“They expressed a desire to develop in every way… friendship and all-round co-operation between the C.P.S.U. and the Czechoslovak Communist Party and between the U.S.S.R. and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on the basis of the principles of Marxism-Leninism and working-class internationalism, to extend contacts at all levels, and to strive for stronger unity and cohesion of the countries of the Socialist community and the world Communist movement.

“It has been agreed that experts will examine proposals from both sides for the further development of economic co-operation.”

The new Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Dr. Jiri Hajek, visited Moscow on May 6–7 for talks with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Gromyko.

Mr. Dubcek had previously paid an unaccompanied visit to Moscow on Jan 29–30 for talks with Mr. Brezhnev, Mr. Kosygin, and other Soviet leaders. He was reported to have explained the developments within the Czechoslovak Communist Party; to have outlined the economic and other reforms which it was intended to carry out; and to have stressed Czechoslovak proposals for basing future bilateral trade exchanges with the Soviet Union on world prices and for the ending of the arrangement under which Czechoslovak licences could be used in the U.S.S.R. without payment of royalties. The communiqué spoke of “complete agreement on all questions discussed in a friendly atmosphere.”

Moscow Meeting of East European Communist Leaders.

After the Soviet-Czechoslovak talks in Moscow, a second meeting of East European Communist leaders was held on May 8 in the Soviet capital to which little publicity was given and on which no communiqué was issued. Four East European leaders—Mr. Todor Zhivkov (Bulgaria), Mr. Gomulka (Poland), Herr Ulbricht (Eastern Germany), and Mr. Kadar (Hungary)—had flown to Moscow for talks with Soviet leaders; a brief Tass statement merely said that they had “exchanged opinions” on “problems of the international situation and the world Communist movement.” It was believed, however, that the principal subject discussed was the assurance given by the Czechoslovak leaders that, while embarking on a more liberal course in the field of domestic policy, there would be no departure from socialist principles.

Prague Visit by Soviet Military Delegation.

A Soviet military delegation headed by Marshal Andrei Grechko, the Defence Minister, and including General Alexei Yepishev, chief of the central political department of the Soviet Army and Navy, visited Prague from May 17 to May 22 at the invitation of the Czechoslovak Minister of National Defence, General Dzur. It was stated that the purpose of the visit was for the Soviet
military delegation “to become acquainted with the new command of the Czechoslovak People's Army, to exchange experiences, and to discuss questions of interest to both sides.”

A communiqué issued at the conclusion of the talks said (1) that the two armies had exchanged information, experience, and opinions “on certain questions of military development”; (2) that the talks had “reaffirmed the unity of the fraternal armies on all the main questions of combat preparedness and mutual co-operation”; and (3) that “concrete steps have been outlined for the further development of the friendship between the Soviet Army and the Czechoslovak People's Army and the strengthening of their co-operation within the framework of the Warsaw Treaty.”

Many Western newspapers carried reports on May 10–11 of Soviet troop movements in southern Poland, near the Czechoslovak frontier, but then was nothing to indicate that there movements were of an intimidatory character; nor was there any substantiation of reports in some newspapers that the Soviet Government was bringing pressure on Czechoslovakia to permit the stationing of Soviet troops in that country under the Warsaw Pact. [Some 20 Soviet divisions are stationed in Eastern Germany, a number in Poland, and two in Hungary, but none in Czechoslovakia or Rumania.] The official Czechoslovak press agency, Ceteka, said on May 10 that the Czechoslovak Government had been “informed in advance of regular manoeuvres of the Warsaw Treaty countries in the region of southern Poland”; it added that reports by some news agencies that these troop movements were directed against Czechoslovakia were “considered in Czechoslovak political circles to be a political provocation.”

Ceteka announced on May 24, after the Soviet military delegation had left Prague, that Warsaw Pact exercises would be held in June on both Polish and Czechoslovak territory. It was stated that Marshal Ivan Yakubovsky (the Soviet C.-in-C. of the Warsaw Pact forces) would be in command of the manoeuvres.

Mr. Kosygin's Visit to Czechoslovakia.

On May 17, a few hours after the arrival of Marshal Grechko and the Soviet military delegation, Mr. Kosygin also arrived in Prague. It was officially stated that the Soviet Prime Minister had come to Czechoslovakia “for a short rest and medical treatment” at the invitation of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and of the Czechoslovak Government, and that the opportunity would be taken “for a continuation of the exchange of views with the Czechoslovak leaders on questions of mutual interest.”

Mr. Kosygin called on President Svoboda on May 18 and on the same day had talks with Mr. Dubcek, Mr. Cernik, and Mr. Smrkovsky; according to Ceteka, the Soviet Premier had told the Czechoslovak leaders that developments in Czechoslovakia were meeting with understanding from the Soviet leadership, and had admitted that every nation “has the right to proceed according to its own conditions and requirements.” Mr. Kosygin subsequently went to Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) to take the waters and for medical treatment, and continued his conversations there with Mr. Dubcek and Mr. Cernik on May 23. The Soviet Prime Minister returned to Moscow on May 25, after a week's visit to Czechoslovakia; no communiqué was issued, but it
was stated that Mr. Kosygin's talks with the Czechoslovak leaders had taken place in a “friendly and cordial” atmosphere.

East German and Polish Criticism of Developments in Czechoslovakia. - Yugoslav Support for Czechoslovak Liberation Measures.

The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry protested to the East German Ambassador in Prague on March 27 against a speech which had been made the previous day by Professor Kurt Hager, a member of the Politburo of the East German Socialist Unity Party and secretary of its Central Committee. In this speech Professor Hager had criticized the liberalizing trends in Czechoslovakia; singled out the speeches of Mr. Smrkovsky for particularly adverse comment; and asserted that the new Czechoslovak policy and Mr. Smrkovsky's speeches served the West German tactics of seeking to undermine the Socialist countries and to divide them from each other. The Marx-Lenin Institute of Prague described Professor Hager's comments as “a gross interference in the affairs of a fraternal party,” while Prague radio denounced them as “totally inadmissible between sovereign States.”

Three Polish papers—the mass-circulation paper Zycie Warszawy, an Army newspaper, and a Communist youth paper—carried articles on May 4 by the Prague correspondent of the Polish Workers’ Agency (a press service) criticizing what was described as the emergence of “neutralist and anti-Soviet tendencies” in Czechoslovakia. The articles spoke of tendencies “to introduce a ‘dictatorship of the intelligentsia’ and to minimize the influence of the working-class” in Czechoslovakia, and asserted that some members of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party were apprehensive that recent developments might “push Czechoslovakia off the path of socialist development.” In reply to these criticisms, three Czechoslovak writers commented in the trade union paper Prace that the Polish leaders should ask themselves “whether the demonstrations of Polish university students are not rooted in dissatisfaction with the state of society, as was the case in Czechoslovakia.” They also appealed to the Polish leaders to end “the shameful anti-Semitism” that had manifested itself in Poland [see 22684 A; 22664 A].

In the Soviet Union, an article appeared in Pravda on May 19 which, while not mentioning Czechoslovakia by name, appeared to be directed against the liberalizing trends in that country. It referred scathingly to systems exhibiting “irresponsibility, petit-bourgeois laxity, and lack of discipline”; spoke of “right-wing liquidators of socialist democracy”; and said inter alia: “In present conditions those who reject the need for strengthening the Socialist State and all its organs stand for the disarmament of Socialism in an atmosphere of the aggravation of the struggle with imperialism.”

The first formal Soviet protest to Czechoslovakia since the adoption of the liberally-rich policy was made on June 11, when a Note was presented in Prague protesting against the reprinting in a Prague newspaper of an American report alleging that General Sejna had been helped by a Soviet general to defect to the United States. The Soviet Note said that the publication of such reports could only harm relations between the two countries, and expressed confidence that the Czechoslovak authorities would protect the friendly relations between the U.S.S.R. and Czechoslovakia from “hostile articles in certain organs of the Czechoslovak Press.”
[The report, written by a Prague correspondent of the New York Times and reprinted in Lidova Demokracie, organ of the People's Party, alleged that a Soviet general had approved the issue of a diplomatic passport to General Sejna. Ceteka emphasized that the report was without foundation, while Lidora Demokracie denied that it had any wish to harm Soviet-Czechoslovak relations.]

Yugoslav support for the new tendencies in Czechoslovakia was expressed on May 15 by the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia, Mr. Nikezich, at the end of a two-day visit to Prague during which he had talks with Mr. Dubcek and Dr. Hajek. At a press conference Mr. Nikezich said that the “internal and external position of socialist Czechoslovakia will be strengthened” as a result of the recent developments, adding that the Czechoslovak people, Government, and Communist Party were “capable of taking care of themselves and of solving effectively the problems facing them.”–(Times - Guardian - Daily Telegraph - Le Monde - Neue Zürcher Zeitung - New York Times - Agerpres, Bucharest - Tanjug, Belgrade) (Prev. rep. Czechoslovakia, 22711 A.)

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