

Czechoslovakia: The hopes of the Czechoslovak liberals to push extreme reforms through parliament have received a jolt.

On 25 April, several ousted conservative ministers were assigned to key parliamentary committees. In these posts, the conservatives could help dilute or block progressive legislation to which the liberal wing of the party aspires. More than a third of the deputies recently opposed the installation of reformer Josef Smrkovsky as chairman, indicating considerable conservative strength in parliament.

Local and national elections are scheduled for November, and the lame ducks now in the assembly are being asked to legislate an electoral reform that will probably prevent most of them from returning. It is possible, therefore, that these assignments were a sop to moderate leaders who fear an open rupture between reformers and hard liners.

Party boss Dubcek is under severe pressure from liberals who want to oust conservatives from the party central committee as soon as possible. Within a month he appears to have reversed field several times on this issue and obviously hopes to avoid a showdown until next year when he might be better prepared.

Yesterday, however, he appeared to bow to the will of the majority at an important party conference. He somewhat reluctantly endorsed the idea of convening an early party congress that will elect a new central committee and promised to introduce a proposal to that effect in May to the current central committee. Because so many conservatives are still on the central committee, the May meeting may become a severe test of Dubcek's strength.

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