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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Czechoslovak Leadership Faces Uncertain Future

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CZECHOSLOVAK LEADERSHIP FACES UNCERTAIN FUTURE

The Dubcek leadership has demonstrated remarkable resiliency since Soviet tanks rumbled into Czechoslovakia on the night of 20-21 August. Despite Soviet pressures and a divisive effort to create the nucleus of a more acceptable regime, Dubcek and his colleagues are still in the driver's seat, and the party hierarchy remains virtually intact, if not united on all questions. The leadership still has the overwhelming support of the population and an impressive majority of the Communist Party apparatus. On 28 October the country celebrated the 50th anniversary of the republic with the re-issue of a postage stamp depicting the Czech lion breaking his chains.

In recent weeks, however, there have been signs that Dubcek's grasp has begun to slip. Moscow is gradually undermining him by forcing him to take a series of retrogressive steps. The party leadership has taken on a centrist coloration. A new eight-man executive committee of the party presidium is dominated by moderates. These leaders, whom Moscow considers "realistic," believe they must respond to Soviet demands but at the same time try to maintain the people's confidence by implementing reforms that do not conflict with Soviet objectives. Such a gambit appears to have little chance of success and may mean that by the time the party congress convenes next year, Dubcek and those liberals Moscow dislikes could be without their trump card: popular support.

Background

Dubcek and his colleagues became immensely popular early this year after they launched a comprehensive reform program designed to guarantee the fundamental rights of individual citizens. Many old social wounds were healed in the process, but there was not time to unite all the diverse elements that make up Czechoslovak society.

Conservatives--both inside and outside the Communist Party--opposed Dubcek's liberal reforms for ideological reasons and because they feared losing their positions. Progressives around Dubcek pressed for faster and more comprehensive democratization. Czechs and Slovaks fought each other over how to federalize the country, even though each accepted the idea of equality.

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CZECHOSLOVAK COMMUNIST PARTY (KSC)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PRESIDIUM

★ Cernik, Oldrich (M)
★ Dubcek, Alexander (M)
★ Erban, Evzen (M)
★ Husak, Gustav (M)
★ Sadovsky, Stefan (M)
★ Smrkovsky, Josef (L)
★ Svoboda, Ludvik (M)
★ Strougal, Lubomir (C)

MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDIUM

Bilak, Vasil (C)
Cernik, Oldrich (M)
Dubcek, Alexander (M)
Erban, Evzen (M)
Hettes, Jarolim (L)
Hrdinova, Libuse (L)
Husak, Gustav (M)
Kabrna, Vladimir (L)
Neubert, Vaclav (U)
Piller, Jan (C)
Pinkava, Josef (L)
Sadovsky, Stefan (M)
Simecek, Vaclav (L)
Simon, Bohumil (L)
Slavik, Vaclav (L)
Smrkovsky, Josef (L)
Spacek, Josef (L)
★ Strougal, Lubomir (C)
Svoboda, Ludvik (Honorary) (M)
Tazky, Anton (L)
Zrak, Jozef (L)

CANDIDATE MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDIUM

Barbirek, Frantisek (M)
Lenart, Jozef (C)
Polacek, Karel (M)

FIRST SECRETARY

Dubcek, Alexander (M)

SECRETARIES

★ Bilak, Vasil (C)
★ Hettes, Jarolim (L)
Indra, Alois (C)
★ Kempny, Josef (L)
Lenart, Jozef (C)
★ Penc, Frantisek (L)
Spacek, Josef (L)
★ Strougal, Lubomir (C)

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SECRETARIAT

Sekera, Jiri (L)
Slavik, Vaclav (L)

Both Czech & Slovak leaders shown; Slovaks underlined

★ New member (17 Nov)

M - Moderate
L - Liberal
C - Conservative
U- Unknown

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When the Soviet Union began to apply pressure on Dubcek to modify his reform program, competing interest groups in the society began to unify on the basis on patriotism. As the pressures increased, anti-Soviet nationalism forged a strong bond between the party leaders and the people. Dubcek, President Ludvik Svoboda, and the other leaders became national heroes after standing up to the Russians at Cierna and Bratislava. The invasion failed to split the Czechoslovak leadership, and brought the people and party together as never before.

Russian interference, moreover, propelled a number of prominent conservatives into Dubcek's camp. Some of them, like the ousted defense minister, Bohumil Lomsky--who had opposed the reforms and was pro-Soviet--became hostile to Moscow because of the invasion. Many whom the Russians had hoped to include in a puppet government refused to participate. Well-known conservatives, such as former Slovak party chief Vasil Bilak, and former presidium members Jan Piller and Emil Rigo, who were publicly branded as collaborators, protested that they had had nothing to do with the invasion. Only the Slovak hard liner, Alois Indra, appeared to be available for a role in an occupation regime.

Several hard liners were forewarned of the invasion, and a few of them, such as then-communications-chief Karel Hoffman, attempted to pave the way. President Svoboda, however, refused to accept a Soviet-imposed collaborationist regime. He counterattacked, demanding negotiations with the Soviets and insisting that Dubcek and the other arrested Czechoslovak leaders participate.

During their "inquisition" in Moscow between 23-26 August, Czechoslovak negotiators were subjected to enormous pressure, including physical maltreatment, prolonged negotiating sessions, threats of dismemberment or devastation of the republic, and the establishment of an occupation government. In addition, the delegation was isolated from news of events in Czechoslovakia and its members were prevented from consulting with one another.

Czechoslovak national unity and loyalty to the leadership reached unparalleled heights during this period, and unity among the top leaders was strengthened as well.

Soviet Tactics

The survival of the Dubcek leadership, albeit with fraying unity and slowly diminishing popular support, is mostly attributable to the Soviet desire for political stability. The Soviets had mistakenly assumed that Dubcek's failure to create a monolithic political machine, coupled with the existence of diverse elements in Czechoslovak society, would facilitate the installation of collaborationist puppets within hours after the intervention. Moscow had to change its plans, however, when it realized that if the

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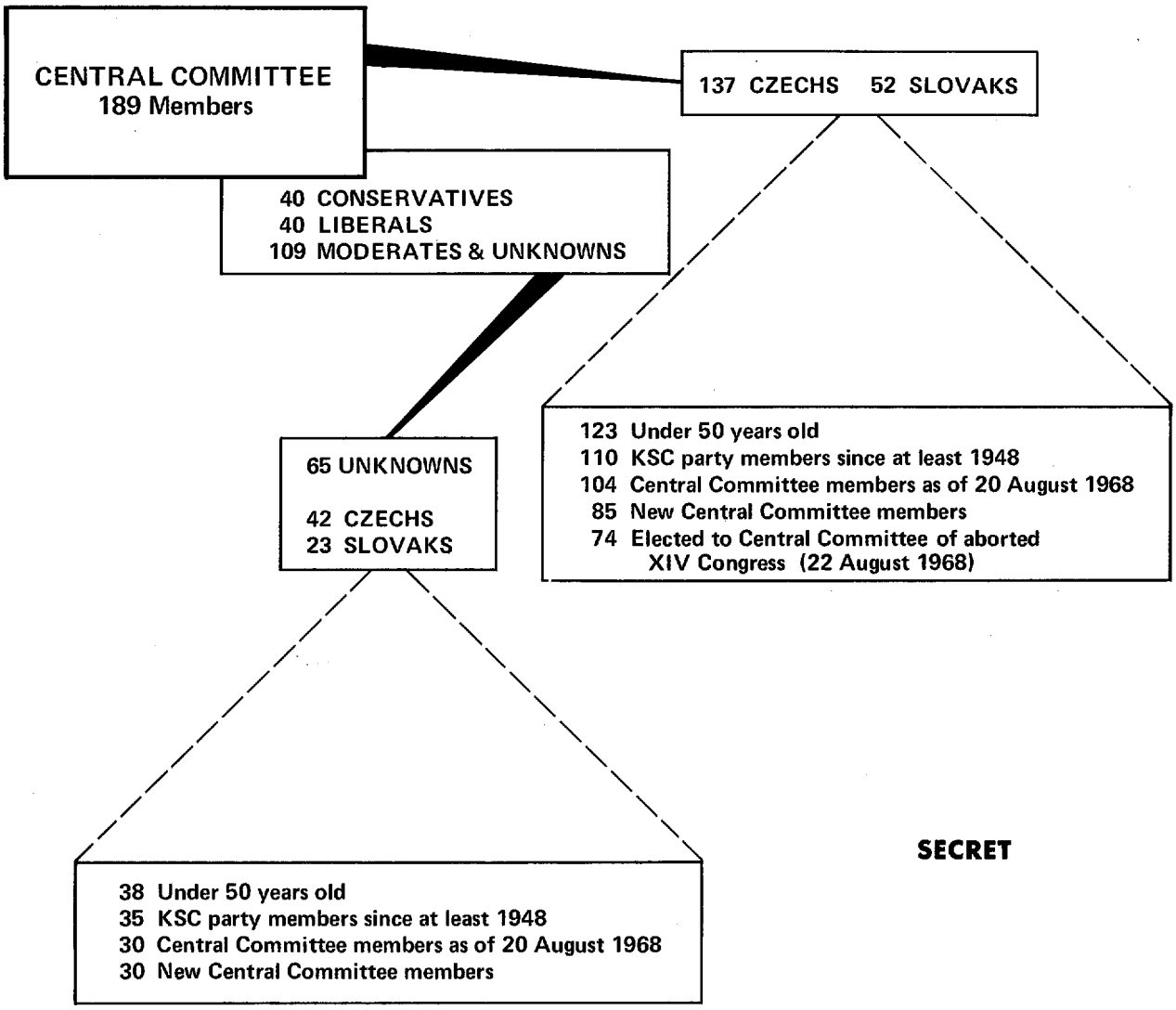

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Czechoslovak leadership were deposed by force, the result could be open rebellion.

In September, the Soviets sent First Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Kuznetsov to Prague as fact finder and troubleshooter. Initially, Kuznetsov's mission was to talk to as many Czechoslovak leaders as possible,to determine the attitude of each toward the USSR, and to report on the general situation in Prague. Later, Kuznetsov tried to determine which officials were worth supporting in an attempt to undermine the leadership, and since then has made some progress in helping to develop an opposition to Dubcek.

The Leadership

The strength of the Czechoslovak leadership is in its "Big Four"--Dubcek, Svoboda, Cernik, and Smrkovsky. These men, with dissimilar backgrounds, temperaments, and political convictions, are pledged to stand or fall together. The rest of the party presidium is not nearly as united.

Party first secretary Dubcek, who headed the Slovak party apparatus from 1963 until he replaced Novotny last January, has a reputation as a stubborn rather than as a strong leader. After spearheading opposition to Novotny during the final months of 1967, Dubcek was an 11th-hour compromise candidate to replace him. No Slovak had ever before been at the head of the Czechoslovak state.

Dubcek and the progressives who supported him initiated the Action Program, a liberal reform that became their political raison d'etre. Dubcek is thought to be more moderate than his reformist allies, but he was astute enough to ride the chaotic tide of reform which by May had taken on a momentum of its own. Consequently, his strength is derived from popular support for the reforms as well as from the

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basic unity among the four top leaders. Moscow, however, considers Dubcek untrustworthy, largely because he aims to live up to his reputation as a national hero, and because he has repeatedly tried to fend off Moscow's demands.

President Ludvik Svoboda had had little experience in politics when he was elected last March--with a minimum of popular enthusiasm--as an interim, rubber-stamp president. Nevertheless, as a staunch Czechoslovak patriot he provided the backbone for the leadership in its later confrontations with the Soviet leaders. He reportedly tempered Soviet demands at Cierna and extracted concessions from the Soviets in Moscow. A 73-year-old war hero who commanded the Czechoslovak forces in the Soviet Union in World War II, Svoboda has long been admired by the Russians and holds the title of "Hero of the Soviet Union."

Premier Cernik has little formal education but an extensive background in industrial management and party work. A competent administrator and an active supporter of liberalization, he went to Moscow several times to try to smooth relations with the USSR. In recent weeks, however, Cernik has apparently concluded that cooperation with Moscow is the only practical course. He is said to believe that he might ultimately replace Dubcek. Cernik might be tempted to remain if the others of the Big Four should resign in protest.

The fourth member of the group, National Assembly President Smrkovsky, represents the anti-Soviet liberals. Smrkovsky is an adamant reformer, and has been critical of the Soviet Union since he was elected president of parliament in April. Perhaps even more than Dubcek,he is anathema to Moscow, and the Soviets presumably have tried to get rid of him. If the unity at the top dissolves, Smrkovsky will be one of the first to be removed.

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Another leader who has emerged in the wake of the invasion is Gustav Husak, an aggressive, outspoken individual who heads the Slovak party. Husak spent most of the 1950s in jail on charges of "bourgeois nationalism," and after his release was politically inactive until this year. When Dubcek took over, however, Husak was one of the first to raise his voice in support of liberal reforms. In the present situation, Husak has become a centrist and

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has been lauded in the Soviet press for his realistic attitudes. This publicity led to the speculation that Husak might, with Soviet help, replace Dubcek as party first secretary. Husak has not denied this, but has said that the Russians have not demanded a change of leaders.

The most prominent conservative leader to emerge after the invasion is Lubomir Strougal, a pragmatic party man without scruples. He was given four top party posts at a central committee meeting in November.

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Strougal was a friend of former party boss Novotny, but he gained a place in the Dubcek leadership by turning against Novotny at the last moment. An ostensible exponent of reform, he was arrested by the Soviets during the roundup of Czechoslovak leaders on 21 August. Although he originally termed the invasion illegal, he has subsequently said that it was necessitated by serious mistakes on the part of the Dubcek

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leadership. He has been characterized as an energetic and able worker, but not a dramatic political figure, which would make him useful as Moscow's man inside the Czechoslovak leadership.

If the USSR maintains heavy pressure on the Czechoslovak leaders, Strougal may be in a good position to challenge Dubcek for the post of party first secretary, perhaps at the party congress next year. In the meantime, he presumably will continue to have Soviet

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support and be in a position to bring other Czechoslovak conservatives into positions of power and influence.

Elements of Dissension

Differences among Czechoslovak leaders have varied from issue to issue, but center on the question of how to deal with the Soviets. Despite his liberal-moderate majority in the major party bodies, Dubcek has come under fire from his own supporters. The liberals charge he is going too far in making concessions to Moscow. Moderates have joined the liberals who have attacked him for bowing to Soviet desires and allowing conservatives to regain a place in the political spectrum.

There is also increasing concern among Dubcek's supporters over the fate of the reform program. Conservatives are trying to force Dubcek to carry out all of Moscow's demands in letter and in spirit, even if it means the abandonment of reforms. The liberals, on the other hand, are seeking to keep intact as many reforms as possible, even though they differ on how far to go in order to satisfy the Soviets. Some ultraliberals, such as Zdenek Mlynar, are dejected by concessions to the Soviets. In November, Mlynar resigned from the party secretariat and presidium rather than be identified with a "compromised" leadership.

Czechoslovak leaders have disagreed on the status-of-forces agreement. The presidium, for example, applauded the conduct of the Dubcek-Cernik-Husak delegation that went to Moscow in early October to negotiate the pact, but it never formally approved the substance of the agreement they brought back. Moreover, while Dubcek seemed resigned to a status-of-forces agreement, Svoboda and Mlynar were vehemently opposed to it.

There is also considerable disagreement among Czech and Slovak leaders on the issue of federalization. Many Czech officials oppose the plan because it gives the Slovaks greater rights at the expense of prerogatives formerly reserved to Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia. Some Slovak leaders, on the other hand, have complained that the law will not give them the equality they are seeking but will instead allow the more numerous Czechs to continue to dominate the country on the basis of "majority rule" in the federal government.

Some of the leading liberals and ultraliberals who backed Dubcek's reform program now fear persecution by the Soviets and have left the country. For example, Jiri Pelikan, the former chief of Czechoslovak television; Eduard Goldstucker, the former Writers' Union chairman, and Jan Brodsky, the president of the anti-Soviet political group called

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"Club 231" all fled after the invasion. Ota Sik, a liberal economist who was the architect of Czechoslovakia's economic reform program, has decided to remain in the West. Thousands of less important but highly trained people, of liberal inclination, are biding their time in the West, undecided on whether to return.

At home, popular disillusionment is growing with Dubcek's seeming willingness to go along with Moscow. The intermittent, nationwide anti-Soviet demonstrations since late October have in part been protests against Dubcek's cooperation with Moscow.

Emergence of Conservatives

In October, in response to Soviet pressures, the conservatives were permitted to meet openly, and their sympathizers turned up at pro-Soviet rallies. Small groups such as the "Fraternal Comrades" and the "Klement Gottwald Party" appear to have sprung up overnight. They total only a few thousand bold hard liners, but their numbers could grow. The hard liners are rallying around conservatives in power such as Bilak, Indra, and Strougal, as well as behind some hard liners seeking a comeback, such as former alternate presidium member Antonin Kapek. There is also said to be a group of national assembly deputies, led by former foreign minister Vaclav David, that is trying to present itself as a nucleus for a future government.

Nurtured by the Soviets, the conservatives have circulated their views in publications printed in other Soviet bloc countries, especially East Germany. In addition, Radio Vltava, the unofficial voice of the Soviet occupation forces, grinds out propaganda attacking the leadership and boosting pro-Soviet personalities. Party leaders are concerned because several important district party committees have announced their support of pro-Soviet conservatives, or at least have failed to denounce them.

The November Plenum

The results of a stormy party central committee plenum held between 14 and 17 November indicate that Moscow's patience and its "salami" tactics are paying off. The party leadership is no longer overwhelmingly liberal, but instead has taken on a centrist coloration. There is a new leadership body controlled by individuals who are willing to go far toward meeting Soviet demands. This new body--the executive committee of the presidium consists of eight members, six of whom seem to be middle-of-the-road "realists" while the other two, Smrkovsky and Strougal, probably serve as spokesmen for liberal and conservative factions, respectively. The executive committee holds effective power, but its decisions are subject to ratification by the full 21-man party presidium, which is unchanged in composition and dominated by liberals and moderates.

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This arrangement could become a source of friction.

The conservatives made considerable gains at the plenum. Bilak and Strougal were elevated to the party secretariat, and the latter was made chief of a newly created party bureau charged with the organization of a Czech Communist Party to parallel the existing Slovak Communist Party. Before the plenum, the liberals had hoped to make the new Czech party organization into a power base, but the central committee elected a bureau leadership that appears to be dominated by conservatives and moderates.

The increase in the number of party secretaries from three to eight brings conservatives, particularly Strougal and Bilak, into positions where they can influence the implementation of policy.

The central committee is unchanged in composition, and because it includes about 80 members of the short-lived central committee elected secretly during the invasion, it is dominated by liberals and moderates who are loyal to Dubcek. There are about 40 liberals and 40 conservatives. Most of the remaining 109 members are moderates.

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Outlook

Dubcek and the liberals are susceptible to a gradual erosion of the popular mandate that is the source of their power. Having admitted that the assumptions underlying this mandate--such as guarantees of freedom of speech, assembly and the press--are "unrealistic," they have been reduced to quibbling about nonessentials and now will find it difficult to save the reforms--such as guarantees of individual liberties--they consider necessary for survival.

The USSR's special emissary, Kuznetsov, will probably continue to monitor Czechoslovak affairs for some time, as the Russians attempt to nudge, badger, and cajole the Czechoslovak leadership into line. The Soviets are in no hurry to force changes and have adopted an attitude of patience in the face of the public's hostility. They will be pleased to allow the East Germans, Poles, and Bulgarians to bear the onus of placing harsher new pressures on Prague. Moscow apparently estimates that such tactics will ultimately lead to the disillusionment of the supporters of the present leadership and a return to the political apathy that characterized the Novotny era.

As long as the Soviets do not press too hard, however, Dubcek still has many cards to play. In early October he announced his intention to stay on as party first secretary, implying that there would be no one to defend the nation should he depart. Immediately after the invasion, he characterized concessions wrung from him by the Soviets as temporary, and although he no longer speaks in that vein, there is no reason to suppose that he has changed his attitude. Dubcek probably hopes that he can continue to take half steps that will satisfy Moscow and retain sympathy at home. Many ordinary citizens and even party members are already critical of this policy, however, and the present leadership will face widespread discontent if it implements the promises it has made to the Soviets.

In private, Dubcek admits that he is being boxed in, and there is a great deal of ambivalence in his thinking about his personal future. Even though he is on record as saying he intends to stay on, he has reportedly told intimates at one time that he feels his job is done, and, at another time, remarked that he did not expect to stay in office more than two or three months. Barring a rebellion--which becomes less likely with each passing day--he may stay on, however, at least until next year's party congress.

In the meantime, his energies and those of the other leaders will be sapped by the continual need to fend off Soviet thrusts and to control the ambitions of the party's conservative wing. Unlike the conservatives and the moderates willing to go along with Moscow, Dubcek will have no significant foreign support. Economic and other important reforms will probably remain stillborn, adding to accumulating problems and fueling popular dissatisfaction. (SECRET)

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