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CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Party Factionalism Over Poland

Czechoslovak leaders apparently have differed over how to react to the situation in Poland, but Politburo member Bilak and other more dogmatic leaders seem to have prevailed thus far.

Bilak evidently took the lead in reversing the more conciliatory line toward Poland during a central committee meeting in early October. He set forth the position that "antisocialists" are in the ascendancy in Poland and the party is in danger of losing control. According to a former party official, Bilak "catalyzed" the meeting with a powerful speech characterizing developments in Poland as "counterrevolutionary." Although this approach did not have wide support, Bilak apparently even swayed party leader Husak into taking a tougher position.

The ability of Bilak and the other hardliners to stay on top of this issue will largely influence the fate of the new economic reform program scheduled to be introduced on 1 January. Bilak reportedly is arguing that with "counterrevolution" rampant in Poland, now is not the time for "experiments." The reforms have strong support within the party, however, and a compromise in either their scope or timing makes their implementation more likely than a cancellation.

Many officials are concerned over Czechoslovakia's own economic difficulties and consumer shortages and apparently are resisting giving assistance to Poland. Czechoslovak aid to date has consisted of only about half of the amount of foodstuffs requested.

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