

Czechoslovakia: The liberals around party leader Dubcek are well on the way toward sweeping conservatives out of the central leadership.

According to the Yugoslav news agency Tanjug, President Novotny's resignation may be expected at any hour. Quoting "well informed sources," the agency maintains that only the form in which the resignation is to be tendered remains to be resolved.

One of the candidates recently often mentioned as a replacement for Novotny is Josef Smrkovsky, party central committee member and government minister, who in the early 1950s was sentenced to life imprisonment for political crimes.

The faltering President has already signed an order removing from office two of his staunchest supporters, Minister of Interior Josef Kudrna and Prosecutor General Jan Bartuska. Novotny's action came after the presidium of the National Assembly had voiced its lack of confidence in the two and suggests that his grasp on political power has significantly weakened.

Other key Novotny supporters who have resigned in the past few days include the premier of Slovakia and the chief of the central council of trade unions. Two other secretaries of the trade unions council also resigned and four more are under fire.

Defense Minister Lomsky, another Novotny man, is under heavy fire, and his resignation could come at any time. Presumably it has been held up by the desire of the party leaders to assess Lomsky's role, if any, in the suicide of Deputy Defense Minister Vladimir Janko and the defection of Major General Jan Sejna. Lomsky also appears to have Russian support.

Dubcek and the liberals are confronted, however, with conservative opponents who still have seats on the

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party presidium and in the central committee, even though some of them may have been ousted from their government jobs. After a session of the party presidium on 14-15 March, the liberals apparently forced through a decision against postponing a central committee meeting until next month. This meeting is to decide on personnel changes and the party "action program."

The liberals are increasing their hold on the powerful party central committee apparatus. During its marathon meeting, the presidium decided to turn over responsibility in the central committee for education, science, and culture to Gestimir Cisar, an outspoken liberal who for years defended the interests of intellectuals in the party and government. [REDACTED]

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