

SECRET

Czechoslovakia-USSR: Prague and Moscow seem to be seeking to ease the tension.

Limited information concerning the two-day conference in Prague of regional and district party secretaries suggests that Dubcek intends to continue the reform program but also to move against both dogmatic party members and the extreme liberals. The latter's activities and statements have been a major cause of Soviet concern.

The conference also discussed preparations for a party congress. The date will be set by a plenum of the central committee later this month. The congress probably will be the setting for Dubcek to attempt to remove or neutralize his opponents.

The Soviet Union also seems to be relaxing the pressure somewhat. Although Moscow still has not directly supported Prague's claim that Soviet troop movements were only routine "maneuvers," it may be edging in that direction. Soviet Marshal Yakubovskiy, the Warsaw Pact commander, said in a Pravda article of 13 May that the Warsaw Pact powers "have held, are holding, and shall hold exercises," and he attacked the Western press for "malicious provocations." Yakubovskiy's remarks were vaguely worded but suggest that Moscow does not now intend to intervene militarily.

Moscow has continued to criticize only carefully selected features of the Czechoslovak liberalization movement. The journal Sovietskaya Rossiya yesterday struck out at the efforts of "some people" to rehabilitate Thomas Masaryk. The article asked if these people--presumably Czechoslovak journalists--"realize what disaster" they can bring on by their activities. Some Czechoslovak journalists may feel obliged to answer this attack.

25X1

15 May 68

3

SECRET