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Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek leadership is on the brink of its greatest crisis since the Soviet occupation.

President Ludvik Svoboda, who last night announced to the nation that a second Czechoslovak youth had set himself ablaze, made an impassioned plea to all Czechoslovaks to refrain from further self-destructive acts and public demonstrations. Svoboda indicated that such disorders could degenerate into riots which might claim "thousands of innocent lives" and bring down the entire Dubcek leadership in the process. His remarks suggest that the Soviets are running out of patience with Dubcek's reluctance to take the necessary steps to maintain order and to use force to squelch anti-Soviet protests and marches.

Student demonstrations in Prague between 18-20 January ended a period of relative calm in Czechoslovakia. Thousands of disaffected youths yesterday marched in the streets in memory of Jan Paluch, a 21-year-old student whose self-immolation has aroused the entire population. Paluch was protesting censorship and the continued existence of an illegal pro-Soviet publication, but his "martyrdom" has sparked other protests and expanded the list of grievances.

In attempting to assess Paluch's motives, the US Embassy in Prague has indicated that a document purported to be a party presidium directive on new censorship provisions, dated 7 January, was circulated in Prague. According to the 18-point statement, the party intended to establish firm control over the Czechoslovak news agency, radio and television by forcing them to adhere to the party line and by making sure that the "right people" are appointed to top positions in the mass media.

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In terms reminiscent of former hardline party boss Novotny, the document also recommends that a new press law minimize the possibility that publications and individual journalists will be able to use legal means in order to circumvent newly imposed restrictions. Under present circumstances, however, it is unclear whether the leadership will continue to push such measures.

The students, who have the support of the workers and the intellectuals, reportedly will meet with trade union officials later this week to coordinate protest activities. Party and government leaders have attempted to head off any further demonstrations by expressing sympathy for Paluch and by meeting student leaders, but these efforts have thus far been unsuccessful. The death of a second student might trigger riots and strikes that could lead to a direct clash between some Czechoslovak demonstrators and the Soviet occupation forces. It was precisely such a situation that the party presidium recently warned could lead to "tragic consequences."

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