

EFFECT OF INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA ON COMMUNIST FRONTS

The degree of consternation, opposition and disarray caused among Communist front organizations presumably surprised the Soviet and other Warsaw Pact invaders of Czechoslovakia. Some officials in some front headquarters and certain national affiliates of the fronts, condemned or deplored the invasion as being contrary to national sovereignty and independence; in some cases front officials, speaking as individuals in order not to invoke the credentials of the front itself, voiced sharp criticism. Given the fact that support of Soviet foreign policy and of Communist Party objectives is the overriding purpose of the fronts' existence, open disagreement with the Moscow leadership of the fronts is a most significant development, indeed one which has never occurred before.* The problem is further accentuated by the fact that the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) with headquarters in Prague -- the most important international front with by far the largest membership -- issued the strongest statement of condemnation and its activities and organization were particularly affected.

The fronts' reactions to the invasion by "fraternal" forces unquestionably impaired their usefulness to the Soviets at a moment when their support was sorely needed. Most likely, the invasion also contributed to furthering the general erosion of the fronts' influence on selected target audiences -- a trend evident in the past few years due to such factors as the Sino-Soviet dispute, the strained relations between the Soviets and Cuba, the increasing demands for national independence and individual freedom within the Soviet camp, etc. Prior to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the fronts had maintained silence on the struggle for freedom in that land in spite of the fact that four of them are headquartered in Prague, including the WFTU, International Union of Students (IUS), and the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ). The Soviets have worked hard to restore "normalcy" in the fronts, and they have been rather successful so far. While major differences remain over the invasion, the Soviets have managed to impose a tacit understanding to avoid the invasion/intervention issue to the degree possible and to concentrate on Vietnam, "European Security," the Middle East, Greece and other propaganda missions. In any event, whereas in the period immediately following the invasion, front meetings which had been scheduled earlier had to be canceled or postponed because of the tension and disarray in the fronts, the WCP

*The invasion of Czechoslovakia is the first instance of the fronts' failure to support Moscow wholeheartedly on a major issue. In 1956 none of the fronts questioned, and some supported outright, the Soviet invasion which brutally suppressed the Hungarian Revolution. It should be noted, however, that there had then been strong differences of views within the World Council of Peace (WCP) leadership, and by failing to commit itself did signify something less than approbation. In this context it might also be recalled that in 1948 Moscow's control of the fronts was so complete as to lead to the immediate expulsion of the Yugoslav affiliates from all fronts when Stalin expelled Tito from the Cominform.

and WFTU did manage to hold major meetings by November and December, respectively. These conferences particularly the WFTU's, were less than harmonious, but organizational splits or other deep, irreparable divisions did not occur.

Highlights of Front Reactions

-- World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)

On 28 August the WFTU Secretariat issued a statement endorsing the earlier public reactions of WFTU Secretary General, Louis Saillant and WFTU President, Renato Bitossi and "condemning and deeply regretting" the military intervention by the five Warsaw Pact countries. The statement stressed that relaxation of international tension can be achieved only if everyone adheres to the rules of noninterference in the internal affairs of others and of negotiations to settle problems. Saillant emphasized that this declaration reflects the fundamental principles which justify the WFTU's existence.

While the Secretariat's statement was supported by most of its affiliates in non-Communist countries, particularly by the Italian CGIL and the French CGT, it was bitterly condemned by Moscow's allies in Eastern Europe, in particular uncompromising terms by the Polish trade unions (yielding to imperialist propaganda; an act of arbitrariness not reflecting the attitude of the WFTU; etc.). During September it appeared that a split might develop within the WFTU and there were indications that the Soviets might oust the organization's leadership. A number of Soviet-arranged, fence-mending meetings were held concurrent with Soviet attempts to intimidate and bring Bitossi and Saillant to heel. However, these actions and the efforts of WFTU's Soviet vice-president, Aleksandr Shelepin, could not even force a retraction of the WFTU Secretariat statement critical of Soviet action in Czechoslovakia.

In the October issue of World Trade Union Movement, the acting secretary of the WFTU, Pierre Gansous, wrote an editorial in which he said "... serious divergencies have arisen within the WFTU and more widely within the international trade union movement ..." but "the WFTU must go on. The difficulties will be serious but the will to surmount them in order to ensure the continuity of the WFTU is great." He stressed that member organizations must coexist and co-operate, especially against U.S. aggression in Vietnam.

During October and November, bilateral and multilateral meetings of WFTU national affiliates were continued, and the 18th WFTU General Council meeting, originally planned for Rostock, East Germany (2-5 October) was held in East Berlin (16-19 December). Great efforts were expended to mask the dissensions that have continued to plague the WFTU since its condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Moscow and its allies insisted defensively, in reportage and comment during and after the meeting, that a spirit of harmony prevailed, and failed to mention Czechoslovakia in accounts of the speeches made at the session or in the final resolution. But the Rumanian speech attested, obliquely, to strains at the conference and the Italian Communist organ L'Unita aired the

dissenting minority position upheld by the CGIL on the issue of what the guiding ideological and organizational principles of the WFTU should be. In brief, it maintained that it should be a democratic international organization independent of parties and governments with each national trade union center free to determine its own path and orientation.

It would now appear that the Soviets' ability to force the resignation of Bitossi or Saillant was limited, so long as the PCI and the PCF continued to assert their independence of the CPSU. Their positions may be less tenable, however, as the Italian and French parties move further back into Moscow's fold.

-- World Council of Peace (WCP)

The WCP statement on Czechoslovakia was issued three weeks after the invasion -- the hesitation reflecting its own dilemma and that facing most of the fronts. Published on 10 September in Brussels and signed by WCP's Belgian Coordinating Chairman Isabelle Blume, and Indian Secretary General Romesh Chandra, the statement expressed "concern and anxiety" but, unlike the WFTU, welcomed the "agreement" reached in Moscow. With this mild rebuke, the WCP was out of step with several of its affiliated peace movements, especially in Europe, which denounced the invasion.

The disruption caused in the WCP was apparently not particularly serious: It opened its new headquarters in Helsinki on September 20 and that same day published its first appeal which asked for action during the Week of Solidarity with the Vietnamese People (15-21 October). Chandra led a WCP delegation to the Afro-Asian "Conference for Support for the Vietnamese People" held in Cairo in September and a joint WCP/Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) Conference in support of the Portuguese Colonies and of the Peoples of Southern Africa was decided upon during September for January (18-20) in Khartoum. The WCP's stress on collaboration with and support of "third generation fronts" (such as AAPSO) and other groups in the Third World precedes, of course, the Czech crisis. It reflects the WCP's awareness of its limited action potential in those areas where it must operate entirely in its own name, which is too tainted with Communism to permit a wide freedom of action.

In October the WCP felt strong enough to call a Presidential Committee meeting, as many members had demanded immediately after Czechoslovakia was invaded. It took place in Lahti, Finland, from 11 to 13 November and dealt with many familiar action issues: Vietnam, the Middle East, support of the Arab Peoples, Greece, Latin America, etc. The official conference press release stated that differences of viewpoint on Czechoslovakia were expressed, and the common wish was for an improvement in the situation. Prior to the meeting, the Yugoslav League for Peace had written to the WCP demanding "concrete action in favor of the victims."

At a preparatory meeting in Vienna, from 10 December, for the Conference for European Security and Co-operation, it was decided to postpone the conference by some five months and to hold it in Vienna in October 1969. The

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung reported on December that the 65 delegates from Western and Eastern European countries had expressed serious differences of views on questions of national sovereignty and noninterference in the affairs of other nations.

-- International Organization of Democratic Lawyers (IADL)

As reported by Le Monde on 13 September, the President and Secretary General of the IADL issued a statement addressed to the IADL affiliates of the Warsaw Pact countries, excluding Rumania, condemning the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia which was "contrary to the norms of international law." Internal stresses in this lawyers' organization over the Czech invasion are not surprising, particularly since it is heavily involving in various kinds of anti-Vietnam War propaganda and "investigative" actions.

-- World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY)

The only significant action taken by this organization concerning the invasion of Czechoslovakia was a statement by its Italian Communist President, Rodolfo Mechini. He issued a personal statement on August 27, condemning the military action. WFDY's Secretary General, Le Gal, was replaced by another French Communist youth leader, Michel Jouet, but no reason was given for the change. Only the Chilean affiliate of the WFDY expressed support for the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia.

-- International Union of Students (IUS)

The IUS issued no statement on Czechoslovakia. The Secretariat met on 26 August in Prague, but decided to postpone discussions. At the next meeting on 7 October, Zbynek Vokrouhlicky, IUS President and Chairman of the Czechoslovak Youth Organization, requested the removal of the Czechoslovak matter from the agenda. In a letter on 24 August to the youth organizations of all Warsaw Pact powers involved in the invasion, he had accused them of violating the bonds of friendship by "clear and absolutely unfounded aggression" and demanded withdrawal of the foreign troops "who are mainly made up of members of your organizations." Several Western European and African members of the IUS were displeased with the IUS's official silence. The fact is that Vokrouhlicky's views remain as stated in his letter of 24 August.

-- International Organization of Journalists (IOJ)

On 22 August, the IOJ protested against the occupation of its headquarters in Prague by the invading troops. The statement said: "we protest most earnestly against this illegal measure" and it appealed to all IOJ members and all colleagues throughout the world "to oppose by every means this brutal intervention." On 3 September, the IOJ Secretariat demanded that the Czechoslovak Union of Journalists be allowed to resume normal operations and it is now planning for an international exhibition, "Interpres '69," to be held in Prague, 11-18 June, 1969.

-- Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)

There is no evidence of any significant reaction to the Czechoslovak issue in this organization, which is somewhat surprising given WIDF's alleged concern with injustice and related matters. The reason for the silence may well be that the WIDF is headquartered in Ulbricht-controlled East Berlin. The French affiliate sent the WIDF a statement condemning the military intervention in Czechoslovakia.

-- World Federation of Scientific Workers (WFSW)

This organization has been deeply affected by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Scientific World (No. 6) admitted that the invasion had complicated the work of the WFSW. The Swiss government blocked the convening of the Ninth General Assembly, due to be held in Switzerland from September 25-29, and the work in Prague of the Central and Eastern European Center was interrupted. The WFSW did not issue a statement on the invasion because, it said, the 29 affiliated organizations could not agree on a common view. The editorial in Scientific World explained that besides disagreeing on the question of the invasion, affiliates also disagreed on whether the subject came within the terms of the WFSW charter and constitution. They finally agreed that the WFSW was a federation of scientific organizations, each with an equal right to a view on how the constitution should be applied.

-- International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR)

The FIR has been deeply affected by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Its Italian President, Banfi, in a letter to Presidium members, condemned the military intervention in one European country by another, and the French and Italian affiliates issued statements reflecting views similar to Banfi's. The FIR and all its West European affiliates sent messages of support to Dubcek. The Sixth Congress, which was due to be held in November, has been postponed until 1969.