USSR-Czechoslovakia: Moscow has formally protested an article in the Czechoslovak press and implicitly demanded reinstitution of press censorship.

The protest note, delivered on 10 June and publicized by Pravda the same day, condemned a Czechoslovak Catholic newspaper for reprinting a New York Times article alleging that Soviet officials in Czechoslovakia helped make General Sejna's escape possible. The article claimed that the Soviets had approved the issuance of passports to Sejna which he subsequently used in his flight.

According to TASS, the note charged that the report was reprinted with the "one aim" of worsening Soviet-Czechoslovak relations. The note expressed the "conviction" that the "appropriate Czechoslovak organs" will take "the necessary measures to protect friendly relations" by preventing the appearance of "similar reports."

The Soviet decision to raise this issue to the level of formal intergovernmental relations is certain to disturb the fragile understanding which was one result of Kosygin's visit last month. Although the Dubcek regime has had some success in toning down the press, Moscow is apparently dissatisfied with Prague's determination, dramatized by the cabinet's decision to abolish administrative censorship last week, to use only informal controls. The timing of the protest and the publicity suggest Moscow may attempt to exploit Prague's need for a loan as a means of securing a retreat on this issue. A Czechoslovak economic delegation is in Moscow now on loan negotiations.

The Soviet protest places Dubcek in a difficult position. For domestic political reasons, he must avoid appearing subservient to Moscow, particularly
on the sensitive issue of press freedom. Prague eventually may deliver a conciliatory but delayed reply to the Soviet note, as it did in the case of an earlier Polish protest. Nevertheless, Dubcek can hardly reverse himself on an issue on which he is so firmly committed.