PRAGUE CONTINUES ON PATH TO REFORM

In his bilateral talks this week with Yugoslav, East German, and Rumanian leaders, Dubcek bolstered Czechoslovakia's independent stand and reaffirmed his regime's plans for domestic reform. There is lingering suspicion and dissatisfaction within Czechoslovakia concerning some of Dubcek's moves as the party prepares for its 14th congress, which convenes on 9 September.

Yugoslav party chief Tito, who received a tumultuous reception during his visit to Prague, pledged expanded political and economic bilateral relations. He offered to help Prague check some of its most serious problems, such as labor supply and construction. Both Dubcek and National Assembly President Smrkovsky are expected to visit Belgrade soon, the latter in October.

In contrast, East German party boss Ulbricht's cool reception in Karlovy Vary on 12-13 August was matched by inconclusive talks with Dubcek that did little to improve bilateral relations.

Prague rolled out the red carpet for Rumania's Ceausescu, who arrived on 15 August to sign a bilateral friendship treaty. Like Tito, Ceausescu offered Prague expanded relations in a show of support for Dubcek's independent stand against Moscow.

During these bilateral consultations, Prague advanced its reform plans by publishing the drafts of new party statutes to be submitted to the congress for approval. Some of the statutes' provisions are certain to irritate those who opposed the Czechoslovak reformers at Bratislava. One proposal provides for a federal system of two Communist parties, Bohemian and Slovak, under a skeletal central party organization. This change will presumably give the Slovaks a greater voice in party affairs and reduces the powers of the central party apparatus.

Another proposal recommends that minorities be permitted to express and solicit support for their views even after being
outvoted by the majority, a clear contravention of the principle of
"democratic centralism." Other provisions would grant additional
freedom to minorities, give a
greater role to organized non-
Communist groups, permit individ-
uals to enter and leave the party
voluntarily, and provide that all
party bodies be elected by secret
ballot.

There is some dissension
among Czechoslovak liberals over
the slow pace of the reform pro-
gram, as well as suspicion over
the ultimate results of Dubcek's
negotiations with the Soviets.
A controversy, for example, has
developed because of the aboli-
tion of the party post held by
Lt. Gen. Prchlik, a Warsaw Pact
critic whose removal was viewed
by liberal party officials as a
concession to Moscow. Recalci-
trant intellectuals have also at-
tacked Moscow's psychological war-
fare against Czechoslovakia, and
have opposed the regime's pleas
for self-restraint by public media
on this issue.

Moscow, for its part, has
maintained its "wait-and-see" at-
titude toward events in Prague.
Most top Soviet leaders apparently
began their summer vacations last
week; only two full members of
the politburo have been noted in
public since 6 August.

The Soviet press continues
to warn the Czechoslovaks to heed
Moscow's interpretation of the
Bratislava agreement, but its
tenor remains restrained. The
only exception to the suspension
of polemics between Czechoslovak
and Soviet media was an attack by
Literarny Gazette in response to a
"provocative" article in the Czech-
oslovak journal, Literarni Listy,
last week. It implicitly demanded
that steps be taken to curb the
journal and served to warn other
Czechoslovak press organs against
similar "anti-Soviet" commentary.

The USSR kept up its military
pressure on Czechoslovakia with an
announcement on 10 August of a
joint communications exercise in-
volving command and support ele-
ments of the Soviet, Polish, and
East German armies. The announce-
ment follows the three-week-long
Rear Services exercise held in
areas adjacent to Czechoslovakia.

On 14 August, Warsaw radio re-
ported the presence in Poland of
the new chief of staff of the War-
saw Pact, Soviet General Shtemenko.
The exercise was Moscow's latest
pretext for keeping Soviet troops
in areas bordering Czechoslovakia.

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