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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN TRANSITION

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11

23 April 1968

No. 0658/68

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
23 April 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Czechoslovakia in Transition

Summary

Alexander Dubcek's beliefs that domestic repression must cease and that the time has come for Czechoslovakia to take its place in the family of nations have led to a bloodless but nevertheless very real revolution in Czechoslovakia. The unbending and unimaginative leadership of Antonin Novotny has been supplanted by a new administration dedicated to policies based on Dubcek's ideas. These include protection of the rights of the individual, the rule of law, a foreign policy serving the genuine interests of the country, and broad economic reforms. The party has promised to institutionalize such changes at a measured pace.

Dubcek still is faced with significant domestic opposition as distinct conservative and progressive factions have now emerged in the party. There is no reason to believe that he will, or safely could, renege on his promises for changes, though he probably will find it difficult in some instances to move ahead as directly and rapidly as he might desire.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Economic Research, the Office of Strategic Research, the Office of National Estimates, and the Clandestine Services.

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The leaders of the Soviet Union appear to have conceded, though grudgingly, the Czechoslovak party's right to reform itself and to attempt a Communist "democratization." Brezhnev and Kosygin and the leaders of the Eastern European states nevertheless obviously fear the spread of such concepts to their own countries. The only limits placed on the new Czechoslovak regime by Moscow, however, are insistence that the Communist Party retain primacy, and that Czechoslovakia honor its commitments to the USSR, the other Communist states, and the international Communist movement. Dubcek has agreed, but the manner in which he and the Russians interpret these limits is certain to be a constant source of friction.

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The Bloodless Revolution

1. After four years as the permissive ruler of Slovakia, Dubcek probably was not surprised by the rapidity with which his views gained acceptance in the party and among the politically active segments of the population. He used this groundswell of support first to sweep Novotny out of the party's top post and later from his position as president. Without previous preparation, and within months, Dubcek seems to have gained effective control of the leadership of the party and government. Novotny and his closest adherents, shorn of their authority, are no longer in a position to interfere with policymaking, but still, through their lower level supporters, can probably cause delays and interfere with the implementation of new policies.

2. Dubcek's position is thus not yet secure. He has strengthened his hold by installing a majority of reformers in the reconstituted party presidium and a balanced new party secretariat to execute policy. He has pensioned off the most flagrant Stalinists, retired with honor older conservatives who helped bring him to power, and given the younger of them a chance to change or be swept out. Dubcek announced on 16 April that in the parceling out of responsibilities in the new party leadership he would retain supervision of party organizational and personnel matters as well as security and defense. He is thus in a position to moderate the quarrels of unsatisfied progressives and scandalized conservatives in the leadership, without worrying that they could suddenly turn him out.

The Organization

3. The new Czechoslovak cabinet is composed mainly of technocrats, rather than ideologues. It accurately reflects the political state of affairs in Czechoslovakia, and is composed of ministers ranging from former conservatives to ultraliberals. The new premier, Oldrich Cernik, fought hard for

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

GOVERNMENT Appointed 8 April 1968

PREMIER

Oldrich Cernik

DEPUTY PREMIERS

Peter Colotka
Frantisek Hamouz
Gustav Husak
Ota Sik
Lubomir Strougal

MINISTERS

Josef Boruvka
Martin Dzur
Miroslav Galuska
Jiri Hajek
Julius Hamus
Vladimir Kadlec
● Josef Krejci
Bohuslav Kucera
● Bozena Machacova
Josef Pavel
Oldrich Pavlovsky
● Frantisek Penc
Stanislav Razi
Frantisek Rehak
● Bohumil Sucharda
Josef Trokan
Vaclav Vales
Vladislav Vlcek
Miloslav Ilruskovic
● Josef Koreak
Frantisek Vlasak
Vaclav Hula
Michal Stancel

Agriculture and Food
National Defense
Culture and Information
Foreign Affairs
Forestry and Water Economy
Education
Heavy Industry
Justice
Consumer Goods Industry
Interior
Internal Trade
Mining
Chemical Industry
Transportation
Finance
* Building Industry
Foreign Trade
Health
Minister-Chairman, State
Commission for Technology
Minister-Chairman, Central
Power Administration
Minister-Chairman, State
Planning Commission
Minister Without Portfolio
Minister Without Portfolio

* New ministry

● Former incumbent

PARTY Elected 4 April 1968

PRESIDIUM

● Alexander Dubcek
Frantisek Barbirek
Vasil Bilak
● Oldrich Cernik
● Drahomir Kolder
Frantisek Kriegel
▷ Jan Piller
▷ Emil Rigo
Josef Smrkovsky
▷ Josef Spacek
Oldrich Svetska

ALTERNATE PRESIDIUM

● Antonin Kapck
Josef Lenart
● Martin Vaculik

SECRETARIAT

● Alexander Dubcek
● Cestmir Cisar
Alois Indra
● Drahomir Kolder
Josef Lenart
● Stefan Sadovsky
Vaclav Slavik
Oldrich Volenik
Zdenek Mlynar

▷ Became member in Jan 68

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Novotny's ouster, but his appointment has come under attack because he was Novotny's economic planner and shares the blame for the sorry state of Czechoslovakia's economy. The performances of men such as Cernik will be carefully monitored by a reinvigorated National Assembly, led by the determined liberal, Josef Smrkovsky, whose contested election gives a clear measure of the residual strength of the conservatives. Smrkovsky received the votes of 188 deputies, with 68 opposing, and 44 abstaining or absenting themselves.

4. Dubcek's party and government appointments are designed to appeal to the broadest possible range of the party membership and of the population, and for the first time on any significant scale in 20 years are also intended to strengthen representation of particular interest groups such as farmers, intellectuals, and the national minorities. On the whole, the new leadership is younger than its predecessor, better educated, and steeled in the art of survival--especially those jailed during the Stalinist era, who in particular are determined that such days of terror will not return.

5. Dubcek and the reformers have made many promises, some of which have already been effected. The first of these, to prevent a future concentration of power in one man's hands such as Novotny had, has been achieved through the series of new appointments to key government and party positions. Only Premier Cernik has a seat both in the cabinet and the party presidium, presumably in a liaison capacity. The posts formerly held by Novotny--party first secretary, presidium member, president, and chief of the National Front (formerly the party "transmission belt" to the population)--are held individually by new appointees.

The Party's New Program

6. Despite inadequate time for thorough preparation and a bitter behind-the-scenes struggle waged by the conservatives, Dubcek has followed through on another promise by promulgating a party

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"action program" that frankly acknowledges many past wrongs and is the guideline for one of the most liberal reforms ever considered by a Communist government. In the words of one of the program's foremost exponents, it is an attempt to "synthesize" democracy and Communism. Compromises in the original draft apparently were necessary to gain conservative approval of the document. They primarily consist of a slowdown in the rate of introducing economic reforms, and some changes in the tone of the document to give more stress to the primacy of the Communist Party and to Czechoslovakia's obligations to its Communist allies. Such generalities, however, are contradicted in the program's promises to share at least some power with non-Communists and to insist that national interest take its place as an equal of Communist "solidarity" as a criterion of foreign policy decisions.

7. The action program is an unabashed attempt to effect a reconciliation between the ruling Communists and the alienated population. Its recommendations for institutional changes will probably be acted upon favorably by the National Assembly and by government ministries because the Communist Party still is in control and in this case the party's desires coincide with those of the populace. The program provides for guarantees of personal rights, including freedom of speech, assembly, association, religion, travel and work abroad. "Certain specialists" are exempted from provisions allowing emigration. The program calls for an independent court system free of "political influences," and promises electoral reforms. It establishes machinery both in the party and the government to rectify the injustices done to an estimated 40,000 victims of past political injustice, not only wiping their slates clean but providing compensation to those still alive.

8. The civil police will be brought under control of the local governments, and presumably will have exclusive jurisdiction over domestic police matters. The secret police will concentrate

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their efforts on counterintelligence against foreign countries. The secret police are expressly prohibited from interfering in politics.

9. One of the most significant reforms recommended by the action program is a call for preparation of a new constitution, a document that should result in a federal system of government which will give to Slovakia its long-sought autonomy. Since the program's publication, important voices in Moravia have demanded that this region of the country also be given autonomous government. In the end, the proposed Czech-Slovak federation may in fact become a federal republic consisting of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, with Prague's national powers limited to foreign policy, macro-economic controls, security, and national defense.

10. Even before the action program was adopted, the Dubcek regime made several sharp breaks with the past. Dissident intellectuals who were punished by Novotny last summer were fully exonerated. Those expelled from the party regained their memberships and no longer are excluded from work in their fields. An informal agreement lifting censorship was arrived at between the party and news media editors. Until the National Assembly can act, the unpopular "press law" is still on the books, and the action program calls for retention of a qualified ex post facto censorship, similar to the "gentlemen's agreement" now in force.

11. Dubcek and the reformers, probably because they approved, have not interfered in recent months as various national or special interest groups purged themselves of leaders tainted by their past associations with Novotny or earlier regimes. University students bolted the official youth organization, setting up one of their own. Trade unions, professional organizations, farmers groups, and government bodies even including military units openly and successfully pressed conservative leaders to resign. New groups representing a wide variety of interests sprang up like

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mushrooms. Their continued existence seems assured by the action program.

12. Perhaps the best summary of what has happened since Dubcek took over was given in early April by a horrified conservative party central committee member:

Honest functionaries are going through personal tragedies, factory managers are being dismissed, demands are being voiced to return to pre-1948 conditions, claims are being heard that enterprises with up to 50 employees should be returned to private ownership, numerous policemen are joining the (Catholic) People's Party, editors of youth newspapers are becoming members of the Socialist Party and, to me the most shocking of all, a West German bourgeois journalist was permitted to attend a Communist Party conference.

A bloodthirsty vendetta has been unleashed and skullhunters are shooting down functionaries, the youth union has disintegrated, editorial boards of newspapers are emancipating themselves, judges are hanging themselves, the countryside is being swept by the slogan "national committees without Communists," and there are new problems connected with the elections.

Perhaps there is not yet any reason for panic and pessimism. Perhaps, as another speaker has declared, a cold shiver need not yet go down our spines. But I nevertheless see the situation as serious indeed.

The "bloodthirsty vendetta" and the "shooting down" of functionaries are figures of speech so far as is known. There is no evidence that anyone has been hurt or arrested although there have been spectacular suicides. There are some indications, however, that those who perpetrated the bloody purges of the 1950s will be brought to trial.

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The Second Stage of Revolution

13. The Dubcek regime is not out of the woods yet. Conservatives in the party central committee and in regional and local organizations are fighting a strong rear-guard action, attempting to retain as much as possible of the status quo. They also are still in power in government ministries and in many cases in the local national councils. To a degree, these functionaries can and probably will attempt to sabotage implementation of reform measures. Over 100 hard-core conservatives still hold a third of the National Assembly's votes.

14. Much to the disappointment of progressives, the conservative forces were able to delete from the party action program a call for convocation of a party congress before its scheduled date in 1970. Only the congress is empowered to make changes in the composition of the central committee. The progressives fear that holdovers from the Novotny regime will use the time between now and the congress to pull down the Dubcek regime, or at least to create such chaos that reform would have to be abandoned. The issue of the congress has become a public controversy and Dubcek has been severely criticized for refusing to take an unequivocal stand on it.

15. Such remarks as Dubcek has made, however, indicate that he favors convocation of a congress sometime next spring, after he has had a chance to evaluate the activities of central committee members against the background of their performance vis-a-vis the action program. Dubcek has said that he will not be a party to wholesale purges of the Communist Party membership, and he squelched proposals raised at a 1 to 5 April central committee meeting for reconvening local party conferences for the purpose of rooting out conservatives.

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16. Dubcek and the reformers probably would have far fewer conservatives to contend with at lower levels of the party if in January they had not foolishly bowed to conservative demands to keep the background of Novotny's ouster a secret. Local party election meetings were held in February under conditions of unprecedented confusion, and the party rank-and-file voted on the basis of an interpretation of events in Prague given to them by their old leaders. As a result, conservatives were frequently re-elected.

17. Dubcek realized his mistake too late, and the delegates to regional party conferences which began on 20 April were elected from among the recently returned conservatives. In most cases, reformers can be expected to press for the ouster of old regional leaders, and there are signs that regional press campaigns, similar to the massive effort which culminated in Novotny's resignation from the presidency, are under way. Should these efforts fail, Dubcek's task in convening a party congress will be all the harder, for the regional party organizations can greatly influence the selection of congress delegates. Furthermore, retention of a regional leadership by conservatives probably would mean great difficulties for the action program in that particular region.

18. Dubcek's prospects of gaining control of the government apparatus are somewhat better. Local elections throughout the country have been postponed from May to next fall at the earliest so that the National Front, with its newly revitalized minor political parties and public bodies such as trade unions, can prepare new lists of candidates to replace the ones which apparently had already been drawn up under the Novotny regime. The forthcoming new electoral law probably will provide that henceforth a candidate who receives a majority of the votes cast will be elected, a routine procedure unpracticed up to now in Communist Czechoslovakia.

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19. Elections to the National Assembly are scheduled for November. If through these elections Dubcek can put in reformist majorities on local and national levels, he may be able selectively to circumvent recalcitrant party organizations and deal with the government directly. Dubcek probably would consider such a course as a last resort, and temporary at best, but there is no reason to doubt that he would do it, especially if he was faced with failure of his program and loss of power.

20. Dubcek is relying for success on the continued support of the free press, and of special interest groups such as students, intellectuals, farmers, and members of national minorities, as well as the population in general. He has shown a keen awareness of the problems facing the ordinary man and has promised to give first priority to the greatest of these, housing. The Czechoslovak Government is prepared to invite foreign--meaning Western--firms into the country to alleviate the drastic housing shortage as rapidly as possible, according to the new minister of construction.

21. Conservatives have been spreading rumors that forthright implementation of the economic reform will lead to a sharp drop in the average man's standard of living. Dubcek and other leaders have been stressing that they will not allow this to happen. Even so, many workers will suffer temporary unemployment and face the prospect of relocation. These effects of the reform will be unpopular and will have to be phased carefully or Dubcek will lose what worker support he has. In his maiden speech as chairman of the National Assembly, Josef Smrkovsky stressed protection of the worker, urging adoption of legal guarantees of minimum wages and of pensions. In the past, the regime manipulated wages and pensions to exact political compliance or as a punishment to recalcitrants.

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Russian Reactions and East European Fears

22. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the Russians, who largely depended on Novotny and his coterie for information, underestimated the potential strength of the wave of demands for liberalization unleashed by Dubcek during the leadership crisis from October 1967 to January 1968. After Novotny's ouster, when they began to understand it more clearly, they were concerned [REDACTED] lest it take an anti-Russian or an anti-Communist turn. Dubcek has reassured them on these points many times, in private and in public, and the Soviet leaders appear to have accepted them.

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23. The Russians are nevertheless uneasy over the prospect that Dubcek may not be able to control the course of democratization in Czechoslovakia. They and the other Eastern Europeans, especially the Poles and the East Germans, are also worried that Czechoslovak ideas on democratization will spread to and arouse their populations. The meeting on 23-24 March in Dresden of Russian and Eastern European leaders (minus Rumania) was called primarily to discuss Czechoslovakia in these terms, as well as the impact of recent events in Eastern Europe on CEMA and the Warsaw Pact.

24. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Dubcek came in for considerable criticism at the Dresden meeting but nevertheless gained grudging acceptance for his program and ideas. Polish leader Gomulka, who had just suppressed anti-regime student riots fed by developments in Czechoslovakia, was reported to have charged that the Czechoslovak party had lost control and was facing an almost counterrevolutionary situation led by intellectuals and rightists. He fearfully added that if such a "false liberalization" succeeded, it would have grave repercussions in Poland. Hungary's Kadar seconded Gomulka's remarks and said that the 1956 revolution in Hungary "began in the same way." Brezhnev was also critical, but wrapped up the meeting by accepting Dubcek's explanations. He warned, however, that the Soviets would continue to watch and criticize if the situation warranted.

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25. Developments since the Dresden meeting indicate that the Russians and the Eastern Europeans were dissatisfied with the results of the conference and remained concerned about Czechoslovakia's course. East German spokesmen sharply attacked the Czechoslovaks for playing into the hands of the "imperialist" West and heaped bitter condemnations on the extreme liberal Josef Smrkovsky, who was then a leading presidential candidate. The East Germans and the Poles have virtually sealed their Czechoslovak borders. Hungary has issued a number of public warnings, referring to its own blood bath in 1956, to remind the Czechoslovaks to be careful. The recent plenum of the Soviet party central committee apparently adopted measures designed to ensure that the Prague plague did not spread to the USSR. Soviet newspaper articles have included a number of implicit warnings to the Czechoslovaks not to allow the Communist Party to lose control, and implicit threats of economic pressures based on Czechoslovakia's economic dependence on the USSR.

26. It seems clear that in the new circumstances in Prague, Soviet influence on the workings of the Czechoslovak Party and Government has diminished. [REDACTED] by mid-February the Russian officials were reduced to asking for information from their Czechoslovak counterparts. [REDACTED] believes that the Russians will tolerate a variety of changes in Czechoslovakia, so long as Communists continue to rule and the new regime honors its alliances with the USSR and the Eastern European states and its commitments to the international Communist movement. Dubcek repeatedly has said he intends to observe these limits but his regime's interpretation of such limitations differs markedly from that of the Russians and others. On 19 April Rude Pravo, the main party daily, underscored this by defending Czechoslovakia's "socialist model," and by stating "no one can prescribe for any party what is and what is not its international duty."

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27. Dubcek has said that he intends to take up the questions of the leadership structure of the Warsaw Pact and the concepts underlying the pact's existence. Economists in Czechoslovakia are beginning to urge publicly that defense spending be cut and the money saved used for economic purposes. The new minister of foreign trade has attacked the economic usefulness of CEMA and has indicated that Prague wants to loosen its ties with this closed system and to reorient its trade to a worldwide basis. The new government is also examining the problems involved in making the Czechoslovak crown a convertible currency.

Where the Czechoslovaks Go From Here

28. The Russians and the other unhappy East European leaders apparently believe that Dubcek can hold Czechoslovakia back from what they see as an anti-Communist abyss. At first glance, it would appear to be so. There have been no basic institutional changes in Czechoslovakia yet and the new leadership includes many who used to be known as conservatives. The population is hopeful, but is skeptical, and is still waiting for legislation implementing the promises. The action program could be no more than empty promises.

29. Such an analysis, however, ignores the style characteristic of the Dubcek regime, with its emphasis on due process and on participation of people of all shades of opinion in making decisions. The new appointments to key positions in both party and government reflect this, with conservatives such as Kolder retained and ultra-liberals such as Husak, who has called for institution of a multiparty system, being added. The action program calls for extensive institutional changes and there are no signs that the regime will renege. Pressures from Czechoslovakia's Communist neighbors have had their effect, but not on Czechoslovakia's basic course, only on the pace with which it will be pursued.

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30. There is no way for the Dubcek regime to retract its promises without reverting to a terroristic police state system. The regime may drag its feet, refusing to accede to pressures for a multiparty system or for a restoration of full freedom for the churches, but it has promised too much ever to pull back completely without facing the prospect of revolution. There is no way for the Russians and the other Communist states to force political changes without resorting to economic boycotts or armed intervention. Czechoslovakia's economy is so intricately interwoven with those of the USSR and other Eastern European states that Dubcek's inexorable progress toward Communist "democratization" will, initially at least, be gradual and cautious.

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