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Czechoslovakia: The factional struggle within the party has again erupted into the open.

On 27 June, three major newspapers and the Writers' Journal published a statement signed by nearly 70 prominent Czechoslovak artists, scientists, and athletes appealing to the populace to demand the departure from various governmental posts of "people who abused their power"--conservatives who retain their positions within the party and government. The signers recommend that workers elect "their natural leaders...irrespective of which party they belong to."

Although ostensibly concerned with elections to government offices, the statement seems intended to influence the elections for delegates to the 14th party congress. As such, it represents still another attempt by the liberals to discredit and to force the ouster of conservatives from the party.

Conservatives reacted immediately in press and television interviews. Their vehemence suggests that they will attempt to use the statement against the liberals generally and as evidence that curbs on the press must be restored. One member of the National Assembly termed the statement "an appeal to counterrevolution" and demanded that the government officials responsible for the press be summoned before the assembly to "adopt an attitude" toward the statement.

The same day that the liberal statement appeared, the party presidium issued a commentary on it which reflected the views of party leader Dubcek, who has attempted to moderate the factional struggle. Without questioning the "good intentions" of those who signed the statement, the presidium criticized it as a "politically irresponsible" act which could endanger the democratization process.

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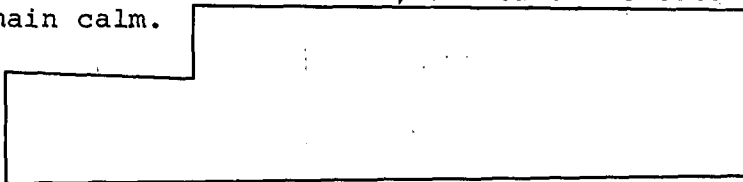
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Apparently apprehensive that Moscow might cite the statement as further evidence that the party is losing control, the presidium noted that the statement creates "problems for our foreign policy." The presidium stressed that the party will act against any action to support the appeal. Finally, the presidium called on the signers of the appeal to re-examine their views, and on all citizens to remain calm.



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