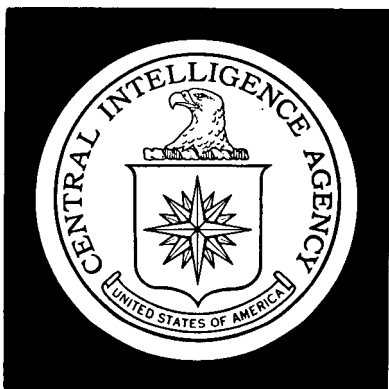


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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Czechoslovakia: The Party Faces the Future

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Czechoslovakia: The Party Faces the Future

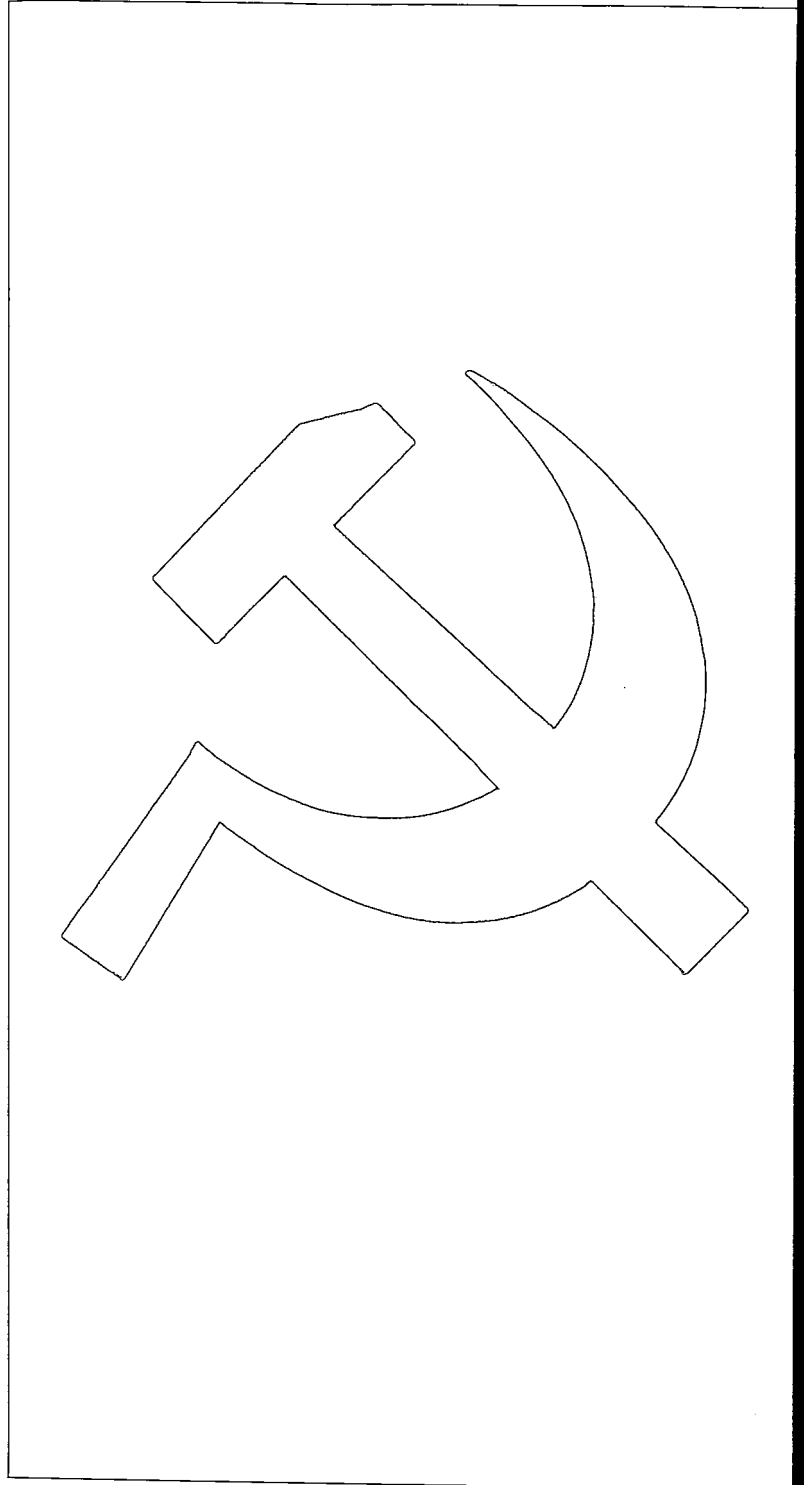
Power must expand or contract; it must be active and successful, or it will decline and others will take it over. Its foundation consists in a dynamism operating on a basis of acquired capability. It must be motivated by intelligence, sustained by high morale and supported by economic prosperity. Lack of any one element may prove fatal to the rest.

Thucydides

The Communist Party's 14th congress,* held 25-29 May, brought to a close a momentous chapter in the history of Czechoslovakia and of the European Communist movement and marked the full return of the regime to Soviet tutelage and Communist orthodoxy. The congress, the first to be convened by new party chief Gustav Husak, served mainly to hail the end of the long process of "consolidation"—the dismantling of liberal innovations introduced during the brief reform era under Alexander Dubcek—and to legitimize the Husak leadership.

Having rationalized the past, the regime has turned its attention to Czechoslovakia's future. The 1971-75 five-year plan launched by the congress is the regime's first effort to tackle systematically the country's economic and social problems. The enormity of the task, following the disruption of four years of reform and counterreform, is recognized by the leaders in Prague. They are aware of the need to mobilize public support to accomplish their goals, but they have invested heavily in the orthodox conservative socialist system that in the past has proven inadequate for the task.

*A hastily assembled "14th" party congress was convened in support of Dubcek following the invasion in August 1968 but it was subsequently annulled at Soviet insistence.



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Husak has proclaimed the defeat of "revisionism" and has anxiously embarked on the "construction of socialism," but it is clear that the leadership will be haunted by the ghosts of the past. By the terms of its succession and tenure and the atavistic nature of its domestic policies, the regime has little chance of establishing credibility in the eyes of the people. Some Czechoslovaks may privately acknowledge that Husak has the best interests of the nation at heart, but for most he still remains the symbol and willing tool of Soviet repression. Moreover, in spite of claims of accomplishment by today's conservative leaders, there is unmistakable apprehension among them that liberal sentiment, now dormant, will one day rise again. This paranoiac dread of renewed "right-wingism" (liberalism) is not the mood of leaders confident of the future.

The New Gospel

The main danger against which we must struggle is rightist opportunism and revisionism.... We must never provide the slightest opportunity for them to assert themselves. The completion of their ideological defeat is an extraordinarily important task of the party at present.

Resolution of the 14th party congress.

A congress responsive to the regime could be convened only after exorcising from all levels of the party any one who backed the ideological heresies committed in 1968 in the name of "socialism with a human face." The nationwide purges of 1969-1970 were but the prelude to this process—a mechanical chore made relatively easy under the aegis of the Soviet occupation. Only by inculcating the membership with orthodox Communist tenets could the party justify its "leading role."

The task of ideological purification was immense. The reform movement that had brought Dubcek to power in 1968 had overturned fundamental principles governing the party's control of the state and its relationship to the individual citizen. The separation of party and government authority, the effective participation of the citi-

zen in the political and social system, and the loosening of the national economy from centralized control were all major planks in Dubcek's program. In the eyes of his heirs, Dubcek's leadership had prostituted socialism, and it was up to them to rid the party of the vestiges of his tenure.

The major vehicle for the regime's ideological offensive was the *Lessons* document,* promulgated by the central committee in December 1970, which presented the regime's interpretation of party developments since the 13th party congress in 1966. It was only after that, the new litany goes, that deviation set in, luring the party from its correct path. As an apologia for the orthodox Communist system of government, *Lessons* sought to restore the legitimacy of that system by blaming both former party chief Antonin Novotny and his successor Dubcek for the 1968 crisis. It was the failure of those regimes, not inherent faults in the Marxist-Leninist system, that lulled the party into a posture vulnerable to the "rightist onslaught." The document also sought to rationalize the roles played during the reform era by some of the party's present leaders. This was a particularly delicate task, because many of them were bitterly divided over some of Dubcek's reforms and over the justification of the Soviet invasion itself.

*Full title — *Lessons Drawn from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society After the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*

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General Secretaries Husak and Brezhnev and President Svoboda celebrating the "victory over revisionism."

Another ideological blast was set off in March, when the regime published "theses" in anticipation of the party's 50th anniversary. This document catalogued the difficulties and accomplishments of the Czechoslovak party since its founding in 1921, recapitulated the ideological themes promulgated in *Lessons*, and depicted the 14th party congress as the "logical conclusion" of the period of crisis that had existed since the 13th party congress in 1966.

The party's search for respectability, however, remains an elusive goal. Too many Czecho-

slovaks reject its tortuous analysis of the past as well as the inadequate steps it sets forth to meet the political, economic, and social demands of the future. As a result, the regime's efforts to reaffirm the inherent worth of the Communist system while forced at the same time to declare that two previous regimes, both products of that system, were incompetent has met with popular incredulity and privately expressed derision.

The congress made clear that the ideological offensive would continue. It reaffirmed the leadership's view that only fully committed party

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members could be entrusted with the task of guiding the further consolidation of Czechoslovak society. But the country's leaders know that at present such commitment is rare and, based as it is on opportunism, also fragile.

The preoccupation of the top leaders, and particularly those in the conservative wing of the party, with the "virtues of socialism" thus reflects a basic insecurity. They are acutely aware that they hold no mandate from the people and that their power and future rest on their usefulness to Moscow. They know that moderate and liberal Czechoslovaks, both Communist and non-Communist, who to them represent the "right wing," will continue to be a threat that they alone cannot resist. Explaining the psychology of the "collaborationists" and their obsession with "right-wingism," one Czechoslovak has observed that it is based on their fear that the deposed of today

may one day regain influence and sit in judgment on those now doing the deposing. Thus, it is not merely the dogmatists' ideological attachment to Moscow or to Communist orthodoxy that drives them, but also personal fear for their future.

The Congress

The one major accomplishment of the congress was the successful show of unity within the top leadership. A sense of cohesiveness was apparent that had not existed since Husak came to power. To a man, the leading figures of the party committed themselves to present party policies, and to the personal leadership of Husak. Factionalism and dogmatism were both officially outlawed, a decree that for the first time appears enforceable. At the same time, however, the congress re-examined the party's glaring weakness—its inability to engage the interest and support of the



14th congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party

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people. Faced with public apathy, the party for all its newfound cohesiveness will probably not be able to mobilize effectively the country's human and material resources.

For the most part, the congress was a pro forma affair, canonizing previously voiced doctrines and shibboleths and streamlining the party structure. Political continuity and stability, Moscow's first demand, were the essential requirement, and nothing was said or done to jeopardize either.

Changes in the party leadership and organizational structure were minor, designed either to tie up loose ends remaining from the liberal era or to manifest further the party's loyalty to the USSR. Thus, Evzen Erban, a holdover from the Dubcek leadership and the only presidium member to lose his job, was replaced by conservative Karel Hoffmann. To fit the Soviet model, Gustav Husak changed his title to General Secretary and future party congresses were scheduled at five-year intervals. Probationary candidate membership to the party was reintroduced as part of the regime's effort to screen and train its rank and file.

In order to recentralize the leadership's power, the congress abolished the Czech party bureau, a stopgap body created after the invasion by reformists attempting to federalize the party around equal Czech and Slovak party organs. The demise of the Czech bureau returns the Slovak party to its traditional subordinate, albeit separate, status. Together with modifications in the federal government structure earlier this year, the move ends the Slovak drive for equal political status with the Czechs.

The only major personnel shifts at the congress were in the central committee. Over half of the membership—holdovers from both the Novotny and Dubcek eras—was removed. Many of the newcomers are political unknowns, suggesting that the regime was hard pressed to find persons with an uncompromised past who were willing to

accept an uncertain future. For the time being, the new central committee, reduced from 132 to 115, provides the leadership with a rubber stamp. One troublesome issue was apparently resolved when Novotny's party membership, suspended in 1968 for his complicity in the Stalinist trials of the early 1950s, was reinstated. This move does not mitigate his official disgrace but avoids raising the sensitive issue of the early trials. The moderates in the regime may have agreed to Novotny's reinstatement in return for a commitment that no action would be taken against the reformist leaders of the Dubcek era.

Rule by Consensus

It was considered virtually certain that Husak would emerge from the congress as undisputed head of the party. The thoroughness with which he had dismantled the liberal movement and his firmness in quieting public dissent had left his conservative opponents no lever with which to challenge his position as first secretary. Moreover, the dedication with which he aligned Czechoslovak policy with Soviet interests and his personal allegiance to Brezhnev earned him the all-important backing of Moscow. This and his success in re-establishing Czechoslovakia's role as a reliable member of the "socialist camp" were his guarantee of tenure. The issue on which he appeared most vulnerable—his failure in 1968 to sanction the invasion—was largely diluted by his public accession at both the Soviet and Czechoslovak party congresses to the thesis that the invasion was in response to "appeals" by true Czechoslovak Communists.

There is also no sign that Husak has recently had any serious rivals for his position. The two presidium members most frequently mentioned in this role—Alois Indra and Vasil Bilak—have shown no desire to initiate a power struggle. Their recent public praise for Husak and exhortations for party "unity" are convincing evidence that, for the present at least, they are more concerned with maintaining stability than with enhancing their own influence.

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CZECHOSLOVAK COMMUNIST PARTY LEADERSHIP

General Secretary	Gustav Husak *
Presidium	Vasil Bilak * Peter Colotka * Karel Hoffmann † Gustav Husak * Alois Indra † Antonin Kapek † Josef Kempny † Josef Korcak † Jozef Lenart * Ludvik Svoboda † Lubomir Strougal †
Secretaries	Vasil Bilak * – international relations Jan Fojtik † – ideology Miloslav Hruskovic * – economics Alois Indra † – appointments Josef Kempny † – Czech party bureau Oldrich Svestka † – press
Other members of the Secretariat	Jozef Lenart * Miroslav Moc † Frantisek Ondrich †
Candidate members of the Presidium	Miloslav Hruskovic * Vaclav Hula †

* – Slovak
† – Czech

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The congress, however, was not an unqualified personal triumph for Husak. By stressing the collective nature of party authority, the congress underscored the fact that he paid for his pre-eminence by compromising fundamentally with his conservative colleagues. The re-election of all but one member of the presidium virtually guarantees a continued balance of power between the "conservative" wing of the party headed by Indra and Bilak, and moderates such as Svoboda, Strougal, and Colotka, who lean to Husak. Party decisions in the future are likely to be determined by consensus, with no individual or "clique" within the presidium developing decisive power. Brezhnev's endorsement of Husak, along with "others" in the leadership, was indicative of Soviet approval of the present combination of political interests within Prague's ruling body.

A strong indicator of the limitations placed on Husak's power was the shelving of his "reconciliation" campaign. His attempt to strike a bargain with the deposed liberal community was a key element in his early political program and the major issue setting him apart from the conservatives. "Reconciliation" involved exoneration of the thousands of Czechoslovaks who had supported the reform movement in exchange for their "atonement" and future cooperation with the party. The lure of jobs and social status was not enough to earn the allegiance of the liberals. The failure of "reconciliation," however, resulted just as much from the refusal of the party actually to put it into practice. Where the more practical Husak could envision a tactical alliance with the liberals for the sake of "normalization" the conservatives could not. Conservative party members considered it beyond the pale to seek rapprochement with their countrymen who so recently had turned on them.

Husak's ability and willingness to revive "reconciliation"—whether tacitly or explicitly—may be one key to Czechoslovakia's political future. The bitter legacy of 1968 must be mitigated before the regime can hope to implement any forward-looking domestic policies. The

talents of the disenfranchised economists, administrators, teachers, and even the hated and feared intellectuals are an asset the Communists cannot in the long run do without.

The Players

During his two years in office, Husak has earned a reputation as a shrewd practitioner of political gamesmanship. He has displayed his ability to recognize the limits of his personal power, to judge the proper moment for compromise, and to reverse himself for the sake of political expediency. His timely warnings in mid-1968 that the reform movement should not overreach itself, his about-face since the invasion on such crucial issues as federalization and the "invitation to invade" thesis, and even his present servitude to the men in the Kremlin all are the mark of a pragmatic, if opportunistic, man.



Gustav Husak

For all of his servility to Moscow, however, Husak is not without plans of his own for Czechoslovakia. As the man who drew up the original federalization plan and who, in the face of

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considerable opposition, offered amnesty to the reformists, he does not fit the image of a mere hireling. Some Czechoslovak observers, with little reason to support the man, have dubbed him the ultimate practitioner of "Schweikism," a typical willingness by Czechoslovaks to conserve their energy, through sycophancy to superior power, while awaiting more propitious circumstances for asserting their interests.

Alois Indra, believed to have been Moscow's initial choice to replace Dubcek as first secretary, by most accounts is number-two man in the party. A presidium member and party secretary in charge of official appointments, Indra is believed to enjoy widespread support among the party's "old guard" in Bohemia and Moravia. By his early opposition to Dubcek's reform program and his defense of the party bureaucracy in 1968, Indra has earned credentials as the top conservative in the hierarchy. He is unqualifiedly loyal to Moscow and has maintained personal contacts with Kremlin leaders. Politically shrewd and intellectually polished, Indra would be the odds-on favorite to replace Husak should the latter leave office.



Alois Indra

Three other members of the presidium, Vasil Bilak, Antonin Kapek, and newcomer Karel Hoffmann are solidly in the "conservative" camp. Like Indra, they were early critics of the reform movement and, more than any other members of the

current regime, represent the "collaborationist" wing of the party. Kapek heads the powerful Prague party committee and is believed to be one of Husak's more persistent gadflies. Bilak, who in 1968 headed the Slovak party, is the most conservative Slovak in the hierarchy, and the reported enmity between him and Husak seems merely to have been papered over.

Husak is not without his "moderate" allies on the presidium. Svoboda, Colotka, and Strougal are believed to line up behind Husak on the most important issues. Strougal, once a contender for Husak's job, has apparently accepted the fact that his political future now depends on his performance as premier, and he is maintaining a low profile on party matters.

The complexion of the regime in Prague is also in part dependent on the political proclivities of men filling subordinate positions in the party. For instance, the two candidate presidium members seem to have earned their positions by virtue of respectable careers as economic administrators. Both apparently remained cautious enough in 1968 to avoid the stigma of reformism and are today considered "reliable." The installation of proregime functionaries in regional and district party organs earlier in the year and the election of a largely conservative central committee at the congress provide a politically homogeneous bureaucracy from which to draw future leaders. The promotion of a large number of political unknowns to the central committee could, however, represent Husak's intention to minimize political rigidity in the hierarchy and to encourage future flexibility.

Party problems

To raise the party's capability to act, it is of decisive importance to have consistent compliance with the principles of democratic centralism, to have strict and voluntary discipline on the part of every Communist stemming from deep conviction, dedication to the party, and the determination to press for the acceptance of its political line.

Resolution of the 14th party congress

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The self-satisfaction that party leaders have evinced over restoring the party's "unity" and ideological purity is clouded by two organizational problems that impair its political viability. First, many local functionaries fail to supervise effectively the economic and social institutions under their charge. Second, those social classes most important to the economic and social development of the country are underrepresented in the party rank and file. Workers constitute only a fourth of the membership, and the over-all average age of members is 49.

Most party members who survived the purge of 1968* have not proved to be the militant "vanguard" of society that the regime sought. Whatever loyalty to the new regime the bulk of the rank and file has developed has been diluted by the organizational disruptions of the past three years that seriously affected the party's local effectiveness. Such organizational problems were, of course, inevitable. But, in the past year the regime has publicly admonished party functionaries for their administrative lethargy and inability to install on-the-job discipline and motivation among the workers. Husak has led the assault on inefficiency and has warned bureaucrats that "no one is irreplaceable."

The congress made abundantly clear that the rank and file can expect close supervision from the top. In his report to the congress, Milos Jakes, head of the party's powerful Central Control and Auditing Commission, warned that the activities of all members would be continually scrutinized and that deviations from party policies and ineffectual performance would not be tolerated.

Fraternal Relations

As expected, the congress trumpeted Czechoslovakia's return as a reliable member of the socialist camp. Except for Romania, all of the Warsaw Pact nations sent their top party leaders to welcome the errant comrades back into the

fold. Soviet party leader Brezhnev could hardly have spoken more highly of the Czechoslovak leaders who led their party to "victory over the enemies of socialism." His reference to the "international prestige" that Husak and his colleagues had earned should put to rest the doubts Prague's allies might still have had over the "reliability" of the regime. With the events of 1968 in mind, one could well imagine a grateful sigh of relief as Brezhnev kissed Husak in true Slavic style.

Nevertheless, other events at the congress suggested that the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia would long remain a contentious issue both within the Warsaw Pact and the Communist movement as a whole. By not attending the congress, Nicolae Ceausescu reaffirmed Romania's opposition to the invasion itself, and to the "Brezhnev Doctrine" in general. References by Romania's delegate to the congress, Dumitriu Popescu, to the "exclusion of the threat of force" in international relations and his call for "noninterference" in the internal affairs of other states, though not directly linked to the invasion, carried the intended message. Popescu also stressed that "differences of views" between socialist countries should not be allowed to affect their relations.

The Soviets made it quite plain that the Czechoslovak experience should serve as a warning to other Eastern European countries who might seek to modify their own political systems or policies independently of Soviet interests. It was no doubt with the Romanians primarily in mind that Brezhnev advertised Prague's analysis of the 1968 reform movement, embodied in the *Lessons* document, as a lesson for the whole camp.

The sharpest note of discord at the congress was raised by the Yugoslav representative, whose remarks suggest that relations between Prague and Belgrade have not measurably improved. He not only specifically referred to Belgrade's "well-known" position on the events of 1968, but

*Some 300,000 were purged, and another 200,000 resigned voluntarily. Current membership is 1,200,000.

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ticked off the international rights of states—national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and freedom of internal development—that by implication were violated by the invasion. As expected, Communist China was not represented at the congress. Peking's assignment of a new ambassador to Prague following the congress was presumably at Chinese initiative and does not signal any major improvement in bilateral relations.

Prague's relations with other, Western Communist parties also were not improved during the congress. The French Communist Party delegate Raymond Guyot pointedly reminded the Czechoslovaks (and Soviets) of the basic differences that have separated their two parties since 1968. The Italian Communist delegate failed to read a prepared message from his party sharply critical of the invasion and of subsequent developments. The message was subsequently released in Rome following Italian Communist charges that they were not given the podium at the congress. The British and Spanish Communists boycotted the congress, apparently to avoid treatment similar to that received by the Italians. In a virtual admission of their pariah-like position in much of the Communist world, the Czechoslovaks referred in their party resolution to the good relations they now had with the "absolute majority" of Communist and workers parties.

There was no indication at the congress that Prague intends to pursue new foreign policy initiatives toward the West. On all major East-West issues, such as the Conference on European Security (CES), Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR), and European detente, it is content to follow Moscow's lead. West Germany is the only West European country with which Prague is conducting substantive political talks. The possibility of these two countries' settling their post-World War II differences appears distant, however, having run aground on the issue of the 1938 Munich agreement. Prague has not eased its demand that Bonn annul the agreement *ab initio*, which, for a myriad of technical reasons involving reparations and the citizenship status of the

Sudeten Germans, Bonn is unwilling to do. A solution to the impasse is not likely to be found until Moscow decides that Czechoslovak - West German rapprochement fits into its over-all European negotiating scheme.

Economics - The Plight Continues

The political prospects of the Husak regime are linked to the sluggish economy. He and his colleagues realize that their predecessors came to grief in part because of the accumulated economic problems of Czechoslovakia. Yet Husak has little room for economic experimentation. He has no choice but to revert to the highly centralized Soviet model. Indeed, he can hardly expect, in the short run, to allow even as much decentralization as have the Polish and East German leaders. This is the case, first, because he cannot afford to remove loyal party hacks from important jobs and, second, because most of the competent people who have managed to survive are afraid to take any initiative. Within these limits he still must try to show improvement.

Despite the disorganization resulting from the reforms and counterreforms of the past four years, however, the economy is not on the verge of collapse. The economic bureaucracy, which has functioned through two decades of misguided policies, still works, though inefficiently. Labor discipline, already very lax, has probably become worse; yet habit and apprehension keep things going. The standard of living remains high by Communist standards, and output has continued to rise. But everyone realizes that the economy has done far worse under Communism than the population expected in 1948, and far worse than would have been the case if Prague had remained a part of the West. To try to restore some measure of confidence in the Communist economic system is this regime's main problem, as it was that of its predecessors.

What Husak has done so far is to reimpose order. By freezing prices and wages, he has contained the inflationary pressures that burst forth

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in 1968. By imposing obligatory goals for output and trade, he has prevented further marked deterioration in the balance of payments. In planning for the future, the regime lays great emphasis on increasing the variety and quantity of consumer goods and services, especially housing, automobiles, and other durables.

The regime has retained the ideas of 1968 on the need for increased investment allocations not only for housing and consumer goods production but also for agriculture, transport, communications, and fuels and power. In order to carry out investments in these fields while favoring the claims of consumers, Husak has ruled out new industrial investment projects. Besides finishing projects under way—some of which were started years ago—Czechoslovak investment in industry will be scheduled mainly to modernize existing plants. A further constraint is that priority must be given to the demands of Slovakia, where the return on investment is likely to be small.

Employment, moreover, will increase very little in the urban economy. The size of the working-age population will rise almost imperceptibly, migration from farms will continue to drop, and employment of women is already high. Thus the regime must rely chiefly on increased efficiency in the use of labor and capital to provide continued economic growth. This in turn depends on a marked upgrading of planning and management, tightening of labor discipline, and sharpening of incentives. Whether such improvement can be expected, given the political situation, is one major question hanging over Husak's entire economic policy.

The regime does hope for some help from rationalization of output under cooperative arrangements with the USSR and under CEMA. That is likely to come rather slowly, however, and the possible gain in efficiency from such shifts is uncertain.

On the whole, therefore, prospects for a substantial early improvement in the economic

situation are the poorest of any East European country. In the face of the bitterness and distrust that permeate Czechoslovak society, the Husak regime must count chiefly on enduring and waiting for a more hopeful day.

The Uncertain Future

We are now experiencing revolutionary changes, a revolutionary turn. Our party, our society, seeks another political system, the opposite of the political system that we have had so far....

Gustav Husak, Spring 1968.

Czechoslovakia may long remain the only country in Eastern Europe that, in the words of a Czech pundit, does not interfere even in its own internal affairs. When, if ever, Moscow's anxiety eases sufficiently to permit the regime in Prague to loosen its grip on the people and to accept the idea that innovation and the freer play of social and economic forces are essential to the country's political viability cannot be predicted. There are, however, grounds for hope. Regardless of their politics today, most of the men in Prague can be credited with an awareness that progress requires change. If events elsewhere in Eastern Europe—most recently those in Poland—hold any message for the Czechoslovaks, it is that raw power is not self-perpetuating and that the future of any Communist regime depends in the last analysis on finding a realistic solution to the social and economic needs of the people.

Contrary to the fears of many, postinvasion Czechoslovakia has not become a brutal police state reminiscent of the traditional Stalinist or Nazi mold. Oppressive as the regime's social controls are, it is an oppression more of the mind than of the body, an intellectual straight jacket characterized by verbal browbeating and incessant proselytizing. Husak and other party leaders have voiced their satisfaction that "normalization" was accomplished primarily through "political" measures rather than by police and terror tactics.

The regime is enforcing strict adherence to its laws, however, and few suspected transgressors

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of civic statutes or "socialist discipline" are being given the benefit of the doubt. Arrests, occasionally *en masse*, are made and prison sentences are handed out even for slight provocations. Western tourists and journalists have been expelled or jailed for seemingly minor indiscretions. Manifestations of public discontent are occasionally seen—antiregime leaflets being passed from hand to hand, anti-Soviet scribbles on walls, and the distant protestations of Czechoslovak exiles. None of these efforts will, however, be allowed to mature into meaningful dissident movements.

But the men now running Czechoslovakia have seen for themselves the bitter results of political stultification. They have condemned,

probably sincerely, bureaucratic rigidity, dogmatism, and the other faults that ossified the Novotny regime. The fundamental and deeply rooted concept of the need for change that lay behind the "Prague Spring" is not easily discredited, and will probably outlast the defensive psychosis that afflicts so many of the current leaders. Even amidst the regime's overwhelming rhetoric, voices looking to the future can be heard. The new economic plan does have merit in seeking new ways to remedy old ills. The pressure for retribution during the past two years seems to have been blunted. The regime now faces the problem of how to motivate the people to look toward the future instead of succumbing to a sense of self-pity.

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