220

### Current Support Brief

#### CZECHOSLOVAKIA DEBATES MARKET SOCIALISM



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#### CZECHOSLOVAKIA DEBATES MARKET SOCIALISM

A large number of Czechoslovak economists have been urging publicly replacement of the Soviet type of command economy in Czechoslovakia by a form of market socialism. This proposal, the most radical in the Bloc, is the focus of a general debate over economic reform conducted under Party auspices since last fall in the hope of finding solutions to some of the country's severe and deep-seated economic difficulties. The proposed economic system has much in common with the actual system in Yugoslavia. It provides for: a devolution of authority to individual enterprises, excluding decisions for key investments and foreign trade, the basing of enterprise incentives on current income instead of the fulfillment of plan assignments, the formation of prices reflecting supply and demand, and the exercise of state controls mainly through financial regulations rather than through plan directives. The liberal proposal has been criticized by some economists who believe that Czechoslovak economic conditions are inappropriate for market socialism. Other economists have emphasized reforms that could be used to make a command economy work better, especially through improvements in planning involving mathematical techniques or through management procedures similar to those of US corporations.

The regime is proceeding slowly and cautiously in changing planning and management. Some reforms, such as a thorough, but on the whole orthodox, revision of wholesale prices, have been implemented, and a simplification of plan directives for 1965 has been announced. An increase in the authority of enterprises and other changes desired by the liberals are to be introduced in 1965, but these changes probably will fall far short of market socialism because of vested interests and the concern of the present leadership with retaining close control over the economy.

#### 1. Economic Reform -- a Bloc-Wide Issue

All the countries of the Soviet Blcc are experimenting with methods of economic planning and management, and in most of them the ideological restraints on economic reform have been loosened greatly. In the USSR, two years ago Liberman urged the use of profit incentives to regulate enterprise behavior in a decentralized manner, and the subject was reopened in mid-August 1964 when Pravda published an article by Academician V. A. Trapeznikov that proposes even more liberal economic reforms. In addition, mathematical economists, such as Kantorovich, have been pressing for the formation of rational prices

by means of linear programing techniques. Hungary has introduced such innovations as an interest charge on fixed capital. In Bulgaria the authority of some enterprises (mainly local and construction enterprises) has been increased greatly, and some basic questions of socialist economics are being debated. In no other country of the Bloc, however, has the discussion gone so far as in Czechoslovakia, where a large group of economists has proposed a complete overhaul of the present economic system. Moreover, in no other country of the Bloc is the issue of economic reform as pressing and as politically acute as in Czechoslovakia.

#### 2. Development of the Issue in Czechoslovakia

Basically the serious concern with economic reform and the radical nature of some of the proposals being entertained in Czechoslovakia stem from the near absence of economic growth during the past 2-1/2 years. As early as 1962, Czechoslovak economists were pressing for reforms, and the need to improve techniques of planning and management was emphasized at the Party Congress in December 1962. Party leader Novotny, however, continued to blame some of the country's economic difficulties on the partial decentralization of 1958-60 and called for a tightening of central controls.

In 1963, as the economic situation deteriorated further and cultural ferment accompanied a new wave of "destalinization," criticism of the regime's policies increased greatly, and some of the critics argued -in direct contradiction of Novotny -- that the error in 1958-60 had been in decentralizing too little. Novotny and his followers were forced to admit that planning had been overambitious, that serious mistakes had been made in the allocation of investments, and that incentives did not give enough stimulus to technical progress and improvement in the quality of output. \* Then, in the wake of a Party and government shakeup of September 1963, which replaced some of the dogmatic officials (especially Vilem Siroky) by more pragmatic men such as Jozef Lenart and Drahomir Kolder, the Party gave official blessing to a thoroughgoing debate on the economic system. A group of economists, headed by Ota Sik, a member of the Central Committee of the Party and Chief of the Economics Institute of the Academy of Sciences, was charged with an intensive study of possible reforms and asked to present its recommendations to the leadership through the newly organized Economic Commission of the Party. Sik told a Central Committee Plenum in December 1963 that the traditional Soviet forms of socialist management no longer worked in Czechoslovakia, because there were no more

<sup>\*</sup> For more detailed information on the economic difficulties, see source 1/.

reserves which could be mobilized and with which inefficiency could be covered up. A large number of proposals and counterproposals on economic reforms began to appear in late 1963 and continue to appear in the Party press and technical journals.

#### 3. The Liberal Proposal

The essence of the liberal proposal, first presented in an article published in the Party journal by Sik in November 1963 and developed by many other economists, \* is to replace the Soviet type of command economy in Czechoslovakia by a form of controlled market socialism resembling in many respects that of Yugoslavia. Although the liberals do not agree on all points and some aspects of the proposal are unclear, there appears to be a consensus of liberal opinion on most of its basic features.

#### a. Planning

Although central planning would continue, it would be attenuated and focused on long-term development. Long-term plans would be worked out by careful economic analysis of alternative means of achieving national objectives. As in Yugoslavia, central economic plans would provide guidelines for decisions at lower levels but would not have the force of law. Enterprises would establish their own operational plans.

#### b. Control

The state would retain direct control over key investments and foreign trade but otherwise would rely on indirect controls over enterprises to implement its policies. As in Yugoslavia, the indirect controls would be achieved through financial means such as taxes, the charging of interest on fixed and working capital, the regulation of prices and wages, and the extension of bank credits. In contrast to Yugoslavia, control organs other than banks would be organized mainly on an industry and branch basis rather than on a regional and local basis.

<sup>\*</sup> For a listing of liberal economists, see the Appendix, and for some of their articles, see source 2/.

#### c. Management

The enterprises themselves would decide what and how to produce and with whom to do business within the limits imposed by state regulations and the direct controls in investment and foreign trade. There is no suggestion of giving workers' organizations authority in enterprise management comparable to that of the Yugoslav workers' councils.

#### d. Incentives

Plan tasks assigned by higher authority but rather would maximize current income. Some of the liberals are in favor of using enterprise profits as a standard, but the majority of them prefer "gross income" (hruby duchod) -- what remains of the receipts from sales after deducting purchases from other enterprises and depreciation. As in Yugoslavia, interest on capital, taxes, and wages would be paid from Yugoslavia, interest on capital, taxes, and wages would be paid from yugoslavia, interest on capital, taxes, and wages would be paid from yugoslavia, interest on capital, taxes, and wages would be paid from yugoslavia income. Minimum wages would be guaranteed by the state and wage scales for different occupations would have to be observed, but additional payments to workers and managers would depend on what remained of gross income after all the above expenses had been paid.

#### e. Prices

In accordance with the reliance on incentives based on current values and on financial controls, prices would correspond approximately to the relative scarcities of goods and services rather than merely reto the relative scarcities of goods and services rather than merely reflecting the prevailing conventions of cost accounting as at present. Except for relatively few consumer goods, prices would not be determined freely in the market. The state would continue to fix the prices of industrial materials, public utility services, and consumer staples, of industrial materials, public utility services, and consumer staples, such as bread and sugar, and would establish limits for price bargainsuch as bread and sugar, and would establish limits for price bargaining among buyers and sellers in the case of many manufactured goods. These fixed or controlled prices, however, would not be allowed to deviate markedly or for long from the levels called for by supply and demand.

The proposal is intentionally vague because of the political sensitivity of the question on the extent and manner of direct state control over investments and foreign trade and dodges crucial questions on the relation of domestic to world market prices and the use of differential

taxes, tariffs, and subsidies to protect or encourage producers. There also are allusions to possible direct intervention by the state in other areas "if absolutely necessary." The proposal, moreover, is being sold to the regime as a means of improving the real authority of the Party and government over the economy -- by comparison with the past system when many state directives were not observed or even had perverse effects on the implementation of national policies. It is very doubtful, however, that the liberal economists really believe that state and Party control would be unimpaired -- rather they probably expect that the state apparatus would be greatly curtailed and that the Party would have to make basic changes in its methods of operation.

#### 4. Criticisms and Alternative Proposals

Because economic reform is a proclaimed goal of the regime's policy and because dogmatism is out of fashion, it is difficult to find any staunch supporters of the status quo in the Czechoslovak economic press, although opposition to change is certainly widespread, not only among the state bureaucracy but also in faculties of economics, where sinecures are being threatened. 3/ A number of economists, however, have taken issue in the press with the liberal proposal or with aspects of it, although they too favor (or claim to favor) reforms of the economic system. Their criticisms range from the simple assertion that the liberal proposal verges perilously close to bringing back "capitalism without the capitalist" 4/ to sophisticated reservations about the possibility of creating an efficient form of market socialism. 5/ It is alleged, for example, that a system like that of Yugoslavia would not work well in Czechoslovakia, because of the tightness of the supply of labor and the favorable conditions for monopolistic practices in many branches of heavy industry, especially heavy machine building.

Many economists have emphasized changes in planning and management that could be used to make a command economy work better, although they also are advocated by some of the liberals. One group of economists, for example, is concerned mainly with improving economic planning through modern mathematical techniques, such as input-output and linear programing. 6/ Another group of economists, concerned mostly with industrial management, takes its inspiration from large Western corporations, arguing that the combining of enterprises into branch-wide economic units with broad authority would facilitate technical progress and bring a businesslike approach to management without much sacrifice of central controls. 7/ In regard to incentives,

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there is general agreement that the old system gives too much weight to gross value of production, but some economists reject the liberals' proposal for introducing a single indicator of enterprise performance, such as gross income or profits, and propose instead the establishment of a variety of plan indicators, differing among branches in accord with the conditions of the branch and priorities of the regime. 8/ Taken together, these proposals on "scientific planning," "businesslike" management, and selected incentives present a possible alternative line for reform to that desired by the liberal economists. This alternative, which would salvage the essential features of the command economy, apparently is being adopted by the regimes in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary.

#### 5. Position of the Leadership

As might be expected, the regime wants to have its cake and eat it too -- it wants to reform planning and management so as to improve economic performance without relinquishing any important controls. According to top Czechoslovak leaders, 9/ "the government must be freed from part of the operational tasks and must concentrate on fundamental problems of economic policy," "economic instruments" rather than orders must be widely used to implement policies, and prices should reflect supply and demand. On the other hand, the same leaders want to "strengthen the authority of the plan, which is the most important instrument of management," and also "continue to strengthen the leading role of the Party."

A few changes already have been introduced in planning and management. For 1965, there will be a reduction of 14 percent in the number of centrally planned and rationed commodities and of 53 percent in the number of directives given to enterprises. 10/ There also has been an announcement that no quantitative production assignments will be given to enterprises for 1965. 11/ There are no details, however, and it is not clear whether the change refers to only one of the stages in planning for 1965 or to all the stages. Various measures of net output are being used instead of gross output to evaluate performance by an enterprise. 12/ A general revision of wholesale prices was introduced in April 1964, following 2 years of intensive work. 13/ The new prices differentiate among a much more precise assortment of products than the old prices and reflect costs more closely. The new prices also reflect demand in the case of some close substitutes; goods in unusually short supply;

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or certain byproducts, such as steel scrap. In general, however, the revision follows the conventional Bloc practice of basing prices on average costs of production in each branch of industry. The regime has promised to introduce additional reforms in the latter part of 1964 and in 1965. 14/ Premier Lenart in May and the Party's First Secretary, Novotny, during Khrushchev's recent visit to Czechoslovakia spoke of introducing many of the specific proposals of the liberals, including increased flexibility for prices, the use of gross income to evaluate enterprise performance and as a basis for paying bonuses, the charging of interest on fixed assets, and a greatly increased use of bank credit for the allocation of investment funds. 15/ Statements by the regime, however, also have emphasized "scientific" planning (including the use of mathematical tools), the grouping of enterprises on a branch basis, and the application of selected incentives.

#### 6. Prospects for Reforms

The prospects for economic reform in Czechoslovakia remain highly uncertain. There is no doubt that many changes in the system of planning and management, including some of those proposed by the liberals, will be introduced over the next year or two. The continued poor performance of the economy is a powerful incentive to making such changes, and part of the Czechoslovak leadership consists of men who are not dogmatic Communists. However, fear by the Party of a loss of control and vested interests are powerful conservative forces that probably predispose the regime to prefer modifications in familiar methods to more fundamental changes that could be risky. Last March the Party Presidium rejected a proposal of the Economic Commission, presumably because it was too liberal. 16/

It seems unlikely that the present leadership will give enterprises anywhere near the amount of authority desired by the liberals or allow market forces to determine output except within narrow limits. According to Novotny, reforms will be introduced "step by step ... with much prudence" and "without upsetting upheavals." This cautious approach gives the conservative forces every opportunity to prevent fundamental changes -- as such forces did so successfully in Poland after the promising beginning of the "new economic model" in 1956-57. Even if there is a substantial devolution of authority to enterprises, it remains to be seen whether the regime will be willing to reduce the central state apparatus correspondingly. And if the apparatus remains largely intact, it will have the possibility as well as the incentive of reimposing controls whenever economic problems develop (as in Poland during 1959-60). As long as there appears to be a pressing economic need, however, economic reform will remain a major issue in Czechoslovakia, and basic changes in the system will be possible.

#### APPENDIX

#### LIBERAL CZECHOSLOVAK ECONOMISTS

Economist	Affiliation				
Bohumil Komenda	Economics Institute, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague				
Cestmir Kozusnik	Economics Institute, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague				
Ota Sik	Economics Institute, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, Prague				
Hruby*	University of Economics, Prague				
Benedikt Korda	University of Economics, Prague				
Frantisek Valenta	University of Economics, Prague				
Vladimir Kadera	Research Institute of Economic Planning,** Prague				
Bohumil Krejcar	Research Institute of Economic Planning, Prague				
Rudolf Kocanda	Research Institute of Economic Planning, Prague				
Ladislav Matejka	Research Institute of Economic Planning, Prague				
Pavel Pelikan	Research Institute of Economic Planning, Prague				
Zdenek Vergner	Research Institute of Economic Planning, Prague				
Eduard Vopicka	Research Institute of Economic Planning, Prague				
Antonin Cervinka	Party University, Prague				
Zdenek Kodet	Party University, Prague				
Hvezdon Koctuch	University of Economics, Bratislava				
Viktor Pavlenda	University of Economics, Bratislava				

<sup>\*</sup> First name unknown.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Subordinated to State Planning Commission.

Economist	Affiliation				
O. Kyn	Komensky University, Faculty of Law, Bratislava				
Radoslav Selucky	Department of Political Economics, Czechoslovak Institute of Technology, Prague				
Julius Branik	Research Institute of Ministry of Finance, Prague				
Rudolf Rohlicek	Worker on staff of Central Committee of KSC and/or KSS				
Eugen Loebl	Ministry of Foreign Affairs				

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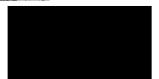
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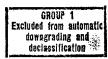
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Athens, Greece
Cairo. Egypt
Damascus, Svria
Kabul, Afghardstan
Karachi, Pakistan
New Delhi, India
Nicosia, Cyprus
Tehran. Iran
Baghdad, Iraq
Tel Aviv. Israel
Beirut. Lebanda
Ammaan. Jordon
Tidda. Saudi Avabia

Ottawa, Canada

#### ARA

Mexico
Guatemala
Panama
Brazillia, Brazil
Buenos Aires, Argentina
Bogota, Colombia
Santiago, Chile
La Paz, Bolivia
Montevideo, Uruguay
Caracas, Venezuela

#### Africa

Yaounde, Cameroun Leopoldville, Congo Addis Ababa. Ethopia Accra. Ghana Abidian. Ivory Coast Nairobi, Kenya Monrovia, Liberia Tripoli, Libva Rabat Morocco Lagos. Nigeria Mogadiscio, Somal Khartoum, Sudan Tunis, Tunisia Pretoria. South Africa Algiers, Algeria Cotonou. Dahomey Dakar, Senegal Bamako, Mah

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