



The
PEOPLE'S
VICTORY
in
CZECHO-
SLOVAKIA



By
Walter Storm
introduction by JOHN STUART

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INTRODUCTION

By JOHN STUART

The great merit of Walter Storm's account of Czechoslovakia's fateful February days is its truthfulness. It is truth in a framework of color, the mood and motion of people, the tenseness of the scene itself. Yet it is not a contrived drama. The facts emerge clearly. They answer those wrathful tigers who leaped across the front pages of the foreign press, growling and roaring their falsehoods and shutting out the voices asking that the case of the Czechoslovak people be heard without bitterness. For the first time in English, we have the story—not the detailed story with its innumerable documents, resolutions, speeches—but its substance. Few foreigners have had the opportunity to see the story unfold as Walter Storm did. He lived in Czechoslovakia for more than a year before the crisis, and when it broke he watched the torrent of day-to-day events until the crisis resolved.

Unlike the mass of western correspondents who descended on Prague, Storm has gone below the surface of things. Many newspapermen came expecting to find a nickelodeon melodrama with barricades, guillotines, and saber-swinging horsemen. When they did not find it they invented it. I was able to see for myself how American and British journalists sucked up the gossip in the cafes and sent it home as the truth. There are, therefore, two versions of what actually happened: the version of a quickening historical moment as written in the coffee shops of the rich and the reactionary, and the version written by thousands upon thousands of angry, anxious workers unwilling to surrender what they had won for themselves.

Storm has accepted the latter version. He works from the very sound premise that Czechoslovakia needs internal stability—a stability achievable only when those who produce the country's wealth hold the reins of power. This was exactly the issue of the Czechoslovak crisis. The other issues found their parentage in the central one. All else was a hash cooked up to feed the world the nonsense of "terror, brutality, and Communist oppression." The crisis was provoked by the old leadership of the National Socialist Party working in close harmony with its counterpart in the People's and Slovak Democratic parties. It was they who resigned from the cabinet, they who hoped there would be a revolt in Slovakia, they who counted on outside intervention to carry through a conspiracy for which, as it turned out, they could find little inside support.

Storm shows this with admirable clarity. And I can append to what he reports my own observations in Prague at the close of 1947 and later during the February days. The technique of the opposition reminded me of the ancient European executioners who kissed and embraced those whom they were about to hang. Czechoslovakia has had these affectionate hangmen only now they posed as heads of political parties. They hid the noose behind their backs while from their mouths came words of fealty to the program of nationalization and land distribution. I heard, for example, how Monsignor Frantisek Hála, second in command of the People's (Catholic) Party and Minister of Posts until he resigned, insisted that the new constitution must provide for administrative practices guaranteeing that economic advances to socialism would cease immediately.

When Hála left the cabinet several weeks later along with others he used as his excuse the dispute over the appointment of eight security officers by the Communist Minister of Interior. The excuse had no more relevance to the real issue and was no more an explanation of the crisis than the shot fired at Sarajevo could explain the outbreak of World War I. Both were pretexts; and the resignations were intended to signal a march backwards from everything the government program was designed to accomplish.

Hála and those who joined him hoped that their resigna-

tions would shatter the government. The fall of the cabinet would thus offer an easy chance for the organization of a new one without Communists despite the fact that the Communist Party was the largest in the country and had won the greatest number of votes in the May, 1946, elections. If the play was not successful, the ministers who walked out planned to fall back on Operation Number 2; they would consent to "heal" the breach and be "persuaded" to reenter the government on their own terms. What these ministers, in brief, feared most was the forthcoming election and their goal was to create a change in the relation of forces within the government and within the state in order to avoid defeat in the Spring balloting.

This was the strategy in broad outline. The Communists did not provoke the crisis for the good reason that they had no need for one. They were strongly entrenched in the country; their membership was rising each day; their prestige among workers and farmers was never higher.

A good many Americans believe that the resignation of the ministers was a highly principled affair in which men were ready to run any risk to "safeguard democracy." In reality it was nothing but a stupidly engineered plot from which principle was notable by its absence. From a long conversation I had with Father Josef Plojhar—a Roman Catholic priest for the last twenty-three years, a leader of the reorganized People's Party, and now Minister of Health in the new government—I learned how the resignation of the ministers was arranged by a few men. They did not consult the membership of their parties or their executive bodies. The resignations were decided upon at a private dinner given by Ivo Duchacek, a People's Party deputy who has since deserted his post and his country. One minister, Dr. Prochazka, learned of his resignation from newspaper reports and another, a deputy premier, discovered to his surprise that a colleague had turned in his portfolio without asking his consent.

There are those who are obsessed with the constitutionality of the change in the cabinet's personnel. It is one of those seductive questions around which hostility toward Czechoslovakia has been aroused. Storm emphasizes that it was constitutional and his steel-ribbed argument is that the changes

rested finally in popular will. The constitution prescribes that the president of the republic nominates, on the suggestion of the prime minister, new members of the government to replace those who resign. That procedure was followed to the letter. The constitution also requires that the new government have the approval of parliament. Parliament voted its approval.

But I think the issue of constitutionality offers an opportunity to ask the angry "defenders" of the Czech constitution, those who cry that it has been violated, why in the time of Munich they said nothing about its flagrant transgression by Hitler? Not a word of complaint was spoken by London or Paris or Washington when Czechoslovak territory was carved and trimmed by Berlin and the constitution trampled upon.

I am not surprised, then, that Czechoslovaks are deaf to the distant caterwauling over their organic law or, for that matter, over the charge that their country has been "raped" by the Soviet Union. On the face of it the charge is false. It has no foundation in fact. It is also untrue because it denies the strong admiration which the overwhelming number of Czechs and Slovaks have for the U.S.S.R. A great leveler of Czechoslovak politics is this warmth of feeling for Russia as liberator and ally; and, on the other side, a strong hatred of Germany. The memory of Munich, the agony of occupation under the Nazis, the betrayal by the West in 1938—all are etched on the national consciousness and motivate Czechoslovak foreign policy.

Fear of Germany brought the Communists even larger support during the February crisis than was already theirs. And these fears had their mainspring in the fact that the old hierarchy of the National Socialist and People's parties was attempting to tie the country to the Marshall Plan with its central target the reconstruction of Germany along lines which could not but again make her a menace to Czechoslovakia. When he reads about the Anglo-American plans to rebuild the Ruhr the Czechoslovak is infuriated. And to him it is the summit of perversity to suggest that the solution of the February crisis meant the capture of his country by the Russians. It meant the very opposite—a greater guarantee of his country's independence for now Prague was in a better position to meet the German problem than ever before.

There was undoubtedly keen Soviet interest in what was happening during February. But that interest, displayed by every embassy in the country, is indeed a far cry from intervention. The Russians never threatened to break their trade agreements with Prague, to withhold grain, or to send troops in order to assure what they might consider to be a favorable outcome of the crisis. In view of the fact that Czechoslovakia runs for several miles along the Soviet border and in view of the direct American pressure on Eastern Europe and outright intervention in Greece and Italy, Moscow would have had good cause to take steps in Czechoslovakia if it were Soviet policy to bludgeon other states into behaving as the Soviets think they should.

The presence in Prague of Valerian Zorin, a Soviet representative sent to supervise the delivery of grain arranged for the previous December, was one of those coincidences which the Russophobes exploited to the fullest. If Zorin were not present mad imaginations would have contrived other "proofs" of Soviet interference perhaps even including the one that the Russians have diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia—damaging evidence, of course, if you are bent on proving that the sun is really the moon in another disguise.

Jan Masaryk's death was used by the same Russophobes to show how strongly he disapproved of the new government and the way it was established. But the memories of sane men go beyond the sudden eulogies to Masaryk from the West. They cannot forget how Masaryk was maligned and his request for credits rejected by the State Department because he held tenaciously to the belief that a strong alliance between Moscow and Prague was indispensable to Czechoslovak security. Now that he is dead his enemies praise his wit, his joviality; they bray over him in the way the living ass brays over the dead lion.

A few days before his death Masaryk gave an interview to the Prague correspondent of the French newspaper *L'Ordre*. It is worth repeating in full because it has been kept from most American newspaper readers. The correspondent, for example, asked his opinion of the joint Anglo-American-French denunciation of the changes that took place in Czechoslovakia. He replied: "It is very easy to make a declaration condemning the policy of another sovereign state. Nothing is

easier than to be indignant about something happening at a neighbor's. The Czechoslovak people have had their say. The changes in our conception of democracy are new and considerable. Czechoslovaks always knew how to look after themselves and they will continue to do so. I have always been with the people, and I am with them now."

To the question of how the February crisis arose Masaryk answered: "There were people in this country who thought that it was possible to govern without the Communists or against them. I have always passionately opposed this idea. The crisis was precipitated by the resignation of the members of three parties of the National Front. We have got a new National Front now, and it is necessary to co-operate with it. The new government has been installed in a constitutional way, and it is going to proceed democratically in accordance with the constitution."

Asked how the change of government was carried out, Masaryk said: "Changes of this kind generally involve civil war and great sacrifices. In 1918 Czechoslovakia carried through a change without bloodshed. It was the same this time. The Czechoslovak people are a peace-loving people. They do not wish Europe to be divided into two camps. They desire lasting peace. We in Czechoslovakia know what war means, and whoever thinks that this desire for peace could be changed is stupid.

"Our people are and will remain democratically minded, and this is why I believe them and love them. If we are given a chance to set to work quietly after this bloodless change, we shall make a great contribution to Europe, the heart of which is Czechoslovakia. I went into this government as a convinced democrat, and will serve our new democracy as well as I can and with all my strength."

Finally he was asked what his attitude was toward recent events in western Germany. "It is our fate," he replied, "that we are and always shall be the neighbors of Germany. We know the German problem and understand it, and in this understanding of the German danger, the new government and the whole nation are united and will remain united."

No one can extract from these statements any sense of hostility toward the new government or judge from them that the change was the cause of his suicide. If he had disapproved

he would have at the very least remained silent and he certainly would not have stayed on in the cabinet as foreign minister. The distorted, wild interpretations of his death are in keeping with the gross distortions of what took place during the Czechoslovak crisis. For the American press Masaryk's death was simply a matter of using any stick to beat the dog.

I have doubts whether what Storm has written in the following pages will change the mind of the State Department. He is not appealing to it but to the good sense of Americans who have until now lacked enough facts from which to make fair-minded judgments. But there is more involved than fair-mindedness toward Czechoslovakia. There is the issue of peace itself. Events in Czechoslovakia have been used to fan the fires of war, to bottle up the natural sympathies that exist among peoples who sweat and toil for their daily bread. Nothing that has happened in Czechoslovakia represents a threat to the American people. If anyone has been frightened, it is the frenzied, profit-obsessed men in deadly fear of social change or economic progress. It is small wonder that they have whipped up a killer madness over a distant country trying to build a society anchored in reason and science—a peaceful life without poverty and without unemployment. That life must be hidden from our eyes lest Americans learn too much from it.

May, 1948.

THE PEOPLE'S VICTORY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

By WALTER STORM

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1948

As I write, it is only five hours since Premier Klement Gottwald announced to the vast, aroused crowd of 200,000 in Prague's St. Wenceslas Square, that President Beneš has finally accepted the resignations of the ministers who had provoked the crisis, and has agreed to Mr. Gottwald's new Government. Yet already there is an unmistakable lift in mood. Gone are the anxieties of last week and the depression of the weeks before.

Coming home in the train this evening, I could feel the ripple of excitement among the passengers. I know most of them, at least by sight, because we often take the same train; they are nearly all workers who live in the villages stretching along the Vltava River north of Prague. Last week they were sitting dour and silent but tonight they were all talking. Most of them had been at the mass meeting in the afternoon, and were still flushed and talkative.

All along the coach, divided into compartments by waist-high partitions, people were reading the single-page special editions of newspapers, with photographs and biographies of the members of the Government. About half the passengers were wearing the new red-and-white Communist Party lapel badges. In a corner near the door a student was playing a medley of Moravian folk tunes and American jazz on a harmonica, and a half a dozen of his friends were singing

with him. Passengers were making jokes, talking about the happenings in their factories or villages, or discussing the new Ministers. There seemed to be so much to discuss, everyone had seen and done so much these few days.

In one corner sat blond Mrs. Karasova from our village, knitting the yellow pullover she started three weeks ago. She was talking to an elderly lady with a string shopping bag on her lap. "I like the idea of Mrs. Jankovcová as Food Minister," she was saying. "It needs a woman to understand what the housewives want."

In the next compartment two railway workers were arguing whether it had been a revolution. "Of course it is a revolution," one of them was saying. "What were the Action Committees? They took control, and that's revolutionary action, as I see it. The change came from the workers."

"But nothing has changed. The reactionaries wanted to change the government program. We simply stopped them from doing that. The twelve ministers resigned, the President accepted the resignations, and he now accepts the new Government. It was always done like that. Anyway, what about May, 1945? We call that the revolution, don't we?"

"Well, I think this is the second part of the revolution" the first said with finality.

Most people in the compartment seemed to agree with that.

An elderly peasant with stiff white moustachios was carrying on an endless commentary. He told everyone he was going back to Usti, in the border districts (formerly Sudetenland) where he had a farm; that he used to live in Moravia, but that after the war he answered the appeal for farmers to go to the border districts. "Emperor Franz Joseph, the First Republic, the Germans, the Second Republic—how many governments have I seen?" the old man was saying.

"What do you think of the new developments?" a young man asked him.

He replied: "Before the war Governments changed but it made no difference to me. We had to hire land and everything went for the rent. We were too poor to eat the eggs from our geese; we had to sell them. The women worked on the land, and the men took jobs in the towns, different jobs every season. It was like that for forty years. Then in 1945 I came to Usti. Now we have 17 acres, a house, machines and animals. We

have been given fifteen years to pay it off, but it will be paid in five. The Communists stand behind us small farmers—we all know that. They made the millionaires pay farmers' subsidies when there was a drought. I am not a Communist; I am a Catholic, and I belong to the Catholic People's Party. My sons are Communists, but not me. I'm too old now. But I'm for Gottwald."

There was a little burst of applause after this speech. It made everyone happy. The passengers went over to the old man, patted his shoulder and squeezed his hand.

"So you are a happy man?" someone asked him.

"No," he said, "I wish I were forty years younger."

This evening the radio announced that in all the towns and villages in Czechoslovakia there are celebrations.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1948

The Immediate Dispute

A week before on Wednesday, February 18, there were many signs that storm clouds were gathering. All the previous week, the National Front* had been under the heaviest strain since its formation in 1945. Disputes firstly over the plan to raise the salaries of government workers, and then on the issue of appointing personnel in the Ministry of Interior and Security Police, were threatening to split it wide open. But few people realized how deep the crisis conditions (of which the Cabinet crisis was a reflection) ran in the life and economy of the country.

* In March, 1945, representatives of all groups which had opposed the Nazi occupation, met in Košice in eastern Slovakia, and agreed to the formation of a coalition government, to carry out a program involving, among other things, the expulsion of the Germans, the punishment of collaborators, land reform and nationalization of industries. The political parties which agreed to participate in the government and carry out the program were the Communist Party, National Socialist Party, Catholic People's Party, Slovak Democrat Party, and Social Democratic Party. The National Front frequently consulted the trade unions and veterans organizations, but lately the right-wing forces in the various parties with the exception of the Communists had tried to exclude them from collaboration.

I heard Wednesday's news from a friend who is the parliamentary correspondent for a daily newspaper.

"The cabinet session today was really tense and bitter," he told me. "It was suspended by Gottwald because it was impossible to make headway." This is the first time this has happened. As soon as the session opened, Václav Stránský, on behalf of the National Socialist ministers, requested a discussion on the Ministry of Interior dispute. The Prime Minister pointed out the matter was not on the agenda, and that the meeting had been called to discuss the new Constitution. Anyway, Nosek, the Minister of Interior, was away ill. The Prime Minister asked them to discuss the original agenda, but the National Socialists supported by People's Party and Slovak Democrat ministers, refused, so he suspended the session. An extraordinary session of the cabinet was called for next Friday.

The issue which caused the rift was a simple one, and not of particular importance in itself. On February 13 the cabinet, by a small majority, instructed the Minister of Interior (a Communist) to revoke a decision of the Provincial Commander of the Security Service, for the reorganization of the police in Prague. What was involved was the appointment of eight police officers, but the protesting Ministers said these appointments had been made on political lines. The Communist ministers claimed that the appointments were strictly in accordance with the law, and made in agreement with the appropriate security authorities of Prague and Bohemia. Furthermore, it had always been recognized that such matters were within the competence of the Minister of the Interior, just as all other ministers had discretion regarding appointments in their ministries.

Earlier Friction

This dispute was the most bitter of a long series which had started months before. During the summer a devastating drought struck the country, and it became necessary to find money to subsidize the farmers. The Communists proposed a special levy on the very wealthy. This was bitterly opposed by the other parties. Although it was necessary to adopt a Constitution before the elections, the matter was constantly being postponed because of disputes on the questions of fur-

ther nationalization, the power of popular councils, and the status of Slovakia. There were numerous complaints by many people and by the Minister of the Interior that the Minister of Justice (Dr. Drtina, National Socialist) was refusing to prosecute black marketeering and espionage cases submitted to him by the police.

Two weeks previously the dispute about raising the salaries of government workers arose. All parties agreed that the civil servants were entitled to increases. The Minister of Finance, Dr. Dolanský (Communist), announced that the budget could afford a flat raise of 300 crowns (about \$6.00) per person.* The other four parties then proposed that the lower paid groups should have a raise of 300 crowns, but that the raises should increase to 800 crowns in the higher paid categories. The Minister of Finance declared it would be impossible; that it would in fact absorb the funds necessary for the National Insurance Scheme, which aimed to give widespread social services to all families in the Republic. "This move by the right-wing ministers has two objects—to win the white-collar votes of the higher paid government workers, and to cripple the National Insurance Scheme which has the support of all the working people" wrote *Rudé Právo* the Communist daily.

The narrow division of forces simply led to a long, bitter stalemate. The Communists were the largest party with eight Ministers, and they were usually supported by the two non-party Ministers, Jan Masaryk (Min. of Foreign Affairs) and General Svoboda (Min. of Defense). In some issues they had the support of the Social Democrats with three Ministers, but more recently, the Social Democrats were inclined to support the right-wing parties. The other three parties had twelve ministries among them. This allocation corresponded with the strength of the parties in the Parliament, which was itself the exact reflection of the results of the General Election in 1946 in which the Communists won 38.1 per cent of the votes, the National Socialists 18.5 per cent, the People's Party 15.7 per cent, the Slovak Democrats 14.1 per cent, and the Social Demo-

* The proposal of the Minister of Finance was in fact that submitted by U.R.O.—the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement—which had the recognized right of counselling the government on all matters of wages and prices. Among the other matters involved was the principle of U.R.O. participating in such decisions.

crats 12.1 per cent. A fractional vote was won by some other minor parties.

Later that day the Presidium of the Communist Party issued a statement. "It had been apparent for some weeks that the representatives of several political parties in the government had decided on a certain course of action in order to prevent—with total disregard of their obligations arising from the decisions of the National Front and from the government program—the coming into force before the elections of the new constitution, and the passage of important laws representing, in particular, the National Insurance Scheme, the new land reform, tax reductions for farmers and tradesmen, and urgent measures regarding distribution." The statement also asserted that "certain government parties had embarked on a deliberate course of action to establish before the elections—by anti-democratic and anti-constitutional means—a government of experts, which would try to wrest power from the hands of the people, and to prepare anti-democratic elections in an atmosphere of political and economic chaos, and at the bidding of reaction."

A "government of experts" is a term familiar in Czechoslovak politics. It means a government of officials and bureaucrats appointed from above, and owing no responsibility to democratic institutions. The Czechs have a dread of such a government—that was the kind they had under the Nazis.

Farmers Protest

Wednesday's newspapers contained an item which was a sure indicator of the kind of political weather that was brewing in the country. Farmers from all parts, acting through their District Farmer's Commissions, had decided to call a protest meeting in Prague on February 28. A Conference of Chairmen of these Commissions had issued an important communique.

"The government program has promised Czech and Slovak farmers the final solution of the ownership of land in favor of small and medium farmers. The National Front has also pledged itself to fulfill the demand of the Hradec Program, i.e. the enactment of the new land reform not later than February 15, and the enactment of the draft bill on the

farmers' insurance scheme, as well as the bill on the farmers' tax by March, 1948. The National Front has also promised us that the draft bill on the merging of uneconomic holdings should be discussed in Parliament not later than February 20."

The communique complained that these promises were not being fulfilled, that there were delays and obstructions in carrying out the land reform, and that the big landowners were being protected by the courts. The farmers were coming to Prague to protest these grievances; to discuss questions of agricultural prices and "measures to bring about order in wholesale trade and distribution."

A few days earlier Mr. Julius Ďuriš, the Minister of Agriculture (Communist), had protested before the Cabinet about the delays in settling urgent agricultural matters. "I am compelled to draw the attention of the government to the fact that I, in my capacity as Minister of Agriculture, demand the fulfillment of the obligations accepted through the government program, and by the National Front. These laws were to be enacted prior to the elections, and included in the constitution. I could not shoulder the responsibility for the failure to fulfill the government program and the decisions of the National Front."

Workers Protest

But the farmers were not the only ones with a grievance. There were many reports of discontent in the factories. Not that workers were striking or slowing down on the job. On the contrary, they were consistently over-fulfilling the targets of the Two Year Plan,* they were putting in voluntary unpaid overtime in the form of brigade work. But there was a feeling that things were not quite right, a sense of frustration. Somewhere down the line there was a bottleneck to progress. The

* The Two Year Plan aims at raising the general standard of living to 10 per cent above the highest prewar level. It is primarily a recovery program. Only in Slovakia is greater industrialization provided for. The Five Year Plan, which will immediately follow it, will bring about a great concentration of heavy industry.

The Two Year Plan targets have been consistently fulfilled in all branches, and there is no doubt the final targets will be reached even before the scheduled time at the close of 1948.

people were working with the same hope and enthusiasm that gripped them in the Revolution of May, 1945, when Czechoslovakia was liberated.

But more and more of the products of factories were finding their way into illegal markets. At one stage nearly half of the country's textile stocks were lying hidden in the cellars of black marketeers, or were providing rich trade to smugglers into Germany and Austria. The distributive and wholesale trade, almost entirely in private hands, was, either actively engaged in the black market, or so badly geared to the planned sector of industry that it was becoming a dead weight on the whole economy.

With the ideas of socialism developing rapidly throughout the nation, with enormous growth of political unity and self-confidence among the workers, the existence of private factory owners, merchants and millionaires living on the labor of others, even though only a remnant of a prewar class, was becoming an anachronism and an irritant.

There was also definite feeling that the gains made since 1945 were now being threatened. Why were the right-wing ministers opposing the National Insurance Scheme, which had the support of every worker? Why did they fight against the new constitution? Why were they always against the trade unions and works councils? These and other questions led to a growing fear that if the right-wing parties gained power, there would be a return to the bad old days of depression, unemployment and labor exploitation.

The Congress of Works Councils and Trade Union Locals, called for Sunday, February 22, and again mentioned in Wednesday's newspapers, was therefore to be an event of great importance. It had been called by the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement in a mood of protest to urge "a settlement of questions being presently discussed by the government." It would decide "how to ensure gradual fulfillment of the justified claims of government workers without affecting the country's currency, how to improve the situation of old-age pensioners, by the swift enactment of the National Insurance Scheme, how to extend social insurance to tradesmen and farmers, how to ensure further progress toward nationalization, how to remove 'parasitic private wholesalers' at the same

time safeguarding the existence and private enterprises of farmers and tradesmen."

As events developed the Congress of Works Councils came to be one of the key events in the whole crisis.

International Tensions

These were developments inside Czechoslovakia, but international tensions also played a part in the mounting crisis. It was becoming disturbingly evident that the country was receiving the attention of intriguers, whose aims varied all the way from tying Czechoslovakia to the American monopolies via the Marshall Plan, to murdering peasants who had benefited under the land reforms. For the past year a secret radio station, operating from a neighboring country, had poured a constant stream of anti-Czech propaganda into Slovakia. In September last a plot to kill President Beneš was discovered, and bombs were dispatched through the mail to leading cabinet ministers. In Slovakia a plot was uncovered, in which armed units modelled on the Hlinka Guard, a former fascist organization, were being trained for an armed uprising. Leading members of the Slovak Democrat Party were involved.

In November two large groups, one of forty and one of sixty persons, were arrested on charges of espionage. In January a group of fifteen was arrested on a similar charge, and large supplies of ammunition were found with them. The worsening international situation, the close proximity to Germany which under the Marshall Plan was being rebuilt into an aggressive power once more, meant a sharp increase both in open propaganda and secret intrigue.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1948

First Reactions

By Thursday it was obvious that the Cabinet crisis was having a disturbing effect throughout the country. Every hour reports arrived of excited meetings in factories, and of gathering tension throughout the provinces. In Prague people were

anxious, but they nevertheless believed that somehow the whole issue would be patched up.

Four thousand workers at the Tito Steel Works in Prague held a meeting the previous evening, and passed a resolution with only two dissenting votes. It declared, "trade unionists in the Tito Works are carefully following the government discussions and demand consistent fulfillment of all promises the government has given the working people of this country."

The Bata Works in Zlin, the Škoda Works, the Tatra Auto Works, the Tesla Radio Factory, the South Bohemian Paper Mills were among the dozens of other factories all over the Republic where similar resolutions were passed.

That workers of all parties were supporting these resolutions was shown by the overwhelming majorities they were receiving in factories where there were known to be thousands of National Socialist and People's Party members.

National Socialist Big-Wigs Take Their Stand

On Thursday the big guns of reactionary party warfare began to boom. *Svobodné Slovo*, the National Socialist daily, issued a manifesto under big blazing headlines. It began: "The Presidium of the National Socialist Party sends brotherly greetings to all members of the Party, especially to the workers and employees in the factories who have been exposed to a wave of Communist terror."

So far this was the first mention of "Communist terror," a cry which had absolutely no basis in fact and was to become the theme of the entire Western press in dealing with the Czechoslovak crisis. Up to now all public activity had taken place at orderly peaceful meetings. Workers who were members of the National Socialist Party wondered what their leaders were talking about.

The statement continued that the Presidium endorsed the actions of the National Socialist Ministers, and condemned the Communist allegation that the non-Communist parties intended to set up a government of experts. The Presidium considered that the Congress of the Works Councils was convoked in an undemocratic way. It also considered "irresponsible" the convention of the Congress of the Farmers Commissions.

Most important of all, it put forward the view of the National Socialists on what was perhaps the fundamental quarrel—that of further nationalization. It insisted that the Košice program and the Two Year Plan amounted to an agreement that there would be no further nationalization. "The present Parliament cannot pass any further nationalization laws," said the statement.

Social Democrats

The Social Democrats, who in the past had been wavering allies of the Communists, were having a crisis all their own. Václav Majer, Minister of Food, and leader of the right wing, wanted his party to join forces with the opposition. But rank and file opinion, particularly in the factories, was rapidly veering away from Majer. Instead it strengthened the hand of Zdeněk Fierlinger and Evžen Erban, who led the left wing. Fierlinger, who was Prime Minister for a brief time after liberation and who was ousted from the party leadership in 1947 by the right-wing forces, openly favored co-operation with the Communists. Erban, as General Secretary of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, was naturally in sympathy with the predominantly leftist attitude of the workers.

The Social Democrats and the Communists together held a small majority in the Parliament and the Cabinet. Whatever action the Social Democrats took could have important results. But at this stage they were undecided. They issued a statement which supported the Communists in some questions, the National Socialists in others. They seemed to be sounding out the possibilities of a "third way," but they took no decisive step in either direction.

Two Items

Thursday's news contained two small items which are interesting in the light of subsequent events. The first was that Mr. Laurence Steinhardt, U. S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, had returned to Prague and told U. S. journalists, "I have not entirely given up hope that the Czechoslovak Government will perhaps sometime later consider its decision and will

directly participate in the European Recovery (Marshall Plan)."

The other was that Communist Party membership had increased in the first two weeks of February by 31,531 new members. The report stated that many of these members had come from the National Socialist Party and People's Party.*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1948

Friday was to be a crucial day. In the morning there would be the extraordinary cabinet meeting to consider the complaint of the right-wing parties about appointments in the Ministry of Interior. But the interval since Wednesday's meeting had done nothing to prepare the way for a settlement. In those two days the attitude of both sides had considerably stiffened. Moreover there were abundant signs that the quarrel had touched off a nationwide demand to satisfy popular grievances. The initiative was passing increasingly to the masses of workers and farmers; the matter was moving beyond the stage of a mere cabinet crisis.

If there were hopes for a peaceful settlement they were decisively shattered when *Svobodné Slovo*, the National Socialist newspaper, came on the streets on Friday morning. Under the headline "We shall not permit a police regime," appeared a savage attack on the Ministry of Interior. The main charges were that the police were using illegal methods to trap members of subversive organizations, and that the Ministry of Interior actually provoked and encouraged subversive activity in order to make arrests.

The effect would not have been so serious if the article had

* The Communist Party had over a million registered members at the time of the General Election in 1946. Its membership increased steadily in the next eighteen months, and just before the crisis was nearing 1,400,000. Membership grew particularly rapidly when the election campaigns started. This is a remarkably high figure for a country of 12,000,000 population. Within a month of the crisis, Communist Party membership had risen to 1,600,000.

merely said that and no more. After all, it was becoming common for party newspapers to attack opposition ministries, and it all went under the name of "pre-election politics." But this article contained an account of an investigation *still being conducted* by the police into an important espionage group operating from the town of Most near the German border. The group was known to be well organized and financed, with high connections, and it had evaded arrest for more than two years. The article was full of implied sympathy for members of espionage groups whom it called "misguided persons." Thus *Svobodné Slovo*, which the day previous was strenuously defending Czechoslovakia's remaining exploiters of labor, had now moved to the stage of aiding criminal elements and the country's enemies.

Later in the day the Ministry of Interior issued a communique. It revealed that the police had attempted to look into an espionage organization headed by a certain Pravomir Reichl, and that a man already under arrest had agreed to help the police by leading them to the organization. The communique said Reichl, a lieutenant in the Czechoslovak Army, had "organized subversive activities and renewed his contacts with other defecionist officers. He arranged for reports about the army, its organization, etc., to be handed to him. He was also in contact with an officer of a foreign power whom he asked to get officers out of this country. The activity of this organization was aimed at bringing about an armed revolt and at murdering leading Communist functionaries." The communique said the statements in *Svobodné Slovo* had been taken from evidence given by traitors and were all the more harmful "as they had compelled the ministries of National Defense and Interior to publish certain circumstances which, in the interest of further investigations, should have remained secret."

Later in the day the purpose of the article became clear. The National Socialists had no interest in healing the breach in the cabinet; on the contrary, they were determined to widen it. They believed this was the moment to strike, and that the situation was in their favor. The *Svobodné Slovo* article was a torpedo carefully aimed at the extraordinary cabinet meeting.

On Friday I had an interview with a Communist member of

Parliament. I asked him to tell me what he considered the basic dispute to be.

"The right-wing parties are alarmed at the rapidly increasing tempo of reconstruction and socialism. They want to stop it somehow because it means that their election chances are running out. That's why they oppose further nationalization, the National Insurance Scheme, the completion of the land reform, tax reductions for farmers and traders—all bills which have the support of almost everyone in the country. These bills will greatly strengthen the process of socialism, and weaken the remnants of the big money men. So the right wing constantly raise false issues, procrastinate, and obstruct the government program."

The Resignations

Like most people in Prague, I heard of the resignations on the radio late in the afternoon. The announcer said "Ministers of the National Socialist, People's and Slovak Democrat Parties informed Prime Minister Klement Gottwald that they have handed in their resignations to the President of the Republic. The following ministers are therefore leaving the government:

Deputy Prime Minister	Dr. Zenkl
Minister of Education	Dr. Stránský
Minister of Justice	Dr. Drtina
Minister of Foreign Trade	Dr. Ripka
Deputy Prime Minister	Msgr. Šrámek
Minister of Posts	Msgr. Hála
Minister of Technics	Eng. Kopecký
Minister of Health	Dr. Procházka
Deputy Prime Minister	Dr. Kočvara
Minister of Transport	Dr. Pietor
Minister of Unification	Dr. Franěk
Under-Secretary of State for National Defense	Mr. Lichner

"In view of the internal political situation created through these resignations, Prime Minister Gottwald immediately called on the President of the Republic and pointed out the

need to fill the vacancies in the cabinet as speedily as possible."

What had happened was that the Prime Minister had summoned the ministers to attend the cabinet meeting in the usual way. Instead of attending, the National Socialists sent a letter stating they would only appear if they were informed in advance what reply the Minister of Interior would make. The Prime Minister replied that this was highly irregular and that the statement would be made in the usual way at the meeting. After a further exchange of letters and negotiations lasting until the late afternoon, in which the National Socialists refused to alter their demand, they tendered their resignations. An hour later came those of the People's Party and Slovak Democrats.

Not all the ministers of these parties were present and in some cases (for example Msgr. Hála and Jan Kopecký) resignations were tendered on their behalf by their colleagues.

It is interesting that Associated Press and United Press had wired the news to the United States in the early afternoon, not only before the news was made public in Prague but before the resignations had been conveyed to the Prime Minister. This showed an interest in the events by other powers which went far beyond the ordinary scope of news reporting.

Since the Social Democratic Ministers and the two non-party ministers, Jan Masaryk (Minister of Foreign Affairs) and General Svoboda (Minister of Defense) had not resigned, there were still thirteen ministers at their posts, sufficient technically for a quorum. The remaining ministers could therefore still function legally as a government.

Why they Resigned

In view of the charges made that the whole affair was a plot by the Communists to seize power, it must be noted that it was the *resignations of the right-wing ministers* which provoked the crisis. Nor was it a sudden spontaneous action. It was a logical development of their activities in the National Front and cabinet in the previous six months when by opposing the government program they were maneuvering themselves more and more into an opposition bloc. They knew, as the most naive of politicians would have known, that their

resignations would seriously aggravate the difficulties, and if they ever rejoined the Communists, any kind of harmony in the cabinet would have been impossible. There is only one explanation for their action—they wanted to create the opportunity to form a government without the Communists despite the fact that the Communists got the largest number of votes in the 1946 elections. This meant a government *against* the Communists, and the whole program of nationalization, land reform, and socialization for which the Communists were the most persistent fighters.

Why they chose this particular moment is not yet fully clear, although the facts are beginning to emerge. One reason of course is that in the internal situation, time was running against them, and the elections were coming all too soon. But there were certainly other reasons. With the Tripartite talks on Germany taking place in London, with the Marshall Plan being discussed by the American Congress, in other words, with the rapid acceleration of developments under the Marshall Plan, it was not possible that Czechoslovakia should have been left out of consideration. The number of recent arrests of espionage groups with connections with Western powers, the amount of propaganda in the foreign press and radio directed toward Czechoslovakia, the dangling of the bait of a dollar loan, the frequent contacts between emigré circles abroad and right-wing leaders, particularly of the Slovak Democrat Party, were all evidence of an intense activity and interest in Czechoslovakia by foreign powers.

It is no coincidence that the tactics of the opposition bear a similarity to those which led to the ousting of the Communists from the governments of France and Italy. There is no doubt that the same recipe was intended to produce the same dish. It was not the Communists who engineered the crisis. It was the right-wing ministers who, unfortunately, misread the auguries.

Prague After the Resignations

The news of the resignations caused an immediate response throughout Prague. People began to collect in little groups on the sidewalks, talking earnestly. They constantly stopped each other, and asked for further news. There seemed to be

an instant realization that this was serious, that anything might happen now. Yet strangely enough there was no obvious excitement. There was a sort of intense quiet.

A group of several hundred people soon collected outside the Communist Party headquarters. The crowd spilled over the pavement, and across the street, up to the ancient walls of the Powder Tower. They stood in the cold gray evening, with hands in overcoat pockets, talking, anxious for news. I heard one man say, "They're not going to make a Greece here."

A little further down Příkopy, a brightly neon-lighted shopping street, a crowd had collected outside the Social Democratic Party offices. As I passed a section of the crowd was chanting, "Long live Fierlinger."

Nearby was Lipperts, where Prague's well-to-do meet in the evenings for liqueurs and coffee. The small, pink-lit cocktail lounge was more full than usual, and buzzing with talk. I saw a gentleman I knew well, a hotel owner, and got into conversation with him. "The time has come for a show-down," he said in English. "The Communists have been going too far."

I went again into the cold air, and made toward St. Wenceslas Square. All up and down the wide pavements little knots of people had collected, talking softly. The first effect seemed to be to set people discussing—weighing up, thinking out the issues.

By now the neon signs were blinking and flashing and unwinding on all the buildings along both sides of the wide thoroughfare—advertisements for shoes, hotels, automobiles, movies, night clubs. I noticed the modern shops, the busy traffic, the well-dressed people.

I caught a trolley to Karlin, a working-class district, and went into a beerhall I knew well. It was more full than I had ever seen it before. The amount of cigarette ends and drained out beer mugs indicated people were staying longer than usual. The radio was on loud, above the conversation.

I went up to a group of men and told them I was a newspaper reporter and would like to talk with them. They agreed at once. Two of them worked at the Kolben-Daněk concern—a locomotive factory. One was a textile worker; one a trolley motorman.

"They are trying to make an anti-Communist bloc, to force

the Communists out of the government," said one Kolben-Daněk worker.

"As they did in France and Italy," added the trolley conductor.

"How are the workers taking that?" I asked.

"We won't allow it. This whole thing is aimed at us. The Communist Party is the party of the workers. There will be serious trouble if that happens," said the Kolben-Daněk worker.

"If the reactionaries take the government now, there'll be no election," said the textile worker.

"It will be like the first Republic again—unemployment, bad conditions, bad wages. We'll be treated like horses again," said the second Kolben-Daněk worker.

"If the reactionaries get power, then we will become soldiers, that's all," the textile worker said.

Late in the evening the radio announced that the Prime Minister would address a public meeting in the Old Town Square at ten o'clock the next morning.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1948

The Meeting in Old Town Square

Early Saturday morning little processions began to form in the districts of Prague and march to the Old Town Square. Although the meeting had been called at the shortest notice, the news had got about during the night and people were coming in thousands. It was bitterly cold, the coldest day of the year, and thick ice covered the pavements.

I noticed a group of several hundred railway workers marching behind a great velvet banner, elaborately embroidered in red and gold—a prized trade union heirloom. At the corner near the Masaryk railroad station a crowd of peasant women with shawls on their heads were gathering. They had come in from nearby villages. A youth group, boys and girls together, marched briskly down the street singing, and carrying

a rolled-up banner. Busloads and truckloads of workers came from factories in the suburbs, their flags flying in the wind.

By half past nine the square was crowded, people standing close together for warmth. It was a very excited and angry crowd, angrier than I had ever seen a Prague crowd. They were shouting, "Throw out the reactionaries," "Jail the black marketeers," "Down with foreign intervention." In the crowd I saw gray-capped workers, clerks, housewives, trolley conductors, soldiers, children perched on parent's shoulders, peasants. Everywhere were trade union banners, the red and gold standards of the Communist Party, and banners with hastily painted slogans. The Old Town Square, with the statue of Jan Hus rising out of the crowd like a black rock in the ocean, with the ruins of the Old Town Hall, the needle-pointed spires of Týn Cathedral, the many-windowed ancient buildings all around, looked like a scene from a high moment in medieval history. But what was happening was very modern—one of the essentially modern events of this century.

The Deputy Lord Mayor opened the meeting and speakers began to explain the situation. The crowd was highly responsive and aroused, cheering and shouting with every few sentences. When Mrs. Koušová-Petránková, the first Deputy Chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Prague, came on to the balcony to speak, the square was filled with a deafening roar. "I am speaking to you as a functionary of the Social Democratic Party. We, Social Democrats, followers of the unity of the working people, are calling the working people to tell them that our democracy is in danger. The present need is unity. All of us, Social Democrats, trade unionists, Communists, co-operative workers and all progressive people from other political parties, who today are resisting the attempts of the right-wing leaders, must form a strong bloc which would smash all attacks against the Republic."

The secretariat of the Social Democratic Party later decided to expel Mrs. Petránková for addressing the meeting, but a day later the expulsion was cancelled.

Gottwald's Speech

The Prime Minister, wearing a black woolen cap, and with snow on his shoulders, came forward to speak. Every-

one had been waiting for this moment when he would declare the Communists' attitude toward the resignations.

I have heard Gottwald speak on many occasions; usually his voice is subdued. But now it had a ring of anger. His words were bitter and sharp. "The ministers who tendered their resignations on Friday had formed a reactionary bloc within the cabinet, which for over a month had not only prevented all constructive work for the fulfillment of the government program, on which all government parties had agreed, but had also made impossible the discharge of ordinary day-to-day government business."

He gave details of the Ministry of Interior dispute, disclosing that the cabinet decision to revoke orders for police reorganization was a snap decision taken at the end of a cabinet meeting, in the absence of the minister concerned, without knowledge of the facts, and in any case was not binding because it was unconstitutional.

"When I called an extraordinary cabinet meeting to explain these things, and to have the Minister of Interior and Minister of National Defense report on the matter, the representatives of the National Socialists, People's and Slovak Democrat parties, refused to attend. Instead they resigned. In other words they refused to hear the reports of the constitutionally responsible chiefs of department, and to make their decisions accordingly."

Then the Prime Minister, speaking with great emphasis and deliberation, said, "The real cause is that reaction tried to obstruct the complete execution of the program of the present government, in particular the enactment of the constitution, the National Insurance Scheme, the new land reform, tax relief for farmers and tradesmen, etc. Another cause is that reaction wants to break up the National Front of workers, farmers, tradesmen and the intelligentsia, in keeping with the ancient slogan, "Divide and conquer." Yet another cause is that reaction wants to maneuver Czechoslovakia into opposition to our Slav allies, in particular the most powerful of them, the Soviet Union, regardless of the fact that this would mean the beginning of a new Munich. In short, our reaction, encouraged and supported by foreign reaction, is making a decisive attempt to undermine our popular democratic regime, and to do away gradually with

all the achievements of our national revolution." He accused domestic and foreign reaction of making a desperate effort to bring about, before the elections, a transfer of power to their advantage. "They are afraid of the results of free and democratic elections," he said.

Toward the end of his speech, the Prime Minister made two dramatic and important statements. The first was the proposal to fill the vacancies created by the resignations with new men who had remained loyal to the original spirit of the National Front. The Prime Minister said, "We believe there are sufficient good Czech and Slovak men and women in all political parties, and in all national organizations. The ministers who resigned have deserted the idea and program of the National Front, have acted without consultation, and behind the backs of their own party members."

The second was the appeal to all Czechs and Slovaks to form Action Committees of the National Front in every village, town and district. He emphasized that these Action Committees were to be made up of democratic and progressive representatives of all parties and national organizations.

At this critical moment Gottwald's decisive, forceful speech produced a tremendous wave of sympathy and enthusiasm amongst the crowd. He stood on the battle-scarred balcony, which was draped with a single red flag, and acknowledged the cheering of the crowd. There was an electric tenseness in the air. Everyone knew the importance of the speech and of the meeting—everyone could feel that this event had a decisive force which altered the whole situation.

Deputation to the President

The chairman of the meeting read out a long resolution, and every clause was received with cheers. It pledged full support for the Gottwald Government, and made an emphatic demand for the acceptance of the resignations, and for the Prime Minister to be allowed to form a Government with new ministers faithful to the program of the National Front. Then a deputation of five was appointed to call on the President and tell him of the meeting and the resolution. The five

men immediately left for Hradčany, the many-windowed presidential palace which crowns a tall hill on the other side of the river.

The President used the visit of the deputation to make his first public statement on the situation. He was anxious to assure the public that he would not permit the formation of a government of experts. "We have a Parliament, a Parliamentary regime, and a Parliamentary Government. There will therefore continue to be a Parliamentary Government and no government of experts."

He was also anxious to state his attitude concerning the reports to oust the Communists from the government. "I told my colleague, Mr. Gottwald, that I would not accept his resignation. I told him—'you are the Prime Minister. I shall do nothing without ascertaining your attitude. If any attempts were made to oust you from the government, I should say that a government without the Communists does not exist for me. We cannot oust the biggest parliamentary party'."

The deputation asked the President to take heed of the desire of the great majority of working people that the ministers who had resigned should not return to the cabinet. To this the President replied, "I am not entitled to say that this or that person is eligible for the government. Nor am I entitled to say who must be in the government. The Prime Minister will propose to me the members of the new cabinet, and I have always seriously considered his views. . . . It is my duty to try to induce the parties to co-operate rather than set them against one another."

All afternoon there were reports of similar meetings in towns and villages throughout the country. The public was actively participating in the crisis, and this increased its tempo with every hour. The demand that the President accept the resignations had in one day become the key slogan and all the weight of public opinion was massing behind it. The refusal of the Communists to work with the old ministers was a serious and unexpected blow to the right-wing leaders, who had always believed they could go back to the status quo if their move failed.

If the right-wing leaders had thought the resignations would win them support or sympathy, they made a colossal

miscalculation. It failed even to create the political confusion on which some of them were banking. Instead it served to illuminate the situation so brightly that every man, woman and child could understand the issues. It was not merely the mass meetings at town and village squares where the issues were publicly aired. It was the discussions in factories, in homes, in restaurants, in trolleys and trains, among groups of people on street corners. The resignations did not focus attention on the Ministry of Interior affair. They set people asking why the government program was being sabotaged, why the resigning ministers had always supported the bigger businessmen, the black market operators, why they were now wrecking the National Front. Throughout the country rank and file members of all parties were supporting the Communists.

Never have political parties committed such rapid harikiri as the National Socialists, the People's Party and Slovak Democrats. They were learning that their once considerable following only existed while they were in the National Front, and helping to carry out the government program. As soon as they resigned and repudiated the program their support began to melt like the snows in spring.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1948

Congress of Works Councils

On Sunday morning eight thousand delegates from factories, shops and offices throughout Czechoslovakia assembled in the vast steel-girdered hall of the Exhibition Building. There was not an important industrial or business organization of the Republic that was not represented. The Congress of Works Councils had been called ten days previously, and the right-wing parties had complained it was "convoked in an illegal manner." They feared it, because it would speak with the powerful voice of more than two million workers organized in the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement. It had

been called to express the discontent felt among working people as a result of the frustration of the government program.

The charge that it was illegally convoked was based on the argument that the trade unions had no right to call a meeting of works councils; but a clause in the Decree Relating to Works Councils clearly showed it was legal: "The organ concerned of the United Trade Union Organization guides and directs the activities of the Works Councils within the framework of the regulations relating to their activities."

Works Councils are important bodies in Czechoslovak factories. They are elected by employees to safeguard working conditions, and to see that the management gives proper consideration to the viewpoint of employees. They have authority in problems of personnel, pay, vacations, and are consulted in all questions of organization, technique and production. They have the right to call for information from the management and to inspect records. While their powers are mainly consultative, their prestige in the eyes of workers, management and the government stands so high that their opinions are seldom overridden.

Since workers had been making their attitude clear at thousands of factory meetings in the past few days, the eight thousand delegates had come with a clear mandate from the Czechoslovak working class.

The atmosphere of the Congress was one of extreme gravity and earnestness. The faces of Klement Gottwald and Antonín Zápotocký (Chairman of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement)—the two main speakers—were pale, drawn and serious. There were none of the social niceties, none of the ceremonies that usually precede the business of conferences. It went straight to work, without preliminary explanations.

Everyone was waiting to hear Antonín Zápotocký, whose speech would give the attitude of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement—the most powerful mass organization in the Republic. Zápotocký, once a stone mason, a man of great simplicity and humanity, had won the affection of the workers, as no other leader had ever done. He stood at the microphone, tall, gangling, with angular, uneven shoulders, a man with a

kindly unhandsome face and high bald forehead; speaking with head tilted to one side, and glasses at the end of his prominent nose—an Abraham Lincoln type of man, whose figure, face and posture are known in every factory and workshop in the land.

“The defenders of the capitalists had asserted that a large private capitalist sector would bring about healthy competition and price reductions,” he said. “Nothing of that has happened. On the contrary, the private capitalist sector is supporting the black market, is thus increasing prices, and is also destroying working morale. It directs excessive profits into its own pockets, and carries out tax swindles which rob the Treasury of billions of crowns every year. This private sector has become an eldorado of reactionary elements who, together with reaction abroad, are plotting against our democratic system. It is therefore necessary to carry out an economic purge.”

The Resolution

The resolution of the Congress was forcefully worded. “We have not worked hard and restricted our demands for over two years only to let the old and new reactionary forces gamble away our future. Our independence and liberty can only be secured by the progressive removal of parasites, by continuing determinedly on the path to socialism, and by faithfully adhering to our alliance with the Soviet Union and other Slav states.”

It demanded the immediate passage of laws to complete the promised government program.

By demanding the nationalization of a whole new group of enterprises including all those employing more than fifty workers, a new turn in the crisis was produced. The resolution read, “In view of the fact that the remaining sector of private enterprise in our economy has become the breeding ground of economic and political intrigues against the Republic, and that, in times of harvest failure and poverty, that sector is swallowing up billions of the national income, in the form of excess profits, which would otherwise be used for urgent measures . . . Congress demands further nationalization to include all internal wholesale trade, all export and

import wholesale firms, all big department stores, the manufacture of spirits, the production and distribution of pharmaceutical products, as well as the nationalization of all private enterprises with more than fifty employees."

At the same time the Congress favored the protection in the constitution of small and medium enterprises with less than fifty employees. The resolution also pledged support to peasants in their demand for land reform.

After a strong show of approval by the delegates Congress recorded that it objected to the Republic being termed a "police state." "We firmly reject all attacks against the National Security Service, which has ceased to be a body guarding the privileges of the capitalists, and has become a necessary and inseparable part of the United Trade Union Movement. The term 'police state' is an insult to our Security Service."

In order to lend weight to its demands, the Congress decided to call a one-hour token strike between 12 A.M. and 1 P.M. on Tuesday, February 24. At this time all workers would be informed of the discussions and resolutions of the Congress.

When the resolution was put to a vote, the Trade Union Council, with 120 members, adopted the resolution with only three dissenting votes, while the Congress approved it by 7,904 votes to 10.

With this resolution, the crisis again took on a new aspect. Now the demand was not simply for the carrying out of the government's former program, and for the refusal to have the old ministers back—it was now a demand for the further extension of nationalization, which would undermine the entire economic basis of the opposition. Also, it was a clear call for a clean-up in political life—for the ejection from responsible positions in Parliament, in the State and economic apparatus, of all who obstructed the popular demands.

The strong wording of the resolution by no means exaggerated the mood of the delegates. And it was backed up by a threat of strike action which would unquestionably have the support of practically every worker in the Republic.

It is true the resolution merely gave expression to demands that had been made at meetings all over the country. But now all the strands of popular opinion had been collected

together, and voiced through the powerful Revolutionary Trade Union Organization at a crucial point in the crisis, and backed by the threat of a general strike. Undoubtedly this clear and forceful expression of working-class opinion at the Congress weighed most heavily with President Beneš when he eventually decided to accept the resignations.

Prague on Sunday

On Sunday morning, while the Congress was in session, all was quiet in Prague. There were no incidents of any kind. Even the gatherings on street corners that one noticed in the first days were absent. It seemed just like any other Sunday. And it was like that all over the country. Although the situation was critical and serious, there had not been a single scuffle, not one violent incident anywhere. All the stages of the crisis had developed at peaceful, legal meetings, by the passing of resolutions, by voting, and discussion.

There was much more hysteria in the editorial offices of British and American newspapers than there was in Prague. The Sunday papers abroad were hot with abuse and full of stories of "terror and intimidation," of a population "cowering in fear" of the security police. Yet if anything was absent, it was an atmosphere of fear. There was a feeling of excitement, a knowledge that these were important hours, but the majority of the population were glad, not dismayed, that this was happening.

There were police on the streets, it is true. There were more than usual, and some were armed, as they would be in any country in the midst of a national emergency. But I saw many cases of the police chatting amiably with the public, of passers-by asking the police stationed at public buildings if they had heard of any new developments. The police, who are also organized into the trade union movement, did their job with an easy, informal air. I met no one who saw any sign of unpleasantness or tension between the police and the people. There were reports on that Sunday evening that after the Congress of Works Councils, people in the street were shouting "Long live our fellow workers, the Security Police."

It would be absurd to say everyone was happy or satis-

fied. Obviously many were disappointed with the turn of events. For businessmen, factory owners, for a large section of the middle class (including many students), who habitually supported right-wing parties, for many journalists and political organizers, these were black days. But this opposition was proving to be much smaller and weaker than most people had believed it would be. It was not strong enough anywhere to make itself vocal. It had little effect on the mood of the public.

By Sunday the opposition had come to realize that they had made a grave blunder. *Svobodné Slovo* said the resignations were "a protest" designed to extract concessions from the Communists. Their desperate hope now was to get their ministers back into the cabinet. They were relying on the President refusing to accept the resignations.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 1948

Action Committees

On Monday, Action Committees commenced to spring up in factories, ministerial offices, and shops; in towns, villages and rural communities. There was no particular procedure. Some were elected at meetings of employees, others were started by a few workers taking it on themselves to enlist the support of interested fellow-workers. Often the initiative was taken by the Communists, but not always so. In the village where I live it was the village station-master, a member of the National Socialist Party for twenty years, who went round the houses asking occupants to sign a list in support of the Action Committee. In our village it was not necessary to take action against anyone; but in the next village they took action against a Mr. Tosek, a coal merchant who was a well known black marketeer. He used to get his illegal supplies by bribing barge-men carrying coal down the Vltava River from the mines in the Border Region. His business was locked up, and he was asked to stay at home.

In the Kolben Daněk works it was the directors themselves

who took the initiative in forming the Action Committee. It was not necessary to act against anyone in a responsible position. All such people were active supporters of the government program, and had shown it conclusively by a fine job of management and organization, which resulted in the Two-Year Plan targets being more than fulfilled. This was the case in many of the larger industrial concerns. The reports of arbitrary, unjust dismissals by the Action Committees were greatly exaggerated.

In one large Prague office, with 300 employees, the Action Committee was formed in the canteen on Monday morning by a group of interested workers. It consisted of six Communists, four Social Democrats, one National Socialist, and one member of the People's Party. After careful deliberation it was decided to send on indefinite leave fifteen employees who were active National Socialists and known to support the right-wing leaders. Then a letter pledging support for Premier Gottwald was circulated through the offices, and all the rest of the employees signed. One of the employees told me: "While some certainly signed in order to keep their jobs, the majority of us had either supported Gottwald all along, or had honestly decided to take his side during the crisis."

Were They Legal?

Authority for the activities of the Action Committees was of course not laid down in books of law, and lawyers could have had a good time arguing whether or not the actions were "legal." But precedents have to start somewhere. When there is a rapid social shift, there is not time for the lawmakers to get together and draw up a charter. One gets back to the axioms of society—one of which is that all law and authority stem ultimately from the will of the people. There was no doubt that the great majority supported the Action Committees, which were in fact the spontaneous popular safety measures taken by the Czech people to protect the change-over they had decided upon.

Many newspapers abroad have made great capital out of the Action Committees. They have been made to appear as unrestrained bodies which have launched an irresponsible purge of all institutions in the state. Actually, although there

was a certain informality about their formation, they were under strict instructions to act with the greatest care and judgment. Dismissals on personal grounds were absolutely forbidden. Nor were dismissals allowed on purely political grounds. Action was taken against three classes of persons: those who were known to be hostile to the government program, and were in positions where they could harm the work of their organization in the national plan; those who were owners of factories or businesses scheduled for nationalization; and known black marketeers. (It was not unnatural to expect owners to oppose the nationalization of their factories, and the government program—particularly as most of them had so energetically supported the right-wing leaders in the past.)

The basic idea of the Action Committees was to remove all those persons who had been obstructing the carrying out of the aims of the May, 1945, Revolution, whether by direct action at their place of work, by political activity, or by illegal trade.

There is nothing new about the idea of Action Committees. They have always arisen in some form when there was widespread political activity by the people. Britain herself has known Action Councils on two occasions—in 1920 and in 1926. In 1920, British workers set up Action Councils to prevent the loading of ships intended for the war of intervention against the Soviet Union. One of the organizers of this campaign was Ernest Bevin. In 1926, Councils of Action sprang up in the General Strike, and took control of most of the public services. They have existed in France and in Russia. Such committees, far from being the instruments of a dictatorial minority, are the surest signs of mass democratic action by the whole people.

Alarmed at the numbers of National Socialist party members who were taking part in the Action Committees, *Svobodné Slovo* issued a warning: "The Presidium of the National Socialist Party asks for strict discipline from its members, urging them to refuse to join the new Action Committees of the National Front, and warning them that any National Socialist accepting a function in these committees or any other political function without the knowledge of his or her organization, would be expelled from the Party."

Slovakia

On Monday reports began to arrive of dramatic developments in Slovakia. Ever since the Liberation in 1945 there had been efforts to revive the movement to split Slovakia off from the Republic. This had been a long-standing political aim of Slovakia's semi-feudal land-owning class. It had a temporary success during the occupation, when Hitler made Slovakia a separate protectorate, in order to appease Slovak national aspirations, and so turn the Slovaks against the Czechs. The result was that the end of the war found reactionaries in a strong position in Slovakia, with public opinion still confused by nationalist slogans.

In September, 1947, the police discovered a well organized plot for an armed uprising by the "separatists." It was organized by a fascist refugee group under a certain Durčanský, and operated from the American zone of Germany. Many high-ranking members of the Slovak Democrat party were involved. It planned to use the services of bandit groups, consisting partly of outlawed SS-men organized by the Nazi invaders and fascist Ukrainians, which were still operating in the hills and forests.

But although adventurers and desperadoes were active, the Slovak people were turning away from these schemes. The land reform—more urgent and overdue in Slovakia than elsewhere—was winning support among the peasants. The Two-Year Plan, giving Slovakia additional industries, was making good progress.

Therefore Monday's news of a great upsurge of popular action against the leaders of the Slovak Democrat Party was an unexpected development. The Committee of Slovak Resistance Organizations which fought the Germans issued a statement that it had no confidence in the members of the Slovak Democrat Party who had resigned from the Government, and called for the resignation of Slovak Democrats from the Slovak National Council and Board of Delegates (Slovakia's Provincial Parliament and Administration). A mass meeting in Bratislava, the Slovak capital—the largest assembly ever to meet in Slovakia—pledged support for Premier Gottwald. Compositors working on the Slovak Democratic paper *Cas* refused to set the paper in view of its attacks on

the Government. A number of popular organizations, including the Union of Political Prisoners, the trade unions, the Union of Slovak Women, the Union of Farmers, the Union of Youth, called a meeting to express support of the Gottwald Government. All over Slovakia members of the Slovak Democrat Party were handing in resignations.

Soviet Interference?

Monday was the anniversary of the founding of the Red Army, an event celebrated each year since Czechoslovakia was liberated by Soviet soldiers in 1945. The celebrations, which were arranged weeks earlier, took the usual form, with speeches delivered at the Red Army monument in Prague and a Congress of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Societies. But the U. S. and British press treated the event as a sinister coincidence, and the celebrations as being full of ominous implications. Some New York papers devoted considerable space to a single photograph, showing the mayor of Prague, Dr. Vacek, making a speech before the Red Army monument, which contains statuary depicting Soviet guards, and the emblem of the hammer and sickle. This picture was intended to dramatize the demented headlines "STALIN'S LATEST GRAB," "RUSSIANS SEIZE CZECHOSLOVAKIA."

To anyone in Czechoslovakia, the idea that the Soviet Union manipulated the crisis or its solution, is laughable. All the events and stages in the crisis were so well known to everyone, and there was such widespread popular participation in them, that the idea of Soviet interference is completely absurd. It was the Czech public that acted, and not so-called Soviet agents. It would have been an astounding achievement for foreign agents, operating in any country, to provoke demonstrations in every town and village, to incite a general strike, to capture the two political parties which command a parliamentary majority, to win the support of leading writers, scientists and scholars, to rally the aid of youth, soldiers', farmers' and women's organizations. To suggest it could happen in Czechoslovakia, which has fought oppression for three hundred years, is the grossest nonsense.

Some papers went as far as to suggest it was all the work of Mr. Zorin, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, who was

in Prague during the crisis week. If so, Mr. Zorin possesses some truly amazing political talents, which are apparently not possessed by Mr. Steinhardt, the United States Ambassador, who arrived in Prague at the same time after several months' absence, with a reported loan of twenty million dollars for Czechoslovakia "in his pocket."

It is easy for editors in London or New York to write glib articles about the enslavement of Czechoslovakia, especially editors who have not themselves had to watch enemy tanks come clanking down their main street, to hear military commands barked out in a foreign language, or to read the placarded decrees of the new Commandant. The Czechs have experienced these things in the past, more than once, and they know the bitter taste and feel of them. They have always resisted enslavement, at times with great heroism and sacrifice. They do not give up their freedom easily. Leaders who fought the bitter struggle against the Nazis, who saw their best comrades tortured and executed, do not need lessons in patriotism from British and American editors.

These events naturally do mean a firmer alliance with the Soviet Union in the international divisions now taking place. "We shall today align ourselves with the Soviet Union more firmly than ever before," the Prime Minister stated at the Congress of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Societies. But this is an alliance deliberately sought by the Czechoslovak people for the purpose, as the Premier pointed out, of protecting their democratic achievements, and preventing interference by powers hostile to those achievements.

Social Democrats

Monday also saw a breach in the deadlock in the Social Democratic Party. Over the weekend rank and file opinion had swung unmistakably to the Fierlinger group. It was making its voice heard through countless deputations, resolutions and letters addressed to the Party leaders and functionaries, who were becoming increasingly responsive to these appeals.

The Central Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party met on Monday night to make its decision. During the day it had received a letter from the Communist

Party asking for its co-operation in helping to form a new government to carry out the government program, and become a firm socialist core around which all democratic, progressive and socialist forces could develop. "We are convinced the Social Democratic Party cannot take its place at the side of irresponsible functionaries of the three parties whose policy is aiming at chaos and at undermining the Republic," the letter stated.

The Central Executive meeting was a complete victory for the Fierlinger group. It was decided to open negotiations with the Communist Party on the basis of the letter. The Social Democratic Ministers would not resign from the government, and the Party would continue to negotiate for a settlement of the crisis. There was complete agreement with the attitude of the trade unions on the question of further nationalization. It approved the Action Committees and gave consent to its members to join them.

Sixteen leaders of the Social Democratic Party, led by Zdeněk Fierlinger, and including cabinet ministers, Members of Parliament, and high administrative officers, issued a statement in which they regretted the mutual distrust that had arisen between them and the Communists as a result of rightist influences which had lately appeared in the Party apparatus. The statement added that it was the duty of the Social Democrats to accept the co-operation of the Communists "for the realization of a socialist program and for the security of the country."

Plot Discovered

Late on Monday the police announced that they had discovered a plot by the National Socialist Party to carry out an armed revolt, and take power immediately after the resignations of their ministers. Organizational preparations had been carried through to the last detail. Special defense commissions, maintaining liaison with political functionaries, had been set up, and they had kept up-to-date information on the strength of garrisons and of the police, and had secured arms. The capture of confidential "situation reports" showed that minute-to-minute information of the position of police and

army units was being sent out to political leaders. The directive stated, "We shall use weapons in case of need."

Two army officers, Staff Captain Teichmann and Staff Captain Němeček, and a number of civilians were arrested. They were found with illegally stored arms and documentary evidence of preparations for armed action.

The police also announced that a warrant of arrest had been issued against Jan Ursíny, a former Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Slovak Democrat Party. He was charged with conveying military and state secrets to a spy, Otto Obuch, who was acting for Durčanský, and informing him of secret cabinet meetings which he attended as Deputy Prime Minister, and handing Obuch secret records of these meetings.*

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1948

One Hour General Strike

Still no word of President Beneš' decision. People were speculating what would happen if he refused to accept the resignations.

"He must accept them. Nobody wants the old ministers back now."

"But what if he does not?"

"I don't know. There'll be really serious trouble. I'm sure our factory would strike—all the factories would. Such a government would not be recognized."

This conversation, heard in a trolley, expressed what many people were now saying. Meanwhile the tactics of the opposition were to play for time, to drag out the crisis in the hope that the atmosphere, so hostile to them, would somehow become calm again.

But the situation was not becoming calm. It was fast mounting to its climax. Promptly at noon on Tuesday every factory, and most offices and shops throughout the Republic,

* Ursíny and Obuch have since been tried and sentenced to imprisonment.

stopped work in a one-hour token strike, in accordance with the decision of the Congress of Works Councils.

Workers gathered in their canteens or factory yards to hear trade union leaders explain the latest developments in the crisis. All transport was halted for five minutes. Over the loud speakers of every factory came the clear quick-speaking voice of Evžen Erban, secretary of the trade unions, broadcasting from Prague: "Workers! International reaction has sent a Trojan horse into Czechoslovakia which has prematurely disgorged its contents. This might make us angry, but it cannot defeat us. If reaction thinks our country is willing to be driven into the camp of imperialist forces like Madrid, Athens or Frankfurt, we must show it its mistake. We working people have mobilized an overwhelming force to end all subversive attempts not only in the government, but in the public administration. We will not tolerate any sabotage of our economic or public life. With your support the Gottwald Government is going to be reconstructed, so that its composition will correspond to the interests of the working people, and will render possible the fulfillment of all the tasks which you are impatiently awaiting. Our country must become an immense workshop of honest labor, and a stronghold of solidarity and socialism."

Two and a half million workers—almost the entire working-class population to a man and the majority of government workers and clerks—demonstrated by this strike their support for Premier Gottwald. The strike did not register the substantial support he also drew from the peasants and small farmers. This hour, when the whole Republic stood still in protest, exposes the dishonesty of those who say that a Communist minority has seized power in Czechoslovakia.

Growing Support for Gottwald

Meantime, all during the day, and from all sources, came items of news proving the growth of support for the Gottwald Government. A group of leading writers, painters, editors, theatrical and film producers, issued a proclamation declaring their support for the working people and farmers. Among them were such famous names as Jan Drda (novelist), Adolf Hoffmeister (artist and writer), Jirí Weiss (film producer),

Maria Pujmanová (novelist), František Goetz (Director of the National Theatre), E. F. Burian (theatrical producer)—the cream of the intellectual life of Czechoslovakia. The Association of Journalists issued a statement condemning members of their profession whose writings had helped foment the crisis.

Transport workers at railway stations were refusing to handle *Svobodné Slovo* and *Lidová Demokracie* (Peoples' Party daily); but in any case Tuesday's was to be the last issue of these papers under their existing editors, because workers of the papermills from which they obtained their newsprint refused to send any further supplies. By Tuesday evening Action Committees composed of workers in both these newspapers had asked a number of editors and writers to leave, and had mounted guard over the premises.

Transport workers marched in a demonstration to the Ministry of Transport, and demanded that the former minister, Dr. Pietor (Slovak Democrat) leave the ministry by midday. The minister and four high officials complied. Post office workers called on the former Minister of Posts, Msgr. Hála (People's Party) and asked him to vacate his office. He did so, with his Chief of Cabinet. In the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Action Committee, after requesting the minister, Dr. Ripka (National Socialist), to leave, immediately set to work to devise a scheme to prevent the flight of currency abroad.

Foreign Press Correspondents

By now the foreign press was working itself up to a real crescendo of fury. The Press Club, situated in an old palace in Příkopy, suddenly became full of unfamiliar faces—those of correspondents who had flown in from Vienna, Paris, Rome, Berlin, London, to cover the events which seemed to be rocking the outside world. Cynical, narrow men most of them were, who knew that their papers wanted a particular kind of story, and were determined to supply it, regardless of what they saw. While thousands of people in the streets were demonstrating support for Gottwald, they sat in coffee-houses, listening to the complaints of a handful of disgruntled businessmen or conferred for hours in closed sessions with foreign embassy officials. And the next day their newspapers

proclaimed the views of the businessmen or embassy officials as the views of the Czechoslovak people. They visited no factories or farms. They were unimpressed by the token strike, by the mass meetings or the Congress of Works Councils. Instead they reported every rumor, every wisp of gossip against the Communists. Although none knew of a single injury to any person, they sent yards of cables about a "reign of terror"; although there was more self-confidence among the Czechoslovak people than at any time in recent history, they could write only about "the depression and misery" of the people.

"This place is dying. You can feel it in the air," a correspondent of a New York paper said to me, while a laughing youth group strode past. Although the Czech people had already practically solved the crisis on their own terms, the foreign newsmen had become a suicide squad desperately defending the doomed fortress of the reactionaries.

Youth Demonstration

On Tuesday afternoon all traffic halted in the center of Prague, the trolleys stood end-to-end looking like giant red caterpillars, and trucks and cars were detoured off, while the youth organizations demonstrated in St. Wenceslas Square. Tens of thousands of cheering boys and girls carrying Red flags and Czechoslovak flags, marched ten deep down the wide snow-covered thoroughfare. Among them were apprentices from the factories, members of the Sokol organization, of sports organizations, office workers—and thousands of university students. *Mladá Fronta*, the youth newspaper, whose alert and lively reporting of the crisis set a new mark in Czech journalism, had produced a special edition announcing "2½ MILLION WORKERS SUPPORT GOTTWALD," and giving details of the strike in the morning. These tens of thousands of young people from all walks of life—not the few hundred students who protested outside the President's palace the next day—were the true representatives of Czech youth.

There was now a feeling that the crisis was dragging on too long. There was a note of impatience in the voices coming through the street-corner loudspeakers announcing the flood of requests and demands for a new government. Everywhere

security measures were being tightened up. Workers wearing red arm-bands were now on guard at important buildings, and were issuing permits to those wishing to enter. In certain factories workers had mounted guard with rifles.

The police were carrying arms, and were patrolling in front of all party and newspaper offices—government as well as opposition. They were prepared to deal with any last-minute act of fanaticism that might arise.

Almost everyone wanted the crisis to be solved in a constitutional way,—by the acceptance of the resignations, and the formation of a new government by the still legal Prime Minister. Nobody wanted an upheaval, all suggestion of which had been completely avoided so far. And internal violence could easily mean the entry of American troops which were even now concentrating on the German-Czech border.

Some Opponents

In the evening I went into Lipperts', where a few days before I had seen Prague's well-to-do in such high spirits. How different it was now—no chatter, no noise; the tables only a third occupied. People were sitting dejectedly staring at their drinks, or watching their cigarettes burn away.

Nobody spoke much, and then only in monosyllables and nods. There did not seem to be anything to say. A blond lady, with a Parisian coiffure, remarked in a voice that carried right across the room, "Workers, workers. That's all you hear. One would think they were the only people in the world!"

What had happened to the *šmelinár* (the black marketeers)? I wondered where they were collecting now. Usually it was easy enough to find them—the moneychanging branch of them, at any rate. They stood on the pavements, or in the arcades near the main streets, wearing smart overcoats and dapper hats, and waiting to hear someone speaking English, or better still, American. Then they would come up and say, "Can I help you? Are you having difficulty with the language?" After a few minutes conversation, they would ask, "Do you want to sell some dollars? I can get you a good price. I have a friend who is interested." They made easy fortunes buying Swiss and French goods with the dollars they obtained, smuggling them back to Prague, and selling these goods on

the black market at inflated prices: then with the profit, buying Czech textiles "under the counter," and smuggling them into Germany and Austria. They were international crooks who were picking the pockets of every honest worker in Czechoslovakia.

Now of course they were off the streets. But they had their favorite coffee houses, and one of them was on the first floor of a deep arcade in Prikopy. I went there and sat at the table near to where five men were playing cards. I noticed diamond rings on some of the plump fingers, and hand-painted neckties. I took a copy of *Life* magazine out of my overcoat pocket, and began to read. I soon attracted their attention, and one came over to me and asked, "You an American?"

I said I was untruthfully.

"How do you like what's happening here?" I was asked. The others gathered around.

I said it was difficult for me to judge. It was a matter for the Czech people to settle; it was not our affair.

"It is your affair. Its everybody's affair. Surely the Americans are going to help us?" one of them said anxiously.

"Is it true that American troops are going to march in?" asked another. I said I had no information on that.

Then one of them became confidential. "You are very lucky. You can go back to America any time. I would very much like to go to America."

"What about the American Zone of Germany? Will they send us back if we go there?" a plump little man asked, very anxious about my reply.

"I shouldn't think they would," I said. "I am sure the American Government will sympathize with you."

"We cannot live here anymore. They have taken away all freedom" said a young *šmelinár*.

"Private enterprise is not encouraged here," was the massive understatement of the plump little man.

After a little more of this kind of talk, the desire to do some business, even at this sad moment, finally won out. One of them leaned over and whispered, "Say mister would you like to sell some dollars?"

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 1948

President and Prime Minister Confer

Early Wednesday morning the radio announced that a meeting of Prague citizens had been called for 2 P.M. at St. Wenceslas Square. *Rudé Právo* and *Práce* (the trade union daily paper) ran the announcement across the top of the front page. The rumor had gone around that the President had finally accepted the resignations, and that a new government was being formed. The purpose of the meeting was believed to be to inform the public of this news.

But the crisis was not yet over. There was a tense situation at Hradčany, the Presidential palace. For two hours during the morning, the President and the Prime Minister were in conference. Dr. Beneš was still hoping for a rapprochement between the Communists and the ministers who had resigned. Mr. Gottwald said that negotiations with them would be contrary to the emphatic wishes of the nation. In the end, Dr. Beneš handed Mr. Gottwald a letter addressed to the Presidium of the Communist Party, setting out his attitude.

"Gentlemen: On February 21st, 1948, you sent me a letter stating your attitude on the solution of the government crisis, and asking me to identify myself with it.

"I fully feel the great responsibility of this fateful moment of our national life. From the beginning of this crisis I considered the situation as it developed, and I related these events to the great developments in the world. . . . Judging the situation calmly, dispassionately and objectively, I feel that the common will of the most various classes of the population who turn to me is the desire for peace and tranquility, for order and voluntary discipline, for a progressive and genuinely socialist life. . . .

"I consider all our political parties associated in the National Front, as bearers of political responsibility. We have all accepted the principle of the National Front, which proved its value until the recent crisis. I do not think, however, that this crisis denies the principle itself. I am convinced it is possible to achieve the vital co-operation of all on this principle. . . . I have therefore negotiated with the

five political parties, I have listened to their views. They are grave, and I cannot just disregard them. I must therefore again appeal to all to find agreement and successful co-operation in a parliamentary manner, and through the National Front. . . . Let us all again begin jointly to agree on further permanent co-operation, and let us not long prolong the division of the nation into two conflicting halves."

To this letter the Presidium of the Communist Party replied as follows:

"Mr. President: The Presidium of the Communist Party acknowledges your letter and states again that it cannot enter into negotiations with the present leadership of the National Socialist, People's and Democratic Parties, because it would be in conflict with the interests of unity and harmony of our nation, as well as with the interests of the further peaceful development of this country. Recent events have irrefutably proved that these three parties ceased to represent the interests of the working people of town and country, that their leadership betrayed the fundamental principles of the peoples' democracy and the National Front . . . and took an attitude of a subversive opposition. This found expression again and again in the cabinet, in parliament, in the press, and in actions which their party secretaries organized against the . . . entire reconstruction efforts of the nation, and against the very foundations of internal and external security of this country. Huge popular demonstrations have clearly shown that our working people unanimously condemn the policy of these parties, and demand the creation of a government of honest, progressive patriots, loyal to the Republic and the people. This also finds expression in the indignation of the membership of these three parties, who are demanding a renewal of their parties, and of the National Front. In agreement with the will of the people, the Presidium of the Communist Party endorsed the proposals of Prime Minister Gottwald, according to which the vacancies in the government were to be filled by representatives of all parties and vital national organizations. We emphasized that the reconstructed government in accordance with the principles of

parliamentary democracy will present itself to the Constituent National Assembly, present its program, and ask for approval."

Mass Meeting in St. Wenceslas Square

The crowds that began to collect in St. Wenceslas Square from one o'clock onwards were shouting "Long Live President Beneš," and "Long Live Premier Gottwald," in the belief that the new cabinet had already been accepted. It was a dull, leaden day, but it was warm enough to start the snow melting on the roofs of buildings and cars, and the railings of balconies. The air was tingling with excitement, and there was the great noise of thousands talking, of loudspeakers crackling all the way up St. Wenceslas Square, of the music of far-off brass bands. People were coming from all directions, people dressed in their winter clothing—caps with earflaps, gray and black overcoats, black highboots of the women. These were workers coming straight from the factories, and still in their work clothes.

Yet as the masses of people poured into the vast quarter-mile long square, as they filled up the pavements and corners, and ebbed around the few parked motor cars, and overflowed into the side streets, which were themselves becoming tightly packed with people, it was obvious that this was to be the largest and most enthusiastic crowd ever to assemble in Prague. Two hundred thousand gathered there that afternoon.

Promptly at two o'clock the strains of the National Anthem came over the loudspeaker, and suddenly the tremendous noise was replaced by an equally tremendous silence. With one movement all heads were bared, and bodies stiffened to attention while the grave, melodious hymn filled the air. As soon as it ended, and while there was still silence, the chairman's voice came through the microphones: "Comrades! We meet here in this tremendous assemblage of Prague citizens to make our voices heard on the political crisis. We want the reactionary ministers out of the government. All we ask is peace, and the chance to reconstruct our country peacefully. We want an end to the reaction, and to foreign intrigues in our Republic. The black market must end."

"Out with the *šmelinár!*" the crowd cried.

The chairman introduced Václav Kopecký, the Minister of Information.

"Long live Kopecký!"

"I have come with greetings from Comrade Gottwald, who is still with the President," announced Kopecký.

"Long live Gottwald!" a vast cry sounded up to the clouds.

"Long live President Beneš" immediately followed it.

"Workers! By your splendid discipline and organization you have made a peaceful solution of the crisis possible," Kopecký continued. His voice was hoarse, and charged with emotion. The audience was highly receptive to every word.

"It is your unity that gave the necessary tempo to developments. Reaction has been smashed. Behind Zenkl (Chairman of the National Socialist Party) stand only a small group of fanatical students."

"Shame on them" people shouted.

"But I must tell you the resignations have not yet been officially accepted."

There was a great groan of disappointment.

"But there will be a new Government. That is sure. If not, there will be a general strike."

"We will make it" shouted the crowd.

"We want a new government!" they roared.

"We want a new government today!"

I went up into a nearby building where some friends lived, and from a balcony looked down on to the vast crowd. All the way from Prákopy corner to the Museum at the top of the hill, this turbulent river of people stretched. Then in the hotels and coffee houses which lined both sides of St. Wenceslas Square, I noticed little groups of well-dressed people peering through the plate-glass windows at the crowds outside. Two worlds—that of the common people taking an historic decision to secure their future, and that of the wealthy few, living in the past, hugging their privileges—separated by a few sheets of plate-glass!

Professor Nejedlý, the aged Communist leader and prominent writer, began to speak. He described the widespread desertions from the right-wing leaders, and the great support the Communists were receiving everywhere. "Our Party is growing larger every minute," he declared.

Speakers explained the now familiar stages in the crisis. Then, late in the afternoon, as the Deputy Lord Mayor of Prague, Krosnár, was beginning his address, the police cleared a way in the crowd, and the Prime Minister's car drove up to the platform.

Gottwald hurried to the microphone. He was smiling. He announced that he had an important message. The crowd sensed what it was, and there were waves of cheering. "I have come straight from the President to tell you that the resignation of the Ministers of the National Socialist, People's and Slovak Democrat parties have been accepted by the President. The President has also agreed to my proposals for the reconstruction of the government."

The Prime Minister then read the names of the new Government.* With each of the better known names, such as Zápotocký, Masaryk, Nosek, Kopecký, there were cheers and applause. When he mentioned the name of the new Minister of Justice, Dr. Alexej Čepička, the crowd roared approval. He said it three times. "I repeat, Minister of Justice—Dr. Čepička, Minister of Justice—Dr. Čepička, Minister of Justice—Dr. Čepička!" It was Čepička who two months previously became Minister of Internal Trade and immediately cleaned up the black market in textiles, unearthing vast hoarded stocks in the warehouses of private wholesalers and retailers. The former Minister of Justice, Dr. Drtina, on the other hand, had shown

* The new government is composed of the following ministers:

Klement Gottwald (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Prime Minister
Antonín Zápotocký (<i>Trade Unions</i>)	Deputy Prime Minister
Bohumil Laušman (<i>Social Democrat Party</i>)	Deputy Prime Minister
Viliam Široký (<i>Slovak Communist Party</i>)	Deputy Prime Minister
Jan Masaryk (<i>non party</i>)	Minister of Foreign Affairs
General Ludvík Svoboda (<i>non party</i>)	Minister of National Defense
Dr. Antonín Gregor (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Foreign Trade
Václav Nosek (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Interior
Dr. Jaromír Dolanský (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Finance
Prof. Zdeněk Nejedlý (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Education
Dr. Alexej Čepička (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Justice
Václav Kopecký (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Information
Zdeněk Fierlinger (<i>Social Democrat Party</i>)	Minister of Industry

a marked disinclination to prosecute black marketeers. The appointment of Čepička was a guarantee by the government of an all-out attack on the black market (as well as on the espionage groups operating against the Republic). The Prime Minister in a quiet and even voice said:

“At this moment, reactionary forces which planned a decisive onslaught on our nation have been routed. The vigilance and firm strength of our people are responsible for this victory. Now, when the decision has fallen, let us return to the work of reconstruction and to the fulfillment of the Two Year Plan. Work will now be all the more joyful because it will no longer be disturbed by subversive elements. Let us now make our country a happy home of the working people.”

And so, on this dramatic climax, the crisis ended. The crowds broke up and made for their homes, and the step and mood of everyone in town seemed to be suddenly lighter.

It had not been easy for the President to make his decision. On a later occasion he admitted it had been “personally very difficult.” But he respected the wishes of the people. “I saw the crisis might have deepened further, and that in the end it might have led to such a division in the nation, that general chaos might have resulted.”

In a personal tribute to the President, Mr. Gottwald stated, “It was your great merit that you heeded the voice of the

Julius Ďuriš (<i>Slovak Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Agriculture
František Krajčír (<i>Communist Party</i>)	Minister of Internal Trade
Alois Petr (<i>People's Party</i>)	Minister of Transport
Dr. Emanuel Šlechta (<i>National Socialist Party</i>)	Minister of Public Works
Dr. Alois Neuman (<i>National Socialist Party</i>)	Minister of Posts
Evžen Erban (<i>Trade Unions</i>)	Minister of Social Welfare
Father Josef Plojhar (<i>People's Party</i>)	Minister of Health
Ludmila Jankovcová (<i>Social Democrat Party</i>)	Minister of Food
Dr. Vavro Šrobar (<i>Slovak Freedom Party</i>)	Minister of Unification
Dr. Vladimír Clementis (<i>Slovak Communist Party</i>)	Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs
Dr. Ján Ševčík (<i>Slovak Democrat Party</i>)	Under-Secretary of National Defense

The inclusion of Antonín Zápotocký as Deputy Premier, and Evžen Erban as Minister of Social Welfare, emphasized the shift toward greater workers' representation in the new government.

people, and recognized its indignation and the justice of its demand. You have substantially contributed to the relatively speedy development of events, and the energetic settlement of the crisis."

The Students

It was this moment of general relief and satisfaction that the foreign press chose for one of the most unscrupulous distortions in their whole campaign against the Czechoslovak people.

It was well known that a group of students at Charles University were the most vocal opponents of the changes that were taking place. Mostly sons of middle class families, and not yet sharing in the constructive work of the Republic, they were not in touch with the prevailing mood of the people. They were easy victims of the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist propaganda constantly blowing from abroad.

When the new government was announced, a few hundred students, in a state of great excitement, marched toward the President's palace to stage a demonstration. As they were coming up a side street near the palace, they were stopped by members of the police. Since they had not obtained the permission necessary to hold a public demonstration, they were told to disperse. Moreover, the police were alarmed at their angry mood, and it was their duty to prevent any possible disorder.

There was an argument, and some of the students tried to push past. At this moment a shot was fired. It ricocheted from a wall, and then struck a student, injuring him slightly. It was admitted that there were orders against using firearms, but the police say the shot was fired by accident. The fact that it hit a wall first, seems to substantiate this.

This incident, the only one remotely resembling violence, to occur during a whole week, when a nation was undergoing a deep political change, was used by the foreign press to make the Czech events appear as a blood-soaked revolution. "Students Killed In Prague Streets," "Police Fire on Students: 2 Slain," were typical headlines. Columns of editorial sympathy were lavished on "heroic students" who "first resisted

the Nazi terror and now the infinitely worse Communist terror."

No people in Prague are more offended and angry at these reports than the majority of Prague students themselves. "Those students were a minority. A group of fanatics. We entirely repudiate them," a student leader declared. The International Students Federation said in a statement: "It is nonsensical to compare November 17, 1939 with the recent events. Students then protested against the fascist occupants in the name of the entire Czechoslovak people. Now only a minority of students demonstrated against the Socialist movement of the Czech people. In 1939 the German Nazis had attempted to root out the national and cultural life of the Czechs, while in February, 1948, it was a demonstration of a few students who did not identify themselves with justice and the will of the people."

A NEW STARTING POINT

The excitement did not die down with the formation of the new government. On the contrary, it served as a signal for an immediate surge of work, new plans and reorganization.

Nor were the street demonstrations and processions over. In every town there were citizens' meetings all during the next week. In every factory there were workers' meetings to consider the changes, and make resolutions for harder work.

At the weekend there was a parade of the workers' militia and the Security Corps in the Old Town Square. Sturdy workers, men and women alike, bearing the rifles with which they were prepared to defend their factories, showed from where the real force of the changes came. The cheers of the crowd when the police detachments marched past, again revealed the good relationship between the public and the police. The Minister of the Interior, reviewing the march, said: "In these historic days the police corps came to the support of the working people. And in the future also, everyone will be able to rely on our police to protect the work that benefits our country."

At the weekend, the Farmers Congress which had been called before the crisis was held on its scheduled date; but now it was a different kind of affair, not a protest meeting, but a celebration. Once again St. Wenceslas Square was crowded to the edges. Many of the farmer delegates, dressed in colorful peasant costumes, were visiting Prague for the first time in their lives. They cheered to the skies when the Prime Minister promised them that the agricultural laws for which they had waited since the end of the war, would be passed immediately.

The reorganization of the National Socialists, Slovak Democrats and People's Party was speedily effected—in each case from within the parties themselves. This was simply a case of continuing the process of ousting the right-wing leaders, which had started before the crisis ended. As early as Wednesday, February 25, leading trade unionists in the National Socialist Party were calling on fellow party members to join the Action Committees. The reactionary editors of *Svobodné Slovo* were replaced by National Socialists who reflected the changes in the party. A statement signed, among others by the new National Socialist Ministers, and Mr. David, chairman of the Parliament, regretted that the former leadership had led the party astray from the democratic achievements and ideals of the liberated Republic.

Similar changes took place within the Slovak Democrats, and a decision taken to change the name to Slovak Socialist Party. Father Josef Plojhar, the new Minister of Health, a leader in the People's Party, and himself a Roman Catholic priest, publicly accused the ministers who resigned of attempting to create a government without the Communists, in order to prevent fulfillment of the Košice Program. He said it was untrue that there had been difficulties in working with the Communists. "The Communists have always fulfilled their promises, which is a necessary pre-requisite for political co-operation," he declared.

The western press sneered at the reorganization of these three parties, suggesting that it had been done by Communist "fellow travellers." But the majority of members, as shown at local and national congresses of the three parties, were in full agreement with the changes. And to put the matter beyond all doubt, 212 out of the 300 members of Parliament elected

in May, 1946, declared support for the Gottwald Government. This is the best evidence of where popular opinion resides in all parties.

Moreover the new ministers from these parties were all leading party men before the crisis, who had played outstanding roles in the resistance against the Nazis. Father Plojhar was imprisoned at Buchenwald and Dachau concentration camps, and organized illegal activity even while in the camps. Alois Petr, the new Minister of Transport, was sentenced to seven years imprisonment by the Germans. He is a vice-chairman of the Parliament. Dr. Alois Neuman was imprisoned in Buchenwald by the Germans. He is a vice-chairman of the Union of Former Political Prisoners. Dr. J. V. Šrobá, Minister of Unification, has a record of political struggle going back to the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He was a Cabinet Minister in the First Republic, and a leader of the Slovak Resistance during the war.

In the three weeks that followed the crisis a greater quantity of constructive legislation was passed than in the three years that followed the liberation. This included the National Insurance Scheme—a major source of dispute in the old cabinet. It provides health insurance for all workers, white collar employees, small farmers, artisans and members of professions as well as their families; old age pensions reaching in some case 80 per cent of the pensioner's last working wage; and death and accident benefits. It gives allowances to the sick wife of a worker to enable her to hire domestic help; it provides lump sum payments to newly married couples to help them set up house.

A number of laws have been passed consolidating the division of large estates among small farmers, and providing credits to farmers for seed, fertilizer, etc., as well as for long range reconstruction projects. The much disputed subsidies for farmers who suffered in the drought have finally been approved. So have the tax reductions for farmers and small traders.

Laws providing for further nationalization, for converting the radio and film industries into public enterprises were also passed.

Dr. Čepička presented a scheme to reform the judicial sys-

tem to bring it in line with the political and economic changes which have occurred in the country. There are also to be stricter penalties for saboteurs and black marketeers in industry.

The functions and status of Action Committees have been clarified. They are to become permanent institutions to safeguard the victory won during the crisis, and to ensure that never again will a group of people be allowed to get into a position where it can undermine the work and reconstruction of the Republic. Decisions of Action Committees are binding on political parties as well as on their various organizations. They are organized pyramid fashion with Local Action Committees as the basic units; above them are Regional Action Committees, and on top the Central Action Committee of the National Front. The work of each is reviewable from above. Local Action Committees only have powers of recommendation—their actions must be approved by Regional Action Committees. Action Committees formed in factories will be disbanded, except in those cases where production is endangered. Even here they will be disbanded as soon as expedient.

Throughout the country there has been a tremendous increase in the tempo of work. New plans to smooth out production problems, co-operative work schemes among workers in different branches, resolutions for overtime, have been discussed in many factories. Brigade work is attracting more recruits than ever before. At weekends, scores of thousands of clerks, managers, government workers, journalists, shop assistants, have been working down the coal pits, helping load freight cars, or putting in an extra shift at factories. Groups of workers have been going around the farms repairing broken down farm machinery. A great volume of labor has been volunteered by all—including women and children—for rebuilding schemes and housing projects now going up in industrial centers. All sections of the population are taking part. One weekend all members of the police who were off duty volunteered for extra work in factories.

But for doing these things, and for having a political spring cleaning, the Czech people are being treated by governments in the west as if they had suddenly become a nation of criminals. The British, United States and French governments

issued a joint statement accusing Czechoslovakia of jeopardizing "the very existence of the principles of liberty to which all democratic nations are attached." Mr. Gottwald's reply echoed what most people felt in Czechoslovakia. "We will never take any lessons in democracy from those who, with Munich on their conscience, dealt with Hitler Germany to divide us up, and who in a most undemocratic and illegal way tore up their alliance of friendship with us."

Soon after the events here described, I visited a coal mining district and got into conversation with many workers. I found that by listening to their talk and feeling their mood, it was possible, without any complicated explanations, to understand why these things had happened.

One evening we sat chatting around the coal-stove in the offices of a mine near Most. My hosts were members of the Works Council. They were tough, kindly men, most of whom had been coal miners for over a quarter of a century.

"There was nothing to argue about as far as we were concerned," a stocky, gray-eyed man said. "We were not going back to pre-war conditions, that's all. We were prepared to fight."

"And we shall in the future, to keep what we have won," added a man with only one arm.

"Perhaps you don't know how things used to be," said a weathered old man who was introduced as the chairman of the council. "Well, I'll tell you. In the first Republic we were only allowed to work three shifts a week—and working full out we could only earn twenty crowns a shift. The bosses did it so that we had to half kill ourselves in those three shifts to make enough to live on. It was terrible. There were strikes, protests, even a hunger strike down this mine. In 1932 two people were shot during one of the strikes in this mine."

"That's absolutely true," confirmed another man. "And not only that. The owners were as crooked as you can imagine. Not only with the workers, but with the government, their own government which always protected them. To avoid paying taxes they built mines which were never used. To show you the difference now, we have a big scheme here to strip away all the top layer of earth, and have open mining—to get as much coal out as possible."

Later they took me down the road to visit one of the miners

at home. We entered a small cottage, obviously very old, and there saw a large red-headed man in a sweater, having his evening meal, his wife cooking at the roaring stove nearby. The chairman told him about our conversation and asked him what he thought.

"The First Republic," he said, "we don't like to think about it. All work for no money. What did we eat then, mother?" he said looking up at his wife.

"Why, almost nothing," she said. "Bread and jam all the time, as I remember it. Meat once a week. When baby came it was worse—we had to give up our own food for the child."

"And I was young and strong and could work better than most. As a matter of fact, after a day in the mine, I used to do road work, farm work, building work, anything, in the evenings. My God," he said vehemently, "we are not having those times back, are we, mother?"

"Sure not," agreed his wife.

They were so enthusiastic it was difficult for the others to speak, but finally a one-armed man took over the conversation. "See, I am injured," he said, waving an empty sleeve over the table. "I lost it in 1930 when I was nineteen. It almost finished me. I just couldn't get the chance of a job, competition was so fierce. So I became a rag-and-bone collector, a beggar if you like. I lived the worst kind of life possible for a man, sleeping anywhere, eating anything. The Germans imprisoned me because they had no use for me."

"Then in 1945 I heard there were jobs for injured men in these parts—so I came. Now I am married and have a flat—who ever thought I would one day live like that? I have a little girl."

He paused while he pulled out his wallet and showed me her photograph. After a while he said in a meditative voice, "You know, it is not only conditions that have changed. We have changed too. We workers don't fight each other for jobs anymore—there is a better spirit. We don't go cap under the arm to the boss anymore, always afraid of being fired. We know our own quality now and see things straight. We are not afraid of anything now."

See things straight—see through the humbug and propaganda about the benefits of free enterprise, the good intentions of the capitalists; and through the current word fog about the

“twilight of Democracy” and the “death of Freedom” in Czechoslovakia.

Not afraid of anything—not afraid of the howling indignation and threats of war of foreign capitalists. Not afraid of throwing off those people who had been sitting on their backs for generations, and were trying to climb back again.

March, 1948.

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