

Czechoslovakia: The party central committee began another plenary session yesterday faced with hardline domestic criticism of the Dubcek leadership and another Soviet demand that the party increase the authority of "reliable" elements.

Lubomir Strougal, who was elected to four important party posts in November and is clearly a Soviet-favored rival to Dubcek, told a television audience on 11 December that a lack of consistency by the post-January party leaders had "released trends" which were "spontaneous and destructive beyond bounds." He also criticized the party leaders for succumbing to pressures, particularly from the information media, which led them to underrate theoretical work, to make unrealistic assumptions, and to attempt too hastily to solve problems.

Strougal, in commenting on the recent meeting in Kiev of Czechoslovak and Soviet leaders, said that the Warsaw Pact leaders will meet "in the very near future," and that a CEMA meeting will take place probably at the beginning of 1969. He also confirmed that the Czechoslovaks will continue to consult with the Soviet leaders at meetings similar to those which took place in Kiev.

The general tone of his speech suggests that Strougal was setting the stage for further criticisms of the Dubcek regime by conservatives and was laying the groundwork for his own advancement.

Pravda weighed in, as the plenum opened, with an editorial reminding the Czechoslovaks that "party and state bodies" must be strengthened "with reliable cadres who are loyal to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism." The same demand was made before the November plenum, and it probably came up in the talks in Kiev last weekend.

The plenum is to consider economic policies and problems, the new Czech-Slovak federation, and

13 Dec 68

*Central Intelligence Bulletin*

6

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

personnel changes. Discussion of the latter will probably concentrate on governmental changes which will result from the establishment of the federal state, but some changes in the party may also result.

Thus far, only excerpts of one speech, that of Premier Cernik, have been published, and Prague Radio reported that only authorized summaries will be published after the plenum ends. The party's relative reticence probably results from apprehension that the public will find the central committee's decisions unacceptable. It may also derive from Soviet and party conservative pressures to operate in a more closemouthed fashion.

25X1

13 Dec 68

*Central Intelligence Bulletin*

7

SECRET