

SECRET

Czechoslovakia-USSR: Yet another ranking Soviet party delegation arrived in Prague yesterday as part of a continuing Russian effort to keep in close touch with Czechoslovak officials during their "normalization" period.

The Russian group, consisting of eight party professionals, is headed by Konstantin Katushev, Soviet central committee secretary for relations with other Communist parties. It also includes first deputy foreign minister Vasily Kuznetsov, who served as Moscow's troubleshooter in Prague after the invasion.

The Dubcek leadership is preparing for the federalization of Czechoslovakia on 1 January. The federative arrangement will divide the country into separate Czech and Slovak republics under a scaled down federal umbrella in Prague. This governmental structure, however, will remain under the control of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, which Dubcek hopes to federalize along similar lines in 1969.

Kuznetsov, in particular, might be concerned with the status of National Assembly President Josef Smrkovsky, who as the leading exponent of liberal reform and an outspoken critic of the Soviet invasion is anathema to Moscow. Several Czechoslovak leaders, including Premier Cernik and Slovak party chief Husak, have implied that Smrkovsky might lose his parliamentary post when the new Federal Assembly is formed later in January. In addition, the Slovak Communist Party has demanded that the next president of parliament be a Slovak.

The Dubcek leadership probably will not strip Smrkovsky of all his party posts, however, if only because of his overwhelming support among the Czechoslovak population. Students, workers, farmers, and intellectuals have threatened demonstrations if Dubcek's reform program is further compromised or if any of the liberals in the leadership, particularly Smrkovsky, are dropped.

25X1

28 Dec 68

Central Intelligence Bulletin

4

SECRET