

Czechoslovakia-USSR: Prague may be trying to play down Premier Cernik's statement concerning the disposition of foreign troops now in Czechoslovakia.

Cernik, speaking in Ostrava on 21 September, said that troops would begin a gradual withdrawal from Czechoslovakia within a few days, but added that "certain contingents" would remain in the country. Cernik was the first Czechoslovak official to admit publicly that troops will stay.

Cernik's remarks were summarized by Czechoslovak radio stations and several newspapers in Prague, but were not reported in the authoritative Rude Pravo, the main party daily. Rude Pravo's failure to publish Cernik's statements suggests that the regime may have considered his remarks untimely, possibly because it believes the Czechoslovak populace is not yet prepared to receive the news that troops will remain on a long-term basis.

The regime may also have thought that Cernik's remarks concerning the withdrawal of troops was too optimistic. The Soviet party paper Pravda yesterday again warned Prague that a "number of serious problems" will have to be solved before "normalization" is achieved. In a series of articles criticizing Czechoslovak developments, Pravda rebuked the Czechoslovak party for not checking those attacking its ideological foundations, criticized its press organs and those of the trade union, and attacked a regional party organization for its "nationalistic," anti-Soviet statements.

This Soviet broadside, doubtless prompted in part by the fact that the Czechoslovak press continues to publish scarcely veiled criticisms of Moscow, may also have been designed as a rebuttal of Cernik's remarks in Ostrava. Cernik defended the news media and stated that Prague does not wish to and "will not punish anyone for his political views." In a

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probable effort to preclude charges that Dubcek was becoming involved in a "cult of the personality," Cernik said that Dubcek himself was against being "celebrated so much," and stated that the party as a whole must enjoy the confidence of the people in order to preserve its authority.

No major change in the disposition of Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia was detected over the weekend.

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