USSR-Czechoslovakia: Moscow has formally pro-
tested an article in the Czechoslovak press and im-
plicitly demanded reinstitution of press censorship.

The protest note, delivered on 10 June and pub-
licized by Pravda the same day, condemned a Czech-
oslovak Catholic newspaper for reprinting a New
York Times article alleging that Soviet officials
in Czechoslovakia helped make General Sejna's escape
possible. The article claimed that the Soviets had
approved the issuance of passports to Sejna which
he subsequently used in his flight.

According to TASS, the note charged that the
report was reprinted with the "one aim" of worsening
Soviet-Czechoslovak relations. The note expressed
the "conviction" that the "appropriate Czechoslovak
organs" will take "the necessary measures to pro-
tect friendly relations" by preventing the appear-
ance of "similar reports."

The Soviet decision to raise this issue to the
level of formal intergovernmental relations is cer-
tain to disturb the fragile understanding which was
one result of Kosygin's visit last month. Although
the Dubcek regime has had some success in toning
down the press, Moscow is apparently dissatisfied
with Prague's determination, dramatized by the cab-
inet's decision to abolish administrative censor-
ship last week, to use only informal controls. The
timing of the protest and the publicity suggest
Moscow may attempt to exploit Prague's need for a
loan as a means of securing a retreat on this issue.
A Czechoslovak economic delegation is in Moscow now
on loan negotiations.

The Soviet protest places Dubcek in a difficult
position. For domestic political reasons, he must
avoid appearing subservient to Moscow, particularly

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on the sensitive issue of press freedom. Prague
eventually may deliver a conciliatory but delayed
reply to the Soviet note, as it did in the case of
an earlier Polish protest. Nevertheless, Dubcek
can hardly reverse himself on an issue on which he
is so firmly committed.   25X1

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