

Czechoslovakia: Infighting between conservative and progressive forces is becoming more intense, but moderate party leader Dubcek remains dominant.

Conservatives and some progressives are dissatisfied with the course of events in the country. The former wish at the very least to retain the status quo; the latter desire even more changes and at a rapid pace.

The strength of conservative opposition to further reform was demonstrated yesterday when 68 members of the 300-member National Assembly voted against the election of Josef Smrkovsky, a leading proponent of reform, as chairman. Forty-four abstained or were absent. The conservatives still hold many seats in the central committee of the party and were able to force the deletion of several innovative aspects from the "action program."

The progressives, who fear that holdovers from the Novotny regime will frustrate other political and economic changes, are becoming more vocal in their criticism both of the conservatives and Dubcek. They particularly resent that Ota Sik, the leading advocate of economic reform, was not made a member of the party presidium or chairman of the new National Economic Council. They reportedly plan to press for an extraordinary party congress to deal solely with the election of a new central committee.

Dubcek is pursuing a middle-of-the-road course, partly in deference to the factions in the party, and partly to allay Moscow's fears that the party would lose control of the situation. He must keep factionalism within bounds if he is to carry out his reforms.

According to a recent official announcement, Dubcek has specific responsibility for party organization, security, and defense matters. This clearly indicates that he is party leader in fact as well as name.

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