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CZECHOSLOVAK POPULAR PROTESTS POSE DOMESTIC CRISIS

Dubcek and his colleagues have become embroiled in a potentially dangerous situation as a result of anti-Soviet demonstrations which may reach a climax in the next few days and get out of control. Student demonstrations between 18-20 January and an alleged suicide pact among Czechoslovak youths, who intend to set themselves ablaze to protest Soviet interference in domestic affairs, ended a period of relative calm in Czechoslovakia.

Thousands of disaffected youths, joined by some workers and university officials, marched on 20 January in memory of Jan Palach, a 21-year-old student who committed suicide by fire to protest censorship and the continued existence of an illegal pro-Soviet publication. His martyrdom has aroused the entire population, sparking other protests and bringing more demands.

Palach will be given a hero's funeral on 25 January--apparently a concessionary gesture by the regime--and be buried in an exclusive area alongside the country's greatest composers, intellectuals, and writers. The ceremony, which may draw as many as 100,000, will attract youths from all over the country who are intent on demonstrating in Prague. Three other self-immolation attempts--even though apparently for personal rather than political reasons--have added to popular tensions.

Top party and government leaders, who met with university officials in an effort to mollify the students, must come up with some type of compromise satisfactory

to the students, or face the possibility of other suicide attempts and demonstrations.

In an attempt to discourage further public gatherings, the popular and respected President Svoboda has warned that riots and strikes could cost thousands of lives and could bring down the Dubcek leadership. Premier Cernik branded some of the student actions "antisocialist" and said that the security police would have to clamp down on any anti-Soviet disturbances. Defense Minister Dzur implied that the armed forces were ready to put down any outbursts.

The students, who have the support of the workers and the intellectuals, met with trade union officials this week to coordinate future activities. The student actions thus far have been non-violent, but the authorities can no longer count on this to continue. The unexpected return to Czechoslovakia of two popular progressives--economist Ota Sik and former writers' union president Goldstucker--may have some positive effect on efforts to calm the students.

The Soviet press reported the first immolation on Tuesday with brief news items. It also charged that "antisocialist forces" were trying to exploit the situation, and quoted Czechoslovak officials as saying that the demonstrations were "directly contrary" to normalization efforts. Pravda said, however, that the Czechoslovak leadership was determined to take stern

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action to quash further disturbances. This formulation carried an implicit warning that Prague had better do just that and the Soviets are keeping a close eye on the situation. Thus far there has been no reaction

by Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia but that prospect is always present if the situation should get out of the control of the Czechoslovak authorities.

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