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CZECHOSLOVAKIA PREPARES TO ADOPT NEW POLICIES

Though still beset by factional problems the Dubcek regime is preparing to implement domestic reforms and is putting a new face on Czechoslovak foreign policy.

Progressives and conservatives clashed during regional party conferences last weekend, with three conferences recommending that an extraordinary party congress be held before the end of the year so that conservatives can be removed from the central committee. Three other conferences advocated a more moderate course, recommending that the regular congress be convened sometime in 1969. The four remaining regional party organizations, when they meet in the next few days, will find themselves under severe pressure to take a stand on the controversial issue of convening the party congress.

If these four also recommend an extraordinary congress, Dubcek will probably abandon his middle-of-the-road position. He has thus far, somewhat equivocally, opposed such a congress and has emphasized that there can be no witch-hunts in the party. At one regional conference on 20 April, he repeated earlier admonitions that "one cannot improvise but must study the problems" before acting.

The National Assembly convened on 24-25 April to hear Premier Cernik present the government's legislative program, which is based on the just-approved party action program. Newly elected assembly chairman, Josef Smrkovsky has promised speedy enactment of a number of reforms.

Cernik also informed the assembly of plans to improve bilat-

eral relations with the Scandinavian and other Western European countries, thus giving some substance to earlier statements that Prague will play a more active role in European affairs. He again emphasized that the German question is the basic problem for Prague's foreign policy, but his position on improvement of relations with Bonn was imprecise and somewhat contradicted earlier statements.

Cernik was not as forthcoming as Foreign Minister Hajek, who on 22 April hinted that Prague's sole condition for "normalizing" relations is that Bonn declare the 1938 Munich agreement null and void from its inception. The Czechoslovaks' equivocation on the German question suggests that they accept the necessity to move slowly on an issue so sensitive in terms of Prague's relations with the USSR and some of the Eastern European states.

Nevertheless, the new regime has already made clear that it will stress self-interest in dealing with Communist nations. On 17 April, Foreign Trade Minister Vales publicly criticized CEMA and indicated that Prague will seek to loosen its economic ties with the Communist states and trade more with the West. The new attention to self-interest has already led to an apparent conflict with the USSR about the nature of the forthcoming international Communist conference. Rude Pravo on 21 April criticized previous world Communist conferences as restrictive and advocated "open" sessions for the current Budapest preparatory meeting as well as at the conference scheduled later for Moscow.

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