

CZECHOSLOVAKIA IMPROVES RELATIONS WITH INVADING POWERS

There has been a discernible effort on the part of the Dubcek regime to improve relations with the states that invaded Czechoslovakia in August. These gestures have been partially reciprocated, probably because most of the governments involved want at least the appearance of "normalization" in hopes that the reality will follow in due course.

Contacts on the diplomatic, party, military, economic, and cultural levels have steadily increased since December. Last week, Prague began to cast its relations with its socialist "allies" in a more favorable light. The improved atmosphere apparently stems from recent visits to the Soviet Union by Czechoslovak party presidium member Evzen Erban and Foreign Minister Jan Marko, who were given red carpet treatment and accorded favorable commentary in the Russian press. Their visits also appear to have set the stage for substantive talks.

In a televised report on his trip last week, Marko advanced the old Soviet line that the world is divided into capitalist and socialist camps, and that Czechoslovakia has no choice but to adhere to the socialist system and to strengthen bilateral cooperation within it. This is a significant retreat from last year's view that a reformed Czechoslovakia could bridge the gap between the contending forces. The leadership probably hopes that this concession will be a quid pro quo for less Soviet and Eastern European interference in domestic affairs.

Marko also said that the foreign ministers of the Soviet bloc countries would soon be coming to Prague. On 19 February, Polish Foreign Minister Jedrychowski arrived there to discuss bilateral cooperation.

The Soviet bloc press appears to have toned down its anti-Czechoslovak bias in recent weeks, in part to convey the impression to domestic audiences that the situation is under control and that the intervention was correct and successful. Soviet commentary also contained a minimum of anti-"progressive" material last week, but this may at least partially reflect Moscow's preoccupation with the Berlin problem.

On 13 February, Radio Vltava, the Soviet-backed station that had beamed propaganda into Czechoslovakia from East Germany since shortly after the invasion, ceased broadcasting. This was a double-edged gesture by Moscow. Although it could not help but better relations a bit with the Czechoslovaks, it also enabled Czechoslovak pro-Soviet conservatives to claim credit for the move. They say one of their leaders, party secretary Vasil Bilak, negotiated Vltava's demise during a recent visit to East Berlin. Moreover, the frequency that Vltava used was turned back to the East Germans--whose propaganda against Czechoslovak reforms is still tough and uncompromising--for their Radio Berlin International program, which includes broadcasts in Czech and Slovak.

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