

SECRET

PRAGUE CONTINUES ON PATH TO REFORM

In his bilateral talks this week with Yugoslav, East German, and Rumanian leaders, Dubcek bolstered Czechoslovakia's independent stand and reaffirmed his regime's plans for domestic reform. There is lingering suspicion and dissatisfaction within Czechoslovakia concerning some of Dubcek's moves as the party prepares for its 14th congress, which convenes on 9 September.

Yugoslav party chief Tito, who received a tumultuous reception during his visit to Prague, pledged expanded political and economic bilateral relations. He offered to help Prague check some of its most serious problems, such as labor supply and construction. Both Dubcek and National Assembly President Smrkovsky are expected to visit Belgrade soon, the latter in October.

In contrast, East German party boss Ulbricht's cool reception in Karlovy Vary on 12-13 August was matched by inconclusive talks with Dubcek that did little to improve bilateral relations.

Prague rolled out the red carpet for Rumania's Ceausescu, who arrived on 15 August to sign a bilateral friendship treaty. Like Tito, Ceausescu offered Prague expanded relations in a show of support for Dubcek's independent stand against Moscow.

During these bilateral consultations, Prague advanced its reform plans by publishing the drafts of new party statutes to be submitted to the congress for approval. Some of the statutes' provisions are certain to irritate those who opposed the Czechoslovak reformers at Bratislava. One proposal provides for a federal system of two Communist parties, Bohemian and Slovak, under a skeletal central party organization. This change will presumably give the Slovaks a greater voice in party affairs and reduces the powers of the central party apparatus.

Another proposal recommends that minorities be permitted to express and solicit support for their views even after being

SECRET

outvoted by the majority, a clear contravention of the principle of "democratic centralism." Other provisions would grant additional freedom to minorities, give a greater role to organized non-Communist groups, permit individuals to enter and leave the party voluntarily, and provide that all party bodies be elected by secret ballot.

There is some dissension among Czechoslovak liberals over the slow pace of the reform program, as well as suspicion over the ultimate results of Dubcek's negotiations with the Soviets. A controversy, for example, has developed because of the abolition of the party post held by Lt. Gen. Prchlik, a Warsaw Pact critic whose removal was viewed by liberal party officials as a concession to Moscow. Recalcitrant intellectuals have also attacked Moscow's psychological warfare against Czechoslovakia, and have opposed the regime's pleas for self-restraint by public media on this issue.

Moscow, for its part, has maintained its "wait-and-see" attitude toward events in Prague. Most top Soviet leaders apparently began their summer vacations last week; only two full members of

the politburo have been noted in public since 6 August.

The Soviet press continues to warn the Czechoslovaks to heed Moscow's interpretation of the Bratislava agreement, but its tenor remains restrained. The only exception to the suspension of polemics between Czechoslovak and Soviet media was an attack by Literary Gazette in response to a "provocative" article in the Czechoslovak journal, Literarni Listy, last week. It implicitly demanded that steps be taken to curb the journal and served to warn other Czechoslovak press organs against similar "anti-Soviet" commentary.

The USSR kept up its military pressure on Czechoslovakia with an announcement on 10 August of a joint communications exercise involving command and support elements of the Soviet, Polish, and East German armies. The announcement follows the three-week-long Rear Services exercise held in areas adjacent to Czechoslovakia.

On 14 August, Warsaw radio reported the presence in Poland of the new chief of staff of the Warsaw Pact, Soviet General Shtemenko. The exercise was Moscow's latest pretext for keeping Soviet troops in areas bordering Czechoslovakia.

25X1

* * *

SECRET