SITUATION REPORT

1. The Constituent Assembly of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union

The constituent assembly of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union took place on 8 and 9 December 1977 in the House of Culture in Prague to restore the organizational continuity, interrupted by the federalization of the republic and the division of the former union into the Czech and Slovak parts. Until now their executive body has been the co-ordination committee.

While the organizational aspect was predominant at the assembly ideological-literary matters were pushed into the background. The new Czechoslovak Writers' Union has dissociated itself from the progressive tradition of the former union, which it has proclaimed was "antisocialist" and unacceptable to the present party leadership.

The Union of Czechoslovak Writers was founded as a "selective ideological and creative organization" following a decision at the first constituent assembly of Czechoslovak writers in 1949 (Prirucni Slovnik Naucny, Part 4, Prague 1967), replacing the Syndicate of Czech Writers in which Slovak authors formed their own section. The history of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union had been distinguished -- except for its early years marked by the Stalinism of the 1950s -- by progressive tendencies. The 1956 second congress reversed the previous political line: the speakers --

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especially poets Jaroslav Seifert and Frantisek Hrůbin -- denounced the distortions of the post-February cultural policy, and demanded such things as the release of imprisoned authors, but President Antonín Zápotocký and the political leadership opposed such liberalizing attempts as "reactionary and ant社会主义." The work of the union remained under strict party control until the early 1960s.

The 1963 third congress inaugurated a period of rehabilitation in Czech and Slovak literature and announced the principle of supporting the literary efforts of new groups; even the names of some silenced authors again appeared, while both the publications and the membership of the union increased substantially in the 1960s.

The 1967 fourth congress was the starting point of the reform course of the Prague Spring. In their program speeches Vaculík, Havel, Kosík, and Kundera formulated the liberalization and democratization demands which were later reflected in the Two Thousand Words Manifesto, in the Action Program of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and in other documents. The Warsaw Pact military intervention arrested such promising developments.

In June 1969, after federalization, the Union of Czech Writers was founded, headed by Jaroslav Seifert; in Slovakia the Union of Slovak Writers continued operating under the protection of Slovak Minister of Culture Miroslav Valek. The Czech Ministry of Culture ignored the existence of the Union of Czech Writers, while the federal Ministry of the Interior announced that the Czechoslovak Writers' Union had been disbanded by the ministry's decree of 25 May 1970 and the Union of Czech Writers by the executive order issued by the Czech Ministry of Culture on 17 December 1970. Both measures were illegal because the statutes of the union, approved by the Ministry of the Interior, provided that disbandment could only follow a decision by the union's general assembly (see Antonín Kratochvíl, "The Literary Scene in Czechoslovakia," Czechoslovak Background Report/26, Radio Free Europe Research, 3 August 1971).

The passive resistance of the Czech writers lasted until June 1972, when a new Union of Czech Writers was set up under the patronage of the party with Jan Kozák as chairman (since March 1977 Josef Rybak). Kozák signed international writers' agreements and was chairman of the Co-ordination Committee of the Union, a provisional body charged with overseeing problems common to the two national groupings.

Subsequently 140 delegates -- instead of the previously announced 150 -- representing Czech and Slovak writers met (Radio Bratislava, 8 December 1977) to set up a new Czechoslovak Writers' Union. The proceedings were opened by Slovak poet
Andrej Plavka and the party and government were represented by a delegation headed by Vasil Bilak, CPCS CC Presidium member and party secretary. Also present were delegations of the writers' unions of the socialist countries, headed by that from the Soviet Union.

In his keynote speech Kozak recalled the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution and its importance for Czech and Slovak literature. He said that this year's writers' congress crowned the process of consolidation in the sphere of culture and the arts, "when, after the profound social crisis of the late 1960s has been overcome, a broad base for Czechoslovak socialist culture has been restored." The aim of the new union will be to stimulate new, ideologically and artistically mature works, to guide writers to achieve a firm Weltanschauung, and to organize excursions for the purpose of work and study to every corner of the country and everywhere where socialism is being built.

Kozak also paid attention to those writers who "fell victim to wrong views" and stressed that "we have never expelled anybody in advance and for all time from literature. The desire to bring into discredit and to exclude those who made a wrong step is basically alien to the humanistic nature of socialism. Our society has not hesitated to extend its hand to those willing to correct their views" (Radio Hvezda, 8 December 1977).

Kozak spoke further about the proclamation of the Czechoslovak committees of the artistic associations made in the National Theater in Prague last January. He emphasized that those who represent the culture of both nations, Czech and Slovak, expressed in their proclamations "their contempt for the handful of renegades and traitors, for those who have alienated themselves from the people and become -- as proved by the pamphlet Charter 77 -- the lackeys of imperialism, of the world of exploitation, preachers of ideological subversion." The proclamation of the artists in the National Theater created the foundation, he said, for a new stage in the execution of the directives of the 15th Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in the sphere of culture and the arts.

In conclusion, Kozak turned to ideological and organizational problems. He said that the leadership of the unions has decided to create a single Union of Czechoslovak Writers to unite the work of both national writers' unions and to develop it further on the basis of the new ideological viewpoints and raison d'état. It will be necessary to work with determination to assure the continuous development of Czech and Slovak literature, to unite artistic and ideological criteria, and to seek the closest possible relations between Czech and Slovak writers, as well as with Ukrainian and Hungarian writers living and working in Czechoslovakia, he continued. The successes achieved by the Union of Soviet Writers in the cultural-political and literary fields should serve as a model for the work of its Czechoslovak counterpart, he added.
The ideological-political aim of Kozak's speech was to restore the myth of a single Czechoslovak culture. This line had been followed with minimal success in the 1950s by the then Minister of Culture, Science, and the Arts Zdenek Nejedly, and Minister of Information Vaclav Kopecky. In principle it was, in the field of culture, similar to the policies of Edvard Beneš and later of Antonín Novotný.

Party delegation leader Vasil Bilak at the beginning of his address dealt with the "years of crisis," and said that only thanks to the new party leadership headed by Gustav Husak could the crisis and its consequences be overcome. "We can say today the over-all political and economic situation and the relations between the party and the intelligentsia are now much better than at any previous time." Capitalism, in order to divert attention from its own ailments, has been trying, in Bilak's words, to unleash "a mean and angry propaganda campaign against Czechoslovakia, in which it is assisted by a handful of people who, because of arrogance, vanity, and often lack of talent, believed until recently that without them neither our arts nor our literature could exist. The only result has been that today they find themselves isolated" (Radio Hvezda, 8 December 1977). As examples Bilak named little-known authors: Egon Bondy, Frantisek Daniel Merth, Jiri Placek, and Rostislav Valusek, avoiding such prominent representatives of Czech literature as Vaclav Kundra, Vaclav Havel, Ludvik Vaculik, Vaclav Cerny, and practically the whole leadership of the former Czechoslovak Writers' Union.

Bilak attacked the Venice Biennale of dissidents which, according to him, true artists avoided attending. "There are situations in which it is our moral duty to tell our adversaries to get out of the way, because we are not prepared to sit passively watching anybody throwing mud at our revolutionary banner." In conclusion, Bilak said that nobody in Czechoslovakia is trying to order artists and writers about and that there is no censorship of literary work. Nevertheless, the CPCS as the leading force in Czechoslovak society cannot ignore shortcomings in any field, least of all in ideology.

Bilak's address was followed by a discussion, generally on the subject of the various literary genres. Bohumil Riha talked about the high quality of Czech and Slovak literature for children and youth, which has enjoyed success throughout the world. Ivan Skala referred to cultural and literary exchanges of opinion and experience among nations and countries and to the attitude of socialist art to the Western countries. The Slovak literary critic Karol Rosenbaum stressed the rise in quality which, he said, is taking place and expressed his view that the rapprochement between Czech and Slovak literatures is a realistic aim which every member of both national unions takes to heart (Radio Hvezda, 9 December 1977).
On behalf of the Union of Soviet Writers, Boris Polevoj, head of the Soviet delegation, addressed the constituent assembly, saying that the most important source of any literature is the organic bond between writers, the people, and their homeland, and that it is an honor for Soviet writers to be able to serve the party, which is the source of their inspiration. A firm friendship of long-standing connects Soviet and Czech and Slovak writers (Radio Hvezda, 8 December 1977).

Elections followed the two days of discussion. Jan Kozak was elected chairman; as deputies Andrej Plavka (chairman of the Union of Slovak Writers) and Josef Rybak (chairman of the Czech Union) were chosen, and Ladislav Benco and Josef Kadlec were made secretaries of the union's central committee. The delegates unanimously approved Kozak's report and accepted it as a binding program for the union's future work. The proceedings were concluded by dispatching a letter to the CPCS Central Committee to declare the Union of Czechoslovak Writers' allegiance to socialist realism and to offer itself to the party leadership as one of its ideological instruments (Radio Hvezda, 9 December 1977).

2. Chnoupek's Visit to Libya: Another Example of Increased Activities in Arab Countries.

After the signature of three documents designed to expand bilateral economic relations on the occasion of Libyan Prime Minister Abd al-Salam Jalud's visit to Czechoslovakia in February 1974 (for details, see Czechoslovak Situation Reports/8 and 9, 20 and 27 February 1974, RFER, Items 2 and 4, respectively), Czechoslovak-Libyan relations improved further. They progressed not only in the economic sphere but also in bilateral contacts between the leaders of both countries. This expansion was allegedly made possible by Libya's pursuing an active anti-imperialist policy and striving to consolidate its political and economic independence, and to put an end to the domination of oil monopolies over the natural resources of the country (Radio Bratislava, 13 October 1975).

In October 1975 Czechoslovak Prime Minister Lubomir Stroual paid an official visit to Libya at the head of a government delegation and had talks with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Premier Jalud. The two premiers made proposals for the participation of Czechoslovak industry in speeding up Libya's industrial development. A mixed commission has been set up to prepare suggestions for long-term co-operation in the economic and commercial fields (for details, see Czechoslovak SR/41, RFER, 22 October 1975, Item 3).

Another impetus for developing bilateral relations was Jalud's visit to Czechoslovakia in May 1977. The importance of Libya as an economic partner was shown by the ceremonious reception he received during the visit, and he met with Secretary-
General of the CPCS and Czechoslovak President Gustav Husak. Their identity of views on main international political topics was noted, and they agreed to continue the exchanges of views and close co-operation in the interest of détente and in line with efforts to find constructive solutions to questions of international relations. A protocol on expansion of all-round co-operation was signed, again noting Czechoslovakia's interest in importing Libyan crude oil (Radio Prague and Ceteka, 17 May 1977).

In September 1977 a Czechoslovak delegation led by federal Deputy Prime-Minister Matej Lucan took part in the celebrations marking the eighth anniversary of the Libyan revolution (Radio Prague, 4 September 1977).

Chhoupek's current visit to Libya was announced in a Ceteka release on 7 December 1977, which stated that the Czechoslovak foreign minister had been invited by the Libyan Secretary of Foreign Affairs Ali Abd al-Salam Turayki. Chhoupek arrived in Tripoli on 11 December 1977 and immediately praised Libya's stand against Israel. Radio Prague quoted him as saying that Czechoslovakia esteemed Libya's policy in what he called "the interest of the Arab peoples' unity in the struggle against Israeli aggression, Zionism, apartheid, and racism." The broadcast noted that the Libyan foreign affairs secretary had pointed out that Chhoupek's visit would contribute to consolidating the friendship between the two countries and to "strengthening the bonds between the Arabs and the socialist countries."

On the second day of his visit Chhoupek met with Jalud. Radio Prague said that Chhoupek and Turayki in separate talks exchanged views on the Middle East. They also discussed bilateral relations and informed each other about the standpoints of their respective countries' governments on international détente, disarmament and the situation in Africa. At a dinner in Tripoli, Chhoupek again stressed that the Czechoslovak people support the liberation struggle of the Arab countries against Israeli "aggression and imperialist intrigues."

At the time of writing, it was not clear to what concrete agreements Chhoupek's visit to Libya would lead; it seems, however, that his trip can hardly be interpreted merely as a routine journey. On the same day that Chhoupek began this visit, Czechoslovak Deputy Foreign Minister Milos Vejvoda arrived for a four-day official visit in Jordan. According to Ceteka (12 December 1977), the purpose of the latter visit was to prepare, together with Jordanian officials, for a visit by Chhoupek next month. According to AFP (13 December 1977), Vejvoda stated in Amman that his country is ready to participate in Jordanian development projects and wants to study possibilities of an increased exchange of tourists between the two countries.

Czechoslovak Defense Minister General Martin Dzur paid an official visit to another Arab country at the same time. He arrived in Baghdad on 12 December 1977, and Ceteka reported that his purpose in going was to deepen co-operation between Czecho-
slovakia and Iraq, as well as to improve relations between their armed forces (Reuter and Ceteka, 12 December 1977). It seems probable that a main purpose of such Czechoslovak diplomatic missions to the Arab countries is to advocate a radical attitude toward Israel and to strengthen opposition to Sadat's peace plans in the Middle East.

Czechoslovakia’s trade and economic relations with Libya have considerably expanded during 1970s. The record in this one-sided trade was reached in 1975 when Czechoslovak exports to Libya were valued at 490,000,000 Kcs. Between 1970 and 1975 there was a considerable increase in exports, but imports were nil. Details are shown in the following table:

Czechoslovak Exports to Libya
(in million Kcs)

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The best known project of mutual co-operation is the 354-km-long asphalt road from Nalu to Gadames constructed with the assistance of Czechoslovak engineers in 1969-1973. The Czechoslovak national enterprise Armabeton built a modern recreation center, the Tourist Beach Center in Libya, with a capacity of 350 beds.

The protocol on Czechoslovak investment deliveries signed in February 1974 provides for the following supplies to Libya: equipment for constructing a metallurgical plant, a glassworks, a ceramic plant, a cementworks, factories for the manufacture of construction materials, trucks, bicycles, motorcycles, footwear, and textiles, as well as supplies of transport equipment, power station equipment, and bulldozers, scrapers, and similar machines. The agreement on scientific-technical co-operation concluded in the same year made special mention of co-operation in geological prospecting and in a number of industrial sectors and health services. Indeed, the Geoindustria National Corporation co-operated with a local Libyan firm in boring wells, prospecting, and geological mapping of the entire Libyan coast. The Czechoslovak foreign trade enterprise Strojexport participated in geological work by boring 39 deep wells for the irrigation of the Wadi Ethel and Wadi Madjed regions (Czechoslovak Foreign Trade No. 10, October 1974).
It should be noted that according to the protocol of February 1974, Czechoslovakia has the possibility of purchasing between 500,000 and 1,000,000 tons of Libyan crude oil a year between 1975 and 1985. In spite of increased Czechoslovak imports of crude oil in 1975 and 1976, this chance has not yet been exploited.

3. The 1977 Christmas Market

In Czechoslovakia long before Christmas, much is said and written about the smooth flow of supplies to the Christmas market, efforts presented as evidence of the efficient care of the party and its leadership. The communication media have been informing the population in press conferences, television and radio discussions, and interviews with leading personalities about the Christmas market. It has been repeated again and again that there will be enough of everything, which goods will be in better supply than a year ago and by how many percent. Only later, after Christmas, it may be admitted that in a few instances everything that had been promised was not available.

It seems that more of this convincing has been going on this year than in earlier times. Perhaps one of the reasons has been the fact that certain kinds of goods, especially some spices, have been sold out: e.g., pepper, marjoram, red pepper, allspice, vanilla, cinnamon, domestically produced rum, and even salt. That these goods have disappeared from the shelves of the shops is the fault — according to the official version — of the petty bourgeois, egotists, and alarmists; "elements" spreading rumors of impending price markups for these goods are described as particularly dangerous. Czechoslovak Television (12 November 1977) declared that "we know very well who these subversionists are and why and for whom they have been acting in this fashion," and called upon everyone to make their names and faces known, advocating that in particularly provocative cases legal steps be taken. Here the question may be asked: how strong politically and economically is a regime that considers itself threatened by a shortage of spices? This buying mania has been countered by the assurance that there are ample supplies of these goods and if they are sometimes missing from the shelves of retail shops, this is due to inadequate packing facilities. Before this bottleneck can be eliminated the spices and other goods concerned will have to be repackaged from larger containers, such as bags, etc. (Radio Prague, 15 November 1977).

The rumors about higher prices reflect some precedents. In July 1977 the already very high price of coffee was raised by 50 per cent and the prices of cocoa, chocolates, and other items were also hiked (see Czechoslovak SR/28, RFEER, 27 July 1977, Item 1). At that time it was explained that this step was made necessary by ever higher consumption, the disproportionately increasing prices of raw materials on world markets, and also
by health considerations. Too much coffee could have, it was said, very serious effects on the nervous system and could cause circulatory problems (Boseda No.33, 19 August 1977). In the CSSR per capita coffee consumption is only little more than one kilogram per year. Its price went up from 160 Kcs to 240 Kcs; the price of one kilogram of coffee thus corresponds to 10 per cent of an average monthly wage.

It is against this background that one must examine the somewhat uneasy official assurances that smooth supplies, “especially of foods,” will be guaranteed during the closing days of the year. The first such assurance was given at a press conference on 5 October 1977 in the presence of dozens of newspaper men and food trade executives. Here it was promised that “everything that is necessary” for the Christmas dinner will be available in ample quantity. At the same time it was pointed out that the best cuts of meat, turkeys, geese, and ducks cannot be made available in unlimited quantity and that poultry is only meant to add variety to the food available on the Christmas market. As for southern fruit, its arrival in the shops in time for Christmas will depend to a large degree on transport and processing (Hvezda, 5 October 1977). Bananas and oranges are available practically the whole year round, although at disproportionately high prices.

Questions were also asked regarding the supply of industrial products. The director-general of trade in industrial goods, Frantisek Kara, declared that his sector was ready to supply customers with the gifts “they will desire.” He said there would also be a sufficient amount of those products which have so far been in short supply, such as washing machines, television sets (particularly color sets), tape recorders, and cameras; he made special mention of Dior cosmetics produced under license by Czechoslovak firms: Although there is enough of everything, Kara admitted that “there are some kinds of goods which are not available always and to everybody.” Here he mentioned bicycles (although 12 per cent more of them have been supplied to the market in the last quarter than in the same period a year ago), sewing machines, and some “smaller items.” He called upon consumers not to go from one town to another to shop because the same kinds of goods will be supplied to all retail outlets (Czechoslovak Television, 15 November 1977).

The Christmas market in Slovakia was the theme of Slovak Minister of Commerce Dezider Goga’s press conference on 17 November 1977. He said that there would be 1,200 tons of meat more in the shops this year than a year ago; there will also be a sufficient amount of poultry and, compared with last year, 30,500 tons more fruit and vegetables, and 15,000 tons more potatoes. Of imported foods, there would be more raisins, dates, coffee and coffee concentrates, poppy seed, lemons, oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, and bananas. Of industrial products, there
would be more woolen knitted clothing for children, stockings made of synthetic fiber, shirts, nylon Windbreakers for boys, sports and collapsible bicycles, watches, alarm clocks, etc. However, demand will not be completely met for such items as sewing machines, bicycles, bath tubs, canvas and rubber footwear, and some other products (Rolnicke Noviny, 18 November 1977).

Judging from what was said at the 23 November 1977 press conference on the subject of supplies for Prague shops, the amount of food available is to be "approximately the same as last year." Visitors coming from Czechoslovakia to the Federal Republic of Germany report a noticeable shortage of meat in the capital during the second half of November; this may have been due to the stocking up for the Christmas market. A better supply of geese, ducks, and turkeys was promised. The demand for fresh water fish is to be fully covered and the traditional Czech carp will be available in the most demanded size of 1.5 kg. Because of the lower amount of fruit harvested in Czechoslovakia this year, there will be higher imports of canned fruit from Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the People's Republic of China. There is to be 33 per cent more cocoa than last year and instant cocoa is also to be available, as will be a sufficient supply of raisins, peanuts, ground coconut, nuts, chestnuts, figs, almonds, and dried apricots. A novelty on the Christmas market will be nuts with sugar coating or caramelized, imported from the People's Republic of China. In the industrial products sector buyers can select from new makes of tape recorders, "exclusive" stainless knives and forks, and imported toys. There is also to be a sufficient supply of woolen fabrics, knitted materials, ready-to-wear clothing, women's garments, men's and women's overcoats, suits, and furs. The Christmas market is to be enriched by footwear imported from Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Italy, and by furniture from Austria, Hungary, and Romania (Radio Hvezda, 23 November 1977).

Ready for the Prague shops are 4,650 tons of fruit from southern Europe and from the subtropical countries; this is 430 tons more than last year and includes 1,600 tons of oranges and 400 tons of lemons from Greece, Spain, Italy, and Cyprus (Radio Prague, 5 December 1977).

According to the information given at the 29 November 1977 press conference, the amount of fruit from southern countries put on the market, apparently for the entire country, during the Christmas period will be 3,500 tons higher this year than last. From Greece, Spain, and Italy 12,000 tons of oranges and tangerines, from Columbia and Ecuador 6,000 tons of bananas, and from Cuba and Lebanon 1,500 tons of grapefruit have been imported (Radio Prague, 29 November 1977).

According to Radio Prague (9 December 1977), a new holiday season feature is a Christmas Market in Brno where Pavilion D-- at the site of the engineering fair held every year in the Moravian
capital -- has been transformed into a "Maxi Store" offering a maximal amount of all kinds of goods. On sale will be the products of some 40 enterprises from the whole country, including new products earmarked for retailing in the coming year. Another novelty mentioned by Czechoslovak Television (22 November 1977) are such "attractive items" as Italian washing machines, British carpet shampooing devices, cameras, and film projectors.

How supply and demand have actually been functioning so far during the 1977 Christmas period may be judged from the comment made by the deputy director of the Prior Department Store in Bratislava, open like other department stores in the country seven days a week. He complained early in December of shortages of knitted goods, men's winter coats, unpatterned unicolor cloth, sewing machines, sports clothing for boys and girls, tape recorders, and other products (Praca, 5 December 1977).

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