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## EAST EUROPE

●CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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### ON THE EVE OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK 13TH PARTY CONGRESS

Summary: The 13th Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party begins in Prague on May 31. This paper seeks to describe and analyze briefly the main developments in public life since the 12th Congress in 1962, to depict the situation on the eve of the congress and to discuss the attitude the congress is likely to take on the main political, economic, cultural and foreign policy issues of the day.

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The 12th Party Congress of the CPCS in 1962 committed itself to mild reformation of the economy and to a review of the purge trials of the early Fifties. It cannot be said that it anticipated a transformation of the entire fabric of society. Though, by its own lights, the congress undertook relatively little and promised only a return to a sounder economy and the re-establishment of Party democracy, it nevertheless did erode many of the basic tenets of policy which had remained unquestioned by the Party since 1948. Since 1962, the Party has accepted change with reluctance and has attempted to restrain and circumscribe the forces which have initiated it; yet, the Party itself created a vacuum at the last congress and was slow in supplying new policies to fill it. The result has been a competition between its own initiatives in the economic and cultural sphere and the ideas of economists and artists who, though usually members of the CP, had their own much more radical proposals for the improvement of society. In general, the Party has had to accommodate itself to this new situation as best it could, trying at one and the same time to incorporate change and maintain control. The Party leadership, at the forthcoming 13th Congress, which began on May 31, will attempt to consolidate and stabilize the changes which have already taken place. Whether it will succeed entirely to its satisfaction remains to be seen.

The Slovak Party Congress, which concluded in Bratislava on May 14, might indicate the direction of the 13th CPCS Congress. The proceedings demonstrated a degree of independence which has never been characteristic of Slovak congresses. This, in itself, was a reflection of the increased assertiveness of Slovakia, which has been an important characteristic of Czechoslovak life over the last few years. While no important institutional changes have been carried out which would

increase the specific weight of Slovakia in the state, the aggressiveness of Slovak politician-writers, backed by the strong feeling of the Slovak people, have resulted in a qualitative change in attitude on the part of the authorities in Prague which, in the future, could be transformed into some institutional action guaranteeing the special status of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak state. The congress was moderate in its attacks on cultural revisionists, specifically singling out only the dogmatists for criticism, and it encouraged the speeding up of economic reform. Judging from the Slovak congress, moderation and realism seem the order of the day in the Czechoslovak Party, and it is not expected that the 13th Congress will deviate from this pattern.

This paper will very briefly deal with the main trend of developments in Czechoslovak public life since the last congress and will attempt a few pointers for the future.

### The Economy

The single issue which represented the thin end of the wedge, opening the way toward liberalization, was the economic crisis of 1961-1963. The huge investment in unfinished projects, the reserves of unsalable goods, the rising level of wages and consumption, and the decreasing productivity of labor produced an economic recession which led to the scrapping of the Third Five-Year Plan and later the Seven-Year Plan. The economy has since been run on the basis of yearly plans, until the principles of the New Economic Model (NEM) could be worked out and the first steps undertaken. Until the Party could clearly re-define the line of its future objectives, no long range plan of development could be constituted.

The mixed attitude of the population toward the NEM, compounded of suspicion, skepticism, and a certain degree of hope, aggravates the problems of the regime in the implementation of its new economic policies. And since the ultimate success of the Party in the consolidation of these policies primarily depends on the positive development of the economy, the resistance of large segments of the population has not, and will not, make the job any easier. The Party has tried to satisfy all the poles of opinion which will be most affected by the proposed system of greater enterprise freedom, more emphasis on economic instruments, and a less interventionary role for the medium and long term plans. It has promised the economists a flexible price system more responsive to market conditions and in closer relation to world prices, but it has also promised the workers no general rise in the cost of living. It has repeatedly stressed the primary importance of the plan and simultaneously emphasized the role of contracts and prices in the allocation of scarce resources. Although one may argue, as the Party has done, that these principles are not in themselves contradictory, the effort to serve often conflicting economic and ideological interests has produced shifts in emphasis on the role and importance of one or another of the facets of the NEM.

The publication of the basic principles of the New Economic Model in October 1964 and the subsequent plenum of the CC in January 1965, which approved the NEM for introduction in 1966, seemed a solid



victory for the liberal economists. The year 1965 was the year of experiment with the model in selected factories, in which over 400 took part. The success of these trials was mixed. The more conservative elements in the Party pointed out the extreme difficulties in reforming the price system, arguing that the 1966 introduction date would be premature. Toward the end of 1965, regime spokesmen stated that the full implementation of the model could not take place before the Five-Year Plan starting in 1970. They said that reconstruction of the price system -- making it more responsive to market conditions -- could not begin before 1968-1969, and therefore, without a wholly new re-calculation of prices, the NEM would not be meaningful.

The original promise that the new system would be established at the beginning of 1966 became modified, and the most that was said was that the Party hoped for the "gradual" introduction of the new "system of planning and management." This atmosphere prevailed even until the beginning of April 1966, when Oldrich Cernik, the chairman of the State Planning Commission, stressed that the considered course of the Party, emphasizing gradualism, was the correct one.(1)

Yet, voices had been raised, as early as January 1966, questioning the wisdom of the Party in putting off the NEM until the subsequent Five-Year Plan. The economists became anxious that gradualism could play into the hands of the economic conservatives and that compromise might lead to the eventual scrapping of the entire system.(2) Ota Sik, the head of the economic institute attached to the academy of sciences and often called the father of the new system, entered the struggle against delay of introduction with a series of articles in Rude Pravo, published in February.(3) He criticized the backward elements of the Party, which exaggerated the difficulties in introducing the NEM. He went so far as to take segments of the working class to task for their foot dragging and silent opposition to needed reform. Many workers, he said, had gotten used to an inferior quality of work and feared that the reforms would affect the pork barrel, requiring them to work harder to maintain the same wages. Sik felt that the opportunity had been lost to institute a once-and-for-all reform of the wholesale price system. In its place, the system of subventions and subsidies had been prolonged, to the detriment of the NEM.

At this stage in the discussions, the price reform loomed as the most important single factor for the future of the new system of management. Adjustment of the level of wholesale prices, bringing them more into line with costs and with demand, represented the decisive issue and focus of the liberal economists. It was felt that the entire system of indirect instruments was near to being worthless without

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(1) Cernik, Oldrich, Hospodarske Noviny, 8 April 1966.

(2) Goldmann, J. and Suk, A., Rude Pravo, 18 January 1966. These two authors said that "...the traditional system... would still be less dangerous and less liable to lead to a dangerous end than a rotten compromise." (Emphasis supplied.)

(3) Sik, Ota, Rude Pravo, 18, 22, 23 February 1966.

recalculation of wholesale prices. The conservatives, on the other hand, pointed out the near impossibility of re-setting the prices of millions of individual articles.

It was suggested by advocates of the NEM that new price indices for wholesale groups of articles could be established by January 1967. Later, in 1968, reform of the total system could be achieved. This procedure would eliminate the need to set new prices for millions of products, simplifying the calculation problems by requiring new prices for only 35,000 groups of wholesale products.

The political implications of this move were great, because the leadership could then be persuaded that the NEM could be successfully undertaken on the basis of the new price indices. The ground for delaying the introduction of the economic reforms until all prices were re-calculated was wiped away. These plans were approved by the Central Committee in February 1966, and the balance of power shifted away from the Party conservatives, where it had rested for some months, in the direction of the liberal economists, who could argue that the introduction of the NEM could objectively be speeded up.

The Central Committee Plenum of April 20-21 represents an important milestone in the introduction of the NEM. In contrast to Cernik, who had said, only two weeks earlier, that gradualism was the proper method of introducing the NEM, Jiri Hendrych, Presidium member and secretary of the CC, announced, at the Slovak Party Congress on 13 May 1966, that the introduction of the economic reforms would be accelerated. Josef Toman, chairman of the State Commission for Management and Organization, wrote in Rude Pravo that the CC had approved measures allowing for a more consistent application of the principles of the NEM. (4) He stated that this commission had prepared plans which would give the economic theoreticians and experts a greater role in the actual organization of reforms. He added that the practical timetable of steps leading to the final objectives had been decided upon. This had long been a source of contention between liberals and conservatives, because the actual schedule had never really been decided upon; so the so-called gradualism of step-by-step reform really represented a smokescreen behind which delay could be disguised.

Toman also wrote that unitary deductions from gross income would be instituted in order not to tax the healthy and productive enterprises for the sake of supporting the less productive ones. He criticized the "orientation" indices which, he said, were merely a reflection of the old central administrative production indices. Toman viewed the wage ceiling as a brake on increased productivity, as well. He stated that only in the best factories had a flexible wage policy been used effectively. He implied that some of the restrictions on pay hikes would be modified, in order that the workers could share, to a larger extent, in the profits of the enterprise.

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(4) Toman, Josef, Rude Pravo, 29 April 1966.



Coming from Toman, these statements demonstrate the shift in the Party's economic policy, especially in view of the fact that Toman himself could be numbered among the gradualists only a few months earlier.

The acceleration of the plans for the NEM stand in contrast to the reform model for the agricultural sector. The industrial sector appears to have drawn most of the attention of the economic reformers, to the disadvantage of agriculture. The model for agriculture is likely to undergo the same kind of criticism that finally forced the Party to move ahead with reform of industry. The model, as it stands in its published form,(5) is unlikely to arouse much enthusiasm among the farmers, nor will it solve the chronic agricultural problems of the CSSR. Out of fear that the consumer will not tolerate a rise in retail prices, the regime is probably reluctant to approve a system of purchase prices for agricultural products which would really cover costs. The details of the agricultural reform preserve the system of discriminatory taxation, taxing the profitable collectives, to subsidize the non-productive farming units.

The decisions with regard to both agriculture and industry have been taken at Central Committee meetings over the past few months. The congress will do no more than confirm them. The hump of resistance has already been overcome by the February and April Plenums of the Central Committee. The March meeting dealt with the problems of agriculture. The congress then can contribute little except by way of confirmation of the gains made by the liberal economists in accelerating the pace of reform.

### The Leadership

Despite the significant changes which have occurred in the economic and cultural life of Czechoslovakia, the top leadership has remained remarkably stable. Antonin Novotny, President of the Republic and First Secretary of the CSCP, has managed to accommodate himself to these changes, notwithstanding his close association with the most despised period of the history of the CSSR, the purge period of 1951-1954. He has retained his government and Party positions, while other associates of his, no less involved than he, have been released from top functions. In the course of 1963, Karel Bacilek was dropped from the Presidium of the Czechoslovak and Slovak CP's; Bruno Koehler lost his position as secretary of the Central Committee of the CPCS; and Viliam Siroky was replaced by Jozef Lenart as prime minister. Their responsibility for "Stalinist" excesses was basically no greater than Novotny's, yet Novotny remained, because of his control of the Party apparatus, and because he was prepared to sacrifice such old colleagues as these to pacify opposition and draw attention away from himself.

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(5) For a review of the proposals for the reform of agriculture, see EERA Background Report: "The New Czechoslovak Agricultural Model," 16 April 1966.

While economists and writers have pressed for liberalization of society and have, to some degree, succeeded in having their ideas accepted by the Party, Novotny has skillfully exploited his power to remain on top. In the cultural crisis of 1963-1964, for instance, he stemmed the tide of revisionism by applying a certain amount of pressure, while simultaneously holding the carrot of reward for the more materialistic of the artists. He exploited the differences between the objectives of the Czech and Slovak writers and used these divisions in order to rule. He has gradually acceded to the economists' demands for re-organization of the economy, and he has withstood pressures from both left and right in maintaining his own decision-making authority. In short, in the few years which have elapsed since the last congress, Novotny has shown a political skill, flexibility and adaptability of which few thought him capable.

In the forthcoming congress, one cannot anticipate that Novotny will give up either his state or Party posts. A congress such as it is likely to be, emphasizing continuity rather than change and stability rather than spontaneity, would hardly destroy this image by making wholesale changes in the top leadership. Nevertheless, some retirements can be anticipated, though they relate mainly to personalities who are old and have outlived their usefulness. Jaromir Dolansky will probably be retired from his post in the Presidium; he is over 70 and has, over the past few years, given up his responsibilities to younger men. He is a former vice premier, but now occupies only the post of Chairman of the Commission for the Standard of Living. Frantisek Zupka, member of the Secretariat and late head of the trade unions, is probably also slated for retirement. He is apparently in poor health, and especially after his resignation from all posts in the trade union organization, he would seem due to be dropped. His replacement as chairman, Miroslav Pastyrik, could very easily take over the vacated position in the Secretariat to preserve the representation of the trade unions in the top leadership.

Zdenek Fierlinger, a man who before 1948 was a top Social Democrat and member of the government, is over 75 now and plays no positive role except as the representative of the assimilated Social Democratic Party. It appears likely that he will relinquish his post in the Presidium to a younger man while preserving his place in the National Assembly and Central Committee.

Martin Vaculik, Candidate Member of the Presidium, seems destined to move up to full membership in the Presidium. At the recent regional Party conferences, he was elevated to the post of Leading Secretary of the Prague Regional Committee, one of the most influential posts in the hierarchy. He is very much a man to watch.

At the recently concluded Slovak Party Congress, the newly-elected Central Committee included a large proportion of technicians and factory managers. After the 1962 Slovak Congress, the percentage representation of the technical intelligentsia on the CC was about one per cent; now their number has been increased to about 17 per cent. The present CC CPCS possesses a similarly low



percentage of managerial and technical types. One might expect that the emphasis on technical expertise will be reflected in increased representation in the CC to be elected at the congress.

The turnover in the Central Committee of the CPCS will undoubtedly be large, in order to permit the inclusion of younger men with more substantial qualifications. The top leadership will not, in all probability, change its character, or any substantial portion of its personnel.

### Culture

Artistic freedom in Czechoslovakia has made some irreversible gains since 1962. The spontaneous and seemingly uncontrollable situation in the arts, reaching its climax in 1963-1964, has indeed been brought under some restraint by the Party. By a mixture of the stick and the carrot, the leadership has maintained order among writers and intellectuals, and the free-swinging criticism which characterized this early period has been muffled. Yet, the Party is no longer able to dictate policy to the writers, and the writers have won a large measure of freedom for autonomous action. They undoubtedly mean to preserve this flexibility, while the Party is attempting to define the outer limits of freedom of expression. Before the congress, it is possible to discern the array of forces and to foresee a possible conclusion.

In March, 1966, L'Unita reported that three representatives of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union had paid a visit to their Soviet colleagues to acquire a first hand report on the specifics of the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial.<sup>(6)</sup> The Czechoslovak agency, Cetecka, later denied the report<sup>(7)</sup> as totally without substance, but, even if untrue, such action is not impossible in the present atmosphere of active resistance to the interventionary power of the regime. L'Unita added a significant statement to its report: "From the debate that took place in an assembly of the union on the entire question (of the trial) and then at the executive level, there arose the opinion that, if the same thing happened in Czechoslovakia, a conclusion different from the actual one would have been desired." In the statement, there is an implicit warning to the Party directors of culture that the union will not permit the same kind of repression in Czechoslovakia. The union has set the limits of its toleration of Party intervention; it has served notice that it will not permit its members to be used to demonstrate the potentiality of the Party to exercise its administrative power. Such exemplary punishment as Sinyavsky and Daniel received would not, under the present circumstances, deter the union from continuing to press for liberalization in the arts. On the contrary, the union might well resist more openly and truculently than it has to date.

On the other side, Jiri Hendrych, Presidium member and Chairman of the CC ideological Commission, has restated the position of the government, describing the limits within which it will permit the exchange and discussion of ideas. "...However, in this sound process, (the process of threshing out various opinions), there is

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(6) L'Unita, 15 March 1966.

(7) Cetecka, 15 March 1966.

no room for just opinions and definitely no room for opinions which leave the ground of our society and of its ideology, which indicate indifference to the world view and class aspects... Today, one need not go far to find examples of the absolute opposite, ideologically opposite, ideas of some people about such fundamental concepts as Party allegiance and ... Marxism."(8)

These two positions provide the rules of the game as far as the artists and the regime are concerned. The Writers' Union has accepted the various changes in the editorial staffs of the most revisionist periodicals and has not openly repudiated the action of the ideological department of the Central Committee in closing several literary reviews, repugnant to the regime. There has been dissent however, as when Jan Trefulka, writing in Literarni Noviny, objected to the closing down of Tvar as "politically questionable."(9) (Incidentally, his statement appeared in the same issue of Literarni Noviny as did the announcement of Tvar's closure, an indication of the attitude of the editorial board of the periodical.) Other examples of individual and collective opposition to the decisions of the Party's cultural arbiters are apparent. Thus, Literarni Noviny published a "proclamation" from the Presidium of the Union of Film and Television Artists, containing 14 signatures, and objecting to the dogmatic criticism of Milos Forman's film The Loves of a Blonde. The "proclamation" said:

Much as in all familiar cases, so even this time, it is our concern that we are able successfully, and with the authority of society behind us, relegate to its appropriate limits the demagoguery which takes advantage of the fact that some spectators did not correctly understand one or another work of art and utilized this fact in an attack upon its creators, upon their honors, and upon our entire socialist art.(10) (Emphasis supplied.)

The ideological department of the Central Committee, headed by Pavel Aversperg, has used its power to change the personnel and composition of the editorial boards of the cultural periodicals to initiate many changes in the last half year. All the leading journals of the liberals, with the notable exception of the Slovak ones, have suffered the ax; the list includes Literarni Noviny, Plamen, Host do Domu, and Kulturni Tvorba. These changes, along with the closure of Tvar and Knizni Kultura, should indicate that a possible cultural offensive is brewing, which might be announced at the congress. Such a conclusion must, however, be qualified by various other factors. In the first place, the new editorial personnel of the three periodicals mentioned above are not distinguished by any strong conservative inclinations. Secondly, an examination of the content of these journals, since the changes took place, does not

(8) Jiri Hendrych's speech to the Third Congress of Theater and Film Workers; Rude Pravo, 1 December 1965.

(9) Literarni Noviny, 1 January 1966.

(10) Ibid., 19 February 1966.



reveal any substantial tempering of this cultural revisionism.

One might ask what is the point of the Party's initiating editorial changes if they do not diminish the influence of the liberals or soften the content of their periodicals? One reason is that a real cultural offensive would only increasingly alienate the intellectual community. The Writers' Union has served notice to this effect. This produces ambiguity in the policy of the Party in restraint of "liberal tendencies." And since administrative intervention of a stringent nature might be highly counter-productive, the Party has undertaken to convince the Writers' Union that it is in its own interest to police its own members.

In his speech at the Congress of Theater and Film Workers, quoted above, Hendrych stated that the artists' unions should take it upon themselves to intervene in the publication of views hostile to Party policies.(11) He also called for greater participation of the artists in their trade organizations. This new approach has been broached numerous times since then in the press.

Jiri Hajek, the editor of Plamen, has also expressed himself on the pages of the Party daily in the same vein.(12) He implied that, were the Writers' Union not so passive in evaluating developing artistic trends, the Party would not have need to intervene directly. The Union, he said, must, for its own good, place a value on artistic trends and judge their relation to socialist objectives.

Hajek is not a cultural conservative and it is evident from this article that he has in mind the greatest possible latitude for the exchange of conflicting views. He describes a creative cultural policy as akin to the Italian Party's policy of "cultural autonomy."

A solution which places the burden of responsibility on the Writers' Union would probably be accepted by both sides if it were offered at the congress. The intellectual community will not accept substantial tightening of the mechanisms of cultural control, and the Party does not really want to turn the screws if it can find another device for keeping the writers in line. A special resolution on cultural and ideological questions, which Hendrych announced would be passed by the congress, will probably state that the Party will not permit liberal humanism to take the place of active Communist engagement. At the same time, it will probably urge the writers to assume more upon themselves in the direction of cultural policy. A compromise of this sort is acceptable to both the Party and the majority of writers, because it would stabilize a situation which the Party feels could get out of control, and it would consolidate the success of the writers in achieving a measure of flexibility in the expression of their ideas.

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(11) Jiri Hendrych, Rude Pravo, 1 December 1966.

(12) Hajek, Jiri Rude Pravo, 1 April 1966.

Alexander Dubcek, the First Secretary of the Slovak CC, speaking at the Slovak Congress, hinted at the possible content of the forthcoming cultural resolution. He rejected accusations of Party conservatives to the effect that the policy of persuading the writers of the justice of Communist orthodoxy represents a compromise. "Party policy," he said, "can be assured solely by Communists in the individual places of work and through... for a creative participation in the formation and realization of the Party's policy." (13)

Of course, the trouble would come only after the congress when the dictum of self-management would come up for interpretation, when someone must decide what kind of an exchange of views represents legitimate discussion and what exceeds the limits of political commitment. Nevertheless, a compromise would have the virtue of preserving unanimity at the congress in presenting a united front between the Party and intellectuals.

#### Foreign Policy

The 13th Congress will be preoccupied with domestic problems. Therefore, its foreign policy initiatives will presumably be few, and they will not be significant, but will confirm its new relationship to the Soviet Union. While, in 1962, Czechoslovakia could still be called a satellite of the USSR, this is no longer the case. The CSSR fulfills more the role of an ally than of a mere limb of the CPCS. In the four years following the 1962 congress, the Czechoslovak Party has drawn away from its Soviet elder brother on economic and ideological questions. This trend has been the result of several factors.

On the one hand, the leaderships of the two Parties have been out of sympathy since the fall of Khrushchev. It is said that Novotny was displeased at the ouster of the former first secretary, and Novotny, only some months after the change in the Soviet leadership, gave his full approval to the policies of the new leaders. In the economic field, both sides have been disappointed by various aspects of their cooperative arrangements. The Soviet Union has expressed criticism of the quality of some Czechoslovak goods and has called for quality controls before shipment. For its part, the CSSR has also reported that Soviet products are below standard and complains that the supply of spare parts has not been adequate.

The issue of greatest single importance has been the supply of Soviet grain to the CSSR. The fact that the USSR is now a net grain importer has apparently made her reluctant to spend her foreign currency to supply wheat for Czechoslovakia. At the beginning of 1966, the leadership of the USSR and the CSSR appeared to have had several consultations on the issue, with the USSR agreeing to supply Czechoslovakia with her contractual obligations, but not any more.

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(13) Dubcek, Alexander, Bratislava Pravda, 13 May 1966.



An indication of the distance which has evolved between the two Parties is evident from a comparison of Czechoslovak statements on the 22nd and 23rd Congresses of the CPSU. The document which preceded the 12th Party Congress stated:

The Soviet Communist Party Program, adopted by the 22nd Congress, is regarded by us as our own program, because it points out the fundamental features of our own future.(14)

In an exchange of notes with the USSR on the 21st anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia, the CSKP sent the following statement, inter alia:

The results of the 23rd Soviet Communist Party Congress will certainly be an example also for the Czechoslovak people and their Communist Party, which, at the 13th Congress, will set itself the task of ensuring, in all respects, the development of socialist society.(Emphasis Supplied.) (15)

One cannot expect any change of policy toward West Germany; this was made clear by the reply of the Czechoslovak government to the Bonn peace initiative.(16) West Germany will probably be accused of neo-revanchism and seeking to obtain nuclear weapons for her own disposal. The CSSR will demand that the federal government declare the Munich agreement void as of the time of signature and demand that the existence of two sovereign Germanies be recognized. The only hope that the Czechoslovak note to Bonn contains is represented by the omission of any demand for the recognition of West Berlin as an independent entity. Formerly, this condition was included in any policy statement coming from the CSSR, but it has not been evident for the last few months. This would indicate that Prague maintains a small degree of flexibility for the negotiation of a trade agreement.

The CSSR follows the Soviet line on the convention of a conference on Communist unity "at an appropriate time." Czechoslovakia has reiterated its stand in favor of the strengthening of the mechanisms of the Warsaw Pact, for the unification of the strategic and tactical objectives of the armed strength of the Warsaw Pact nations, and for greater centralization of military decisions.

The 13th Congress is not expected to contribute anything new to the foreign policy of the CSSR. The current interest in the Warsaw Pact and Communist relations in general, prompted by Rumania's reluctance to ally itself to Moscow's foreign policy objectives, may indeed evoke a masked criticism of the Rumanians by the Czechoslovak Communist leadership. It will almost certainly produce no new initiative from Prague. In foreign affairs, therefore,

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(14) "On the Prospects for the Development of Our Socialist Society," Rude Pravo, 14 August 1962. This document set out the guidelines for the discussions for the 12th Party Congress.

(15) Ceteka, 7 May 1966.

(16) Ceteka, 7 May 1966.

