WESTERN CPs CONDEMN INVASION, HAIL PRAGUE SPRING
By Kevin Devlin

Summary: The Major West European communist parties have marked the 10th anniversary of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by reaffirming their original condemnation of the military intervention, by deploiring the repressive "normalization" which followed, and by proclaiming their support for the ideals of the Prague Spring. Statements by British, French, Italian, and Spanish CP spokesmen repeatedly use one eloquent metaphor: Czechoslovakia is still an "open wound" in the international communist body. Meanwhile, the Italian CP daily reports that five exiled protagonists of the Dubcek regime's "new course" have sent an anniversary appeal to the Belgian, Dutch, French, Greek (Interior), Italian, Spanish, and Swedish communist parties, as well as to "numerous" West European socialist parties.

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Eurocommunist parties have marked the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armed forces of the Soviet Union and four other Warsaw Pact states with statements and articles reiterating their condemnation of the intervention, refuting the arguments advanced to justify it, and proclaiming their support for the Prague Spring and its ideals of "socialist democratization." These anniversary statements also call for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Czechoslovakia and the restoration of full state sovereignty and party autonomy.

The Italian Communist Party has publicized an appeal, also calling for withdrawal of Soviet troops and an end to repression of dissent in Czechoslovakia, which leading protagonists of the Prague Spring, now in exile, have sent to the Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, Belgian, Swedish, and Greek (Interior) communist parties, as well as to "numerous" West European socialist parties.

The Italian CP had heralded its renewed condemnation of the invasion with a three-day Gramsci Institute Seminar on the heritage of the Prague Spring. This included, as l'Unità (10 July 1978) put it, "an equally firm condemnation, without appeal, of the repression and the aberrant practices to which the restoration /sic/ has led." As the anniversary approached, Gian Carlo Pajetta of the party Directorate discussed it in a television interview reported in l'Unità of August 18. He described the armed intervention as "a wound which has not healed, which is still open ... because the rift between Communists is profound. ... It is not only a question of polemics and residual bitterness, but also of administrative measures, which means that the Czechoslovak situation does not correspond, at least in our opinion, to what the situation of a socialist country should be." This, he added, explained the PCI's "largely negative" judgment of developments in Czechoslovakia and other countries and also outlined "our cold and even polemical relations with the Czechoslovak CP."

The same issue of l'Unità carried two other articles dealing with Czechoslovakia: one, a report on articles critical of Western communist comment on Czechoslovakia by CPC's CC Secretary Jan Fojtik in Pravda and by Soviet commentator I. Medvedev in the Novosti service; and the other, the above-mentioned report on the appeal which Czechoslovak exile leaders sent to West European Communist and Socialist parties. There was also an editorial commentary on all three items. Rejecting the attempts of Fojtik and Medvedev to justify the military intervention, the editorial said:

We further think that it is neither possible nor acceptable to present as "normal" the situation in Czechoslovakia today -- one which conflicts with our idea of 'normality' in the relations between states and in the situation of a country.

The appeal to the Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, Belgian, British, Swedish, and Greek (Interior) CPs as well as to "numerous"
West European socialist parties was signed, l'Unità reported, by Eduard Goldstuecker, Zdenek Hajzlar, Zdenek Milynar, Jiri Pelikan, and Ota Sik. After protesting against the repressive aspects of a "normalization" which "has not solved any of the country's problems," the appeal said that the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the CSSR would be in conformity with the conclusions of the Helsinki conference on European co-operation, which exclude the use of force and other means of pressure against any European state, whatever pretext may be advanced to justify such intervention. This would furthermore contribute to improving the political atmosphere in Czechoslovakia and within the international workers' movement.

The "open wound" metaphor used both by Pajetta and by the exiled signatories of this appeal was used again by the PCI's leading journalist Giuseppe Boffa in an anniversary commentary, (1) in which he declared that during the past decade his party's condemnation of the intervention and of the repressive normalization which followed had remained unchanged. The "convergence of judgments" among West European CPs in their reaction to the invasion, he said, had been a very important element in the development of what are now called Eurocommunist ideas. Italian Communists and others have been led to stress that the link between socialism and democracy is not merely indispensable for their own countries but also has "a universal and permanent value."

Repression Denounced

One of the strongest anniversary statements came from the British CP. Its Political Committee rejected the argument that the intervention was necessary to suppress counterrevolution: the fact was that "this attempt by the Czechoslovak working people to rid their socialist society of its deformations was halted by the military intervention and by the political repression that followed in its wake." The statement denounced in particular the persecution of signatories of Charter 77 and other dissidents:

Restrictions on democratic activity and expression in Czechoslovakia should cease, and there should be an end to the persecution of those who take a different view to that of the Czechoslovak authorities on how democracy and socialism should be developed.

In the interests of socialism in Czechoslovakia it is essential that these antidemocratic practices be ended, and that, in conditions of full independence and sovereignty, the Czechoslovak people are once again able to pursue their own policy for expanding socialist democracy, and so give a new and powerful impetus to socialist construction.

The French CP marked the anniversary with an article (2) in which Raymond Guyot, a member of the Politburo at the time of the invasion, declared:

Ten years have passed, and the open wound in the side of the Soviet Union and the four other socialist countries, as in the heart of the Czechoslovak people -- this open wound in the international communist and workers' movement is still gaping. Until now, nothing has been done to heal it. And yet, for the sake of our ideal and for the Soviet Union itself, this must be done.

What should be done today after ten years? Proclaim an amnesty for all Czechoslovak citizens who are victims of these tragic events, and restore to them their rights, so that they may take their full part in the building of that socialists Czechoslovakia to which they proclaim their attachment.

The Spanish CP has marked the anniversary with a full-page commentary in the current issue of Mundo Obrero by Federico Melchor of the Executive Committee. He, too, used the inevitable metaphor. By invading Czechoslovakia the Soviets had opened wounds in the international communist movement which have grown deeper over the last 10 years. "The cause of socialism and its image, the practice of international solidarity, or relations between socialist countries and communist parties, received a serious blow with dramatic far-reaching consequences," Melchor said. (3)

A contrast to these anniversary comments was provided by the Austrian CP daily Volksstimme, with an article (4) justifying the invasion as necessary to avert a counterrevolution led by "right-opportunist forces" within the party who had gained ascendancy and were leading a "revisionist front." The article failed to mention that in August 1968 the Austrian CP had strongly condemned the Warsaw Pact intervention -- and that, after 10 years, it is the only West European communist party to have reversed its judgment on the invasion. An ignoble distinction, one might think.

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(2) R. Guyot, "Il y a Dix Années...", l'Humanité, 18 August 1978.

(3) UPI dispatch from Madrid, 18 August 1978.