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ITALIAN CP PUBLISHES HAJEK BOOK ON PRAGUE SPRING

By Kevin Devlin

Summary: The Italian CP's own publishing house has put out an Italian edition of a book on the Prague Spring by Jiri Hajek, former Czechoslovak Foreign Minister and also a former spokesman for Charter 77. The party daily, l'Unità, has drawn attention to this by carrying an enthusiastic review of the book. The author of the review, Ennio Polito, firmly restates his party's condemnation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and its continuing commitment to the ideals of the Prague Spring.

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The already glacial state of relations between the Italian and Czechoslovak Communist Parties will not be improved by the fact that the PCI's own publishing house, Editori Riuniti, has published an Italian version of the book Prague 1968 by Jiri Hajek, Czechoslovak Foreign Minister during the Prague Spring and former Charter 77 spokesman. From the viewpoint of the Husak leadership this is bad enough, but the PCI has compounded the offense by publishing in its party daily a strongly worded review (1) of the book by Ennio Polito.

Polito opens his article with a historical note couched in partisan terms, recalling that during those turbulent days of August 1968, "while troops of the USSR and four other Warsaw Pact countries were taking over Prague and the top leaders of the Czechoslovak 'new course,'" Hajek was among a small group of regime spokesmen who escaped the fate of their colleagues because they happened to be on vacation in Yugoslavia. His subsequent activities "in support of the truth and of Czechoslovak sovereignty" through participation in the UN Security Council debate and his appeals to fraternal parties and international public opinion are described as a "piece of the mosaic" which helps to bring out the contradictions of an operation aimed at liquidating (in Hajek's words) "a grandiose effort . . . [to achieve] the democratization of the country's political system."

In his book, writes Polito, Hajek recalls those dramatic developments "with the rigor of the scholar and at the same time with the passion of the communist militant, while avoiding any digression into the merely personal." And the reviewer adds a provocative thought of his own: Hajek's situation ten years ago is now being "repeated in reverse." He suggests:

Then, he was at liberty in involuntary exile; now he is an exile in his own fatherland -- in both cases faithful to his country and to a profoundly mature and "felt" vision of socialism, determined to continue his struggle with courage and intelligence, knowing that what is at stake does not allow for emotional or sensationalist reactions.

Discussing Hajek's "lucid" analysis of the Prague Spring, Polito cites his statement that it involved an "experiment in economic and political changes, within the continuity of foreign policy," adding "within an advanced industrial society in which the consensual commitment to socialist transformation had been solidly affirmed . . . never had the margins of risk connected with such a transformation been so reduced, and never had the risk of not changing appeared so clear."

(1) Ennio Polito, "La Notizia Che Venne da Praga," l'Unità, 21 September 1978.

Then what went wrong? Polito's judgment (and that of his party) is bluntly uncompromising:

The "new course," whatever its limitations, is an integrating part of the experience of the international revolutionary experience. (2) Its repression was an aberrant option [scelta], carried out without any sort of "emergency situation," and heavy with disastrous consequences. What is more, it was an option which did not check the crisis of the "model"; if anything, it has, paradoxically, accelerated it.

Against Reform

Why was the fateful decision to invade taken by the Soviet leaders? The article notes Hajek's authoritative judgment that, while the motivations behind the decision are not known and may never be known, "it would be vain to seek them in a presumed re-orientation of Czechoslovak foreign policy in a pro-Western direction." For Polito himself, "there is no doubt that what aroused the suspicions and misunderstandings, manifested in varying degrees by the leaders of the five countries, was the very existence of a proposal for reform."

Armed resistance was never considered, for reasons listed by Polito, and the agreement which the Czechoslovak leaders had to sign in Moscow foreshadowed normalization.

The last line of defense, and even of development, of the experiment was to be the initiative of the base which was to unfold for another seven months, defying all pressures and deferring for a time the restoration of the "model." With this trial of strength we come, perhaps, to the most significant element of the "lesson" of 1968.

There is, however, also a lesson to be drawn on the international level, he adds; and Hajek does so in two ways, "substantially in accordance with the evaluations and orientations of the communists and leftists of Western Europe":

On the one hand, he points to the limitations and negative aspects of a vision of détente which places the emphasis on preserving the territorial status quo, denying the perspective of a free, democratic, and progressive development within both alliance systems. . . . and he stresses the innovative value which the Helsinki principles take on from this viewpoint. On the other hand, he is happy to note the progress that the idea of "unity in diversity" has made, since Prague, in the international communist movement. On

- (2) Note the present tense: since August 1968 the PCI has emphasized the enduring relevance of the Prague Spring and described the invasion as an "open wound" in the international communist movement.

the further strengthening of this idea and on what is still alive among the Czechoslovaks of their extraordinary experience depend, in fact, the possibilities and hopes for the future.

Consistent Stand

The publication of Hajek's book by Riuniti and the warm review carried by l'Unità demonstrate the consistent and "principled" concern with Czechoslovakia which the PCI has maintained over the past decade and has expressed in countless commentaries, statements, and official communiqués. This is, in fact, the second year in succession that it has chosen to do so by publishing a book: in 1977 another Italian Communist publisher, De Donato of Bari, brought out the book, "Prague: an Open Question", by the Czechoslovak dissident Zdenek Mlynar, with a vigorous preface by PCI Central Committee member Lucio Lombardo Radice. (3) (One might, perhaps, note in passing a certain divergence between the French and Italian CPs in this respect: the French edition of Hajek's book, Dix Ans Après, was issued by a noncommunist publisher, Seuil, and the review article (4) in the party daily was a good deal less enthusiastic than the one in l'Unità.)

One month ago the PCI monthly Rinascita marked the 10th anniversary of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by publishing a 4-page dialogue (5) on the subject between Giuseppe Boffa and Gian Carlo Pajetta. From the two participants we may take brief sentences which express and exemplify the PCI's continuing support for the ideals and ideas of the Prague Spring, and at the same time help to explain why it has published Hajek's book:

Boffa: When we condemned the intervention in the energetic terms which all recall . . . we knew that we were not making a simple, one-time protest, but that we were . . . making a precise and profound political choice, and one involving great commitment.

Pajetta: When, in these discussions, we talk about the affirmation of principles that we cannot give up, when we talk about Eurocommunism, we mean a process of which the Czechoslovak experience also undoubtedly forms a part.

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- (3) The book gained further interparty weight from the fact that it consisted of the text of a long memorandum that Mlynar, a former secretary of the CPCS, had sent to the leadership of European communist parties in early 1975, within the framework of preparations for the pan-European conference.
- (4) See Max Leon, "A Mi-chemin de l'Histoire," l'Humanité, 14 February 1978.
- (5) See "Il '68 Cecoslovacco e il Socialismo," Rinascita, 25 August 1978.