



COMMUNIST AREA

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GDR/6

● GDR: Foreign relations
Information media

11 March 1969

EAST GERMANY'S SILENCE ON THE
CZECHOSLOVAK TRADE UNION CONGRESS

Summary: The press in East Germany accorded the Czechoslovak trade union congress the same sparse coverage that it gave the Italian Party Congress. The question is raised whether the Yugoslav Party Congress will be treated in the same way by the SED, which seems to be avoiding press coverage of controversial communist events.

In line with its policy of covering any controversial event in parties which have "genuine inner-party democracy," East Germany has also reported on the recent Czechoslovak trade union congress. For months now, the GDR has avoided open polemics with Czechoslovakia, with Rumania and even with Yugoslavia, presumably preferring to pass over in silence all those subjects for which the East German propagandists seem unable to find sufficiently convincing arguments. It was primarily for this reason that the East German population was kept in nearly total ignorance of the main speeches made during the Italian Party Congress, at least as far as official regime sources were concerned.*

* See RFE Research report "East German Coverage of the PCI Congress," 19 February 1969 by Dorothy Miller.

On the Czechoslovak trade union congress, which drew to a close on 7 March, the main SED Party organ Neues Deutschland managed to feature two short dispatches, each of about fifteen lines, printed on the foreign news page of the paper. The first item, on 5 March, stated that the congress had opened and that the Chairman of the Central Council of Czechoslovak trade unions, Karel Polacek, "discussed the tasks of the trade unions"; the second item mentioned on 9 March that the congress was finished, that Karel Polacek was re-elected to his previous position and that several speakers of the Party and government had appealed to the congress to support their efforts "at consolidating socialism and at helping to overcome the economic difficulties of the country." As on previous occasions, there was no reflection of any of the heated discussions, of the pledges of national independence and calls for freedom of the press, etc.

With the convocation of the Yugoslav Party Congress, it is legitimate to raise the question whether East Germany, after having boycotted the meeting itself (as have the Soviets and the other East European countries -- with the notable exception of Rumania), will also give the Congress the same bland news coverage it accorded the Italian and the Czechoslovak trade union congresses. It would almost appear that this is the way of least resistance for the sensitive and fearful East Germany Party.

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