

## RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

CZECHOSLOVAKIA/31

17 August 1977

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#### 1. High Honors for Vasil Bilak

In today's Czechoslovakia, 50th and 60th birthdays are the customary occasions for honoring deserving individuals. But seldom has a Czechoslovak politician or statesman been honored in such an ostentatious manner as was party Presidium member and CC Secretary Vasil Bilak on his 60th birthday, August 11. On the eve of this memorable day, he was awarded no fewer than three highest orders. From the Soviet Union he received the Order of Lenin, which makes him the third living Czechoslovak bearer of this highest Soviet award (the other two are former President Ludvik Svoboda, who was awarded the Lenin Order in 1943 and 1965, and party Secretary-General and President Gustav Husak, who was so decorated in 1969 and 1973). Czechoslovakia honored Bilak with two of its highest awards: the honorary title of Hero of Socialist Labor, with the right to wear the Golden Star of a Hero of Socialist Labor, and with the Klement Gottwald Order for the Building of the Socialist Fatherland. The ceremony at the Prague-Hradcany Castle was attended by all members and candidates of the party Presidium, the chairman of the party Control and Auditing Commission, and by several members of the party Secretariat.

No less impressive than this array of the most illustrious party dignitaries was the accompanying homage. In addition to a detailed life history, portraying Bilak in the most flattering terms as the model of a consistent Marxist-Leninist and internationalist, the Czechoslovak radio and television stations also broadcast large excerpts from Husak's laudation and Bilak's reply. Personal congratulations from Leonid Brezhnev and other Soviet party dignitaries were conveyed to Bilak by the Soviet ambassador in Prague on August 11.

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Husak referred particularly to the "last eight to nine years" (i.e., the postinvasion period), during which Bilak had "substantially contributed" toward strengthening Czechoslovakia's position both internally and internationally. He also thanked Bilak for his initiative and the creative and constructive attitude he had displayed while working in the supreme party and state bodies. Brezhnev's message contained good wishes for Bilak's "further successes" in strengthening socialism in Czechoslovakia and "fraternal friendship" between the CPCS and the CPSU, in deepening the unity among socialist states, and the consolidation of the communist and workers' movement. This can only be interpreted as evidence that Moscow fully sanctions the political line pursued by Bilak.

Vasil Bilak's reply to Husak's congratulations was characterized by a tone of modesty, with which he endeavored to minimize his personal achievements. His whole life and career, he asserted, had been forged by his mother, who taught him to love his country; by school, which gave him the rudiments of knowledge; his co-workers in Hradec Kralove, Bohemia, who taught him class solidarity (Bilak had learned the tailor's trade there); the Bratislava Communists and antifascists; the Soviet partisans (during the Slovak Uprising in August 1944, in which Bilak had taken an active part); the party organization; and by Husak personally. He himself, as he modestly added, had done "nothing but endeavor to do conscientious and honest work."

One can well imagine that it was not easy for Husak to direct such lavish praise at Bilak. The very beginnings of their political collaboration, during the 1968 reform period, did not start under good auspices, as Husak fought for political power and Bilak was keen on retaining it. Right after the August 1968 invasion, one of Husak's first political acts, when he replaced Bilak as the First Secretary of the Slovak CP, was to strip him of all political functions in Slovakia and virtually to chase him from that region. But the apparatchik Bilak, more experienced in the handling of party machinery than Husak was, and with well-established feelers to Moscow, took refuge in the Prague party Presidium, from where he proceeded, with Soviet backing, to build up his position and broaden his influence. The extent to which he succeeded is apparent from the fact that, in addition to his post in the party Presidium, he is now the secretary responsible for international relations and chairman of the CC Ideological Commission, i.e., the party's chief ideologist and, for all practical purposes, the second most powerful man in the country.

Both internally and internationally, Bilak has built up and maintained his strong position from a platform of ideological rigidity and unflinching pro-Soviet loyalty. It is with good reason that his now published official biography speaks of a "continuity" in his career. He was always known as a hard-core pro-Soviet fundamentalist, and is widely believed to have belonged to those few selected Czechoslovaks who knew of the August 1968 invasion in advance. Since that event, he has successfully blocked all attempts to accord a more



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lenient and rational treatment to the victims of the postinvasion party purge, and has displayed unbending orthodoxy in other instances as well. Internationally, he has become perhaps the socialist community's most vociferous proponent of "real socialism," proletarian internationalism, and its higher form, socialist internationalism. Consequently he is also one of the most resolute opponents of any form of communism different from the Soviet model, and most recently has emerged as the most vocal critic in the orthodox campaign against Eurocommunism.

Whatever reservations Husak and some other members of the top party leadership may have against Bilak, they not only have to tolerate him but, as the recent shower of orders and eulogies shows, recognize him as an "outstanding Czechoslovak politician and statesman, and a recognized functionary of the international workers' movement" (quoted from Bilak's official biography published on his 60th birthday; see, e.g., Zivot Strany No.16, 1 August 1977; Radio Prague, 10 August 1977). On his 60th birthday, Bilak has also optically been confirmed as one of the leaders in Czechoslovakia, hierarchically second only to Gustav Husak -- a remarkable feat, indeed.

## 2. The Situation of Lower Clergy

a. The Oppression of the Catholic Students of Divinity and the Monastic Orders. Since beginning the preparatory work for the Belgrade conference and the publication of the document on religion, supplementary to Charter 77, the regime has been making attempts to alter, at least optically, its policy toward the Churches, especially the Catholic Church. Bishop Frantisek Tomasek, for example, upon being made a cardinal, received a personal letter from President Gustav Husak conveying the head of state's "sincere congratulations on appointment to this high office" (Radio Hvezda, 14 July 1977; the full text of the letter was published in the Prague and Bratislava editions of Katolicke Noviny, 24 July 1977). After Cardinal Tomasek's return to Prague, an official reception was held in his honor at the archbishop's palace. Along with Church dignitaries and representatives of the proregime organization Pacem in Terris, it was attended by the director of the government Presidium's Secretariat for Church Affairs, Karel Hruza, by representatives of the Ministry of Culture, which is in charge of Church Affairs, headed by Frantisek Jelinek, by Zdenek Bartunek of the Prague National Committee, and by several members of that committee. The Office of the President of the Republic was represented by Karel Mensik (Katolicke Noviny, 17 July 1977, and Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 6-7 August 1977).

Both these steps are certainly quite unusual and are reminiscent of the time, shortly after the 1948 communist coup, when President Klement Gottwald attended the High Mass celebrated on his election to the office of President of the Republic. These official regime acts may similarly be meant for propaganda purposes and foreign consumption,

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rather than for domestic purposes. In any case, they have had little practical effect on the regime's hard Church policy. After a few months of respite, atheistic propaganda is again running in high gear, especially in the schools, but also in the communication media and at the people's universities, which form part of the Socialist Academy and take care of adult education.

The regime is being especially rigorous toward the lower clergy and members of the religious orders who are active in Church administration. One good example is the case of the Salesian priest Stefan Javorsky, sentenced in 1976 by the Roznava District Court to 18 months in prison on charges of working among the intelligentsia and young people, and of having recommended listening to Radio Vatican. Javorsky appealed the verdict, but the Kosice Regional Court increased the sentence to two years (Pravda, Bratislava, 26 January 1977). Javorsky's imprisonment is not an isolated case. Apart from prison sentences and the early retiring of clergymen, the regime is also attempting to reduce the number of clergymen by strictly applying the numerus clausus at theological seminaries. Special efforts are now being made to discourage applicants for admission to these seminaries, and restrictive measures taken against students and graduates, both in the case of Catholics and Protestants. The only exception is the Orthodox Church, which is totally under the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church and has only a negligible number of students. In 1975-1976, there were only four new students admitted (Statisticka Rocenka CSSR 1976, Prague 1976, p. 514).

The regime's hard-line attitude toward applicants and students of theological seminaries has been documented by information received and distributed by the Roman information center Pro Fratribus (KNA agency, 16 May 1977).. This documentation was published in Czechoslovakia as samizdat. According to this information, officers of the political police (StB) are present at applicants' interviews and ask them questions regarding their attitude to the communist party, to the socialist state order, and to the proregime clerical organization Pacem in Terris. The documents attest that divinity students are under the supervision of the political police during the whole of their time at the seminaries. They are often subject to interrogation and are forced to perform certain "duties." If they refuse, they risk expulsion from the seminary. The premises are periodically searched by the police looking for tapes, tape recorders, and transistor radios. The students are prohibited from listening to Radio Vatican.

According to Pro Fratribus, the students' extramural activities and contacts are also closely watched. They are not permitted to be in touch with those clergymen who have been officially forbidden to perform their clerical duties or with professors expelled from the theological seminaries. Prior to their ordination, divinity students are advised to follow the directives of the state secretaries for Church affairs in performing their work as priests. It is now



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prohibited to show films and lend out religious literature as part of religious instruction.

A great deal of comment was caused in recent months in Church circles in the West by the regime's uncompromising attitude to monks and nuns. In connection with the publication of Charter 77's Document No.9 on religion, the Swiss Catholic press agency (KIPA) issued a memorandum in which the "superiors of monastic orders and congregations in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic protested against the destruction of monastic life, a move that runs counter to the agreements on human rights signed by Czechoslovakia in Helsinki" (Novy Zivot, Rome, Nos.7-8, July 1977). It is pointed out in the memorandum that this destruction started back in 1950, when members of religious orders were deported to concentration camps. Ever since that time, with the exception of the short respite during Dubcek's reform in 1968-1969, they have not been permitted to live in monasteries and have been subjected to discriminatory orders and measures. While the Office of the Prosecutor-General in Prague explicitly confirmed on 29 November 1968 that the orders have the right to exist, the Czech Ministry of Culture declared in its decree of 14 June 1971 that the religious orders and congregations have no legal justification for their existence (Novy Zivot Nos.7-8, July 1977). The superiors point out that in other socialist countries the question of the monastic orders has been solved in a more humane and just manner. They emphasize that they are not seeking the return of confiscated property and libraries, that the purpose of their memorandum is not recrimination, but anxiety for the present and the future so far as the right to live a monastic life is concerned. The memorandum on the oppression of the religious orders in the CSSR contains 10 points and refers to the Helsinki Final Act and to the Czechoslovak Constitution. (The text of the memorandum was published in Novy Zivot Nos.7 and 8, July 1977.)

The question of the oppression of the religious orders in Czechoslovakia was one of the subjects discussed at the congress of German superiors (Vereinigung Deutscher Ordensobern) in Wuerzburg, 20 through 22 June 1977. The congress, attended by 75 superiors, passed a resolution sent to the Czechoslovak ambassador in West Germany, to Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans-Dietrich Genscher, UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, and the Vatican's sacred congregation concerned with the monastic orders. This resolution contains the memorandum of the Czechoslovak superiors. The resolution emphasizes that it is not only the monastic orders as a whole, but also their individual members who are more than ever being subjected to oppression by the state and have real reason to fear the possibility that their orders will be dissolved. The members of the orders are prohibited from forming any kind of association and are barred from admission to the novitiate. It has been made virtually impossible for nuns to continue their education. Their applications for admission to higher education are not accepted. They are being systematically expelled from their posts in various social

institutions, in spite of the fact that there is an acute shortage of qualified workers, especially in the health sector. The purpose of this policy is to isolate the nuns as far as possible from the life of the country. The members of the men's orders are not allowed, unlike priests, to acquire the degree of Doctor of Divinity upon completing study at theological seminaries (Muenchener Katholische Kirchenzeitung No.31, 31 July 1977).

b. The Position of the Protestant Church of Czech Brethren.

In addition to the memorandum of Catholic superiors, the clergy of the Protestant Church of Czech Brethren have also produced a comprehensive document, which was submitted to members of the Czechoslovak National Assembly (parliament). The document informs the deputies about the oppression of members of this Protestant Church.

The Protestant Church of Czech Brethren has the largest membership of all Protestant Churches in Bohemia and Moravia, and is the second largest Protestant Church in Czechoslovakia, with 272 congregations and over 240,000 members.

The document is rather general in character and quite comprehensive. The introduction points out that, under present circumstances, atheism is considered part of the state's monopoly over ideology and is enforced by strict administrative methods. Since 1969, the administration has rejected any kind of discussion of the subject and has made use of administrative measures to pursue its aims, especially in the educational and cultural sectors. Fear of impairing one's material well-being has also been exploited.

The document enumerates the main areas of oppression. They are: restrictions on the activities of religious congregations and possibilities of publication; the restrictions imposed on ecumenical work, especially propagated by the Czech Brethren; and repeal of permission granted to priests to carry out their priestly duties. Since 1971, 18 Czech Brethren preachers have been barred from executing their priestly duties and 20 divinity students have been expelled from the theological seminary for political reasons. As is the case with the seminaries of the other Churches, the new students are under the strict supervision of the StB and the Church secretaries.

The document lists the names of priests whose state permits have been withdrawn in recent months, as well as the names of students expelled from the seminaries, or who, upon graduation, were not permitted to engage in their calling. The withdrawal of state permission, according to the document, has no legal basis. The administration motivates it by a 1949 law, but that law states that once such permits are granted, they cannot be withdrawn. The priests whose permits have been withdrawn are not allowed either to preach or to have articles published in the Church press. The document draws further attention



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to the fact that the priests have the lowest salaries among all groups of the country's labor force. Their salaries have not been adjusted in the past 20 years.

Special attention is devoted in the document to the religious instruction of children. In 1969-1970, over 10,700 children were enrolled for religious instruction in the Protestant Church of Czech Brethren. By 1976, this number had dropped to 576 in Bohemia and Moravia. Not a single child was enrolled in Prague. The document also refers to the administrative measures taken against parents who enroll their children for religious instruction, and cites examples of the methods used by the political police against believers (Deutsche Zeitung/Christ und Welt, 5 August 1977).

The oppression of believers and the lower clergy persists, notwithstanding all the official declarations about the good relationships existing between the state and the Churches. Recently, it has been the lower clergy, with their direct contacts with believers, who have been increasingly subjected to pressure. At the higher level, the authorities profess a certain amount of willingness to co-operate. One example of this was the interview of editor Eva Pohankova with Pavel Cerny, head of the Department for Church Affairs at the Czech Ministry of Culture. Cerny made an effort to prove that believers have complete religious freedom and that the state is, in fact, importing religious literature from abroad (Radio Prague, 8 August and 10 August 1977 in its foreign service). At the same time, Czechoslovak communication media have on several occasions reported cases of confiscation of religious literature by customs officials (e.g., Obrana Lidu, 12 March 1977).

### 3. Reaction to the Belgrade Compromise

The Belgrade deliberations concerning preparations for the main autumn meeting of representatives of the 35 states that signed the Helsinki Final Act were the subject of frequent reports and commentaries in the Czechoslovak mass media. The first report to speak about the "unofficial" conclusion of the Belgrade preparatory meeting was that of Radio Hvezda (3 August 1977). It noted that the stimulus which led to the solution of the last problem was the declaration of the head of the Soviet delegation, who spoke in favor of the Spanish compromise proposal. This proposal, Radio Hvezda added, was accepted by all delegations after a short discussion.

The head of the Czechoslovak delegation in Belgrade, Ambassador Richard Dvorak, commented on the preparatory meeting on 5 August 1977. He told Ceteka's correspondent that the deliberations had been very complex and had an explicitly political character so far as all the principal questions of the agenda were concerned. Dvorak pointed out that the Czechoslovak delegation -- in close co-operation

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with those of the other countries of the socialist community -- actively participated in all deliberations, and that some of its proposals were also reflected in the document adopted at the conclusion of the preparatory meeting. The adopted document is to be regarded as a success. The preparatory meeting -- according to Dvorak -- arrived at a compromise, after strenuous negotiations on particular points and disputed questions. The head of the Czechoslovak delegation added, however, that that was usual in international talks.

A commentary by Jan Hrobar, Rude Pravo correspondent in Belgrade, noted that the difficulties which emerged during the preparatory discussions in Belgrade resulted from different opinions and aims. The socialist countries had consistently asserted that the main meeting can fulfill its mission only if the participants conduct there a dialogue in a constructive spirit and with the clear aim further to confirm the continuation of the positive development since Helsinki. The principal aim should be to contribute to the process of détente and to strengthen security and co-operation on the European continent.

Hrobar further criticized Western countries, which allegedly were represented above all by the United States and its NATO allies. According to him, they tried to give the Belgrade meeting a character that would be in harmony only with their own one-sided interpretation of the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. They wanted the discussion to be unlimited and proposed creating various commissions which would endlessly deal with those questions which would fit in their propaganda script. This, naturally, had nothing to do with the constructive effort, and was at variance with the obligations resulting from the Helsinki document. The author of the commentary added that the Western countries finally had to withdraw their almost absurd demands, and had accepted compromises without which no progress is possible (Rude Pravo, 6 August 1977).

On the same day a commentary in the Slovak CP daily Pravda criticized "some Western countries, above all the United States" who would wish to place "humanitarian questions" at the top of the agenda. The author noted that such questions first depended on the solution of political problems, and added that the socialist countries did not fear discussion on any of the items of the Helsinki Final Act. They can deal with any question but, the commentator pointed out, unnecessary quarrels in Belgrade could harm the process launched in Helsinki. The socialist countries wish for a favorable political climate during the forthcoming Belgrade meeting. The author of the commentary did not, however, mention the compromise solution concerning the agenda and the time schedule of the meeting.

The full text of the document accepted by the preparatory meeting in Belgrade was published by Rude Pravo and Pravda on 8 August 1977. A short report by Ceteka only noted that on Friday, 5 August 1977, the preparatory meeting was concluded after seven weeks of deliberations and that it ended with an accord among the views of delegations representing 35 states.



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On the same day a Radio Prague broadcast for Czechs and Slovaks abroad criticized the attitude of "some Atlantic states," especially the United States, and said that these countries tried to turn the recent Belgrade preparatory meeting into "a platform of accusation" against the socialist states. It further noted that these Western countries had attempted to push through an agenda for the follow-up conference of a nature that would have allowed discussion of the individual provisions of the Helsinki Final Act "out of context," as it suits these circles, and which would be detrimental to the process of détente.

The broadcast pointed out that realism nevertheless won the day in Belgrade. No small credit for this went to the socialist countries, since the limitation of the time framework for the conference meant that it was organizationally necessary to prevent the conference turning into an endless negotiating marathon without efficiency or purposefulness. The broadcast did, however, add that even the most precise timetable cannot guarantee that the "train will actually arrive at the terminal without delay." In the case of the Belgrade conference, this will depend above all on the morale and realism of all partners concerned. As far as the socialist countries are concerned, they have already shown sufficient honest effort and good will during the course of the preparatory meeting.

The broadcast further stressed that the CPCS daily Rude Pravo had published the full text of the document issued by the preparatory meeting. Thus, the citizens of Czechoslovakia have the possibility of learning "from A to Z" what the representatives of the 35 countries agreed upon in Belgrade.

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