

CS CZECHOSLOVAK STAND AT BUDAPEST TRADE UNION MEETING

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(With CAA Paper of September 26, "WFTU Arena for Pro-Czechoslovak Struggle - F-150)

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The following commentary was issued by the Central Research Unit of the BBC on September 16:

The Communist Trade Unions of many countries are still debating the rights and wrongs of what happened in Czechoslovakia. Budapest was the scene of such debates, behind closed doors on September 14 and 15. Trade Union leaders from Czechoslovakia and the five countries which invaded Czechoslovakia met to try to reach an agreement on some form of words to lay before the World Federation of Trade Unions, which has its headquarters in Prague. Even before the publication of the communique on September 16, enough reports had come out of Prague to show that the two day meeting in Budapest found it difficult to reach agreement -- all the more so as the later part of the discussions on the 15th was also attended by the Italian Chairman of the World Federation of Trade Unions, Renato Bitossi, and the French Assistant Secretary General, Pierre Gensous.

The Chairman of the Central Council of Czechoslovak Trade Union, Karel Polacek, proposed that the best course of action for the Budapest meeting would be to avoid discussing what had happened on 21st August (when the five armies marched in Czechoslovakia). Instead, said the Czechoslovak Trade Union delegation, the meeting should state its approval of the Moscow agreement between President Svoboda, Party Secretary Dubcek and the Soviet leaders, as the realistic basis for getting the troops of the five armies to march out again.

But this Czechoslovak proposal was nowhere near enough for some of the other delegations at the Budapest meeting who wanted to issue a document firmly asserting that the entry of the five fraternal armies into Czechoslovakia had been good, and undertaken at the urgent request of the always unnamed "leading figures" of the Communist Party and State of Czechoslovakia. Some at least of the delegations (particularly the East Germans) are reported to have demanded that the Budapest meeting should criticize the Secretariat of the World Federation of Trade Unions for having published a condemnation of the march into Czechoslovakia without first getting the statement approved by all the members of the organization.

From the text of the communique of the Budapest meeting, it can be seen that the Czechoslovak delegation succeeded

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in getting its standpoint accepted. The communique expressed its support for the new course of the Czechoslovak Party, as decided in January and May of this year. It called on the Czechs and Slovaks to reject any attempt by "nationalist or anti-Communist voices" to make use of the new situation to make "an open or camouflaged attack on socialism." In this way, by sticking to the new course charted by Dubcek in January and May, and by rejecting any anti-socialist deviations from that course, the communique looked forward to "an accelerated normalization of the situation in Czechoslovakia, and thus to a gradual withdrawal of the allied troops stationed temporarily on the territory of Czechoslovakia.

And that is all. Not a word of criticism for Louis Saillant and the Secretariat of the World Federation of Trade Unions for their condemnation of the armed intervention. And not a word in justification of the armed intervention.

This is a remarkable, hopeful and realistic climb-down from the attitude of some of the participants at the beginning of the Budapest conference -- to judge, for example, from two reports in the East German paper Neues Deutschland of 14th and 15th September. On the 14th the East German paper published a listener's question about the attitude of the World Federation of Trade Unions to "the events of twenty-first August"; and the paper replied with a heap of abuse about how wrong the Secretariat of the World Federation of Trade Unions had been, but quoted nothing that it had said. And next day, Neues Deutschland quoted with approval a statement by the Bulgarian Trade Union organization also criticizing the Secretariat of the World Federation of Trade Unions. It must have been a bitter disappointment, at least for the East Germans, that they could not get this attitude expressed in the Budapest communique.

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