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1. Seventh Congress of Czechoslovak Journalists

The Seventh Congress of the Czechoslovak Union of Journalists, which took place in Prague on June 17 and 18, was dominated by the ideologically militant speech of Vasil Bilak, CPCS Presidium member, Central Committee secretary, and chief party ideologist. The party delegation which he led at the congress included CC Secretary Jan Fojtik; Rude Pravo editor-in-chief and member of the CC secretariat Oldrich Svestka; federal Deputy Premier Matej Lucan; and Deputy Chairman of the National Front Tomas Travnicek.

Vasil Bilak, who has come to be considered in recent months as the socialist community's most outspoken critic of Eurocommunism, used the congress platform for a hitherto unsurpassed attack against this brand of communism. In his opinion, Eurocommunism is a "child without a father," a "fashionable slogan of anticommunism," and a "product of anticommunism foisted upon the West European parties."

But it was not only the term that irritated Bilak. The very content, he charged, is "treacherous," as it involves deliberate efforts to split the international communist movement according to geographical zones and various spheres, to encourage everything which breaks apart the movement and the class solidarity of workers. Eurocommunism, Bilak argued, was a "mixture of the most varied elements of the theories of petty-bourgeois reformism, national communism, people's capitalism, democratic socialism, and socialism with a human face." Proponents of these theories use them to embellish their positions and are, in turn, exploited by anti-communism against "Leninism and proletarian internationalism." The propagators of Eurocommunism, Bilak summed up, have been "wrapping up their revisionist products in nice paper, but 'rubbish remains rubbish even in the most beautiful wrappings, just as a diamond remains a diamond even in rags.'"

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This diamond, Bilak seems to think, is proletarian internationalism. He defended this concept with extreme vigor as the "foundation of the CPCS policy" and as being of "vital interest" to all strata of the Czechoslovak population. Bilak declared that the CPCS would not be detracted by foreign criticism of its policy, that it would never accept anti-Sovietism or retreat from Leninism. On the contrary, he called for a more vigorous offensive against bourgeois ideology, opportunism, revisionism, and anti-Sovietism.

It is indicative of the ideological orthodoxy of the country's mass communication media that the congress resolution specifically noted that Bilak's speech is to be considered a "binding guideline for the further activity of the union." Incidentally, the Moscow Pravda (June 19) published excerpts from Bilak's speech at the union's congress whereby it paid special attention to passages in which Bilak emphasized the need for a more intensive and wider propagation of Marxism-Leninism, and in which he characterized the term Eurocommunism as a "fashionable new slogan of anticommunism designed to disrupt the international communist movement" (Radio Hvezda and Prague, June 19). As usual, the Yugoslavs were the first to denounce Bilak's condemnation of Eurocommunism, declaring it an "unacceptable thesis of a leading party and one center of the communist and workers' movement" (Milika Sundic over Radio Zagreb, June 19). The PCI followed with a biting commentary in l'Unità (June 20) in which it sarcastically referred to Bilak as an "illustrious Marxist theoretician" and said "there is no doubt that public opinion in his country can now finally be informed in an exhaustive and correct way about the ideas and the policies of the Western communist parties, and that thereby the freedom and the civilized nature of the political debate, already notoriously so lofty in Czechoslovakia, will be further exalted."

Turning to recent political developments in Czechoslovakia, Bilak declared that attempts "in the past weeks and months" to form opposition in the country had ended in "an absolute fiasco." He praised the mass communication media, especially the main party daily Rude Pravo, for their increasing political commitment and their "militant and offensive" response to the "slandorous attacks of international anticommunism against Czechoslovakia in connection with the so-called Charter 77."

The congress took place amid continuing efforts to raise the political commitment and professional standard of the union members. Re-established as the umbrella organization of Czech and Slovak journalists five years ago at their sixth congress, the union has not yet fully recovered from the effects of the postinvasion normalization, in the course of which almost 40 per cent of its members had to leave the union. During the exchange of membership cards carried out in 1970, the Czech Journalists' Union lost 1,212 members, and its sister organization in Slovakia lost 368 members (see Novinar Nos. 3 and 5, March and May 1972).

These members have been replaced in the meantime; indeed, membership had increased from 3,759 in May 1972 to 4,790 in October

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1974 and now stands at 4,676 (Ceteka, June 16. The same source reported on June 17 that the union had 4,762 members, plus 219 candidates). But the newcomers were mostly young journalists or functionaries from other fields with little experience, and this could not but reflect upon the professional standard of Czechoslovak journalism as a whole. The age structure has profited from the shake-up. Whereas in 1967 only 8.6 per cent of the union members were under 30 years of age, their share rose to 28 per cent by October 1974 (Novinar Nos. 9 11, and 12/1967; Sesity Novinare No. 1/1975). The now reported share of 14.3 per cent is rather surprising, as it practically halves the October 1974 percentage, suggesting a considerable number of young dropouts.

The statement of the old and new chairman of the union, Zdenek Horeni, first deputy editor-in-chief of Rude Pravo, that the country's journalism was now facing "new, complicated, and challenging struggles . . . in the service of progress and socialism at home and on the international platform" confirms what had become apparent at the preceding congresses of the two provincial, Czech and Slovak, unions, namely that the stress has shifted from economy to ideology. This shift was apparently necessitated as a result of the Helsinki conference and the East Berlin communist summit which had produced, inter alia, also a human rights campaign in Czechoslovakia and gave new impetus to communist parties striving to emancipate themselves from Moscow. Consequently, the congress of the Slovak Journalists' Union (25 and 26 March 1977) and of the Czech Journalists' Union (13 and 14 May 1977) had already put ideology first. The Slovaks pledged to fight against "the machinations of international anti-communism and its agents at home" (Radio Bratislava, March 26), while the Czechs called for an "offensive against bourgeois ideology, opportunism, and a petty-bourgeois morale." They promised to "expose the reactionary substance of imperialism," to contribute toward consolidating the defense capability of the CSSR, and to implement the program of the 15th party congress (Ceteka, May 14).

In fact, the entire opening speech by Horeni emphasized the ideological aspect of journalistic work. He lashed out against "aggressive imperialist forces" that organize ideological subversion and slandering campaigns while "American imperialism, this gendarme of work reaction, poses as an international defender of human rights." He called for an increased offensiveness and effectiveness of Czechoslovak journalists. "Irrespective of their political affiliation," journalists must consider themselves "fighters for the socialist cause . . . for the ideas and goals of our communist party." As can be seen, nothing has changed in this respect since the last union congress in 1972, which had defined the status of Czechoslovak journalists as that of "political workers, a segment of the party aktif, and responsible to the CPCS" (Novinar No. 11, November 1972).

At the close of the session, the congress approved a resolution, a declaration of solidarity with journalists "struggling for progress and against imperialism, for lasting peace," a letter to the CPCS.

Central Committee, and an amendment to the union statutes. In the resolution, the union pledges to "concentrate in a more purposeful, convincing, and profound way" on the advantages of the socialist system and the socialist way of life, on a more effective struggle for the ideas of communism, against bourgeois ideologies, revisionism, and anti-Sovietism. It further pledges continuing "fraternal alliance" with the Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist community. The union declares itself in favor of a further strengthening of co-operation with "fraternal" journalistic organizations, as well as with journalists from the developing countries and national liberation movements; it wants to strengthen the "class fraternity" with "progressive" journalists in the capitalist countries, and to continue to support the activities of the International Organization of Journalists.

The amendment of the statutes probably concerns a document called "Principles of the Ethics of the Socialist Journalist," which was discussed at the congress. The document, it was said by Ceteka (June 17), stemmed from the "great responsibility of the journalist" for the printed, written, or broadcast word, for an "all-round supply" of information to the public, and for the education of the socialist man.

The congress agenda seems to have been designed to boost the morale of Czechoslovak journalists, rather than to dispense criticism. The shortcomings in journalistic work will, as in the past, be periodically deplored after the official enthusiasm has subsided and given way to routine work.

2. Bureaucracy Hampers the Flow of Information

The Slovak Ministry of Culture Regulations on the Principles of Providing Information for the Mass Communication Media and on Journalistic Work in the Sphere of Culture, which have just become available, are about as clumsy as the title suggests (see Zvesti Ministerstva Skolstva a Ministerstva Kultury Slovenskej Socialistickaj Republiky, Vol.4, 30 April 1977). In no less than 15 paragraphs, the ministry's bulletin defines the technical terms and provides instructions on how to deal with the press, radio, and television. These regulations are valid only for that ministry and for enterprises under its control, but it may be assumed that rules issued by other ministries are equally, if not even more, cumbersome. Also, they only regulate contacts with the domestic media; for foreign journalists, the regulations say, the ministry has issued "special rules."

The introduction acknowledges the "great significance" co-operation with the mass communication media has for "regular, timely, truthful, and all-round" information of the public. Hence, the ministry seems to believe that activity of such importance cannot be entrusted to journalists alone, and that appropriate rules must be laid down.

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After defining the terms "mass communication media" and "information" in the context of these regulations, the bulletin outlines the ways a piece of information may be conveyed. These may take the form of interviews, written materials or, in matters of greater importance, "press undertakings" (tlacove podujatia), by which press consultations or conferences are understood. It is these "undertakings" that run against the principle of timeliness demanded by the regulations. The ministry rules that these "undertakings" must be carried out "according to a half-year plan" which, moreover, must be approved by the Presidium of the Slovak government. In these circumstances, the element of timeliness may be reduced to anniversaries and similar predictable occasions.

Enterprises and organizations directed or supervised by the ministry are somewhat better off, insofar as their "undertakings" are not governed by the rigid rules of planning. In case an enterprise desires an "undertaking," it has simply to apply for permission to the ministry. In writing, to be sure, and "at least three weeks in advance." The application must contain information on the nature of the "undertaking," the date and place, the theme, the names and assignments of officials entrusted with conveying the information to the journalists, as well as general information on the round of the invited editors. In due course, the ministry's press secretary informs the petitioner "about the ministry's attitude" to the application.

Without going to the trouble of an "undertaking," an enterprise can, in fact must, inform the media about "events or facts worth publication." It is then up to the media to seize the opportunity and send out a reporter for an interview. More often than not this yields little of interest, as the interviewee must not divulge information if it contains "state, economic, or business secrets," information whose publication could harm the interests of the state or the society, or whose publication contradicts the "rules set for protecting citizens' rights." Restricted as they are by these considerations, neither the interviewer nor the interviewee can be expected to probe deeply into a given problem. It is no wonder, then, that there are complaints about a "chronicler's attitude" among journalists.

Despite these drawbacks, the ministry seems eager to supply the broad public with necessary information. For this purpose, the regulations also contain rules on the journalistic activity of key executives. Such activity is considered to be part of managerial work, and as such subject to certain rules. It may be carried out "according to an annual plan worked out in advance," or by complying with the demands from the mass communication media, or, when necessitated, "by the need to comment upon timely issues." At any rate, none of the key executives can escape the duty to face the public, be it in the form of an article, a contribution to a discussion, or a lecture. One such public appearance in a calendar

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year is considered a minimum requirement by the ministry, which also assumes the right to remind the slow and tardy of their duties in this respect.

The ministry does not set any strict rules for these contributions. It merely "recommends" that the following methods be employed:

- a. A positive example should be set.
- b. Criticism should be "constructive."
- c. The contribution should serve to popularize good experience.
- d. The conclusions must be "concrete."

Possibly guided by the maxim: "Trust is good, control is better," the ministry's regulations contain instructions concerning files to be kept on contacts with the mass communication media. Records about "press undertakings" must contain information on the nature of the "undertaking," the place and date, and the name and assignment of the ranking employee in attendance. Information on the journalistic work of an employee must note the form (article, lecture, etc.), the nature of the information medium, date of publication, title of the article or lecture, and the name and assignment of the author. This information must be fed by the enterprise managers once every half-year to the ministry, where central records are maintained.

All the above is presented as a mere general guidance. The ministry authorizes the managers of its subordinate enterprises or organizations to issue "more detailed instructions." These regulations have been valid since 1 March 1977.

3. The Church's Situation After Tomasek's Elevation to the Rank of Cardinal

On Monday, 13 June 1977, the bishop who was apostolic administrator of Prague, Dr. Frantisek Tomasek, arrived by plane in Rome. During his visit he was received by Pope Paul VI and, according to international press agency reports, was invested as a cardinal and officially handed his cardinal's hat at a meeting of the consistory on 27 June 1977.

The elevation of Dr. Frantisek Tomasek has evoked reactions in the foreign as well as the domestic press. Katolicke Noviny (Bratislava) reported that federal Deputy Premier of the CSSR Matej Lucan received Dr. Tomasek in a special audience on May 30, which was said to be held in a spirit of mutual understanding and willingness to contribute toward good relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church (Katolicke Noviny No.24, 12 June 1977). The Italian communist

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weekly Rinascita (10 June 1977) pointed out that the rank of cardinal had been conferred on a Czech bishop who had been moving in dangerous waters for many years and had had to cope with complicated obstacles while in his late 70s. While the consolidation of Church-state relations was well advanced during the era of Alexander Dubcek, this development was subsequently suddenly halted. According to Rinascita, the naming of the elderly bishop as a cardinal may mean that an accord with the Church is in the making, or that its realization can be expected in the foreseeable future. Rinascita judges the whole case in a positive light and Bishop Tomasek is supposed to have expressed an equally positive feeling when he remarked in Rome that negotiations between the Vatican and the government would commence in the near future (dpa, 14 June 1977).

Dr. Frantisek Tomasek is not a personality of the same caliber as were his predecessors, Cardinals Josef Beran and Stepan Trochta, or Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary, or Cardinal Wyszynski in Poland (see Czechoslovak Situation Report/21, Radio Free Europe Research, 8 June 1977, Item 2). He is an old man, nearly 80, who is seriously ill and bears the marks of his imprisonment in the 1950s. Last year, he spent a considerable period in a hospital and he wanted to retire as long as eight years ago.

It would benefit a genuine normalization if the bishops whom the state prevents from exercising their office could do so in the vacant bishoprics in the CSSR. There are 12 Roman Catholic, 1 Greek Catholic, and 1 Old Catholic bishoprics in the CSSR. There are residential bishops only in Banska Bystrica and Nitra, the two archiepiscopal sees in Prague and Olomouc are vacant, with Bishops Tomasek and Josef Vrana as apostolic administrators there, and the other Czech bishoprics are vacant. In Slovakia, Julius Gabris is the apostolic administrator of the diocese of Trnava, but the sees of Spis, Roznava, and Kosice are vacant (see Czechoslovak SR/2, RFER, 19 January 1977, Item 3).

There are five bishops in the CSSR who are not permitted to exercise their functions: first is the prominent theologian Dr. Karel Otcenasek, then Ladislav Hlad, and Dr. Kajetan Matousek, and in Slovakia the Jesuit Jan Korec; the other is the old Catholic residential bishop of Varnsdorf, Professor Augustyn Podolak. The vacant bishoprics are an urgent problem, as the head of the State Office for Church Affairs at the Presidium of the Government, Karel Hruza, has admitted. Several Western sources have noted that permission for these bishops to exercise their functions would be the quickest way to lead to normalization of Church-state relations, but it is this question of filling the vacant bishoprics that has led to deadlocks in negotiations between the regime and the Vatican on several occasions. The question of residential bishops is exceptionally important to the Church, because only residential bishops can fulfill administrative, pastoral, and other functions -- such as ordaining new priests -- without which the whole life of the Church is paralyzed. The Vatican insists on its historic right to name bishops, while the Prague regime has to date adamantly refused to

approve candidates who might be unacceptable to the regime. In this respect, compromises on both sides have not helped.

Of late, several articles have appeared in the regime press alleging that "bourgeois propagandists and their helpmates" present a false picture of the situation of the Church. Milos Borovicka (Zemedelske Noviny, 24 May 1977), for example, chose a rather unusual subject to discuss in an article: the question of religious literature. He listed various religious publishing houses and the circulation figures for diverse religious periodicals, but said nothing about the publishing houses' specific plans for new books, despite the fact that publication of religious books is almost nil. The publishing branch of the Czech Catholic Charity, for example, has in the past few years only been permitted to put out calendars of about 100 pages, in which greater attention is given to regime holidays than to religious ones.

During the first republic, more than 15 Catholic publishing firms were in existence, and although in the 1950s all the religious publishing houses were shut down, the Czech Catholic Charity and, in Slovakia, the St. Adalbert Society were allowed to issue several religious publications annually, some even in large print runs. One example was the volume Solunsti Bratri (The Salonica Brethren, Prague, 1963), about the Slav mission in the Czech Lands, which was prepared by professors of the Litomerice Theological Seminary. The work was translated into foreign languages and has gone through several editions; another was the comprehensive Bohovedny Slovník (Theological Dictionary, Prague, 1963), compiled by the then dean of the school, Dr. Jan Merell, with a team of faculty members. At the time of the Prague Spring, works by Catholic authors were also put out by other publishing firms, and the Czech Catholic Charity came out with an annual list of some 10 original titles by domestic and foreign authors. As far as religious periodicals are concerned, the situation cannot be compared with that in the past. Here, too, political articles and articles on the proregime organization Pacem in Terris predominate, while polemics or pieces defending religion are not permitted.

In recent articles that have tried to prove how creative Church life is in a socialist society, it is stated that "the Churches educate candidates for the priesthood at six divinity schools (Prace, 17 May 1977; see RAD Background Report/115 /Czechoslovakia/, RFER, 21 June 1977). However, the strict numerus clausus applied at these institutions is passed over in silence. This numerus clausus and the premature retirement of priests at the age of 60 are together causing a steadily increasing number of parishes to become vacant, and unless the bishop is able to find an occupant for such a parish, it is abolished. The number of new students is between 16 and 20 at the most (Statisticka Rocenka CSSR, Prague 1976). If an applicant is not admitted to a theological seminary, he cannot study at any other institute of higher education. Despite this, many new students still attempt to enroll at a theological seminary.

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One of the arguments adduced as proof of religious freedom in the CSSR is that "in this country, we have a total of 18 Churches, that is, one third more than in Austria, for instance" (Zemedelske Noviny, 24 May 1977). This argument is valid on paper only. Only the Catholics, Protestants, members of the Czechoslovak Husite Church, and of the Orthodox Church have theological institutes. The other Churches, including the Jewish religious communities, must send their future clergy to study abroad, which the regime permits only in exceptional cases. This is how the Churches are being undermined in a roundabout way, as they cannot exist without clergy. Data on the number of believers are not recorded anywhere, since statistics on religion and membership in a Church are not gathered on any official documents.

The regime press carefully avoids the two most sensitive problems: the question of the imprisoned priests, and the dual question of religious instruction and the persecution of children and their parents. Only in exceptional cases do the faithful read about them in the newspapers. A case of this type is that of the Salesian priest, Dr. Stefan Javorsky, who was first sentenced in 1976 to 18 months for working among the young and the intelligentsia and his recommendation that they listen to foreign radio stations. Dr. Javorsky lodged an appeal which was dismissed, and his sentence was increased to two years (Pravda, Bratislava, 26 January 1977).

The Vienna daily Neues Volksblatt (10 June 1977) illustrates the pressure against believers in an article entitled "Sacked Because of Attendance at Religious Services," citing examples showing how the political police photograph believers who regularly attend religious services and send this evidence to the managements of enterprises asking them to dismiss those concerned, albeit officially on other grounds.

On the whole, the oppression of the Churches continues unchanged and the elevation of the nearly 80-year-old Dr. Tomasek to the rank of cardinal is primarily personal recognition of his merits, but does not mean much for the life of the Church and the faithful. Any final judgment must await the results of any new negotiations with the Vatican that may be undertaken.

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