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SOVIET UNION ISOLATED, YUGOSLAV PAPERS CLAIM

Summary: Notwithstanding sharp criticism from the Soviet Union and other East European countries occupying Czechoslovakia, the Yugoslav press continued attacking the aggression by claiming that it demonstrates the weakness, rather than the strength, of the Warsaw Pact countries. The tenor of the Yugoslav newspaper articles is that the Soviet Union has isolated itself from the rest of the world by having occupied a free socialist country. In their polemics with Bulgaria and Hungary, Yugoslav journalists made certain claims re these two countries' press and radio.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and four other Warsaw Pact states, as well as the settlement imposed by the Kremlin, are claimed in the Yugoslav press to demonstrate Moscow's weakness rather than its strength. The tenor of the articles published in the Yugoslav newspapers and in commentaries broadcast over the radio is that the Soviet Union has isolated itself from the rest of the world. The only way out for Moscow and its four East European satellites is a full confession of their sins and complete withdrawal from Czechoslovakia, the Yugoslavs insist. The latter are not frightened by the attacks levelled against them by the Soviet information media and other East European papers. Today's Zagreb Vjesnik asked why the occupying states attack only Yugoslavia for having condemned the aggression against Czechoslovakia. What about other Communist Parties outside the Warsaw Pact? - the Zagreb daily asked. It added: "Why have TASS and Izvestia and the others not yet informed their readers that the French and Italian Communists, together with the Communists from 18 other countries,

have characterized [the occupation of Czechoslovakia] as intervention and aggression, rather than as help from the five Warsaw pact members?"¹

In another commentary Vjesnik called the aggression against Czechoslovakia "the fatal and poisonous military operation" which has isolated the attackers from the democratic world. This is a great danger, the paper said, but not the only one. It then went on to say:

The greater and more dangerous damage is the fact that the people who until yesterday have propagated understanding and mutual respect among nations, have, by occupying Czechoslovakia, shown not only the weaknesses of their own system and policies, but have also put in question peace in Europe and in the whole world.²

Still, despite all their efforts, the Soviet Union and its allies will not be able "to prevent the humanization of socialism." From now on "in the eyes of the world socialism will no longer be a religion," the author of the article, Lj. Djoric, said. The idea that the majority of Communist parties in the world "have been organizations subordinated to a sole greater-state concept in which human beings are only tiny wheels" has definitely disappeared.

Borba resolutely rejected all Russian attacks against Yugoslavia concerning the latter's support for Czechoslovakia and said that the Russians have not been willing to see that "this time the imperialists have been less vocal in their condemnation of the occupation of Czechoslovakia than the Western Communist Parties, on whose support Moscow thus far has been able to rely." The author of the article, Vlado Teslic, added that this proves "how isolated the Soviet Union has become because of its aggression against Czechoslovakia."³

Belgrade's biggest evening boulevard paper Vecernje novosti said recently that "the ideological instigators of the intervention" in Czechoslovakia have become "completely confused because of the brilliant, quiet but unanimous and resolute resistance of the Czechoslovak people."⁴ The paper refused to accept the idea of "a carbon-paper-like socialism," i.e., a socialism dictated from a center." The paper went then on to say:

It is not our fault that today, while commemorating the 50th anniversary of "Lenin's October," we have

1 Radio-Zagreb, 30 August 1968, 06:15 Hrs.

2 Vjesnik, Zagreb, 28 August 1968.

3 Borba, Belgrade, 28 August 1968.

4 Vecernje novosti, Belgrade, 28 August 1968.

to quote the following words by Engels: "People who oppress other people cannot be free either." We all used this quotation too many times while defending ourselves against Hitler.... This is the first time that we use it in connection with an action of socialist countries; this, however, is a problem of the five [countries] whose tanks were rolling in the streets of Bohemia and Slovakia; this is why the progressive section of mankind, which has not passed in silence over the Czechoslovak drama and over the problem of the free development of socialism, cannot be blamed.⁵

In another article Borba polemicizes with Yuri Zhukov and his article in Pravda, which claimed, "by using routine phraseology," the Western Communist parties have been "inconsistent." On the contrary, says the author of the article in Borba, S. Simic, the Western Communist parties have been consistent in their support for Czechoslovakia's reforms from the very beginning. In the past "unanimity" meant "to accept something which someone else decided and frequently carried out," Simic said. This era of "unity" has gone forever. He then continued:

The condemnation of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Communist parties of Italy, France, Rumania, Yugoslavia, Spain, Britain, Australia, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, India, New Zealand, Japan and Austria -- not to mention the Chinese and Albanian Communist Party leaders who did so for their own reasons and with some reservations -- clearly indicates that the carte blanche giving [the Soviet Union] the absolute right to commit mistakes without any responsibility, at least within the framework of the Communist movement, no longer exists.⁶

Finally, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Croatian National Assembly met on August 28 to condemn the aggression against Czechoslovakia by the five Warsaw Pact countries. The action of those countries "who have attempted and still attempt to crush a free socialist country" was sharply condemned. The most dangerous thing, according to the Foreign Affairs Committee members, is the fact that "the Soviet Union and other countries which have occupied Czechoslovakia have remained totally unaffected by the opinion and appraisals of the majority of Communist parties in the world."⁷

5 Ibid.

6 Borba, 29 August 1968.

7 Politika, Belgrade, 29 August 1968.

Polemics With Bulgaria And Hungary

A speech by the Bulgarian Party leader Todor Zhivkov, read by Politburo member Stanko Todorov in Sliven and published in Rabotnichesko Delo of 26 August 1968, was sharply attacked by Borba.⁸ The claim that Zhivkov could not come to Sliven "because of a sudden illness" is said by the Belgrade daily to be untrue. Actually "at that moment, he was in Moscow," Borba said. Zhivkov's justification of Bulgaria's participation in the occupation of Czechoslovakia is called hypocrisy by the paper, for the Bulgarian leader said he was "concerned about the destiny of socialism in Czechoslovakia." Said Borba:

It does not occur to Zhivkov that such logic could cause someone else in this socialist world to start being concerned with the fate of socialism in Bulgaria. For instance, for the Yugoslavs Bulgaria cannot serve as an example of the success of socialism. For us, socialism means self-management of the working class, reforms, a complete de-étatization and de-bureaucratization in internal democratic development. The ideas and actions of Todor Zhivkov have been contrary to such views.

Borba added that "Zhivkov and the Bulgarian leaders always run out ahead of the platoon when dark Stalinist methods are put into effect." It continued:

They have learned nothing from the past, neither the near nor the distant one. Because for them there are no problems, they see everything clearly. With the changing situation, they also change. They were the first to erect huge monuments to Stalin but also the first to destroy these monuments. For them it is quite normal to be friendly with Czechoslovakia, to occupy it and then to withdraw the troops again. It is also quite normal to smear Yugoslavia, then proclaim brotherhood with the same Yugoslavia, then again smear it, and tomorrow offer it the hand of friendship, as if nothing had happened. Such are the notions of Todor Zhivkov about socialism and relationships within the international workers' movement.

In another editorial comment, Borba crossed swords with the Hungarian Communists. Writing under the title "Together With 'Counterrevolutionaries' In The Struggle Against 'Counter-revolution,'" Borba complimented Radio Kossuth, which on August 28 "pleasantly surprised us with its program trying to analyze the Yugoslav attitude concerning the occupation of Czechoslovakia." In contrast to the Bulgarians, the Belgrade daily said, the Hungarian radio used a very polite

8 Borba, 28 August 1968.

and civil vocabulary. Unfortunately, the paper added, the contents of Radio Kossuth's program was full "of untruths and semi-truths played by the orchestra of the five [countries] under the direction of their Moscow composer."⁹

Borba said it could not accept Radio Kossuth's claim that the Hungarian and other soldiers had to go to Czechoslovakia and crush the "counterrevolutionaries." Who are these "counterrevolutionaries" after all, the Belgrade paper asks. From the very beginning Dubcek, Svoboda, Smrkovsky, Pavel, Dzur and the others were called such names. But what then should one say about the fact that these very people, the alleged counterrevolutionaries, were brought to Moscow to talk with Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny "in a comradely atmosphere," as it was stated in the communique. We won't even mention the kisses" lavishly distributed in Moscow, Borba said. Then it concluded:

Now, Hungarian comrades, we should continue analyzing in a comradely tone these events [in Czechoslovakia] which you try to justify by trying to convince us how justified your armed intervention was. However, we should be serious; the time is terribly earnest and the events in question are the most tragic events of socialism's existence; these events have put at stake the confidence of the international workers' movement in socialist countries. Look around yourself: even people who had once swallowed the Rajk trial in the interest of the unity of Communist parties and socialist countries are now condemning the occupation of Czechoslovakia without any reservation.

It may be of some interest to mention in conclusion that the Belgrade daily Politika started on August 28 to publish a series of articles under the title "Three Decades Since Czechoslovakia's Tragedy -- Horthy And The Dismemberment of Czechoslovakia." Recalling that the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia took place in March 1939, the commemoration of the 30th anniversary has begun in Yugoslavia more than six months early.

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