EAST EUROPEAN COMMUNISTS SHOULD HELP REFORMS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, YUGOSLAV PAPERS INSIST

Yugoslav papers have of late intensified their defense of changes in Czechoslovakia against criticism from some East European countries, especially East Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union. For Yugoslav Communists the changes taking place in Czechoslovakia are of historical significance. This is why any attack against these changes is considered by the Yugoslavs as not solely an anti-Czechoslovak outburst, but rather an overall onslaught against progressive socialism in general. On balance, the Yugoslavs consider it is necessary to cease insisting that all changes in Communist countries must limit themselves to an "improvement of the old system." In this connection, Josip Vrhovec, the foreign policy commentator of a Zagreb daily, recently said the following:

The essence of the problem is given in the following question: "Must changes in socialism necessarily be carried out as a "continuity," only as an improvement of the old system, as supplementing the existing good things [in the unsatisfactory old system] with new, desirable aspects?" Should the theory of continuity be turned into a dogma of socialist development, or should one, by a dialectical approach, allow the affirmation of other, opposing theories? Since the "old" socialism has contradicted the very essence of socialism to such an extent that things have reached the point of explosion, it follows that changes in such a socialist system cannot be carried out as a continuation [of the old system], but rather as a reaction to it; not by making compromises with the old [system], but rather through a renaissance reflected in the affirmation and victory of new ideas.¹

¹) Vjesnik, Zagreb, 18 May 1968.
In Vrhovec's opinion, it is now impossible to practice any "dogmatic continuity" in Czechoslovakia because the old ideas have stubbornly resisted change, "thus leading almost to an explosion." For this reason, all Communist countries and parties should help Czechoslovakia because the possibility for the victory of a truly progressive socialism in this country "is a great opportunity for socialism" in general. "The greatest socialist and internationalist help [to Czechoslovakia]," Vrhovec said, "would undoubtedly be to give full confidence to the forces carrying out the revival of Czechoslovak socialism. It is good that we Yugoslavs have done this already." Vrhovec is critical of the attitude taken against Czechoslovakia "in the GDR, Poland, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union," an attitude, he asserts, which has not been free of "a marked pressure" exerted upon Prague.

Anti-Czechoslovak Leaflets Printed Abroad

Vrhovec's colleague Mirko Bilic is also very critical of the East German, Polish and Soviet tactics in opposing changes in Czechoslovakia. In these countries, Bilic said, all the negative aspects of Czechoslovak changes are being emphasized while the positive aspects are intentionally neglected. "One has even reached such a low point that [the East Berlin] Berliner Zeitung used some film co-production details in order to discover in Prague nothing less than 'American tanks!'" Bilic then continued:

However, we do not recall that in the past, during the "trials" of Slansky, Clementis and other Czechoslovak revolutionaries, the authors who (in East German, Polish and, of late, also in Soviet newspapers) are now expressing their concern [about "dangerous changes" in Czechoslovakia] had ever warned anybody or even spread the alarm when socialism in Czechoslovakia was the object of derisive attack. The real paradox is the fact that the people whose every second word, so to speak, is "internationalism" sounded the alarm because of some fictitious or real excesses in Czechoslovakia (excesses which have been present in all socialist countries, including the Soviet Union), instead of welcoming and supporting -- as one would expect -- everything in the latest internal developments in Czechoslovakia that represents an original, creative and encouraging contribution to the cause of socialism in that country and in contemporary socialist practices in general.

2) Ibid.
In his recent report from Prague, Velimir Budimir, the Tanjug correspondent in the Czechoslovak capital, claimed that the East German and Polish anti-Czechoslovak attacks, "and the very reserved attitude of the Soviet press," have encouraged conservative elements in Czechoslovakia. Most people in Prague believe that in some socialist countries there exists an inimical attitude toward the changes in Czechoslovakia rather than a mere lack of understanding, Budimir said. In the long run "this means support for and encouragement of the old, dogmatic forces." Budimir then continues:

How could one explain otherwise the appearance of leaflets supporting the old conservative forces and the calling of the present Party leaders "the revisionists?" All this indicates that these [conservative] forces have become active or have been encouraged to become active. When a package of these leaflets were discovered recently individuals knowledgeable about the products of the Czechoslovak paper industry stated that no Czechoslovak printing press makes packing in the same way [as that in which the leaflets were wrapped].

Budimir added that "such open or indirect criticisms have begun to multiply; this is why one believes that very soon some clearer declarations must be made on the one side or the other."

Fear of Czechoslovak Democratization Unfounded

The latest issue of the Yugoslav Central Committee weekly Komunist criticized "the incomprehensible fear of progress of socialist democracy" in Czechoslovakia by some East European countries. The author of the article, Zdravko Micic, said that "a significant number of Communist Parties and socialist countries" has fully supported the radical changes in Czechoslovakia. However in some socialist countries and Communist parties, Micic added, there have been forces which are against Czechoslovakia's democratization. He mentioned some East German, Polish and Soviet papers whose reporting on Czechoslovakia "cannot be interpreted as a sign of support of [Dubcek's] Action Program." The Czechoslovak Communists, Micic asserted, are exposed to rather strong pressure by these three countries and parties. However, any fear of what is now happening in Czechoslovakia is absolutely unjustified, Micic says. Czechoslovak Communists, "who are responsible before their own working class and people, have the full right to decide unilaterally what type of policy they should conduct, and to find out for themselves and remove the dangers which might appear on the road leading to a socialist transformation," Micic concluded.

Slobodan Stankovic

3) Borba, Belgrade, 18 May 1968.
4) Komunist, Belgrade, 16 May 1968.