YUGOSLAV PRESS DISSATISFIED WITH BULGARIAN TREATMENT OF CZECHOSLOVAK STUDENTS

Summary: The Yugoslavia-Bulgaria polemic exchange has been enriched by a new topic: the maltreatment of a group of young Czechs and Slovaks by the Bulgarian authorities. The Yugoslav press is disgusted with the manner in which the Bulgarian military and civilian officials banned the Czechoslovaks from entering Bulgaria on their way to Sofia to attend the Communist International Youth Festival. In the opinion of the Yugoslavs the attitude taken by the Bulgarian border authorities is only a reflection of the attitude taken generally by the Bulgarian state and Party leaders toward the democratization process in Czechoslovakia.

The Yugoslav press has given great prominence to the fact that the Bulgarian frontier authorities maltreated a group of Czechoslovak students who were on their way to the Ninth International Youth Festival in Sofia. A group of 31 young Czechs and Slovaks started the long march to Sofia on June 23 in Pilsen, and in 33 days had left behind 1,460 kilometers, walking through Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. On July 27 they reached the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border at Dimitrovgrad but were banned from entering Bulgaria under the pretext that they were "improperly dressed and dirty." The young Czechs and Slovaks were, however, not the only young Communists prevented from entering Bulgaria. About 40 West Germans, Frenchmen, Austrians, Belgians, British and even three Hungarians were also denied permission to enter Bulgaria. A student from Lebanon is quoted by a Belgrade daily as having been questioned by Bulgarian officials.

1 Politika, Belgrade, 21 July 1968.
concerning the number of foreign languages he spoke. He answered: "I speak four languages and a little Bulgarian." The Bulgarian official was shocked:

- "That! So many languages! Like a prostitute! You cannot enter Bulgaria!"
- "It's the truth, and I shall never come again!" the Lebanese student said.

After having passed the Bulgarian border for the first time, the Czechs and Slovaks were awaited there by "Comrade Szabo, a representative of the International Festival Committee" in Sofia. Comrade Szabo collected all passports and told the Czechoslovaks to wait. They waited until the evening, when two Bulgarian civilians told the youths they could not enter Bulgaria because they were improperly dressed. They went to the Yugoslav side of the border, dressed "properly" and returned to Bulgaria. But still, the Bulgarians did not allow them to proceed to Sofia. The leader of the Czechoslovak group, Jiri Indra, Secretary of the Czechoslovak CP District Committee in Pilsen, insisted that they had documents to prove they were members of the official Czechoslovak delegation, but nothing helped. What happened later is described by Josef Dadíč:

He decided to wait until an official answer from Sofia arrived. It was already late in the evening, about 11 p.m. Three Bulgarians in uniforms and two civilians came. I held in front of me a poster with the inscription "International Youth Festival - Sofia." One of the Bulgarian soldiers took the poster, rolled it up and started beating Jindrich, whose brother jumped to defend him. The Bulgarians then unfolded the poster and with grey paint crossed off the word Sofia. Two brothers, Jiri and Jindrich, mechanics in a chemical enterprise in Založi o Mostu, attempted to take the poster from the Bulgarians. A brawl started, joined by a group of hitchhikers from Trencin. The Czechs and Slovaks firmly joined their hands and formed a line. Girls started screaming when the Bulgarian soldiers pushed us toward Yugoslav territory...Perhaps as a farewell gesture for a happy return to Czechoslovakia, some of us were kicked in the seat of the pants...

The Yugoslavs are extremely disgusted with such behavior on the part of the Bulgarians. The Belgrade daily Politika sharply supported the Czech and Slovak during their stay in Yugoslavia and the Ljubljana students requested the Yugoslav delegation at the Sofia Youth Festival "to protest sharply to the International Committee of the World Festival" and even to ponder over whether to stay at the Festival at all.
The Ljubljana students share the view of the Czechoslovaks that such an inimical attitude toward the young Czechs and Slovaks reflects "the attitude of the Bulgarian state and Party quarters toward the process of democratization and socialist construction in Czechoslovakia, headed by the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party."

In the meantime, the Czechs and Slovaks returned to their home country.

Slobodan Stankovic

2 Ibid.