Eastern Europe – Fifty Years Ago
A Press Review by a Hungarian Refugee

'Underground' Wit Baffles Russia
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Iron Curtain No Bar To Students' Revolt

By SMITH HEMPSTONE
European Correspondent of The Star

PRAGUE — Slogan-shouting students barricaded themselves into the university buildings. Mini-skirted coeds furiously condemned the police for their "indescribable, brutal behavior" in breaking up the demonstrations and accused the press of "falsely reporting" what had happened.

Long-haired student leaders called for the resignations of top political leaders and demanded social, economic and political equality for all.


Student revolution is no respecter of political borders or ideological frontiers. Eastern European students from Bratislava to Kiev, like their peers in the West, have been strident in their demands for their visions of a better, more democratic society.

While every Eastern Euro-

pean country has had its troubles with students this year, those of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have been most successful in bringing pressure to bear on the established order.

Here in Prague it was a student leader named Jiri Muller, a name still virtually unknown in the West, who had virtually as much to do with the overthrow of Antonin Novotny's Stalinist regime as did Alexander Dubcek, the reformist Communist party secretary.

In December 1965, while Novotny was still firmly in the saddle, Muller, an engineering student at Prague's 600-year-old Charles University, got up at a conference of the Communist-controlled Czechoslovak Union of Youth (CSM) to argue that the organization should "express..."
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and enforce the real opinions of young people, and to mobilize the mass movement by the (Com- munist) party to achieve its ends.

His reply was silence.

But by late 1966, Muller and his supporters, still arguing the view that the CSM should be something more than a rubber stamp, gained support in Prague Council (it is interesting to note that in Eastern Europe, the attempts to change society by working through existing organs, in the West, by either opting out or trying to destroy these institutions, are usually met with the reaction of the Communist authorities, who tend to take the attitude toward youthful pacifists that do their country a disservice.

But while Muller’s CSM, kick him out of the university and draft him into the army. In the winter that followed, Muller’s friend and political supporter, Lubomir Holecek, defected Muller and had his own group before the CSM and proposed a student reform program.

The program was rejected without discussion and student Holecek, received his “Bureaucracy” from the Czechoslovak army.

The history of Czechoslovakia’s students has been far from different. In 1965, 500 students in Brno and other towns and cities of central Europe, moved against bad lighting, marched to their homes, carrying lighted candles.

They were set up by the Czechoslovak people, who had torn themselves as a lover to prayer Novotny from his pedestal of power.

There followed the “Spring” and “Summer” of liberation, which triggered last August’s new invasion of Czechoslovakia and the continuing efforts of these newly won freedoms.

Even in the face of Russian tanks and stifling economic measures, the Communist student organizations have continued to function, leaving many necessary issues to be resolved.

Only last month, 60,000 students have not been able to hold their university buildings for three days in silent protest against the new invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Such reforms have been and are being bitterly contested by the old-line Communists.

While many neo- Statists in the West fear that these reforms may lead to destruction of their country, there is no evidence to suggest that the main stream of Yugoslav students (many of whom are not students) support the Belgrade party organization, which includes the large number of students in the West.

Speaking at a Belgrade student rally less than two weeks before the June riots, Veljko Vlahovic, a top liberal ideologist, who is a member of the national party and the Balgare party, told students that the vital element of student organization is that it is independent of the Communist party and to form it, to make it more responsive and humane.

It is probable that a 5 percent rise in the cost of living in the first quarter of 1967 and rising unemployment exacerbated by the growing number of new quasi-professional and unskilled workers has much to do with Yugoslav discontent as political theory.

Manipulation Cited

Gyorgy Lukacs, the 83-year-old Hungarian philosopher who was a loyal Marxist in the past and is now making a strong effort to solve the problem of creating a new prostatist democracy, a completely new democracy, that is to say the gap between the theory and practice.

But the effectiveness of the students in narrowing this gap clearly depends upon their ability to appeal to the mass power factor in the existing structure of the Communist party, in that they have been able to do in Yugoslavia (writers, Soviet nationalists, party reformers) an effort to use revolutionary, anti-Communist modernist, disgruntled workers).

This turn in appearance tends to lend credence to an oft-repeated theory that revolt takes place not when conditions are improved but when people sense a little freedom in the air, when hope exists. The Yugoslav students, for instance, are the greatest in the open society in Eastern Europe for 20 years.

The Polish Contrast

Poland is a good case in point. There, where students lack basic support within the power structure. In Poland the government, triggered by the banning of the classic Polish play "Daszko" (which was banned over tones) and banned by protests from the Polish Writers’ Union, developed into full-scale student demonstrations. But the demonstrations were premature and the students were unable to find any powerful political force willing to back them.

At least 73 were expelled from Warsaw University and 47 from Wroclaw (Kracow), and those drafted into the army will face criminal charges. One such student disappeared last month was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment for "propagating revisionist and hostile views".

In the future, past behavior and political awareness will be taken into account before students are admitted to universities and annual grants will be renewed only if the candidate has been "correct.

In Russia, dissent has centered in Moscow and in the always restive Ukraine, where Ukrainian students have been imprisoned for protesting against the charges of nationalization.

"Werewolf" Critics

Pravda, the official Russian Communist party daily newspaper, has been sensitive to the Liberation Front, the "New Left" to condemn its followers as "werewolves" trying to destroy the "new social order" of "communism of Marxism.

Another indication that the Soviet students have taken to their people came in June when S.P. Pavly, first secretary of the youth department of the Communist youth organization (since 1969), was fired.

Y. N. Yelchenko, first secretary of Komosov’s Ukrainian branch, also got the axe.

A.D. Shape, Italian Communist party secretary in charge of ideology, has also been purged (and replaced in archconservative) yet another sign that the trouble is centered in the Ukraine.

Goals Differ

In general, university students in Eastern Europe tend to be a little older and considerably more mature than their counterparts in the West, and because the penalty for dissent can be exile, imprisonment and a life at the blue-collar level, a student needs considerably more courage and conviction to stand up to the authorities than he does in the West.

And certainly the goals of the students are significantly different.

Jan Kubek, a Czech student who attended university in the United States and now works in Switzerland, puts it this way:

"While fighting for a better society, these American students are at the same time destroying their own self, whereas the Czech students would be most grateful for some of these (U.S.) activities. Students who want to stop sitting out without taking their own family or sexual frustrations and become productive members of a society which, for all its shortcomings, still contains many characteristics for which Czechs, and for the matter most others, would be greatly appreciative.

But for the establishment, to be democratic or Communist, youth in 1968 meant the same thing: trouble and challenge.

Tomorrow: Troubles in Italy.
Cross-Curtain Culture

By Peter Osnos
Washington Post Staff Writer

Book Review

‘Seesaw: Cultural Life In Eastern Europe’
By Yorick Blumenfeld (Harcourt, Brace & World, 276 pp., $5.95).

Within Poland itself, dozens of writers, journalists, dramatists and teachers have lost their jobs, many because they are Jewish, others—like the renowned philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski—because of their outspoken dismay over the demise of the reforms of 1986.

According to Blumenfeld, all that is left of the Polish noweulev vague are a few painters and musicians. And most of these, one should add, can no longer be regarded as progressive.

In Poland, the process of cultural awakening has been stymied. But elsewhere in Eastern Europe, where the awakening was slower in coming and more cautious in its expression, it is still taking place. Blumenfeld’s chapters on Poland and particularly Czechoslovakia seem politically dated, but he also writes of poetry and satire in Hungary, architecture and the philosophical ‘Praxis’ in Yugoslavia, literature in Bulgaria, television in Romania, opera in East Germany and what he calls the “cultural mini-revolution” in Albania.

ON BALANCE, Blumenfeld’s assessment of these efforts is sympathetic, sometimes favorable. Hungarians, he tells us, “are the only artists who successfully manage to combine politics in their poetry.” Blumenfeld sees Eastern European culture developing out of its own varied roots, relatively free of the mustiness of Soviet socialist realism and the vulgarity of Western commercialism.

But he also points out that much of the work that seems courageous and imaginative within the framework of a Communist dictatorship might seem flat and stale in a society where restrictions are minimal. Blumenfeld, who is a Newsweek feature editor and former Eastern European correspondent, confesses that paintings imbued with a romantic message in Prague and Warsaw looked broken on the walls of his New York apartment, where they are stripped of the esthetic symbolism the painters sought to attain.

But what is finally most important is not the quality of the work being done in Eastern Europe, but the fact that it is being done at all. People who create are not easy people to suppress.

Dubcek Bends to Moscow's Pressure

By HARRY SCHWARTZ

Are the terrible days of secret police terror and purges about to return to Czechoslovakia? Will Alexander Dubcek, whose ascent to power almost a year ago ushered in the “Czechoslovak spring,” be the helpless puppet used by Moscow to restore the worst wintry political weather of the Novotny and Gottwald eras?

These dark possibilities have been raised by Mr. Dubcek himself in his Bratislava speech this weekend, an address that marks his deepest capitulation thus far to Moscow pressure. In that speech, Mr. Dubcek declared his political platform to be last month's Czechoslovak Communist party Central Committee resolution, which represents an almost complete ideological surrender to Russia.

Then, after assailing the great majority of the Czechoslovak people who still refuse complete surrender to the Soviet occupiers, Mr. Dubcek declared: “If these tendencies hindering our way should continue, unavoidable measures would become necessary, measures appearing undemocratic, but serving democracy to chase anarchist elements back.”

The significance of this clear threat to purge journalists, trade union officials and others who have kept up Czechoslovakia's resistance is particularly great because it was made by Mr. Dubcek. Those he now assails as “anarchist elements” are precisely the people who were his most devoted supporters before last August’s Soviet invasion—those who have used Dubcek’s name as a symbol of continued democratic sympathies even in the four months since the massive violation of Czechoslovak sovereignty by Soviet troops.

A month ago a similar threat was made by Lubomir Strougal, the politician who has risen most rapidly in the Czechoslovak Communist party hierarchy since the invasion. “It is impossible to tolerate any longer the direct expression of non-Marxist opinions by Communists,” Mr. Strougal declared, adding, “A policy of defiance and resistance which makes use of national emotions only leads people into adventurism. Unfortunately, this policy finds too much space at present in our communications media.”

Threat of Force

What should be done about these problems? Mr. Strougal was frank enough in his reply: “Where normal political methods are of no help, it is necessary to use force. This is in the interest of the party and the society.”

These threats undoubtedly reflect Moscow’s deep dissatisfaction with the continued defiance of its will in Czechoslovakia.

Four months after the invasion, Czechoslovakia still has far more freedom and democracy than any other country in the Soviet bloc. Only last weekend, members of the Czechoslovak National Assembly dared publicly denounce Hungary and Bulgaria for their participation in the invasion.

The Czechoslovak press is now only a pale shadow of its free-wheeling, free-speaking, exuberant past last spring and summer. Nevertheless, it is still the most informative, most honest and most heretical press in any nation occupied by Soviet troops.

Mr. Dubcek, who seems a tragic figure indeed these days, was undoubtedly forced to voice his latest threats by Kremlin pressure of the harshest sort. His reference to “unforeseeable consequences” if the nation does not fully capitulate is very evidently a reminder that if Moscow’s patience runs out completely it can sweep away Prague’s present Government and install a captive dictatorship based on nothing more than Soviet tanks and bayonets.

The vague agreement for Soviet economic aid signed in Prague yesterday is undoubtedly aimed at sugar-coating the bitter pill Moscow wants Czechoslovakia to swallow.

Mr. Strougal's threat of “force” a month ago proved completely ineffective in forcing the Czechoslovak people's moral and political surrender. If anything it stimulated the unity of intellectuals and workers in resisting such pressure. Moscow was warned of mass strikes as the answer to any purges of journalists or other resistance leaders.

New Terror Looms

Will Mr. Dubcek’s plea prove any more effective in winning the voluntary, final and complete capitulation of the Czechoslovak people? The answer is likely to be negative.

If Moscow wants to end the present remaining freedom and heresy in Czechoslovakia, it must—either directly or indirectly—use tactics of force and terror. Those tactics are almost certain to be resisted—and perhaps not always nonviolently.

A new, difficult chapter in the tragic yet inspiring story of Czechoslovakia’s aborted drive for freedom seems about to begin, a chapter that may well claim many more victims than anything that has yet happened since the Dubcek era began.

HARRY SCHWARTZ is a member of the editorial board of The Times.
By Karl E. Meyer
Washington Post, Foreign Service

PRAGUE—If, as the cliche holds, Czechoslovakia is the heart of Europe, then quite arguably the heart of our city can be found in a tiny cabaret theater called the Semafor, where two very popular comedians concoct a bitter-sweet humor that could only be made in Prague.

Like most of the city's 20-odd theaters, Semafor is reached through an inside arcade and its stage is below the pavement—an underground forum for the kind of underground wit that baffles and exasperates the Soviet Union.

Performances are always standing-room-only, even though the two comedians—Jiri Suchy and Jiri Slitr—have been putting on similar programs for a decade. It is astonishing to see usually staid Czechs at these performances; the audience joins in songs and in the animated repartee with the stars that ends the show. Encores last half an hour.

Slitr is a fortyish man who slouches around the stage wearing a bowler hat and an expression of deadpan sadness. In contrast, Suchy is small and puckish and bounces around like a marionette whose responses are controlled by his audience.

The show last week at the Semafor was "The Devil of Vihohrad," a ragbag of skits, songs and tricks with lights interspersed with poker-faced lectures on what to do in the case of fire, flood, earthquake or military disasters like an invasion. Midway, two pretty girls burst onto the stage and insist on singing.

Slitr patiently explains that not everyone can get into the act; after all, there are 14 million Czechoslovakians, "counting only those who really belong here." Later, there is difficulty with stage lights. Slitr remarks that there are 13 lights, of which 12 are made in the West and work. The other light, which emphatically doesn't work, was made in a socialist country, and, "of course, we love that most of all." The audience roars.

The Semafor's other show is a brilliant satire called "The Last Stop," which is about a sanatorium where all the patients die. Their despairing doctors admit a healthy young man as a patient in the hope of giving the place a better name—but even the newcomer perishes. The political point is not lost on citizens of a once-healthy country who are forced to live in a socialist sanatorium.

This allusive and elliptical wit forms a grace note to songs and pantomime that can be enjoyed anywhere, even in Moscow. The Semafor has performed in France and Germany, but it was surprising to hear from Slitr that the troupe has not received an invitation to play in America or Britain, an oversight that surely must be corrected.

Un Czeched Procurement

The second part of the evening was "The Devil of Vihohrad," a 30-year plan of normalization" presented by Jan Prohazka, an eminent liberal author. Writing in the literary weekly Listy, Prohazka suggests that the bed is Czechoslovakia's ultimate secret weapon.

He quotes a fictitious opinion poll which claims to show that 51 per cent of the citizens like "the activities preceding the conception of a baby," another 13 per cent express no objection, 18 per cent are indifferent and only 11 per cent are starving. So with a little purposeful love-making, he calculates, three million families could have ten children each in a decade.

By 1978, there would be 44 million Czechoslovakians. And by 1998, even allowing a ten-year rest pause, there would be 129 million Czechoslovakians. He concludes:

"At that stage, the majority of other countries would have to treat us decently. We would be free and even sovereign, and nothing could prevent us from carrying out the reform which was drawn up so fortunately for us in the historic spring of 1988 by dreamer Ota Sik."

(Dr. Sik, of course, is the economic planner now living in Basel, Switzerland.)

Kremlin Loses Friend

An interesting man to see in Prague is Dr. Josef Hromadka, the country's most distinguished Protestant theologian, who since 1948 has argued for friendship with the Soviet Union, so much so that some Czechs called him a Quisling. In 1956, he defended the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt, and two years later he received the Lenin Peace Prize, the ultimate accolade of the Kremlin.

His views have undergone a profound change. On Aug. 22, he was among the first prominent Czechs to denounce the invasion of this country by five Warsaw Pact armies. In an open letter to the Soviet ambassador in Prague, he said, "My deepest feeling is of disillusionment, sorrow and shame. Something has happened which cannot be rectified, a loss of love and respect for the Soviet Union which will not be overcome for many decades."

Dr. Hromadka is president of the Christian Peace Conference, an international organization which held a meeting in Paris in October. He was asked by prelates of the Russian Orthodox Church not to go to Paris or, if he did, not to allow the invasion to be discussed.

He refused, sending a confidential memorandum to the council describing his anguish, observing, among other things: "In my mind, Aug. 21 is engraved with much darker colors than March 15, 1939 (the Hitler occupation). The Nazis were our chief enemies...but on Aug. 21 it was our friends and allies who invaded our country."

A warm-hearted man of 79, he now lives in retirement in a small Prague apartment. For decades he was dean of Comenius Seminary, and his pupils include nearly every Protestant pastor in the country. His English is eloquent: from 1939 to 1947, he taught at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Nearly four months after the invasion, what does Dr. Hromadka think? "I believe we won on Aug. 21. We were not defeated morally or politically, only militarily. Now that we can look back, people have started to ask whether nonviolence is more potent than the arrogance of power. We didn't have any theories about pacifism—we didn't have time to think about theories. But I have a feeling that we have done something that will be important to pacifist doctrine."

Dr. Hromadka's church, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, has a pacifist tradition, but not a particularly strong one. Curiously, in this nation of passive resisters, the law makes scant allowance for conscientious objectors. Beginning in 1952, some provision was made—partly as a result of Dr. Hromadka's personal intervention—for purely religious objectors. But the cases have been few and have mainly involved theological students.

For Dr. Hromadka, the most troubling aspect of Soviet policy has been the tendency to anti-Semitism. "I am baffled by it," he says, "and I am deeply distressed by the use of the phrase 'Jewish extraction' in a pejorative sense."

While talking, Dr. Hromadka sat on a small wood stool—his "chair of moral atonement." In his book-lined study, one saw pictures of Pope John, Lenin, Thomas Masurek and Jan Hus—an ecumenical pantheon that one may perhaps find only in Prague.

Pointed Humor

Best joke heard last week.

Question: What is the luckiest country in the world?

Answer: Israel. It is surrounded by 40 million enemies.
CZECH TV REVIEWS
SCENES OF INVASION

Special to The New York Times

PRAGUE, Dec. 30 — Czechoslovaks watched on television tonight a dramatic review of the Soviet-led invasion of their country Aug. 20-21, including films of the Soviet tanks and a blood-spattered flag.

The invasion scenes were part of an hour-long program reviewing news events around the world, including the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, the United States election campaign and scenes of the Vietnam war.

Then the program took about 10 minutes to review events here, showing film of the rise to power of Alexander Dubcek, First Secretary of the Communist party, the negotiations with the Warsaw Pact countries over the liberalization program and then the invasion by the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Hungary and Bulgaria.

"The price Czechoslovakia paid for looking into itself to solve the urgent problems was great, too great," the commentator said.

The scenes showed the faces of Prague's citizens, the tanks which two of the three sets Mr. Mccord did not say