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COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

WORKING PAPER #69

The (Inter-Communist) Cold War on Ice: Soviet-Czechoslovak Ice Hockey Politics, 1967-1969

By Oldrich Tuma, Mikhail Prozumenschikov, John Soares, and Mark Kramer

Edited and Introduced by James G. Hershberg

February 2014



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WORKING PAPER SERIES**

Christian F. Ostermann, Series Editor

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“Cold War on Ice”

This Cold War International History Project Working Paper is one of the first products of the “Cold War on Ice” (CWOI) initiative, which seeks to explore, using new evidence, the intersection of the histories of the Cold War and international ice hockey after World War II. This initiative, in turn, is affiliated with a broader project on “The Global History of Sport and the Cold War” led by Prof. Robert Edelman (University of California at San Diego), Prof. Christopher Young (University of Cambridge), and CWHIP director Dr. Christian F. Ostermann. Other CWOI products include CWIHP Working Paper #68 by hockey historian John Soares ([‘Difficult to Draw a Balance Sheet’: Ottawa Views the 1974 Canada-USSR Hockey Series](#)) and presentations planned to take place at “Sports and the Cold War” conferences in New York City in October 2014 and in Moscow in May 2015.

With an international network of scholars who combine Cold War expertise and languages skills and varying levels of hockey enthusiasm, the CWOI initiative looks forward to examining, and re-examining, some of the iconic moments when cold war and international ice hockey trajectories converged—from the 1972 Canada/USSR “Summit Series” to the 1980 “Miracle on Ice” (the USA defeat of the heavily-favored Soviets at the Lake Placid Winter Olympics shortly after the invasion of Aghanistan) to other charged hockey-related competitions, on and off the ice, that were inextricably linked to Cold War events and currents (e.g., reverberations from the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, defections of ice hockey stars from communist nations, *détente*-era contests between Soviet and North Americans teams, and the acceleration under Mikhail Gorbachev’s *glasnost* of Soviet-bloc players leaving to play, for higher salaries, in the NHL, where they had (and continue to have) a major impact).

Though such stories have been told many times from a North American (often Canadian) perspective, usually by journalists or participants relying on memories, public sources, and/or interviews, the CWOI initiative seeks to tap long inaccessible Soviet and other communist (and non-English language) archival sources to bring fresh evidence and perspectives, and to deepen a mutual dialogue between ice hockey history and political and cultural cold war history to better understand both domains.

In addition to the scholars contributing to the present working paper—Mikhail Prozumenschikov (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History; RGANI), Oldřich Tůma (Institute for Contemporary History, Prague), John Soares (University of Notre Dame), and Mark Kramer (Harvard University)—participants in and friends of the CWOI initiative include Fredrik Logevall (Cornell University), Sergey Radchenko (Aberystwyth University, Wales), Malcolm Byrne (National Security Archive), Mark Atwood Lawrence (University of Texas at Austin), Pierre Asselin (Hawai'i Pacific University), Larry Berman (Georgia State University), Andrew Preston (Cambridge University), Erica Fraser (Carleton University), and David Wolff (Nottingham University in Ningbo China). We invite others who combine interests in hockey and cold war history to join us to contribute to future activities.

The present CWIHP Working Paper exemplifies CWOI's approach of bringing new evidence from multiple perspectives to examine key events. In this case, the paper presents new Soviet/Russian and Czechoslovak archival evidence on hockey's role in the turbulent Soviet-Czechoslovak relationship in the period surrounding the Moscow-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. In particular, materials are presented from both sides on the reverberations from a Soviet-Czechoslovak hockey confrontation at the world championships in Vienna in March 1967—demonstrating that such tensions existed even before the rise of the Prague Spring—and, especially, on the hockey-related events in the spring of 1969, which had a major impact on Czechoslovak politics. It is often forgotten that, after the Soviet invasion, communist leader Alexander Dubček and several of his reformist associates actually retained their positions, albeit with sharply circumscribed powers after they had been compelled to sign an agreement with Soviet leaders (the “Moscow Protocol”) vowing to preserve socialism and limit reforms.

It was only seven months later that the Soviets instituted what became known as the “normalization” process, replacing Dubček and other lingering reformers with hardliners and instituting tougher domestic policies that would last for two decades, and the proximate cause was...hockey. On March 28, 1969, the Czechoslovak national team defeated the Soviets at the world championships in Stockholm (where they had been moved from Prague). Throughout the country, Czechoslovaks took to the streets, celebrating the victory—and often taunting the Soviet occupiers, venting their resentment in a massive, nationwide spontaneous display of nationalistic

and anti-Soviet feeling that would not be replicated until the “Velvet Revolution” in November 1989. The clear evidence that the holdovers from the Prague Spring were neither willing nor able to impose the proper attitudes of comradely friendship and deference toward the Soviet overlords not only appalled Kremlin leaders but prompted them to move briskly to finish the job they had started in August.

While the public outlines of this story have long been known, this Working Paper allows readers to delve inside the leaderships in both Moscow and Prague and the tense exchanges between them as the “hockey night” exacerbated their relations. To put these events in context, and outline them based mostly on Western sources (including the Canadian archives), John Soares first examines the trajectory of Soviet-Czechoslovak hockey relations after World War II, as the Cold War broke out and the USSR joined and then surpassed its ally as an international ice hockey power. Oldřich Tůma then recounts and analyzes events from a Czech perspective, using new archival evidence to reassess the impact of the “hockey night” and address some lingering mysteries and controversies concerning the event. Tůma’s commentary is followed by five translated documents from Czech archives, including an internal round-up of the hockey celebrations/protests from security services and reports on tense high-level Soviet-Czechoslovak exchanges in ensuing days. The next two contributions offer insight into Moscow’s views. Mikhail Prozumenschikov, in an excerpt from his book on the Soviet Union and sports, uses materials from the former archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), where he is the deputy director, among other sources, to probe Soviet-Czechoslovak ice hockey relations. Mark Kramer then presents a telegram from the Soviet ambassador in Prague from April 1967 concerning an event that, in retrospect, foreshadowed the hockey-incited explosion two years later—the reactions to an on-ice melee between Soviet and Czechoslovak players at the world championships in Vienna.

– James G. Hershberg (jhersh@gwu.edu), CWOI organizer

Complexity in Soviet-Czechoslovak Hockey Relations

by John Soares

*International hockey during the Cold War was the site of intense rivalries across a steep ideological divide. But it was more than that: Canadians and Czechoslovaks both used the sport to assert their distinctiveness and independence from their own superpower ally. Canadians often resented the US role in Canada's economy, culture, and international relations. But as John Soares points out in this excerpt drawn from his chapter in the forthcoming University of Kentucky anthology, *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft and International Relations Since 1945*,¹ the situation was even more pronounced in the case of Czechoslovakia and the USSR. And in Czechoslovakia – and in neutral nations like Sweden and Switzerland - Western diplomats often looked to fan behavior for insights into genuine popular opinion ordinarily concealed for political reasons.*

. . . Canadian resentment of the United States was dwarfed by the hostility in the Soviet-Czechoslovakian relationship. Canadians lamented US involvement in Vietnam, the American role in the Canadian economy, and declining Canadian sovereignty in the era of NATO and NORAD, but Canadians lived in a free, open, democratic, politically pluralist society in which they had substantial say over their government and the policies it pursued. After a short-lived effort at self-government with substantial communist participation after World War II, Czechoslovakia was reduced to a single-party dictatorship in February 1948. What the West denounced as the “Czechoslovakia coup,” the Prague regime celebrated as “Victorious February.”² Hockey, though, offered a number of indicators that many Czechoslovaks shared the Western view. Because it was hard to penetrate genuine public opinion in closed societies, embassy observers looked for a variety of ways to understand what the Czechoslovak people were thinking. And a sport of such importance in the country was one means of doing so.

¹ This essay is adapted from John Soares, “‘Our Way of Life Against Theirs’: Ice Hockey and the Cold War,” in *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft and International Relations Since 1945*, ed. Andrew Johns and Heather Dichter (University Press of Kentucky, forthcoming 2014).

² See, e.g., “Prague Rally,” Prague Domestic Service, 24 February 1970, published in *Foreign Broadcasting Information Service Daily Report*, FBIS-FRB, 70-058, 25 February 1970, under the heading “Festivities Mark February Victory, People’s Militia, Czechoslovakia, p. D8.

Czechoslovakian hockey fans manifested their unhappiness in many ways. Some Czechoslovaks thought Prague was too proud of Soviet hockey successes. They also were unhappy with ticket distribution for hockey games with touring Canadian teams. Instead of making tickets generally available to hockey fans, the authorities “carefully selected” ticket recipients “to guard against the danger of the crowd manifesting its opposition to the [communist] government.”³ This was a serious concern, as Canadian observers in the 1950s noticed that the “usual hockey crowd [was] strongly pro-Western and incidents” often occurred at hockey games. One night a crowd “chanted for 15 minutes the name of their favorite player,” a national team “captain, who was at that time forbidden to play because his brother had asked for asylum in Sweden, and who had himself been sentenced to five years in prison for an attempt to escape.”⁴

Imprisoned players were also an issue at a non-league game between clubs from Prague and Brno in March 1955 that advertised popular resentment of the government. The hockey players arrested in the 1950 purge of the national team were being released, and two of them, Vaclav Rozinak and Augustin Bubnik, were scheduled to play.⁵ For a non-league game, around 2,000 spectators would be expected, but 7,000 showed up to see Rozinak and Bubnik. This turnout caused officials to panic; they decided not to let the former prisoners play. This triggered a 45-minute riot in which spectators threw sandwiches and thermos bottles and chanted protests against the government and its leaders. Officials then revised their decision: Rozinak and Bubnik still would not play, but fans who came to see them could get a refund of their admission fee. Fans promptly stormed the ticket offices, overwhelming staff who did not have the change needed to pay the refunds. The crowd was so agitated that police called to keep order fled.

³ Numbered Letter No. 145, Canadian Legation, Prague, to The Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 3 March 1955, Record Group [RG] 25 (External Affairs), vol. 8203, file 8137-D-40, part 1.2, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario (hereinafter “LAC”).

⁴ Chargé d’Affaires a.i., Canadian Legation, Prague to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 23 February 1955, RG 25, vol. 8203, file 8137-D-40, part 1.1, LAC.

⁵ According to a letter dated 3 March 1955 which the Canadian legation in Prague passed on to Ottawa, the two players named “Rosinak” and Bubnik” were members of the 1947 world championship team who had been released from prison two months earlier. Because the players arrested in 1950 were released from prison in 1955, and Augustin Bubnik and Vaclav Rozinak were among them, the author has concluded that these were the players whose scheduled presence contributed to the large fan turnout and subsequent riot. See translation attached to Numbered Letter No. 145, Canadian Legation, Prague, to The Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 3 March 1955; and “Worst Wrong Done To In Czechoslovak Hockey Fifty Years Ago,” Czech News Agency, 10 March 2000 (obtained via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe).

Canadian officials in Prague received an anonymous description of these events they regarded as so credible and important that they sent a complete translation to Ottawa.⁶

Worries about crowd behavior apparently motivated Czechoslovak authorities planning an exhibition game with Team Canada following the 1972 Summit Series between Canada and the Soviet Union. After the Canadians reached an agreement to play Czechoslovakia's national team in Prague, the Czechoslovak federation unilaterally announced that the game would be played in Pilsen instead.⁷ The federation claimed a socialist youth festival was already scheduled for the Prague arena,⁸ but in Ottawa it seemed "absurd to claim that the change of venue from Prague to Pilsen . . . has been proposed for any reasons other than political, i.e., to avoid any possibility of a demonstration in the Czechoslovak capital which might be construed as inimical to the interests of the [Czechoslovak] regime and/or the Soviet Union."⁹

US embassy observers similarly found clues to Czechoslovak popular opinion in hockey. They were convinced that spectators at the 1959 world tournament games in Prague "took the opportunity presented by international competition to display basic political likes and dislikes." The American officials considered "[t]he most notable aspect of the tournament . . . the coolness with which crowds treated the Soviet team." Significantly, too, Czechoslovak fans were pro-American in every tournament game except the USA-Czechoslovakia game. Czechoslovak fans even cheered for the Americans against the USSR. And the US embassy observer found local fans with whom he spoke "unanimous in their pleasure over the pro-American, anti-Soviet reactions of the crowd."¹⁰

Gauging popular opinion in a communist regime was, of course, difficult. It was possible that those who spoke with American (and Canadian) embassy officials were unrepresentative of the population, Czechoslovaks whose self-selection for sympathies to the West might have skewed Canadian and US embassy officials' perceptions of the Czechoslovak public. Still, the

⁶ Translation attached to Numbered Letter No. 145, Canadian Legation, Prague, to The Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 3 March 1955.

⁷ Prague to EXTOTT, No. 708, 16 August 1972, RG 25, vol. 10920, file 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 1, LAC.

⁸ Prague to EXTOTT, No. 713, 16 August 1972, RG 25, vol. 10920, file 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 1, LAC.

⁹ Redraft Memorandum, GEA to GEP, 17 August 1972, RG 25, vol. 10920, file 55-26-HOCKEY-1-CZECH, part 1, LAC.

¹⁰ Foreign Service Despatch No. 479 from AmEmbassy, Prague to Department of State, 3 April 1959, Record Group [RG] 59, Records of the Department of State, 1955-1959 Central Decimal file, box 4062, file 800.453/4-359, National Archives, College Park, MD.

evidence available suggests hostility to the communist regime was common among hockey fans: the delight of Czechoslovak fans at scenes of Canadians viciously bodychecking Soviet players in a documentary about Soviet hockey success in 1954, reported incidents of political misbehavior at hockey games, government efforts to restrict tickets for hockey games with Canada to the politically reliable, the behavior of Czechoslovak fans at the 1970 world championships, even Prague's effort to move the exhibition game with Team Canada '72 to Pilsen to avoid political embarrassment – all suggest that the hostility embassy observers reported was genuine.

Hockey's most important demonstration of Czechoslovak hostility to the USSR came during the 1969 world championships, the first held after the August 1968 invasion. The International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) initially scheduled the 1969 world championships for Prague to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of hockey in Czechoslovakia. But in September 1968 Prague announced that it could not host the tournament because of "technical, economic and organizational conditions." The US "embassy thought real concern was for prospective crowd behavior at Czechoslovakia-USSR matches."¹¹ When the tournament was played in Stockholm, it had serious political repercussions. Czechoslovakia defeated the USSR twice in the course of the tournament. After the first victory, Kenneth Skoug Jr. of the US embassy reported a "modest demonstration" in Wenceslas Square which led to some arrests and otherwise might have gone unnoticed had newspapers not publicized it "and, most unusually in a Communist country, revealed a few statements of the culprits, such as 'No tanks were there so they lost.' In standard Communist practice, assertions by defendants would be published only if abject confessions of guilt."¹² The apparent reason for the regime's willingness to publicize these comments became clear when the Czechoslovaks defeated the Soviets a second time, on 28 March. Crowds in Czechoslovakia celebrated the victory; some chanted "Russians go home!" or "Today Tarasov [the Soviet ice hockey coach—ed.], tomorrow Brezhnev."¹³ One of the slogans

¹¹ Kenneth N. Skoug, Jr., *Czechoslovakia's Lost Fight for Freedom, 1967-1969: An American Embassy Perspective* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), 227.

¹² Skoug, *Czechoslovakia's Lost Fight for Freedom*, 228.

¹³ Alvin Shuster, "Aeroflot Office Burned in Prague," *New York Times*, 29 March 1969, p. 5.

was “Czechoslovakia 4 – Occupation forces 3!”¹⁴ US diplomat Skoug reported that he “had never seen Czechs so happy. Clearly, the city had not experienced such joy since the defeat of the Nazis in 1945.”¹⁵

This second game had a political impact that stemmed from an attack on the Aeroflot and Intourist offices in Prague. This episode happened during the post-game celebrations, and it helped to finally topple Aleksandr Dubček, the reformist Czechoslovak leader who remained in power even after the invasion. Dubček reported that “a team of police agents under cover as city workers” – he identified their supervisor as “the Czech minister of the interior, Josef Groesser, a Soviet agent” – “had unloaded a heap of paving stones in front of the offices.”¹⁶ Skoug pointed out that there had been little vandalism directed against the Soviets during and after the invasion. Following the second hockey game, though, he “saw burly men, none of whom looked the least bit like students, unhurriedly and dispassionately hurling large paving stones through the windows of . . . Aeroflot. No police appeared until the store windows had been completely shattered. They took no apparent action.”¹⁷ And “[a]lthough Groesser said the initiators of the ‘vandalism’ would be discovered and brought to justice, this never happened, and his promised report was never published.” Despite all of this, “a number of journalists and historians, none of whom witnessed the event, reported having heard eyewitness accounts of provocation but were reluctant to endorse it.”¹⁸ *Pravda*, which blamed a different group of provocateurs, was likely accurate when it wrote that “the provocations that took place in Prague”¹⁹ had been “planned in advance and had far-reaching political objectives.”²⁰

The political outcome of the riot in Prague was that Czechoslovak hardliners had a pretext to bring a final end to Dubček’s tenure in office. The Kremlin provided an elaborate

¹⁴ Quoted in Dino Numerato, “Between Small Everyday Practices and Glorious Symbolic Acts: Sport-Based Resistance Against the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia,” *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 13.1 (2010), 112.

¹⁵ Skoug, *Czechoslovakia’s Lost Fight for Freedom*, 229.

¹⁶ Alexander Dubček, *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubcek*, ed. trans. Jiri Hochman (New York: Kodansha International, 1993), 236-7.

¹⁷ Skoug, *Czechoslovakia’s Lost Fight for Freedom*, 229.

¹⁸ Skoug, *Czechoslovakia’s Lost Fight for Freedom*, 230. Skoug gives more detail in note 19 on p. 240.

¹⁹ “Hockey and Nationalistic Frenzy,” *Pravda*, 31 March 1969, p. 5; translation in “After the hockey match,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 21.13 (16 April 1969), 19.

²⁰ “In a Frenzy,” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 1 April 1969, p. 4; translation in “Steps Are Taken to Curb Czechoslovak News Media,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 21.14 (23 April 1969), 6.

explanation of the riots. It claimed that the repeal of Prague Spring reforms after the Soviet invasion had been “favorably received by the working class, the toilers in agriculture and the majority of the working people.” Despite the purported popularity of the post-August 1968 repeal of reforms, though, “forces hostile to socialism” and “right-wing revisionist and counterrevolutionary elements” were “fanning a nationalistic psychosis.”²¹ They were “whipping up anti-Sovietism”²² and encouraging events of “a clearly terroristic and counterrevolutionary character.”²³ Interestingly, among the evidence of this purported counterrevolutionary Czechoslovak activity were the uniforms of the Czechoslovak hockey team: “for the first time in recent years,” they “did not show the name of their socialist homeland. Only the seal depicting a lion remained.” The Soviets also complained about the “poorly disguised gesture made by Czechoslovak television, which organized a long period of ‘interference’ on the screen when the Soviet national anthem was played after the USSR team’s victory over the Canadians.”²⁴

Demonstrating the zeal with which the Soviets made their case for intervention in Czechoslovakia, in one diplomatic conversation a Soviet official spun out what his American counterpart considered “a bizarre fantasy” of events in 1968: that a “subversive anti-Party ‘group’” had been “consciously stirring up trouble” in Czechoslovakia and was planning to take over the Communist Party at an upcoming Party Congress, “and to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact.” Acting “in cahoots with agents of” West Germany, these renegade Czechoslovaks were even planning for “the eventual formation of a ‘third force’ alliance in Central Europe, independent of both the USSR and the US”²⁵ This Soviet position – that counterrevolutionaries were running wild in Czechoslovakia and being encouraged by Western, and West German, agents – justified the August 1968 invasion, and in April 1969 demanded a change in leadership in Prague. Dubček, who had kept his position following the invasion, albeit with many limitations, was finally removed from power after the hockey riots.

²¹ “Hockey and Nationalistic Frenzy,” 18-19.

²² “Meeting of the Presidium of the CCP Central Committee,” *Pravda*, 4 April 1969, p. 4; translation in “Steps Are Taken to Curb Czechoslovak News Media,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 21.14 (23 April 1969), 5.

²³ “Session of the Presidium of the SCP Central Committee,” *Pravda*, 10 April 1969, p. 4; translation in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 21.15 (30 April 1969), 18.

²⁴ “In a Frenzy.”

²⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, 5 September 1968, Boris N. Sedov, 2d Secretary, Soviet Embassy, and Raymond Garthoff, US NATO/TDY/Dept., National Security File, Files of Spurgeon Keeny, box 3, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

After this crackdown, subsequent hockey games between Czechoslovakia and the USSR were even more passionate. The regime in Prague wanted to see players and fans behave responsibly, but Czechoslovak players and fans mostly wanted to defeat the Russians. This was evident in such events as the Czechoslovak fans' behavior at the 1970 world championships, and the brutality of the Czechoslovak players in their 1972 Olympic meeting with the Soviets.

Significantly, unhappiness over the Soviet invasion was not limited to the Czechoslovaks. Stockholm took its neutrality seriously, and the Swedish hockey federation often voted with the USSR at IIHF meetings, but ordinary Swedish hockey fans responded sharply to the invasion. Swedish hockey officials cut off hockey ties with the USSR – at least for a short period – to protest the invasion, triggering “bitter criticism” in the Russian newspaper *Sovietsky Sport*.²⁶ As Sweden hosted the 1969 world tournament, most of the fans in attendance at games were Swedes; they cheered overwhelmingly for Czechoslovakia. During the first USSR-Czechoslovakia contest, a crowd of 7,000 chanted, “Dubček! Dubček!” at the end of the game.²⁷ During the second game, “[m]ore than 10,000 pro-Czech Swedish fans put on another ear-splitting performance.” Fans waived signs that read, “Your tanks can’t help you here.”²⁸

The Swedes were not alone. The Canadian embassy reported after the 1971 world championships in Berne that continuing Swiss anger over the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia affected their treatment of the Soviet hockey team. “The atmosphere in neutral Switzerland,” the embassy reported, “at least at the level of the ordinary Swiss spectator, was openly anti-Soviet.” It described a “shameful scene” during the contest between United States and the USSR. The Swiss fans booed and whistled at the Soviets “[t]hroughout the entire game.” After the Soviets won, the teams lined up for the customary salute of the victor’s flag and the playing of its national anthem. “[T]he whistling and booing reached such a piercing intensity that the unfortunately very long Russian national anthem, played at full strength on the loud speakers,

²⁶ Canadian Embassy, Moscow to Under-Secretary, No. 1088, 18 December 1968, RG 25, vol. 10527, 55-26-HOCKEY, part 7.

²⁷ “Czechs win hate match, refuse to shake with Russian losers,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 22 March 1969, p. 1 (obtained via ProQuest Historical Newspapers (hereinafter, “ProQuest”).

²⁸ “Czechs near world title with 4-3 win over Russia,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 29 March 1969, p. 1 (ProQuest).

could not be heard. The Russian players stood on the ice, looking around in bewilderment at this expression of open dislike on the part of the Swiss crowd.”²⁹

Sport, then, demonstrated hostility to the Soviets among its allies and neutrals, in circumstances in which politics often encouraged people to conceal their true feelings. But the Soviets also used feedback from sports events in assessing popular attitudes in the West. Despite the hostility of Western governments, the Soviets and their allies took comfort that real popular opinion, and genuine friendship for Communist nations, was revealed by the fans and journalists who praised the superior skills of Soviet hockey players, or denounced the thuggery of their Canadian rivals. For example, the Czechoslovak media quoted a Swedish newspaper praising Soviet hockey and denigrating the Canadians after the USSR’s triumphant debut at the 1954 world championships.³⁰ *Komsomol’skaya Pravda* quoted a Finnish newspaper’s observation that the Soviets had demolished the “myth” of Canadian hockey professionals’ superiority in the Summit Series.³¹ Canadian criticisms of Team Canada ‘72 that appeared in the *Ottawa Journal*, *Montreal Star* and *Toronto Star* were quoted with evident pleasure by the official Soviet news agency TASS, and the newspaper *Sovietskaya Rossia*.³²

On both sides of the Iron Curtain, then – and in neutral nations – hockey fans and journalists provided information that contradicted the official line. But this similarity conceals more than it reveals. Westerners were freer, and given more latitude to criticize their own society, its representatives and its government. Canadian anti-Americanism was more openly expressed than Czechoslovak anti-Sovietism. And, in the end, its consequences could be dealt with more easily by the governments involved, in ways that would maintain popular support for the regime and its alliance connections.

²⁹ Canadian Embassy, Berne, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 3 May 1971, RG 25, vol.10920, file 55-26-HOCKEY, part 15, LAC.

³⁰ Numbered Letter No. 193, Canadian Legation, Prague, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 24 March 1954.

³¹ Translation attached to Canadian Embassy, Moscow to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 7 September 1972, No. 575, RG 25, vol. 10921, file 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 4, LAC.

³² Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, No. 607, 28 September 1972, RG 25, vol. 10921, file 55-26-HOCKEY-1-USSR, part 4.1, LAC.

“They had no tanks this time and they got four goals”:

The hockey events in Czechoslovakia in 1969 and the fall of Alexander Dubček

by Oldřich Tůma (translated by Jiří Mareš)

The context of the so-called “ice hockey events” in the spring of 1969, which worsened the ongoing political crisis in Czechoslovakia and were the reason why Alexander Dubček finished as the head of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in a matter of a few weeks, thus opening the way for the final round of pacification of the Czechoslovak people and its resistance against the August 1968 invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies, is primarily political; however, to understand all consequences and ramifications of what happened in the end of March 1969, one cannot do without understanding the popularity of ice hockey in Czechoslovakia and the attention which the public paid to matches between the Czechoslovak and the Soviet national ice hockey teams (not just at that time, but also before and after).

Ice hockey started being popular in the Bohemia, one of just a few European hockey-playing nations at that time, relatively early; the first ice hockey club, Prague’s Slavia, was founded as early as in 1900. In 1908, the Czech Ice Hockey Association was established, which also became one of the founding national associations of the International Ice Hockey Federation. Although there was no independent state yet, the Czech team participated in initial European Ice Hockey Championships and won three times, in 1911, 1912 and 1914, i.e. before the Great War. Czechoslovakia finished third in the first World Championship, which took place during the 1920 Olympic Games, losing only to the then unbeatable national teams of Canada and United States (0-15 and 0-16, respectively). The Czechoslovak national team usually finished in top positions at other interwar championships as well. Ice hockey became an extraordinarily popular sport, practically second only to soccer, particularly in the Czech environment (but after WW2 also in Slovakia). The phenomenon was rather remarkable; unlike in Scandinavian or Alpine countries, natural conditions in Czechoslovakia were not too favorable for ice hockey. As a rule, natural ice never lasts more than a few weeks in Prague, and even these are separated by spells of warmer weather. The first (and for quite some time also the only) arena with artificial ice was built only in the early 1930s (and Prague could thus host the World Championship tournament for the first time in 1933). If some other hockey-related events of the

20th century have been known as a “miracle on ice,” the phenomenon of the long-standing popularity and quality of the Czech and Czechoslovak hockey could perhaps be termed as a “miracle without ice.”

Between the wars, European teams basically had been unable to compete even with amateurs coming from overseas to represent Canada and the United States; however, the situation started changing after the war. The first post-war World Championship, which took place in Prague in 1947, was won by Czechoslovakia! Of course, Canada was not present there. Two years later, in 1949, Canada did play, but Czechoslovakia won again—the first time a continental European team had won a world tournament when Canada competed. The returning team was met by massive celebrations and the hockey players were hailed as national heroes. It looked like a golden age of the Czechoslovak ice hockey was coming.¹

However, the situation was quite different a year later. The Czechoslovak team did not get a chance to defend the title. The ruling Communist regime was afraid the hockey players might not return from the championship, which was taking place in the United Kingdom in 1950. The regime found defections of prominent sportsmen and sportswomen very difficult to swallow; those who had left the country included, inter alia, Ája Vrzáňová, twice the women’s world figure skating champion, and Jaroslav Drobný, an excellent tennis player and the 1954 Wimbledon champion. Cases like this damaged the reputation of the regime; and just imagine what would have happened if the super-popular world ice hockey champions had taken to their heels. Some of them might have even considered staying abroad and making their living as professional hockey players.

However, they did not get the chance. The Czechoslovak national team did not travel to Britain at all. The pretext the Communist Party leadership used to justify the withdrawal from the championship was an alleged denial of entry visas to reporters of the Czechoslovak Radio by British authorities. It was a false pretext, but it was decided that the team would not take part in the championship in protest against it. It is hardly surprising the players were mightily peevd.

¹ On the first fifty years of the Czechoslovak ice hockey see, e.g., Karel Gut – Václav Pacina: *Malá encyklopedie ledního hokeje (Small Encyclopaedia of Ice Hockey)*, Praha 1986; Miloslav Jenšík: *Kronika českého hokeje (Czech Ice Hockey Chronicle)*, Praha 2011, nebo Karel Gut – Jaroslav Prchal: *100 let českého hokeje (The Hundred Years of the Czech Ice Hockey)*, Praha 2008. See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemia_national_ice_hockey_team, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovakia_men's_national_ice_hockey_team.

Quite a heated discussion took place during their meeting in a Prague restaurant, and when a group of Secret Police members arrived to the scene, blows were even exchanged. Almost all members of the national team were arrested, indicted and sentenced to long prison terms (the prosecutor even called for death sentences). The first golden generation of the Czechoslovak hockey thus ended up in uranium mines. The cars the players had received as a reward for the championship title they had won in Stockholm were later used by Secret Police officers. All of them were released by the mid-1950s, and some of them were still able to play, but Czechoslovak ice hockey had to wait more than two decades for the next championship title. And Bůža Modrý, a phenomenal goalie who had been one of just a few Europeans to receive an offer from the NHL before his imprisonment, returned from prison in such poor health that he died a few years later.²

The Czechoslovak national team made its international reappearance only at the Winter Olympics in Oslo in 1952. Soon thereafter the composition of the world's ice hockey top underwent a radical change. The Soviet team appeared for the first time at the 1954 World Championships in Stockholm and surprisingly won. The following years essentially saw an ongoing duel between Canada and the USSR (with alternating success), in which Czechoslovakia did not have any major role to play. The Czechoslovak team managed to beat the Soviets only at the 1961 World Championship – and then nothing again for quite a long time. There was another important change taking place since the early 1960s. Amateur players representing Canada and the United States were no longer on par with European – and particularly Eastern European teams composed of players who were amateurs only on paper, but in fact were making their living by playing hockey. Canada won the World Championship for the last time (during the Cold War) in 1961. In 1965, during the World Championship hosted by Tampere, Finland, Czechoslovakia beat Canada 8-0 and the United States even 12-0.³ It was as if the history of the early international contacts of the Czechoslovak ice hockey was repeating itself – but this time the other way round. And as the best Swedish hockey players started playing in the NHL since the mid-1960s (although not in substantial numbers until the following decade)—and thus could not play for their country at world championships—the

² See, e.g., Vladimír Škutina: *Ztracená léta: příběh hokejového zločinu (The Lost Years: The Story of a Hockey Crime)*, Pardubice 1990. See also http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proces_s_československými_hokejisty_1950, or http://www.totalita.cz/proc/proc_hokej.php.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1965_World_Ice_Hockey_Championships.

championships developed into a duel of national teams of the USSR and Czechoslovakia. The fact that professional players could finally take part in the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) world championships beginning in 1977 did little to change the situation, since only members of the National Hockey League (NHL) teams that had not qualified for the simultaneous play-off round could do so anyway.

The tournaments usually ended in Soviet victories. The Czechoslovaks could beat the Soviets every now and then, but equally often they managed to spoil the overall outcome by a loss to another team (most frequently Sweden). For the Soviets, mishaps like this were very rare. Between 1963, when the Soviets had won the World Championship again after some years, and 1990, when the situation in international ice hockey changed thanks to political changes (also Soviet players started playing in the NHL), the Soviet national team had won 24 out of 30 top-level tournaments⁴, followed by Czechoslovakia with 4 victories. The victories of Sweden in the 1987 World Championship, and in particular of US amateurs in the 1960 and 1980 Winter Olympic tournaments in Squaw Valley and Lake Placid, were absolutely exceptional.⁵ It is hardly surprising that, due to their stereotypical outcomes (between the 1963 World Championship and the 1972 Winter Olympic Games, the Soviet team won ten times in a row), top-level international ice hockey events were generally an extraordinarily boring (or at least predictable) affair for the international community of ice hockey fans.

However, that was not the case of Czechoslovakia. For Czechoslovak ice hockey fans, matches with the USSR were always the sporting event of the year; and, to some extent, not just a sporting event. In Czechoslovakia, the popularity of ice hockey was combined with a changing attitude to the Soviet Union. The extraordinarily subservient nature of the Communist propaganda, the ceaseless adoration of all things Russian and Soviet, which was also reflected in how the mass media reported on matches with Soviet sportsmen and sportswomen who – like all things Soviet – were presented as examples that should be followed, were ultimately counterproductive. They managed to turn a society in which Russophilia was a fairly common phenomenon (in this respect, Czechoslovakia was an exception among other Central European countries after 1945) into a society which viewed all things Russian and Soviet with ironical contempt and a feeling of cultural

⁴ In some Olympic years, there was also a separate world championship, in others not.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice_Hockey_World_Championships.

superiority. The attitude was also reflected in sports events; annual matches during the ice hockey world championship were seen not as a celebration of friendship among sportsmen (which was how the regime's propaganda machine presented them), but rather as highly intense and prestigious duels, all the more so that the Czechoslovak team was a regular loser. Rumors to the effect that the Czechoslovak team had to lose for political reasons, i.e. that the results were politically manipulated, were rife in the society. They were not true, but they show how much significance the public assigned to the hockey matches and with how much hostility it viewed Soviet hockey players.

The regime leaders were well aware of the role of sports in general, and ice hockey in particular, for the public opinion, and thus paid special attention to any potential incidents. A bizarre document, dated 1966 and prepared for First Party Secretary and President Antonín Novotný, has been preserved, which described a "friendly" match between SONP Kladno and Dynamo Moscow, when "Kladno's player Lidický was fouled in the eleventh minute of the second period" and subsequently "attacked again by Dynamo's player Shchegolov, whose charge started an all-out melee." The document ends with a list of measures of the Disciplinary Board: "SONP Kladno was ordered to deal with the case and make sure that things like this will not happen again."⁶

A case unto itself was the match with the Soviet team during the 1967 World Championship in Vienna, which Czechoslovakia lost 2-4, but which ended in multiple fights. Moreover, the Soviet anthem played during the final ceremony was accompanied by deafening boos and catcalls from the audience. It is very likely they came mainly from Czech and Slovak tourists. Shortly before the championship took place, the regime had lifted some of the restrictions on travel to the West, and the 1967 World Championship was the first tournament abroad (and close to our border) which Czechoslovak spectators could attend and show their emotions. The Vienna match and its repercussions also drew the attention of the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.⁷ A document prepared for members of the Politburo analyzes reactions to "the scandalous end of the match between the two best friends." It admits that a part of the general public (euphemistically referred to as "a minority") "made use of the game conclusion to voice their anti-Soviet attitudes and to ridicule and deride our friendship." In Jičín, "people criticized the Soviet team, saying that

⁶ Document of September 16, 1966, NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. A. Novotný, b. 25.

⁷ Document of March 31, 1967, NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. A. Novotný, b. 25.

Canada used to be repeatedly condemned for a behaviour like this [*i.e.*, *excessive roughing – O.T.*].” According to a report of the North Moravian Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, “the match had a negative effect even on school children, who spoke insultingly about the Soviet Union.” And so on, and so on. Even “the slogan “With the Soviet Union forever” was ridiculed by an addition “even when they beat us,” or the slogan “The Soviet Union – our example.” The document ends in a pessimistic but realistic tone: “The information acquired from regional committees and members of the apparatus of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CC CPCz) invariably indicates that most people believe the blame lies with the Soviets and that the scandalous end [of the match—O.T.] will make our mass political work much more difficult.” (See doc. No. 1.)

Ice hockey – and particularly the matches with the Soviet Union – had been much more than a sporting phenomenon for Czechoslovaks even before 1968. To make a strict distinction between the sporting aspect and the political component of the issue and to interpret the ice hockey history of 1969 only as a compensation of “frustrated feelings of national pride”⁸ thus amounts to something like misunderstanding. And the reflections to the effect that the Czechs were impossible, that they caused unrest and a political crisis with catastrophic consequences over something as trivial as a hockey match only to keep their mouths shut for the next two decades when much more important matters were at stake, which have appeared quite often in Czech journalism and partly also historiography since 1989, may be seen as perhaps exaggeratedly self-critical. On the contrary – there were important political matters at stake in March 1969, and the hockey match was just their triggering mechanism; the events that took place in the evening of March 28, 1969, showed how much energy and authentic willpower to resist was present in the society even seven months after the invasion and occupation, the compromises and far-reaching concessions the CPCz leadership had been forced to make notwithstanding. Still, a victory in a handball or basketball match against the USSR would not have, almost certainly, triggered such a reaction.

August 21, 1968—the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia—changed everything, including the attitude of Czechs and Slovaks to Soviets or, as was the common perception, to

⁸ Petr Pithart: *Osmádesátý (The 1968)*, Praha 1990, p. 207. (However, Pithart’s book is an otherwise fairly poignant analysis of events during the Prague Spring.)

Russians. The ironic contempt was supplemented by bitter hatred. There is a fairly common opinion – and increasingly frequent as time elapses – that the Prague Spring ended with the signature of the Moscow Protocol (a document agreed to under duress by Czechoslovak leaders forcibly brought to the Soviet capital after the invasion) and the pacification of the intensive nationwide resistance against the aggression. It is perhaps true that, as an attempt of the reformist wing of the CPCz leadership to carry out an autonomous policy, not one entirely subordinated to Moscow, it indeed ended. However, as a dynamic, all-society process, it did not. The public and various civic organizations (Union of Students, artists' guilds, trade unions) refused to capitulate long after the abovementioned events, hoping that their support of reformist politicians would help retain at least some of the liberties won in the spring of 1968 and perhaps even make the foreign troops leave. Tens of thousands of people were demonstrating on Independence Day, October 28; other demonstrations took place on November 7, the anniversary of the Bolshevik coup, at that time naturally celebrated as the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Students of secondary schools and universities went on strike in mid-November; trade unions were planning another strike at the turn of the year in support of Josef Smrkovský, who was about to lose his position of the Speaker of the Parliament under Moscow's pressure. Immediately thereafter, on January 16, the public was mobilized by Jan Palach's suicide by self-immolation in protest against the Soviet occupation. A general strike was considered, hundreds of thousands of people were out in the streets again. By the by, in the evening after Palach's funeral, during clashes between policemen and protesters in the centre of Prague, a display window of the branch office of the Soviet national carrier Aeroflot in Wenceslas Square was broken – without prompting any Soviet reaction at that time.

However, even the most free-thinking of the reformists were not prepared for the type of policy that could exploit the considerable potential public support within Czechoslovakia. Instead, as veteran apparatchiks, they relied on their ability to convince the Kremlin that the situation was not that dramatic, and that they themselves were the best guarantee of its consolidation. However, they wanted some breathing space and a calm situation to be able to do so – not repeated mobilizations of the public albeit in their support. As it was, they only allowed themselves to be pressed into more and more concessions; at the end of the day, even Smrkovský offered his resignation and talked trade unionists out of the strike. The huge potential represented

by the public attitudes was not made use of in a politically relevant manner, and those who the public continued to trust and to whom it offered its support – i.e., Dubček and other reform-minded members of the Party leadership – were neither able nor, in fact, willing to exploit it. Moreover, an increasing number of Party officials, who had adamantly rejected the invasion in August 1968, started behaving very pragmatically. They had simply arrived to a conclusion that their continuing political career depended on Moscow’s goodwill, and were doing their best to win that goodwill back. As there was no one to steer the still strong energy of the society in a meaningful direction, the energy was looking for its own impulses and outlets, manifesting itself in situations and ways that could be, and often were, politically counterproductive.

The World Ice Hockey Championship matches in the end of March 1969 were precisely an impulse which triggered a massive public reaction. It was Czechoslovakia’s turn to host the Championship; however, the International Ice Hockey Federation had decided (reportedly upon the request of local organizers in Prague⁹), fairly reasonably, that having the event in a recently occupied country was not a good idea, and moved the Championship to Sweden. The public was awaiting the Championship, and particularly the matches with the Soviet team, with great excitement, but also with optimism. After all, Czechoslovakia had managed to beat the Soviets a year earlier, at the Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France. Although Czechoslovakia had ultimately lost to Sweden and the gold medal had gone again to the Soviet team, the victory achieved after seven long years of waiting had seemed to dovetail nicely with all the promising changes of the social atmosphere of the spring of 1968. According to rules then in force, the 1969 Championship was a double round-robin tournament. The Czechoslovak team won the first match with the Soviets 2-0; the result – combined with current political aspects – produced an unbelievably tense and excited atmosphere before the second match. It looked like the national team could win the Championship again after two decades, if they managed to repeat the victory. Unfortunately, that did not happen; on the last day of the tournament, Czechoslovakia lost also the second match with Sweden, finishing third, and the Soviets were the champions again.¹⁰

⁹ See Kenneth N. Skoug, Jr.: *Czechoslovakia’s Lost Fight for Freedom 1967-1969. An American Embassy Perspective* (Westport-London 1999), p. 227.

¹⁰ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1969_World_Ice_Hockey_Championships.

Before the second match with the Soviets, which was played in the evening of March 28, millions of Czechoslovaks, including many who had never shown the slightest interest in results of sporting matches, and would never do so thereafter, were about to take a seat in front of their TV sets. Even the match, the venue of which was Stockholm's Johanneshov Arena, was much more than a sporting event. There were hundreds of Czechs and Slovaks among the audience, most of them exiles rather than tourists, and the Swedish TV offered a shot of banners with anti-Soviet slogans from time to time. Some of the Czechoslovak team's players hid the five-pointed star, which was a part of the national emblem on their jerseys, under a piece of electrician's tape.¹¹ They also ostentatiously avoided shaking the hands with their rivals when the game was over. The Czechoslovak hockey players were not a textbook example of sportsmanship in those matches, but their behavior was quite understandable under the circumstances. A TV shot clearly shows Jaroslav Holík¹², a forward of the Czechoslovak team, shouting something at the Soviet goalie immediately after the first goal was scored, while Václav Nedomanský¹³, another excellent forward, is banging his stick against the post of the Soviet goal in euphoria. Many years later, Holík recalled that he had been shouting "You f---ing Commie!"¹⁴ at the Soviet goalkeeper. The game was also dramatic in itself; the *sbornaya* (combined USSR team), losing 0-2 after the first period, first managed to level the score, but Czechoslovakia ultimately won 4-3.

Thousands of people had celebrated even the first victory, in the evening of March 21, in the center of Prague. However, the second one triggered a massive outburst of elation. Within minutes, downtown Prague, as well as centres of many other cities, filled with jubilant throngs. A report by the interior minister (see Document No. 2) mentions altogether 69 towns and cities where celebrations and protests took place. Gustáv Husák was allegedly complaining: "There were

¹¹ In 1960, the newly adopted constitution declared the socialist system in Czechoslovakia completed; in addition to a change of the official name of the country (Czechoslovak Socialist Republic instead of Czechoslovak Republic), there was also a change of the national emblem. The traditional royal crown above the lion's head was replaced by a five-pointed star.

¹² See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaroslav_Holík.

¹³ In 1974, Nedomanský defected and became the first Czechoslovak hockey player who really made his presence felt in North American professional hockey, first in the World Hockey Association (WHA) and then in the National Hockey League (NHL). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Václav_Nedomanský.

¹⁴ See the Czech TV's movie of 1999, *Razítka na normalizaci (The Normalization Stamp)*, (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Bu-6vNxWE8>). There is no English voice-over, but the footage itself is indicative enough of the emotional atmosphere during the match in Stockholm and subsequent street celebrations.

half a million people out in the streets that night.” Actually, the number might be even higher; it took two decades for crowds of the same size to appear in the streets of Czech and Slovak cities in November 1989. The November 1989 events were purely about politics, but even those taking place in 1969 were not just celebrations of a victory in a sports match. As soon as people were out in the streets, the celebrations spontaneously turned into a political manifestation of resistance against all things Soviet and, in particular, against the presence of the Soviet Army in Czechoslovakia. It is definitely not accidental that the wildest riots took place in towns and cities where Soviet troops were stationed. Sports and politics blended perfectly. Perhaps the most frequent chant was “They had no tanks this time and they got four goals!” In the heads of Czechs and Slovaks, Anatoli Tarasov¹⁵, the notorious, despotic and now finally beaten coach of the Soviet team, or the massive defender Alexander Ragulin¹⁶ (whom Czechoslovak hockey fans had remembered well as one of the protagonists of the brawls in Vienna in 1967) turned into surrogates of Brezhnev’s USSR that night. The fact that most members of the Soviet national team traditionally came from the military team CSKA Moscow, and were thus *de facto* members of the Soviet Army, made the connection even easier.

The keen observer of Czechoslovak events during the Prague Spring, Kenneth N. Skough (who worked for the US Embassy in Prague between 1967 and 1969), wrote: “The night air throbbed with the sound of national redemption. I had never seen Czechs so happy.”¹⁷ However, Czechs and Slovaks were not happy only because their national ice hockey team had won or because their national pride had received a boost that night. In March 1969, the Czechoslovak people were still living under the impression of their resistance against the August 21 invasion. The week of the anti-invasion, non-violent, but decisive and inventive resistance brought an almost euphoric experience of unity and determination to the Czech and Slovak society. As the provisions of the Moscow Protocol had remained top secret, it moreover seemed that the resistance had been at least partly successful. At least, the abducted politicians had reassumed their previous positions – and that had been one of the most important requirements of the public. In spite of recurring disappointment over concessions and capitulations of the politicians whom, however, they still

¹⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatoli_Tarasov.

¹⁶ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Ragulin.

¹⁷ Skoug, *Czechoslovakia’s Lost Fight for Freedom*, p. 229.

trusted, the euphoric experience was still present and restorable. On that night, people were also enthusiastic over how many of them were out in the streets again; it seemed such a force had to achieve something and could not be ignored.

Perhaps a short diversion concerning historical literature on the 1969 hockey events would be appropriate here. The author of the hitherto most comprehensive study on the Prague Spring written and published in English, H. Gordon Skilling, touches upon them only marginally.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, all developments since August 1968 are just “an epilogue” for him. Kieran Williams has devoted more attention to these events, but, insofar as the March 28 protests are concerned, he relies mainly on Czech literature.¹⁹ Some sports historians have paid some attention to the issue, or the role of sports during the Cold War, e.g. the Finnish historian Markku Jokisipilä. Their narrations are, at least where Czechoslovak facts are involved, often inaccurate.²⁰ Of course, the topic has also been covered by Mikhail Prozumenshchikov, a co-author of this paper, whose interpretation is based on Soviet documents relating to the period.²¹ It is quite natural that Czech historians have been dealing with the issue in a much greater detail, and also produced much more detailed descriptions of the events.²²

¹⁸ H. Gordon Skilling: *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 819-820.

¹⁹ Kieran Williams: *The Prague Spring and its aftermath: Czechoslovak politics 1968-1970*. Cambridge 1997, pp. 198-209.

²⁰ Comp. Markku Jokisipilä: “Maple Leaf, Hammer, and Sickle: International Ice Hockey During the Cold War,” in: *Sport History Review* 37 (2006) 36-53 states, for example, that “Alexander Dubcek was removed from the office by Moscow, only a day later” (p. 46) etc. His other work, “Revenge in 1969, Miracle in 1980. The Two Most Politically Charged Moments of Cold War Ice Hockey,” in: *Sport zwischen Ost und West. Beiträge zur Sportgeschichte Osteuropas im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*. ed. A. Malz – S. Rohdewal – S. Wiederkehr. Osnabrück 2007, 93-111, was not available to me, nor were other articles which Jokisipilä refers to in the abovementioned article.

²¹ Comp. Mikhail Prozumenshchikov: Das glatte Eis des „Prager Frühlings“. Der Sport in der Geschichte der sowjetisch-tschechoslowakischen Beziehungen. In: *Prager Frühling. Das internationale Krisenjahr*. Vol. 1. Beiträge 1968. Ed. By S. Karner – N. Tomilina – A. Tschubarjan. Köln-Weimar-Wien 2008, 879-893. However, other texts of Russian authors quoted by Prozumenshchikov were unavailable to me.

²² E.g. Ondřej Felcman, the author of the “Počátky ostré etapy normalizace” (Beginnings of the Hard Normalization Stage) chapter in *Československo roku 1968 (Czechoslovakia in 1968)*, vol. 2: Počátky normalizace (Beginnings of the Normalization), ed. By V. Mencl. Praha 1993, in particular pp. 51-64; Jindřich Madry, *Sovětská okupace Československa, jeho normalizace v letech 1969-1970 a role ozbrojených sil (The Soviet Occupation of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia's Normalization in 1969 – 1970, and the Role of Armed Forces)*. Praha 1994, in particular pp. 41-71; Zdeněk Doskočil: *Duben 1969. Anatomie jednoho mocenského zvratu (April 1969. The Anatomy of a Power Turn)*. Brno-Praha 2006, in particular pp. 97-113; Jan Kalous: ČSSR – okupanti 4:3. Analýza jedné březnové noci (CSSR – Occupying Forces 4:3. An analysis of a March night). In: *Paměť a dějiny* 3 (2009), vol. 2, 22-37.

No description of the events of the March night is needed here. A detailed and fairly credible description of what was happening is provided in the report by Minister of Interior Jan Pelnář, attached as Document No. 3 hereto. The report may exaggerate a bit in some cases, presenting the protesters less favorably than they deserved, but these are just minor details.

While the English translation obviously does not offer any clue in this respect, the original Czech text clearly indicates that some of the slogans were not chanted at all – they were not rhythmic, and it is difficult to imagine them being chanted. However, their meaning and orientation are unquestionable. They were indeed anti-Soviet slogans, often mixing events, allusions and names from the sporting world with political phenomena. There were innumerable variations of a basic statement to the effect that, in the absence of arms (submachine guns, tanks), the Soviets lost. The most frequently chanted names – often in a context which was far from flattering – were those of coach Tarasov and Soviet leaders Brezhnev and Kosygin. And there is hardly any need to add that those of Czechoslovak hockey players and reformist leaders, in particular Dubček, were chanted with admiration and sympathies.

There were indeed frequent slogans reflecting the then growing escalation of tensions between the Soviet Union and China. It was not because of Mao or the Cultural Revolution being extremely popular in Czechoslovakia. It was a simplified application of the “Enemy of my enemy is my friend” adage or just a manifestation of malicious joy over the problems that Moscow had to face. Slogans such as “Go home Ivans, you have got the Chinese there!” were indeed heard very often. The simple chanting “Ussuri, Ussuri,” reminding of recent armed and bloody clashes along the Soviet-Chinese border earlier that month, was a battle cry of sorts of the gathered crowds. [“Ussuri” was the name of the river on the Sino-Soviet frontier along which the clashes, on a disputed island (Damanskii/Zhenbao), took place—ed.]

On the other hand, it is difficult to understand why the protesters would have chanted “Long live Hitler,” which Pelnář’s report claims they did in Uherské Hradiště. There were definitely no right-wing extremists, such as skinheads, and no sympathies for Nazism in Czechoslovakia at that time. On the contrary – equating Nazism to Communism and the aggression of Hitler’s Germany against Czechoslovakia in 1938-39 to that of Brezhnev’s Soviet Union in 1968 was a very frequent manifestation of the contempt of and resistance against the invaders, particularly during the period immediately after August 21. There were endless cases of swastikas painted on Soviet combat

vehicles, and drawings with an equal sign between the swastika and the five-pointed star or the hammer-and-sickle symbol kept appearing on walls, posters or Soviet tanks all the time. This view of the matters was still very much alive in the spring of 1969; after all, the minister's report mentions a similar case involving a red flag with a swastika painted on it being carried in the procession in Pardubice. The chanting of "Long live the USA," mentioned in the same part of the document, does not make much sense in the context of the events, and was probably fabricated.

However, Soviet documents were twisting the facts to suit them to their propaganda needs much more. According to them, the protesters were even firing at Soviet soldiers from automatic weapons.²³ As a matter of fact, the Soviet propaganda machine had used similar allegations in August 1968 as well. There is no doubt that nothing like this occurred on March 28; civilians in the streets naturally did not have any weapons, and no Czechoslovak document mentions them. Although the atmosphere in the streets was acutely anti-Soviet, the use of weapons did not fit into it. It was actually the other way round – Soviet soldiers used their arms at least twice, in Mladá Boleslav and Ústí nad Labem. Unlike in August 1968, they were fortunately firing only into the air. After all, Marshal Grechko himself openly threatened that weapons would be used in any potential future incident (see Document No. 4).

Physical violence on the part of the protesters was rare, only during clashes with the police, and Pelnář's report does mention several injured policemen. However, attacks against Soviet targets were fairly frequent. There were several cases of Soviet vehicles being set on fire, the protesters also often attacked the buildings housing local Soviet HQs or barracks where Soviet troops were billeted. Nevertheless, the violence was limited to physical damage (e.g., throwing stones into windows, destroying signs, etc.). By the spring of 1969, the Soviet Army had been stationed in 36 towns and cities, and incidents such as those described above took place in twenty of them. In some places, the crowd attacked memorials commemorating the role of the Soviet Army in the liberation of Czechoslovakia from Nazi Germany in 1945. And, of course, the Aeroflot office in Prague's Wenceslas Square was destroyed, and the office of the Soviet Intourist travel agency was also attacked (although less violently). The police prevented potential attacks against Soviet diplomatic buildings in Prague and Bratislava.

²³ See Prozumenshchikov, op. cit., p. 890.

It is obvious that manifestations of unrest in Slovakia were less frequent and that there were fewer people taking part in them than in Bohemia and Moravia. On the other hand, the police in Slovakia intervened in a much more robust manner; in Bratislava, but also elsewhere, its members used a substantial amount of aggression and violence. Although the scope of protests in Slovakia was smaller, most cases of apprehension or arrest took place there. Even in the beginning of April, the Czech public was outraged by a depiction of violent acts committed by the policemen dispersing the protests in Bratislava in the evening of March 28. However, the article written by Zora Jesenská, a well-known Slovak writer, and named “The First Energetic Action of the Police of the Slovak Socialist Republic,” was published only in Prague’s *Listy*²⁴; it was not published in Slovakia. The situation of Slovakia was already different at that time. The social resistance in Slovakia was suppressed much earlier than in the Czech Lands, and Slovak state authorities were under much more efficient control of the already more or less “normalized” leadership of the Communist Party of Slovakia. Gustáv Husák, who had become the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia and a member of the CC CPCz Presidium late in August, was a person whom Moscow was both interested in and respected, not only because of his tactical manoeuvring in the party leadership (of course, in favor of Soviet requirements – e.g. the abolition of the outcomes of the 14th Extraordinary CPCz Congress in August 1968, the ousting of Smrkovský from the position of the Speaker of the Federal Assembly), but also because of the effective measures he took to calm down the situation in Slovakia.

The central role in an analysis of the events of March 28 and their consequences belongs to the demolition of Prague’s Aeroflot office. It is generally perceived as the event that helped the Kremlin escalate its pressure on the party leadership in Prague and promote personnel changes in the CPCz leadership. The event is also interpreted as the outcome of a provocation prepared in advance and staged in the interest of the Soviet Union by the normalized State Security, or at least the pro-Soviet faction within it, which thus fabricated the necessary and properly spectacular pretext escalating the crisis and adding to the pressure on the CPCz leadership. Basically all the works of domestic and foreign historians cited above²⁵ (and many others) are in agreement on this issue. They generally contain similar or identical details. There was a heap of paving stone prepared in

²⁴ *Listy* 13, April 3, 1969.

²⁵ See footnotes 17 to 21.

front of the Aeroflot office on the eve of the match. Plain-clothed State Security members started breaking the display windows and when the plundering and destruction were in full swing, they left the scene and were taken away in a bus or buses parked around the corner. There were suspiciously few (or no) policemen around the Aeroflot office, and those present did not interfere. Colonel of the State Security Bohumil Molnár is most frequently mentioned as the person who controlled the operation. However, there is a problem; although the interpretations are presented without a shadow of doubt, they are not supported by explicit evidence or sources. The provocation theory is generally based on hearsay evidence of persons who, moreover, provided it after many years. Only the American diplomat mentioned above has written that he was present on the scene and saw “burly men, none of whom looked the least bit like students, unhurriedly and dispassionately hurling large paving stones through the windows of the... Aeroflot [office].”²⁶ State Security officer Josef Frolík, who defected to the West in the summer of 1969 and published his memoirs there, also mentions agents-provocateurs. Allegedly, another State Security officer had told him the operation was being staged even before it took place.²⁷ The hypothesis – or its part – was confirmed by other Czechoslovak public figures (mainly after 1989, usually during interviews provided to historians from the Government’s Commission, which examined the events related to the Czechoslovak crisis from 1990 to 1992): Lubomír Štrougal, in 1969 a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee²⁸; Robert Horák, member of the Central Committee’s apparatus²⁹; and Miloš Paris, diplomat and advisor to President Svoboda.³⁰ Bohumil Šimon, in the spring of 1969 a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee and the First Secretary of the Municipal Committee of the of the Communist Party in Prague, voiced his doubts as to why thorough security measures had not been implemented in time, i.e. before the hockey match, at a meeting of the Central Review and Audit Commission as early as in the autumn of 1969.³¹

Let us give the conspiracy theory another thought. The demolition of the Aeroflot office was an incident that undoubtedly came in handy for Moscow and its allies in the CPCz leadership, and

²⁶ Skoug, op.cit., p. 229. On pages 229-230 and 240, Skoug mentions other witnesses, in particular foreign journalists, who supported the provocation theory.

²⁷ Josef Frolík, *The Frolík Defection*, London 1975, p. 152.

²⁸ ÚSD-SKV, interview with L. Štrougal, May 23, 1991.

²⁹ ÚSD-SKV, interview with Robert Horák, April 9, 1990.

³⁰ Miloš Paris: *Fakta ze zákulisí (Facts from the Backstage)*. Prague 1968 – Moscow 1991. Praha 1991, pp. 22-23.

³¹ ÚSD-SKV, f. D III/161.

they knew how to make use of it. Staging provocations like this was not uncommon in the portfolio of Soviet measures taken in relation to the Czechoslovak crisis. Let us remember, for example, the finding of a rucksack with weapons which was supposed to provide evidence on preparations of counter-revolutionary forces for an armed action shortly before the invasion.³² There undoubtedly existed a strong anti-reform faction within the State Security, which would have been able to organize an operation like this. Colonel Molnár was a prominent representative of that faction, and also played a role in an attempted (and ultimately unsuccessful) pro-Soviet coup on the eve and on the first day of the August invasion.³³ And his people also were present and provided assistance when Alexander Dubček and other reformist politicians were arrested in the morning of August 21, 1968. But: how comes there is no documentary evidence and we have to rely on hearsay? How comes none of the “burly men” throwing stones at the Aeroflot office has not provided evidence on the events later, after 1989? Or at least sold his account to the media?

If we consider the arguments which the conspiracy theory relies upon, we find out they may give rise to some questions. Everyone who remembers Prague under the Communist rule knows that there were lengthy repairs taking place all the time, that streets and sidewalks were often taken up and then left unattended, and that piles of paving stone lay here and there for years. Paving stone might not have been brought in front of the Aeroflot office on purpose, which operation would have involved a certain amount of risk. The argument that those breaking up the Aeroflot office’s shop-windows did not look like students does not prove much either. Western journalists and diplomats were convinced that all anti-regime and anti-Soviet actions were staged and implemented by students. In fact, most of the actors of the street protests in 1968 and 1969 were young workers and apprentices. They were also the moving force of protests during the days of the first anniversary of the invasion in August 1969³⁴; and most of the people who were apprehended on the night of March 28 at the Aeroflot office or later investigated by the police came from that social and age segment as

³² See, e.g., Nikita Petrov: “The KGB and the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968: Preconditions for the Soviet Invasion and Occupation of Czechoslovakia,” in: *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*. Ed. By G. Bischof – S. Karner – P. Ruggenthaler. Lanham 2010, pp. 145-163.

³³ See Pavel Žáček, *Odvracená tvář pražského jara: Státní bezpečnost v Praze a srpen 1968 (The Dark Side of the Prague Spring. The State Security in Prague and August 1968)*. Cheb 2010.

³⁴ See Oldřich Tůma et al. (ed.): *Srpen 69 (August 1968)*. Edition of documents. Praha 1996.

well.³⁵ What would a busful (or busfuls) of plain-clothed State Security officers have been good for? One or two pieces of paving stone would have definitely been enough to provoke the incident. It is true that riot police were not on the scene in time and in sufficient numbers. They arrived only when Aeroflot's premises had already been demolished. It is certainly a sign of security measures prior to the match having been neglected, but this does not necessarily mean that they were neglected to enable a provocation. The minister's report explains, fairly credibly, that the police could not get to the scene because of the crowds, and thus were not in a position to intervene in an adequate and timely manner.

Another weak point of the conspiracy theory is the fact that comparable incidents occurred in more than twenty other places. If we don't want to expand the conspiracy theory and admit that the incidents in Ústí nad Labem, Mladá Boleslav, Jaroměř and elsewhere were also provoked – and that would have had to be a grandiose operation – then we must admit that the atmosphere in itself was so tense that incidents like this were born spontaneously. It is true that the targets of all attacks outside Prague were Soviet military installations – in this respect, the Aeroflot incident is indeed different. However, there were no Soviet military facilities in Prague and the Aeroflot office served as a substitute or secondary target, the more so that it was very conveniently located – in Wenceslas Square, right where the action was. And a thought no one seems to have paid attention to yet: how could they have planned the provocation in advance, if favorable conditions for its implementation depended on the outcome of the match taking place in Stockholm? To have a significant impact, the provocation needed crowds of tens of thousands of people all around; otherwise it could have taken place anywhere else and at any other time. However, the crowds were brought to the scene by the victory which no one could have predicted in advance. If we indeed wanted to speculate, we would have to consider the possibility that the result of the Stockholm match was manipulated. That would really be a paradox. Czech and Slovak fans had always consoled themselves that their team had to lose for political reasons, and now the Soviet *sbornaya* would be ordered to lose because of higher

³⁵ See the Information memos on the state of criminal investigations in matters related to the events of March 28 and 29, 1969, in the Czech Socialist Republic, dated April 8, April 17, April 18, April 21, and May 1, 1969 (ABS, f. A 13, arch.u. 168). There were altogether 30 indicted (in the Czech part of the state), 18 of whom were workers, 5 without employment (probably apprentices), 3 conscripted soldiers (probably also workers in their civilian life), 1 old-age pensioner, 2 students and 1 “member of working intelligentsia.”

interests of the state. It is more than likely that something like this never happened; after all, if it had happened, someone would certainly have leaked it after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

We will probably never know for sure whether the Aeroflot incident was the outcome of a planned provocation or not, so we may be limited to guesses. What is important about the event, however, is that it does not matter whether it was provoked or not. The atmosphere was so tense and anti-Soviet sentiments were running so high that they led, even without provocations, to authentic and spontaneous actions which gave the Soviets a much-needed pretext to make use of. Which they did.

The CPCz leadership, and particularly its reform-oriented faction, clearly underestimated the potential impact of the match with the Soviet ice hockey team. There were no extraordinary precautionary measures implemented in Prague or anywhere else in the Czech lands – unlike in Slovakia. The possibility to use the Czechoslovak Army to guard selected buildings was not considered at all, although some of its units were earmarked for such duties and had orders to be able to deploy within twenty minutes. Such measures would not have prevented celebrations and protests, but might have blocked direct attacks against Soviet-occupied buildings. The use of the army was considered only in the evening, by which time the protests were in full swing. The Federal Ministry of Interior asked the Ministry of National Defense for assistance. The request took some time to get to Defense Minister Dzúr. However, he did not want to make the decision alone; he first tried to reach Prime Minister Černík and President Svoboda by phone, but to no avail, and only then did he turn to Dubček. Dubček did not permit the use of the army; he only ordered the minister to collect more information on the situation and find out what's going on.³⁶ Some historians criticize Dubček for the decision.³⁷ Whatever reasons Dubček might have (indecision, worries that the army might be used in the internal political struggle), by the time he spoke with Dzúr, i.e. around midnight, it was already too late anyway.

The reformist part of the CPCz leadership also underestimated the consequences of the “hockey night” and initially did not realize how serious the situation was. The Czechoslovak Government’s statement of March 29 condemned manifestations of “vandalism and hooliganism,”

³⁶ Comp. Alexander Dubček, *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubček*, ed. J. Hochmann. New York 1993, p. 237. See also the minutes of the meeting with Marshal Grechko, whom Defense Minister Dzúr was explaining the situation to (Document No. 4).

³⁷ J. Madry, op. cit., p. 44; Z. Doskočil, op. cit., p. 104.

but in a relatively mild tone.³⁸ Under the Soviet pressure and domestic criticism of the reformists, the proclamations and measures were becoming increasingly tougher and condemning; the robust resolution of the Czech Government of April 2³⁹; the resolution and opinion of the Federal Government of April 2 and 3, respectively⁴⁰; the resolution and statement of the CPCz CC Presidium, dated April 1 and 2, respectively,⁴¹ which followed on the meeting of the Executive Committee (here as Document No. 4) and the subsequent meeting of the whole Presidium on April 1.⁴² The reaction of army commanders, who had been under direct pressure of their Soviet counterparts from the very beginning, was particularly merciless. It was formulated in two orders (dated April 2 and April 9) of Defense Minister Džúr.⁴³ The second one included a number of personal measures affecting a number of officers; they were relieved of command, dismissed from the army, and even handed over to criminal prosecution. In this respect, the army outran other spheres of public life. All these resolutions and statements, although introducing sterner public order maintenance measures, including direct involvement of the army, and stricter media control, and increasingly using the wording and phrases until recently found only in statements and comments of Soviet representatives, could not satisfy Moscow anymore. Moscow no longer believed Dubček had the situation under control or that he was able and/or willing to bring it where Moscow wanted it to be. The Soviets decided to exploit the situation and were initiating and carrying out steps, both overt and covert, the purpose of which was to achieve the desired personal replacements in the CPCz leadership.

The Soviet reaction was robust, well-thought-out and swift, and the Czechoslovak party leaders' response was too slow. On the next day after the riots, Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deliver a strongly formulated protest (see Document No.

³⁸ See Ondřej Felcman – Jitka Vondrová (eds.): *Vláda a prezident*, vol. 2. Období normalizace (září 1968 – říjen 1969) (The Government and the President of Czechoslovakia. Normalization, September 1968 – October 1969). Praha-Brno 2010, pp. 325-326.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 334-336.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 331-333 and 336-337.

⁴¹ Jitka Vondrová – Jaromír Navrátil (eds.): *Komunistická strana Československa*, vol. 4. Normalizace (listopad 1968 – září 1969) (The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Normalization, November 1968 – September 1969). Praha-Brno 2003, pp. 280-284.

⁴² Ibid, pp. 264-280.

⁴³ Antonín Benčík – Jan Paulík – Jindřich Pecka (ed.): *Vojenské otázky československé reformy 1967-1970*, vol. 2. Srpen 1968 – květen 1971 (Military Aspects of the Czechoslovak Reforms, 1967-1970, August 1968 to May 1971). Praha-Brno 1999, pp. 193-198 and 202-205.

2). On March 31, Chervonenko met Deputy Prime Minister of the Federal Government František Hamouz, who expressed “the deepest apologies” on behalf of the government.⁴⁴ While accepted, the apologies could hardly change anything. On the same day, the hockey events were discussed by the CPSU CC Politburo; it adopted a statement and a letter addressed to Czechoslovak authorities, which contained very critical comments on “extensive counter-revolutionary riots” and the incapability of Czechoslovak authorities to oppose “rabid anti-socialist elements.” The letter ends with a warning that, should any further provocations and attacks occur, “the Soviet party will be forced to take effective measures” and “reserves the right to determine the nature of such measures.”⁴⁵ The Politburo decided⁴⁶ to dispatch Soviet Minister of Defense Marshal Andrei Grechko and Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semyonov to Czechoslovakia. They landed at the Milovice aerodrome (a Soviet base) on the same day. Both then had a number of meetings; Semyonov delivered the abovementioned statement of the CPSU CC Politburo, while Grechko negotiated mainly with leaders of the Czechoslovak Army, ignoring Dubček. The minutes of the latter meeting (Document No. 4) are very eloquent. They contain very critical remarks concerning the state and political leadership, as well as threats both overt (the Soviets reserve the right to implement any measure, including the use of arms and reinforcements of their troops, even without the Czechoslovak government’s approval) and implicit (the situation is worse than on August 21). It was remarkable how Soviet generals not only demanded loyalty and obedience, but friendship. It explains the nature of relations between Moscow and its East European satellites better than any lengthy analyses.

Another interesting document has been preserved in Russian archives and made available only since a few years ago.⁴⁷ It is a memo of Ambassador Chervonenko on a meeting with representatives of “healthy internationalist forces” in Prague, on their assessment of the situation and their proposed strategies, including an appeal “to coordinate forces in the event of an extreme

⁴⁴ See O. Felcman – J. Vondrová (ed.): *Vláda a prezident (The Government and the President of Czechoslovakia)*, vol. 2., pp. 328-329.

⁴⁵ The original of the letter is deposited in Prague, NA – U ÚV KSČ, f. 07/15, a.j. 281. For a Czech translation, see Jitka Vondrová – Jaromír Navrátil (ed.): *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967-1970*, vol. 3. Zář 1968 – květen 1970 (The Czechoslovak Crisis in the International Context, 1967-1970, September 1968 to May 1970). Praha-Brno 1997, pp. 288-290.

⁴⁶ For the resolution, see *Chechoslovatskiy krizis 1967-1969 gg (The Czechoslovak Crisis, 1967 - 1969)*. Moscow 2010, pp. 504-505.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 1048-1056.

situation which the right-wing and anti-socialist forces could provoke,” which is difficult to interpret in any other way but an invitation to another Soviet military intervention, if deemed necessary. It was, in fact, a repetition of the situation prior to August 21, when the same people (Karel Hoffmann, Antonín Kapek, Vilém Nový and others) had been talking Moscow into a military action and offering their cooperation. The document also contains a personnel analysis of sorts, in which the Soviets are recommended whom not to deal with, whom to get rid of, whom to neutralize and whom to cooperate with. It is interesting to note that they recommended focusing on and supporting, in particular, Gustáv Husák and Lubomír Štrougal. At the same time, they also informed the Soviets that their group intended to establish a connection with Husák and Štrougal as well. In the next few weeks, their plan of action was implemented more or less along the lines described in Chervonenko’s memo.

While the hockey events mobilized the Soviets and their fifth column for an offensive, the same did not apply to the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Presidium of the Central Committee held on April 1 (Document No. 5), and also the minutes of the meeting of the whole Presidium on the same day are proof positive of that.⁴⁸ The reformists (particularly Dubček and Smrkovský) are on the defensive and unable to collaborate effectively with each other, get mired in details, retreat. Smrkovský’s incessant excuses and explanations that he did not participate in the celebrations in the center of Prague or, more precisely, that his presence there was accidental, are particularly embarrassing. The tone of the discussion is set by Husák, Štrougal and Černík, whose speeches are much more comprehensive and basically take over the Soviet language and Soviet views (they too claim that the current situation resembles that before August 21). It is remarkable that the main attack against the reformists in April 1969 was not led by the Soviet lackeys and authors of the “letter of invitation” prior to the August invasion, but rather the politicians who had strictly condemned the invasion or even belonged to protagonists of the Prague Spring. To some of them, the tactics paid off and ensured top slots in government and party bodies for them. Husák held the position of the

⁴⁸ J. Vondrová – J. Navrátil (ed.): *Komunistická strana Československa (The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia)*, vol. 4, pp. 264-280. After the co-option of many members elected into party at the 14th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (held on August 22 and rendered null and void by the Moscow Protocol), the Presidium had too many members (20), which was why an eight-strong Executive Committee of the Presidium was established as a temporary supreme body of the party.

First Secretary until 1987 and that of the President until 1989; Štrougal was the Prime Minister of the Federal Government until 1988; Evžen Erban retained the position of the Chairman/Speaker of the Czech National Council until 1981. To others, it was good for nothing. Prime Minister Oldřich Černík and Štefan Sádovský, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (since Husák's promotion to the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), were able to survive only until early 1970.

In the next two weeks, all that mattered occurred. Husák finally managed to win the support of Moscow, which had written off Dubček completely. He had also garnered support in top bodies of the party, whose members were tired and frightened by repeated social conflicts. Dubček did not muster enough courage to resist; he resigned and served the new regime of Husák in a series of less and less important positions. The society pulled itself together once again, in August 1969, for open resistance in the streets, but that was a battle lost before it started, where only honour was at stake. Dubček did not fall and the Prague Spring did not end because of the hockey protests. These were just a pretext and the stage for a new Soviet offensive, which was successful this time and ended in a triumphant victory. After more than a year of efforts, more than a year from the largest military operation in Europe since 1945, Moscow finally forced its solution of the Czechoslovak crisis. At that time too, Dubček acted like many times before. Facing a dilemma whether to succumb to Moscow's pressure or whether to meet expectations of the Czech and Slovak peoples, who supported and admired him to the point of adoration, he manoeuvred and vacillated. He did display enough confidence to rely on the support of the society (if he had asked it for support instead of resigning in April, the squares and streets would have been probably more crowded than on the hockey match night), but he also did not act with enough resolve to stabilize the situation.

Apart from politicians and journalists doing so in 1969, even some contemporary Czech historians and publicists show a tendency toward criticizing the vandalism and hooliganism of protesters who allowed themselves to be provoked into attacks against Soviet targets on March 28, 1969. However, considering that the events took place in a country which had been occupied and deprived of its sovereignty just seven months earlier, that shots had been fired in the streets only a few months before, and that Soviet soldiers killed or injured dozens of people, the intensity of the protests is hardly surprising. As a matter of fact, the actual material damage was not that great. Ambassador Chervonenko perhaps exaggerated when estimating the damage sustained by the

Aeroflot office at one million Czechoslovak Korunas. Even that would not have been an exorbitant amount.⁴⁹ Compared to students' or racial protests taking place in the streets of Western European or Northern American cities at the same time, the Czech and Slovak protesters behaved quite meekly in March 1969.

Ice hockey championships and particularly matches with the Soviet team continued to be the headache and nightmare of the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia until 1989. Special security measures were invariably implemented for the duration of the championship; a special ops team was established, activities of operatives of the State Security and regular police were stepped up to the maximum level, there were more patrols walking their beats, and also an increased level of monitoring of "anti-social elements." The regime's approach to the championships was as cautious as to sensitive anniversaries, e.g. August 21. In particular, special police manoeuvres accompanied the 1972 World Ice Hockey Championship, which was hosted by Prague at last and which the Czechoslovak team won after 23 long years of waiting for the championship title. On April 12 and April 20, starting at 5PM, i.e. at the time when the match with the Soviets was about to begin, the forces normally available to the Police HQ in Prague were reinforced by 860 officers assigned by other departments of the Interior Ministry. Just like on similar sensitive occasions, they were sent out to patrol the streets, plain-clothed, with their service pistol in a shoulder holster, 16 rounds of ammunition and a can of tear gas. However, all went well in 1972, both for the Czechoslovak ice hockey and for the regime. Unlike in March 1969, "attempts of insignificant groups of politically irresponsible elements to make use of the enthusiasm after the match between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Soviet Union on April 20, 1972 [which the Czechoslovak team won 3:2 – O.T.] for an anti-socialist riot were thwarted by a well-timed and –organized action of the riot police."⁵⁰

Matches with the Soviet team continued to be watched with great interest in Czechoslovakia, and if played at home, also with some manifestations of anti-Soviet sentiments. However, after 1969 they were never again an impulse for major political events.

⁴⁹ It is, however, difficult to convert it into today's money. It would be between CZK 10 and 12 million today, i.e. about half a million US dollars. With the vastly different official and black market (more realistic) exchange rates at that time, it is possible to say that a million Czechoslovak Korunas in 1969 was worth US \$30,000, but could also be worth US \$150,000.

⁵⁰ ABS, f. Secretariat of the Minister of Interior, A2/6, i.n.81

Czechoslovak Documents

Compiled by Oldřich Tůma (Translated by Jiří Mareš, Mark Kramer, and Kathleen Geaney)

A Note to the Documentary Annex

The five Czechoslovak documents below date back to 1967 and to the critical days at the turn of March and April 1969. One of them (Document No. 1) illustrates the concern felt by the CPCz leadership to the public opinion regarding the match between the USSR and CSSR at the March 1967 world ice hockey championships in Vienna, two of them (Documents No. 2 and No. 4) illustrate the Soviet reaction to the hockey night events on March 28, 1969, one (Document No. 3) prepared by the Federal Ministry of Interior lists protests that took place in the evening of March 28, and the last one (Document No. 5) illustrates the reaction of the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to the events and also to the Soviet pressure.

All the documents are deposited in Czech archives in Prague; the original language of Documents No. 1, No. 2, No. 3 and No. 5 is Czech, that of Document No. 4 is Slovak. Three of the documents (No. 2, No. 4 and No. 5) have been edited as parts of the broadly conceived series of publications *Prameny k dějinám československé krize v letech 1967-1970 (Sources on the History of the Czechoslovak Crisis 1967 - 1970)*, which has been published by the Institute of Contemporary History in Prague since the mid-1990s. An English translation of Document No. 4 was published earlier.¹

In Documents No. 3 and No. 5, some segments have been omitted and marked [...]. In Document No. 3, text segments containing personal data of apprehended protesters have been omitted in accordance with personal data protection legislation. As to Document No. 5, segments dealing with procedural or organizational matters and parts where the discussion repeats itself or digresses to other, unrelated issues have been omitted. Square brackets contain first names of persons whom the documents refer to.

¹ Jaromír Navrátil et al. (ed.): *The Prague Spring 1968*. Budapest 1998, pp. 564-570.

List of abbreviations of archival funds used:

ABS - Archiv bezpečnostních složek (Security Forces Archive)

A MZV – Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive)

NA, A ÚV KSČ – Národní archiv, Archiv Ústředního výboru KSČ (National Archives, Archive of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia)

ÚSD, SKV – Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, Sběrka komise vlády (Institute of Contemporary History, Collection of the Government's Commission)

VHA, f. MNO – Vojenský historický archiv (Military Historical Archives), “Ministry of National Defense” archival fund

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Document No. 1: March 31, 1967, Prague. Czechoslovak Communist Party (CPCz) intraparty information concerning the response among the population to the USSR-Czechoslovakia match at the Ice-hockey World Championship in Vienna

Response to the USSR – CSSR ice-hockey match among the population

The general public in our country was very interested in this year's Ice-Hockey World Championship; the achievements of the Czechoslovak team in Canada the same as articles and commentaries from the sports section of our press contributed to this. Part of the sporting public hoped that Czechoslovakia would become World Champion.

The match between the USSR and CSSR was awaited with great interest; it should be noted that particularly part of the sporting public even made improper (unsportsmanlike) forecasts: the USSR could let us "win" the match; on the other hand, there were sharply contrasted views that can be characterized as follows: the Soviets will not deliberately lose if for nothing else than because of prestige.

Views on the events that took place during the match, and especially at the end of the game, are quite unfavourable and, based on the data we have received for the time being (the department did not organize any special comment campaign), it is possible to roughly divide these comments as follows:

A considerable proportion of the public condemns the match, recognises the priority of Soviet ice-hockey, feels bad about the match and evaluates the end of the game as unworthy of two best friends among socialist states and points out that millions of spectators from all over the world will not have a good impression of us (i.e. the USSR and CSSR). At the same time, it warns that this will make mass political work more difficult, especially among young people.

Another part of the public (however, it cannot yet be quantified) likewise condemns the final part of the match, but it roots for our team and reckons that we will get even with the Soviets at the earliest possible opportunity.

The third part of the public, generally individuals however, exploits the final part of the game for anti-Soviet diatribes and for ironizing our friendship.

This characteristic can be illustrated by the following facts:

In the Uranium Mines, Shaft 3 – the Region of West Bohemia – comrades were outraged by the conduct of Soviet hockey players and said that the skirmishes did not serve the friendship between our nations and its strengthening that we had been building for years. A brief moment will disrupt what we have been building. Millions of people worldwide saw it and that causes harm to us. Similar opinions can be found in the Region of West Slovakia or in Southern Bohemia, and these can be summed up as follows: it is incomprehensible that two countries in fraternal unity can push it so far, especially in sport. Furthermore, rumor has it that the match was virtually no big deal for the Soviet Union and that at the score 4:2 they had no reason to act in such an undignified manner. Agrostroj [Agricultural Machinery Company] Jičín criticised the Soviet team and said it was Canada that used to be condemned for this behavior.

According to the information of the Municipal Council in Prague, most people rate the match adversely and even consider the last part of the game as shameful and unworthy of both teams, which will not contribute to the reputation of both countries. It likewise did not contribute to the deepening of relations between our two nations.

According to the report of the North Moravian Regional Committee of the CPCz, the match adversely affected even school children who insultingly commented on the Soviet Union, and other citizens expressed themselves in a similar way while adding: You see, it is always like this with them.

According to the information of the Central Slovakian Regional Committee of the CPCz, the match sparked outrage among many workers, and some further expressed the view that the friendship between us is not quite as cordial as openly and officially proclaimed.

Certain cases of exploitation of the event, however rare, have already emerged as well. For instance, the following slogan was ridiculed in the Prague 7 district: “With the Soviet Union forever – even If they beat us.” Ironic remarks on how the Soviets contributed to the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution were pronounced in CzechShipyards. In a similar way, the slogan “the USSR – our example” is mocked.

Some people expect the whole matter will be explained in a television discussion, others (Agrostroj Jičín, the former chairman of the Prague 10 branch of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship) suggest that the responsible and competent highest circles address the issue.

Objective evaluation of the match in the *Rudé právo* daily is appreciated; in contrast, many disagree with the writings of the *Večerní Praha* daily.

Those who criticise our team (although this is rare) for playing the too hard as well are among those voices.

Information coming from the regional committees [and] the Central Committee of the CPCz concludes that most people see the mistake especially on the Soviet side and that particularly the embarrassing end of the game will make mass political work much more difficult.

[Source: NA, Prague, A ÚV KSČ, f. A. Novotný, b. 25, translation by Kathleen Geaney.]

Document no. 2: Report on Visit of Soviet ambassador Stepan Chervonenko to Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, 29 March 1969

On March 29, 1969, Ambassador of the Soviet Union Chervonenko visited State Secretary V[áclav] Pleskot upon his own request.

By way of opening, he stated that the purpose of his visit was to draw Comrade Pleskot's attention to events which had occurred in many places all over Czechoslovakia after the ice hockey match between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Soviet Union, and to ask him to inform the Federal Government about his visit. He also apologized for disturbing Comrade Pleskot on Saturday because of the urgency of the matter.

He noted that the Prime Minister of the Czech Socialist Republic, Comrade [Stanislav] Rázl, had called him in the morning to express his concerns and to apologize for the events. At about noon, he had also been visited by Deputy Prime Minister [Ladislav] Adamec and Minister of Interior [Josef] Grösser in the same matter, the purpose of the visit being to present the Czech Government's opinion regarding the events to the Ambassador.

Comrade Chervonenko then outlined the situation on the basis of information available to the Soviet Embassy. He added that his visit was to convey a preliminary notice the purpose of which was to draw the Czechoslovak Government's and Czechoslovak President's attention to the events and the indignation they had produced in the Soviet Union.

Yesterday, after the USSR – CSSR ice hockey match, political protests took place in many places all over Czechoslovakia. According to today's issue of the "Rudé právo" daily, they were attended by 100,000 people in Prague alone (and even more according to information available to the Soviet Embassy). The rioters were shouting anti-Soviet slogans. They raided the Aeroflot office on Wenceslas Square in Prague, destroyed its equipment and furnishings, threw all documents found there out on the street and set them afire. In Ústí nad Labem, some 5,000 protesters crashed into the office of the Soviet Army's representative, broke its windows and severed telephone lines. Three cars were destroyed. Similar events also occurred in Olomouc, Liberec, Děčín, Česká Lípa, Košice and other cities. In Hradec Králové, the crowd doused the memorial of Soviet soldiers with gasoline and set it afire. When the fire had burnt out, candles were lit in front of the memorial. In Bratislava, protesters attempted to break into the building of

the Soviet general consulate, but were stopped by policemen. There are certain indications that the events were organized and coordinated. For example, trucks had been prepositioned in Prague's neighborhoods where students' dormitories are located to allow the protesters to be quickly transported to riot locations. When the riot on Wenceslas Square had ended, the protesters were instructed to move to the Soviet Embassy. Indeed, an unspecified crowd of people assembled at the embassy at around midnight, but policemen intervened against it in time.

Comrade Chervonenko further noted that, according to today's issue of the "Mladá fronta" daily, Comrade [Josef] Smrkovský appeared on Wenceslas Square at about 11PM to rejoice together with the protesters. It is possible that his presence there was accidental.

According to the "Rudé právo" daily, the events were a manifestation of people's enthusiasm. However, the "Rudé právo" daily failed to notice that the protesters carried banners in support of the People's Republic of China and daubed the same slogans on various buildings.

Comrade Chervonenko expressed his hope that the Czechoslovak Government would assess the events and take measures preventing their repetition. In Comrade Chervonenko's opinion, it would be necessary to have a representative of Czechoslovak authorities appear on TV, either today or tomorrow, to prevent a recurrence of the events after the closing of the Ice Hockey World Championship tomorrow.

Furthermore, Comrade Chervonenko requested that the Aeroflot office be guarded by members of the police. People strolling on Wenceslas Square can enter the office freely and foreign correspondents take photographs of the demolished premises. A police patrol comes to the office every now and then, but departs immediately.

In this respect, Comrade Chervonenko asked that the office be repaired and restored to its normal condition today or tomorrow. He emphasized that he estimated the damage at about CSK 1 million. The shop-window glazing had already been broken during the events connected with the suicide of Jan Palach, but it had not been replaced yet, although the Soviet Embassy contacted the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately thereafter.

Comrade Pleskot thanked the ambassador for his information and stated that the events prompted disagreement and concerns on our part as well. Sporting events must not be abused for such lowly acts, the more so that the latter do not represent the opinion of Czech and Slovak people. Furthermore, Comrade Pleskot added that he understood concerns of the Soviet

Ambassador and that he apologized for the abovementioned events on his own behalf as well as on behalf of the Czechoslovak Government. He promised to notify the government immediately. The damage will be compensated.

Comrade Minister [Ján] Marko is presently visiting the region of Orava, which is his constituency. Comrade [Oldřich] Černík is not in Prague as well. The State Secretary, however, promised to arrange that the government would be notified immediately.

Comrade Pleskot added that the damage caused to the Aeroflot office in connection with the suicide of Jan Palach was to be rectified by the National Committee of Prague and that he did not know the matter had not been resolved yet.

By way of conclusion, Comrade Chervonenko emphasized that the Soviet Embassy was aware of the necessity to differentiate between people of Czechoslovakia and certain elements attempting to exploit sporting enthusiasm for the purpose of furthering their despicable goals.

The meeting took from 13.10 to 13.45 PM.

[Source: A MZV, Prague, GS »T«, box 32, 11, in Jitka Vondrová – Jaromír Navrátil (eds.): Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967-1970, vol. 3: Zář 1968 – květen 1970 (Praha – Brno 1997), pp. 286-87; translation by Jiří Mareš.]

Document no. 3: Czechoslovak Interior Minister Jan Pelnář, Report on Security Situation in Czechoslovakia on night of 28-29 March 1969 (Pelnář Report), 31 March 1969

On the March 28/March 29, 1969, night, after the ice hockey match between the teams of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, public gatherings took place in many towns and cities of the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic. Apart from normal manifestations of joy over the victory of our team, some groups of citizens in some of the cities made use of the opportunity to stage overt anti-Soviet protests; buildings, in particular those housing Soviet troops, were damaged and there were other public order disturbances as well.

The most serious situation developed in Prague, Ústí nad Labem, Bratislava, Košice and other, mainly larger cities.

In Prague, the offices of the Soviet AEROFLOT airline were demolished and their equipment set afire. In Ústí nad Labem, three motorcycles and two vehicles of the Soviet Army were set afire as well. In Jaroměř (East Bohemia), the mob even attacked the hospital and broke some of its windows. The disorderly rioters also damaged some memorials. Seventeen policemen who took part in riot-control actions in the territory of the Czech Socialist Republic were injured, three of them seriously. In the course of protests in the territory of the Czech Socialist Republic, altogether 20 rioters were brought by policemen to police precincts, of whom four were detained in accordance with the Penal Code, two were proposed to be remanded into custody, and three were handed over to investigators of public prosecution offices. Intensive investigation of all cases is going on.

In Bratislava and Košice, police intervened against protesters causing serious public disturbances. The latter were throwing stones and burning paper at the policemen, and were interfering with their intervention in other ways as well. Truncheons and tear gas were needed to perform the action. Thirty-four of the intervening policemen were lightly injured, and many others sustained minor bruises etc. The rioters damaged motor vehicles of the police and firefighting units. In Bratislava, 19 people were brought to police precincts, one of whom was proposed to be remanded into custody. Investigation is going on.

The police (Public Security) had prepared forces and assets, particularly in Prague and Bratislava, in the event of public disturbances by some of the citizens who would celebrate the

victory of our hockey team over the Soviet team. However, the actual scope and nature of the gatherings, mainly in Prague, and their transformation into criminal acts exceeded the expectations. Still, the police in Prague, using its forces and means and sometimes in cooperation with members of the 5th Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, prevented protests in front of the Soviet Embassy, the Soviet Military HQ in Prague and other buildings. However, its members failed to prevent other events in Prague and elsewhere, mainly because of the spontaneous nature and scope of the protests, and had a very difficult time to restore order.

Descriptions of the course of events in the towns and cities where serious public order disturbances or other serious violations of our laws took place on the March 28/March 29, 1969, night are presented below:

Capital City of Prague

At about 10 PM, some 25,000 to 30,000 people gathered in Wenceslas Square and hundreds of cars were slowly moving up and down the square and through adjacent streets, constantly honking their horns and with their headlights on. Step by step, the crowd grew to 100,000 to 150,000 people and almost completely filled Wenceslas Square, Příkopy, Mezibranská, Jindřišská, Vodičkova and other streets in the vicinity. The result of the ice hockey game was written on shop-windows, cars, buildings and other surfaces. At 10.10PM, about a thousand people gathered in Old Town Square. However, they dispersed into adjacent streets within less than an hour. The massed crowds in Wenceslas Square were chanting different slogans praising our hockey players.

At 11.15 PM, a group of about 400 people left Wenceslas Square. They marched down Na Příkopě and Revoluční streets toward the (Letná) tunnel, their probable intention being to get to the Soviet Embassy. In cooperation with members of the 5th Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, arrangements were made to stop the crowd and prevent its further advance. The human barrier composed of members of the Municipal Police Directorate of Prague indeed stopped the advance and, at about 1.00AM, all was quiet around the Soviet Embassy.

At about the same time, some 20,000 to 25,000 people gathered in Wenceslas Square, particularly in its lower part, between Můstek and the office of the Soviet AEROFLOT airline.

Some 3,000 to 4,000 people were massed on the sidewalk and street directly in front of the AEROFLOT office. The display window of the office was broken; the cause of the breaking has not yet been established. In spite of the massed people, a patrol consisting of members of the Traffic Control Squad of the Municipal Police Directorate of Prague appeared there in a short time and immediately called for additional reinforcements. Twelve policemen were dispatched to the incident site, followed by an additional 40-strong reinforcement unit; however, when they arrived, the AEROFLOT office's display window had already been broken and a group of youths were demolishing the interior equipment.

The first group of policemen dispatched to the AEROFLOT office after the Traffic Control Squad patrol's report also experienced difficulties getting to the site, as their advance was blocked by protesters. As the police patrols fought their way to the AEROFLOT office, they did their best to apprehend the perpetrators, who continued to destroy the already demolished interior equipment of the Soviet airline's office. Some items of the interior equipment had already been thrown out onto the sidewalk earlier, where the protesters burnt them. The patrols were attacked by the crowd and the perpetrators they apprehended were literally torn out of their hands by the mob and allowed to escape. Some policemen were injured as early as at that stage of their intervention; consequently, there was no other option but to protect the office against further destruction. With the assistance of the reinforcement unit and some citizens, the policemen succeeded in pushing the crowd away from the building and restoring order in front of it.

The action in front of the AEROFLOT office claimed 10 wounded policemen, two of them seriously, who were injured by paving blocks or rods. At the same time, the massed crowd in front of the AEROFLOT office kept insulting them, shouting "Gestapo – beat them!" The police bus bringing additional police reinforcements was also pelted with stones in the same area.

The above description of the situation clearly indicates that the breaking of the display window and destruction of equipment of the Soviet airline's office could not be prevented.

The disorderly conduct described above resulted in a total destruction of the ground floor rooms of the AEROFLOT office. Their equipment was completely destroyed and the front part of the office utterly demolished. More specifically: all display windows and entrance doors were

broken; telegraph, telephone and office equipment destroyed; furniture and carpeting were torn, broken and burnt; typewriters and calculators were destroyed as well.

All lighting fixtures were torn off and shattered, all promotional items (leaflets, aircraft models, various souvenirs etc.) were burnt; all furniture and appliances (“ZIL” refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, coffee and tea sets) were completely destroyed. Neon signs of AEROFLOT and INTOURIST, neon panels, movies and an electrical map of international flights of AEROFLOT were destroyed as well. Documents were partly burnt; some of them were tacked on tree trunks and walls around the office. The walls and floors of rooms were scarred and soiled.

According to indicative estimates, the damage sustained by the AEROFLOT office amounts to CSK 1 million.

At 01.45 AM, policemen advancing from the statue of St. Wenceslas and also from Mústek toward the center of Wenceslas Square succeeded in dispersing and scattering the massed crowd of people to adjacent streets. At around 02.15 AM, only some 200 people remained in the bottom part of the square. At about 03.00 AM, a new throng of 300 to 400 people formed around the statue of St. Wenceslas, where they were chanting various slogans. Throughout the demonstration in Wenceslas Square, the following slogans were chanted: “Shaibu, shaibu” (Score, score!); “One, two, three, four – score”; “Long live Jiřík, long live Golonka” etc. Later on, especially during the demolition of the AEROFLOT office, the following slogans were chanted: “CSSR – occupiers 4:3,” “Watch out, Tarasov”; “Ussuri, Ussuri”; “Go home Ivans, you have Chinese at your doorstep.” At about 03.15 AM, peace and order were restored throughout Wenceslas Square.

During the protests in Wenceslas Square, decorations and adornments around the statue of St. Wenceslas were also completely destroyed.

During the demonstration, eight people were apprehended in Wenceslas Square and brought to the Municipal Police Directorate of Prague, interrogated and later released.

North Bohemia

At 10.30 PM, 4,000 to 5,000 people gathered in front of the building of the Soviet HQ in Ústí nad Labem. They first chanted the result of the hockey match. The pressure of the crowd

broke some of the building's windows. Shortly afterward, two Soviet officers, a major and a captain, emerged from the building. The latter fired one shot into the air from his pistol, whereupon the massed crowd pulled back and responded by insults and stones and pieces of bricks thrown at the HQ building. In the course of these events, some more windows were broken, and the equipment in two rooms on the ground floor, the door to the building and plastering were damaged.

Some youths then took a jerrican with petrol from a Soviet truck parked in front of the building; another group turned over a GAZ 4x4 standing nearby, doused both vehicles with petrol and set them afire. The same people then pushed three motorcycles with sidecars parked nearby to the burning vehicles; these were burnt as well. A fire squad was summoned to the site; one of its members was injured by broken glass. The damage caused to the Soviet vehicles is approximately CSK 150,000.

Police reinforcements intervened against the people massed on the site; the policemen were attacked with stones and pieces of bricks.

Three policemen were injured, one of them seriously.

[...]

The intervention restored order and peace in Ústí nad Labem.

[...]

In Liberec, some 15,000 to 20,000 people gathered in Náměstí Bojovníků za mír (Peace Fighters' Square) after the hockey match. Some youngsters among them were chanting slogans against Soviet leaders.

[...]

Similarly, a crowd of about a thousand people gathered in front of the Soviet HQ building in Teplice, chanting various slogans. At that time, a Soviet tank and two APCs moved in front of the building and were parked there.

[...]

Central Bohemia

In Mladá Boleslav, some 5,000 people gradually gathered on Lidové Milice (People's Militia) street in front of the 9th of May Barracks. The largest crowd consisting mainly of young people filled the area in front of the gate of the barracks, chanting slogans such as "4:3," "You are chickenshit" etc., and singing the Czechoslovak anthem.

Shortly after 10.00 PM, three Soviet armored cars drove out of the side entrance of the barracks, with machine guns sticking out. As the vehicles were passing by, some people started throwing stones into the windows of the barracks and bundles of firecrackers on the roof. They started chanting insulting slogans, including "Brezhnev is an asshole," "Kosygin is an asshole," "Ivans, take on the Chinese," "All could see that the Russians are fucked," or "Fascists, fascists." At about 11.30 PM, as the armored cars were returning to the barracks, some people tried to get closer to the vehicles, whereupon their crews reacted by firing several bursts from their submachine guns into the air. Soviet soldiers responded to the insulting slogans by throwing empty bottles and loaded cartridges at the crowd and firing flares from the windows on the street.

Also participating in the riot were about 40 Czechoslovak soldiers, who were unruly, with too long hair, and of uncouth behavior. The actions described above resulted in 81 broken window panes; where the windows were double, the number will increase.

In some cases, the police attempted to apprehend our citizens who were shouting insults, but were unable to do so because of the reaction of the crowd.

At about midnight, the gathering dispersed. No one was apprehended or brought to the police station.

[...]

North Moravia

At around 10.00 PM, crowds of citizens gathered in different towns and cities, marching in processions and chanting various slogans, most of them celebrating the victory in the hockey match. In Bruntál, Karviná, Nový Bohumín, Frýdek-Místek, Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, Fulnek, Nový Jičín, Opava and other towns, these gatherings numbered up to a thousand people. In Havířov, there were about 3,000 people and there were also some 80 hooting vehicles driving through the city. The largest crowd of about 4,000 people and many vehicles gathered in Olomouc. The city where Soviet units are garrisoned saw anti-Soviet demonstrations. The crowd was chanting slogans such as “*Shaibu, shaibu*” (Score, score!) and “Russians out.” The whole crowd then moved in front of the Soviet HQ in Žižka Square, where it was protesting for about an hour. Some 25 windows of the Soviet HQ building were broken during the protests. The perpetrators were not identified. Members of the District Police Department in Olomouc secured the scene. Two tires of a GAZ vehicle (ID unknown) parked in front of the building were punctured. An unknown perpetrator also punctured a tyre of a parked Soviet bus. Total damage has not yet been calculated. The case is investigated by the District Police Department in Olomouc. The crowd dispersed at about midnight.

The crowd in Fulnek chanted slogans such as “Tarasov, eat your notebook,” “Let us take clubs and drive Russians out”; in Rožnov, the crowd chanted “They came with tanks, but we scored four goals against them.” In Ostrava, the crowd chanted “Ivan go home – this is for August.”

[...]

The policemen did not use tear gas or truncheons; they only ordered the crowds to disperse and their orders were heeded. No police vehicles were damaged and no policemen injured. Soviet soldiers did not intervene against our citizens shouting slogans in front of buildings occupied by Soviet troops. In Šumperk, a Soviet patrol, whose members’ names were not found out, apprehended O. B., born on [...], who had a Czechoslovak flag on his car [...] and drove at the head of the procession. The Šumperk policemen, who took him over from the Soviet patrol, established his identity and released him. In Krnov, a Soviet GAZ vehicle (ID G-ShCh

6120) parked in the square was damaged. The driver of the vehicle was not identified. Unknown perpetrators bent its windshield wipers and broke its taillights. The damage was CSK 100.

[...]

In Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, unknown perpetrators tore signs off the building of the Soviet HQ in Náměstí míru (Peace Square).

[...]

In the District of Olomouc, the District Police Chief declared 100% readiness; his counterpart in the District of Karviná declared 50% readiness. There were no cases of serious public order disturbances involving damage to property and the whole region was, as of midnight, peaceful.

South Moravia

Some 30,000 people took part in gatherings and processions in the region of South Moravia. Twenty-five processions that marched through Brno, Břeclav, Žďár, Vyškov, Blansko, Třebíč, Uherské Hradiště, Gottwaldov, Kroměříž and Prostějov numbered about 2,000 people each. The largest crowd, some 18,000 people, gathered in Brno's Náměstí míru (Peace Square); in other places, there were 1,000 to 3,000 people. Slogans such as "The gold medal will be ours – and you will go to Siberia," "We want Svoboda," "Slivovitz for Dubček – club on the head for Brezhnev," "Now they did not have tanks and received four goals" were chanted during the gatherings and processions.

In rare cases, the slogans "Long live Hitler" and "Long live the USA" were chanted in Uherské Hradiště. The procession that marched through Prostějov carried banners with inscriptions such as "Go home Ivans, the Chinese are getting ready for you," "CSSR – occupying forces 4:3" etc. Participating in these gatherings were relatively high numbers of passenger cars and trucks. Some 400 cars drove through Brno with their lights on and horns hooting. In other towns, a total of 200 passenger cars, 20 trucks and 1 bus participated in the rallies. As a rule, the vehicles bore the result of the hockey game or the slogan "For August." Maroons [this refers to firecracker-like rockets making a loud banging noise—O.T.] were used in the processions in about 130 instances (20 in Gottwaldov, 40 in Žďár, 80 in Uherské Hradiště – close to the housing estate of Soviet

military personnel, 10 in Brno). There were no cases of serious public order disturbances during the events and policemen did not have to intervene anywhere.

[...]

East Bohemia

In Havlíčkův Brod, some 500 people gathered in front of the building of the District Police Department, which also houses the Soviet HQ. The crowd was chanting various slogans, such as “Ivans go home,” “Beat them,” etc. In Jaroměř, about 4,000 people started marching toward a Soviet military depot and attempted to get inside its compound. The Soviet guard fired several submachine bursts in the air, whereupon the crowd withdrew. It, however, proceeded toward the military hospital, now used by the Soviet Army. There was a lot of booing and catcalls and 21 windows of the hospital were broken. The crowd withdrew only after the Soviet guard had fired several submachine bursts in the air. Wreaths laid at the Memorial of the Soviet Army were destroyed. A GAZ vehicle parked at the hospital had its tyres punctured. At 00.30 AM, the crowd dispersed.

Five to six hundred people also gathered in buildings occupied by Soviet troops in Trutnov, Rychnov nad Kněžnou and Rokytnice v Orlických horách. In Trutnov, a clash between our citizens and Soviet soldiers took place in front of the Soviet barracks. Both sides threw stones at each other. One Czechoslovak citizen was injured. Several windows of the barracks were broken as well.

In Pardubice, there was a gathering of 20,000 to 25,000 people. The crowd was chanting various slogans, and a Soviet flag with a painted swastika was carried at the head of the procession.

South Bohemia

In Slavonice, Český Krumlov and Pelhřimov, processions numbering 500 to 1,500 people were marching through the towns. They chanted anti-Soviet slogans, such as “Death to

occupiers,” “Chervonenko is just gaping at how we can play” etc. People shouting these slogans were not identified, as other people participating in the rallies made that impossible.

There were no cases of public order disturbances by people participating in the rallies in other towns and cities in South Bohemia.

West Bohemia

Some 30,000 people participated in the rally in Pilsen. They were marching through the city. The event did not involve any disturbances, except for the burning of a Soviet flag and its tossing out of a window of the student dormitory in Pilsen-Bory. The perpetrator has not been identified yet.

East Slovakia

After the ice hockey match, rallies took place in Košice and Prešov. In Košice, some 1,200 university students left their dormitories, carrying burning torches and shooting from starter pistols. They completely stopped the traffic and the municipal transport system, as they were joined by more people.

A group of 45 policemen was dispatched by the Municipal Police Directorate to restore order and the traffic flow. Upon their command, some of the demonstrators left, others started throwing stones and burning paper torches at them, shouting “...Gestapo, SS-men ...,” etc. Tear gas and truncheons were used; the crowd turned and ran away. Two people stumbled and were run over in the process. Two policemen were injured, many others suffered minor bruises. In addition, the rioters damaged police and firefighting vehicles.

In Prešov, some 300 students and non-students took part in the rally. They carried a sports flag and dispersed without any resistance when ordered to do so by the police.

No anti-Soviet, anti-socialist or insulting slogans were chanted.

Central Slovakia

Similar rallies took place in Žilina (some 2,000 people), Banská Bystrica (about 700 people), Zvolen (500 people) and Martin (150 people). These processions marched peacefully and no circumstances requiring a police intervention occurred. The rallies dispersed by 11.00 PM. No people or policemen were injured.

West Slovakia

The gatherings and processions took place in the following towns and cities: Nitra – some 500 people, mostly students, carrying a placard with the following slogan: “Send your tanks to protect your goal...” Having marched through the city’s streets, the people sang the national anthem at the castle and dispersed.

In Trnava, some 150 people appeared on streets at about 10.15 PM, chanting “Shaibu, shaibu” (Score, score!); they sang the national anthem and then dispersed.

In Šala (Galanta District), some 500 people took part in the rally. The gatherings in Trenčín, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Trenčianské Teplice and Stará Turá numbered 300, 200, 300 and 100 people, respectively. They were chanting slogans such as “...Long live Dubček and Svoboda...” “...Long live Golonka and Dzurilla, long live Czech hockey players...” In all the towns listed above, the rally was concluded by the Czechoslovak national anthem or other hymnal compositions.

The situation did not require a police intervention in any of the towns listed above.

The most serious situation developed in the city of Bratislava, where large numbers of students, citizens and other young people gathered in various squares, in particular in Námestie SNP (Slovak Uprising Square). They marched there carrying torches made from newspapers and were chanting sport slogans. Some of the university students later dispersed there; however, some of them joined other young people (including those with a criminal record) and adult citizens and proceeded toward the Soviet HQ building in Miletičova Street, where policemen intervened against them. As the rioters resisted the policemen, throwing stones etc., truncheons and tear gas were used. Thirty-two policemen sustained injuries during the riot-control actions, mostly minor ones.

As to the rioters, 19 of them were apprehended and brought to police stations. Fifteen of them were found to be university students, one was a doctor of medicine, one was a journalist and the rest were workers, drivers etc.

Windows of some police vehicles were broken by stones thrown by rioters.

Order was restored at about 00.30 AM.

[Source: ABS, Prague, f. A 10, arch.u. 181 (ÚSD, Prague, SKV, f. C II/282); translation by Jiří Mareš.]

Document no. 4: Record of Conversation, Czechoslovak Defense Minister Martin Dzůr and Soviet Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, Prague, 1 April 1969

April 1, 1969 (10:00 AM-12.30 P.M.) in the building of the Ministry of National Defense

The CSSR Minister of National Defense Col. General M[artin] Dzůr received the USSR Defense Minister, Marshal of the USSR A[ndrei] A. Grechko at his own request. In addition to Minister Grechko, the Soviet side was represented by:

- Col. Gen. [Alexandr] Maiorov, commander of the Central group of forces in the CSSR,
- Col. Gen. Povalin, head of the main operational administration and secretary of the State Defense Council,
- Maj. Gen. [S. M.] Zolotov, head of the political administration and member of the Military Council of the Central group of forces in the CSSR.

In addition to the minister of national defense, the Czechoslovak side was represented by:

- Lt. Gen. V[áclav] Dvořák, state secretary of the CSSR government at the Ministry of National Defense,
- Lt. Gen. K[arel] Rusov, chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak People's Army,
- Lt. Gen. F[rantišek] Bedřich, head of the main political administration of the Czechoslovak People's Army,
- Lt. Gen. A[lexandr] Mucha, head of the main administration of land forces, deputy minister,
- Maj. Gen. J[an] Lux, head of the main rear, deputy minister,
- Col. Gen. M[iroslav] Šmoldas, inspector general of the Czechoslovak People's Army, deputy minister.

Minister [Dzůr]: stated at the outset of the talks that he had convened those members of the army command requested by Minister Grechko. The meeting is unexpected for us and it would have been more agreeable had it been possible to talk under different circumstances.

Grechko: stated that he, too, would have wished the situation had been better. He had come at the decision of the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR government to investigate the causes and consequences of anti-socialist outrages on March 28-29, 1969, directed against the Soviet army and the Soviet people. He would carry out the investigations with his own people.

It was a shameful thing and that is why he felt obliged to inform the minister of national defense and the command of the Czechoslovak People's Army on his opinion of the affronts directed against the Soviet army. A note from the Soviet government and the CPSU Central Committee would be handed over today in which they address the ČSSR government and the CPCz Central Committee, informing them of the inadmissibility of a repetition of similar outrages.

According to the reports they were receiving they knew what was being prepared. Yesterday (March 31, 1969) there was a meeting of commanders and political officers of the Central group of the armies where they convinced themselves how far counterrevolutionary groups had gone, insulting the peoples of the USSR and jeopardizing the friendship of our peoples and armies. They found out that these were not spontaneous actions, to do with ice hockey, but were well planned and organized demonstrations.

These are official talks and that is why he must lay down the facts concerning insults and acts of violence against the Soviet army. He would not even take the trouble to speak about Prague.

In Bratislava slogans appeared such as "occupiers," "fascists," "Brezhnev is a hooligan" and so on. Even members of the Czechoslovak People's Army took part in the demonstrations. We are talking about political demonstrations, organized political demonstrations by thousands of people with counterrevolutionary tendencies. If similar slogans directed against the ČSSR appeared in the USSR they would know how to cope with it immediately. In Bratislava Interior Ministry bodies did not intervene until three to four hours after the outbreak of the demonstration. The commander of the garrison had asked for help but nothing was done. However, Bratislava was the only city where the security bodies, General [Egyd] Pepich, finally intervened energetically.

At Ústí nad Labem the komandatura was surrounded, windows were shattered, a truck was burnt as were three motor-bikes, and soldiers took part as well.

At Turnov windows were also shattered and the barracks, housing Soviet troops, were besieged.

At Trutnov several thousand people wanted to force their way into the barracks.

In Olomouc several thousand demonstrators surrounded the staff of the corps and the military hospital. Columns of demonstrators were headed by soldiers, eight groups of soldiers, 50 persons each.

In Ostrava there were also thousands of people. Apart from slogans and insults there was even shooting. Machine-gun fire could be heard. After the end of the demonstration military vehicles were driving people around the town, praising other demonstrators. The commander of the security forces had given orders not to intervene.

At Jaroměř – a demonstration around the hospital, 30 windows shattered. Stones were thrown and even landed in the wards. A monument to the Soviet army was destroyed and wreaths were set on fire there.

At Havlíčkův Brod gangs gathered outside the *komandatura*.

At Pardubice mobs gathered near a Soviet tank where they set fire to a Soviet flag with a painted swastika.

The conduct of Czechoslovak soldiers in the presence of a delegation of the Transcarpathian Military Area with the Western military area was undignified. Soldiers were hurling Molotov cocktails and shouting obscenities. The question arises whether commanders are commanding their troops. If this happened in their country they would know how to deal with this even without the courts.

The problem has gone beyond all limits, a danger is looming. The leadership of the Ministry of National Defense has taken no measures to liquidate actions against Soviet troops and to protect the allied army. It would surely not have been difficult to bring out a regiment to protect at Olomouc even if it had arrived on the scene later. Once it [the Soviet army—editors] begins to defend itself many people will suffer.

Their patience has been exhausted. How much longer are they to stand for insults and violence? Nobody protects them, no one apologizes to them. Although they turned to the security forces, no one, except in Bratislava, took part in suppressing the disorders. How do you

regard this? None of the leading personages was on the spot, but [Josef] Smrkovský was. He said that now there was more at stake than just scores.

Minister [Dzúr]: he said that this is not quite the way things went and measures had been taken.

Grechko: continued that they had their officers in plain clothes. They knew that this had all been done in an organized manner and here, everyone acts as though no one had seen anything. He expressed the indignation of Soviet troops, commanders, the army command and the government. He conveyed a protest to the minister of national defense at the insults hurled at the Soviet army which had shed its blood for the liberation of the ČSSR. He quoted from the note saying that in the event of a repetition of similar events the Soviet side would be compelled to take its own measures and feel free to choose what kind of measures to take, depending on what kind of measures the ČSSR would take.

He once again asks Comrade Dzúr to take steps if he honors the memory of Soviet soldiers, and protect the Soviet army against counterrevolutionary elements. We, too, have our pride, honor and dignity. He had ordered Soviet commanders not to shoot, to ask for help, to keep a cool head and use restraint.

They hear nothing but verbal assurances but it looks to them as though counterrevolutionary elements are gradually expanding the range of their activity and are becoming increasingly daring. No one explains anything but merely shudders. No proper political work is being done and no measures are taken to strengthen friendship. Soviet troops are not allowed to go near Czechoslovak ones; they do not need this kind of friendship.

He has given the commander of the Central group of forces orders which do not go beyond the provisions of the treaty:

- 1) to patrol from time to time with armored vehicles and tanks;
- 2) in the event of a threat, demonstrators are not to be permitted to come nearer than 500 meters to the barracks, and if lives are in danger firearms are to be used;
- 3) armored vehicles and tanks are to be sent to warehouses and bases where there are no troops and arms;

- 4) commanders of Soviet garrisons are to be instructed to inform the local state administration about this order;
- 5) if such events are repeated a curfew will be introduced, companies and tanks are to be deployed around existing komandaturas;
- 6) the possibility of increasing the number of Soviet troops by 10-15,000 to reach the number of 75,000 is being examined;
- 7) the Warsaw Pact states are being informed of the participation of certain members of the Czechoslovak People's Army in anti-Soviet demonstrations;
- 8) instructions have been issued for helicopters to patrol above areas where Soviet troops are deployed;
- 9) he has ordered the group of Soviet troops in the GDR, Poland and in Ukraine to prepare a plan to enter ČSSR territory and, in the event of a threat, to enter ČSSR territory without even prior warning to the Czechoslovak authorities.

He demands a strict investigation of and sanctions against soldiers who are guilty and material damage to be compensated. We leave the moral damage up to your conscience. He is bitter that he has to talk in this way since this then also reflects on the Soviet people. He asks to be received by the president, Comrades [Alexander] Dubček and [Oldřich] Černík to express his protest and emphatically demands that measures be taken.

Dzúr: noted that the document he had prepared in many ways coincided with all that has been said. Several measures had been taken by the army. The only one who had asked for the assistance of troops was Pepich. We are specifying the situation in every respect. In Bratislava it had not been the soldiers but certain members of the Interior Ministry. Our inspection team left for Bratislava that same night. At Ústí nad Labem soldiers from the road battalion had been involved. A number had been summoned to the prosecutor.

He had and has thousands of troops ready, as well as a special plan. In agreement with the Interior Ministry he had taken measures and will take even more than had been requested. Every garrison commander has orders to help the security forces. In addition, there are special units. However, he himself cannot issue orders to the troops.

He was in contact with Comrades Dubček, [Lubomír] Štrougal and [Gustáv] Husák, but had been unable to contact the president and Comrade Černík. He had called on the commander of military counter-espionage and certain garrisons. On Saturday at 10 P.M. he was informed that everything was in order. All that needed to be done was done. He admits that certain factors were underestimated. He will summon the command, make his own evaluation and submit it to the party leadership, the government and the president.

Rusov: said that we felt miserable having to hear all this. Our information concerning the garrisons is more or less the same. We have a plan, the troops were prepared, all that was needed was for the political leadership to issue instructions. If soldiers did take part in the demonstrations, they were not from armored car or motorized divisions but from various rear supply units where there are soldiers with criminal records. We are investigating everything and shall take steps so the army will fulfill its duty. He informs the two ministers of the measures adopted.

Grechko: says the deputy commander of the group of forces had asked for assistance which was not given. Had he known that riots were being prepared throughout northern Bohemia he would have made a proposal to the government.

Dzúr: says that the Ministry of Interior, under pressure from us, has taken measures at Ústí. He explains that the deputy commander of the Central group of troops had telephoned between 12:30 A.M. and 1:00 A.M. when everything was essentially over. Everything had to be first clarified and specified through the Ministry of Interior. He himself is not authorized to bring the troops out without permission.

Grechko: This means that Dubček did not permit this.

Dzúr: argues that this was not the way he put it. Comrade Dubček ordered things to be clarified and specified. It was then that he called Comrades Štrougal, Husák, Pepich and others.

Maiorov: repeated the incident with the delegation of the Transcarpathian Military Area at lunch. When they were proposing a toast, explosives and Molotov cocktails were thrown outside and obscenities shouted. The commander of the Western military area and the commander of the 19th division were there. Of 36 garrisons 21 were in a state of disorder. He showed them on a

map. A wireless engineering company was to have been deployed around Plzeň and Comrade Černík had spoken about this, but nothing is settled.

Rusov: specified that it was not near Plzeň but near Český Krumlov. We asked the government three times but received no answer.

Grechko: asked what our assessment was. He claimed that we were just looking on while the counterrevolution is running events. He again began to speak about counterrevolutionary slogans and banners and remarked that none of us had ever used the word counterrevolution. The allied troops had entered ČSSR territory to block the road to counterrevolution.

Dzúr: pointed out that he had said all he wanted to say.

Dvořák: noted that all that had happened and that is taking place cannot continue. The principles of friendship are being violated. The events on Saturday had been organized, and even if they had not, it's the results that matter. We have to apologize and take steps. He proposes that the Military Council thoroughly assess the situation, suggest measures and submit our evaluation and proposals to the leadership.

Dzúr: points out that this has been done. Agrees with Comrade Grechko that joint groups be set up to confront and verify facts with reports.

The question of guarding the western border is clear but as regards internal matters he is unable to state a decisive position. Then there is the political issue, the law on the press, censorship, the work of the judiciary, which also has its share.

He repeated how many and in which locations soldiers have been detailed to help the security forces. But he cannot send out a combat unit, for this he must receive instructions, consent. The commanders of the areas have the relevant orders.

Zolotov: division commander Novotný said he vouched for the senior officers but was unable to vouch for the younger ones.

Grechko: understands that Dzúr cannot send armed troops against the demonstrators. It was necessary to bar the road without arms.

He again came back to the insult of the Transcarpathian Military Area delegation. The commander does not command the regiment, the regiment has escaped subordination. In your country 40% of the soldiers say the main enemy is the USSR. And hundreds have taken part in

anti-Soviet demonstrations. Relations with the USSR are getting worse. Counterrevolutionary forces are consolidating their positions. What are you doing in your political work? You call yourselves allies? Do you belong to the Warsaw Pact at all? We are defending socialism.

Both my hands were injured in battles for Czechoslovakia. I personally liberated many of the places where there were disturbances. You see this without any feelings. You are afraid to go to the troops and tell them the truth.

We warn you that we shall not tolerate a repetition of such acts. You said (that is, Comrade Džúr), that you prevented clashes between Czechoslovak and Soviet troops. There was no need to say this. We shall make short shrift even of 100,000 counterrevolutionaries. We shall not let the CSSR go. We shall withdraw neither this nor next year.

Nobody from the 21 garrisons came to apologize. This speaks for itself. You talk about this quite calmly. You should hear what our soldiers and commanders said. I am sorry but we shall not ask, we shall not ask your leadership, we shall not be afraid to adopt measures. You are afraid of a confrontation with counterrevolution.

There were signals of anti-Soviet slogans as far back as on March 21, yet this was no warning for you. You know the situation when ice hockey could turn into a political demonstration. You have no political vigilance.

Throughout the command of the Czechoslovak People's Army there is no good relationship with the Soviet army, otherwise measures would have been taken. What of it that the Military Council will meet, talk a while and then disband. Our people are waiting for someone to come and apologize.

At Mladá Boleslav, the commander asked three times until someone came and hit him with a stone. Things are verging on the terrible. Go to the soldiers and tell them the truth. Our soldiers are not permitted to mix with yours. I do not understand this and we cannot tolerate this. Measures must be taken, otherwise things will be really bad. One has to educate them, if not for friendship, then at least to show respect. Demonstrations are being prepared in your country and you are sitting still. I once again express the indignation of the Soviet command on the question of relations with the Soviet army. He not only asks but proposes that measures be taken.

Bedřich: agrees with the evaluation and understands the indignation. We have taken several measures but our results are not commensurate with our efforts. Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship

is not being defended consistently. It is not easy to paralyze various influences on people's thinking. We must apologize for the events that have taken place and take steps towards strengthening lasting friendship.

Zolotov: is astonished how calmly the head of the main political administration is speaking. You often said that many political workers were an obstruction but you do nothing, you have them all at the main political administration. Those who want to work are angry that things are being dragged along and nothing is being done.

Maiorov: states that the treaty of October 16, 1968, is not being implemented, namely the passage which states that measures will be taken to strengthen relations. The Czechoslovak People's Army is not carrying out the president's decision on contacts. We are trying to fulfill it. The political leadership has laid down the line—the letter from the CPCz Central Committee to local branches speaking of the reinforcement of mutual relations. This applies to the army as well. An all-army assembly also underlined the demands to strengthen relations, but in practice nothing has changed. No political work is being done in carrying out the demand of the political leadership. If the army command did this the Soviet army would not be so isolated. There is still the Warsaw Pact. We made some good decisions there but what is needed is political education, friendship, love.

Grechko: none of this is felt, counterrevolution has gone onto an open offensive.

Dzůr: remarked that comrade Maiorov would be right if things were that simple in the state and among the people. There are many orders as well as speeches by leading representatives. We do not have the means to introduce love and friendship.

Maiorov: says he would dismiss a person if he were to find out that his men had harassed the allied army.

Dzůr: says he, too, will do this but only if the information is accurate.

Grechko: orders are given but how are they being fulfilled? We do not tell our people the kind of insults we hear. Or don't you think it necessary to summon your men, tell them, to come and see our men and talk to them?

Dzůr: is not too soft to do this. We, too, shall go there and explain.

Grechko: says it is essential to wage a real battle. He believes the situation in our country is worse than on August 21, 1968. If you don't take measures things will be in a bad way.

Dvořák: not only for us but for you as well.

Grechko: Smrkovský is always there when something against the USSR is taking place. He is surprised that we are so soft.

Dzúr: has spoken to the president and wants to brief him tomorrow at 10 A.M. The Bureau, the presidium is meeting and he is asking to be invited. He will inform them and state his opinion.

Grechko: asks Dzúr to inform them in the same way he informed the army command.

Dzúr: promises he will do this.

Grechko: asks Dzúr for an appointment for the whole delegation with the president, Comrades Dubček and Černík.

Dzúr: says he cannot promise that the president will see all of them. He stressed that we must make a profound analysis of all questions. It is not that simple. Your work is easier.

Grechko: we do not have people of the Smrkovský type. He (Grechko) would make use of this outrage by the counterrevolution and take a number of steps. He said he was glad that shortcomings, the consequences of incorrect processes and so forth, were being eliminated.

Dzúr: does not want to say a great deal. As regards the enemy from outside, the Czechoslovak People's Army will always be by the side of the Soviet army. The internal situation is something else. There are various linkages from which we shall learn lessons.

Grechko: again returns to the note, and remarks what it contains in this respect. Rejects the view that it was all unexpected. Go and explain and I, too, would like to go to our troops and explain certain matters.

[Source: VHA, Prague, F. Ministry of National Defense, 1969, 1/8-1, in Antonín Benčík – Jan Paulík – Jindřich Pecka: Vojenské otázky československé reformy 1967-1970, vol. 2, Srpen 1968 – květen 1971 (Praha – Brno 1999), pp. 183-88; translation by Mark Kramer.]

Document No. 5: April 1, 1969: Minutes of the discussion at the 18th meeting of the Executive Committee of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on the letter of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the events of March 28 and 29, 1969.

[...]

[Alexander] Dubček: I received a report on the security situation in the republic.

[Stanislav] Provazník: Reading the report of Comrade (Jan) Pelnář.

Dubček: The report is being read so that it can be included in the minutes. [We have] multiple documents on what happened in Czechoslovakia's territory in connection with the events. I intended to present this information to show that the picture of the events would be related to [the letter. The letter submitted by Vladimir] Semyonov is known to [Oldřich] Černík and [Ludvík] Svoboda. The Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia adopted a declaration yesterday, and a meeting of the government has been convened at 4.30PM today. The Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must take up a position, distance itself from the events, and discuss what to do next. Urgent measures need to be taken – it is absolutely [necessary] to place publishing activities under control so that they do not incite against the Soviet Union.

[I suggest] that our activities in these days should be as follows: It is necessary to take immediate measures, preventive rather than reactive. The party leadership, the Ministry of Interior and the government must have enough information on and evaluations of the security situation, so that adequate security measures can be adopted. The most important thing now is that we must discuss how to proceed from now on, as the position and the letter, as you could hear, are adamantly clear and of course formulated in a different tone than used until now. The letter ends with a warning of sorts, and makes the party and state leadership responsible, after a fashion, for the internal events.

Of course, some facts and phenomena have emerged on the surface in these days. If the Soviet Union indeed has some organized people or centers, as they call it, surveyed, it would be a serious matter. One of the reasons why I wanted to inform you about the opinion of the Ministry of Interior was that the ministry, in cooperation with other state authorities, has not

submitted any report or memo. It has not performed any fundamental legal analysis that could confirm or disprove the conclusions on organized counter-revolutionary activities in the country and traceable to Western intelligence agencies. I am not drawing any conclusions; I am just stating the fact.

It is necessary to consider the immediate steps we need to make and to take up a position with respect to the nuisances, to think about our own measures the party and the government would have to make to prevent such events developing into a situation that would lead to serious disturbances and an armed intervention against civilian population. It is perhaps necessary to take preventive measures in all areas to avoid it.

We could not prepare ourselves for this. Before our meeting, I refused to receive Semyonov. Our position should be formulated by the Presidium of the Central Committee. Consequently, and in compliance with what I have said, I believe it is necessary to consider, along party and government lines, how to prevent the tendencies aimed against the Soviet Union, as they could produce an undesirable situation.

[...]

Svoboda: How have our people been informed about what happened? I suggest drafting a statement that would not be approved by the Presidium of the Central Committee. But it's not only the statement; what have we done to prevent a recurrence? No, I refuse to do this. Some authority needs to cover this. We need to take a statement on this. It is an extremely serious matter. We are surprised over all the things that happened. I heard yesterday that 99% of our people disagreed with what happened in Wenceslas Square.

One must feel ashamed over what happened. If they had succeeded in setting the Aeroflot office afire, all the buildings around would have burnt down as well.

Just think about it. A hundred and fifty thousand people in Wenceslas Square, 30 to 50 demolishing things, causing a lot of damage, and the others are just looking. Would something like that be possible in another country? We must be ashamed for that.

Dubček: We will have a lot to do until the evening. We must draft the statement so that it can be published tomorrow. We must politically distance ourselves from the demonstrations and warn about their repetition.

[Josef] Smrkovský: I would like to remind you that, insofar as mentions about me are concerned – I read them in newspapers – they are not true. I was not in Wenceslas Square. It's written in newspapers, but I drove from the Wallenstein Garden and when we arrived to Národní Street, the road was closed there, so we drove back along the Masaryk Station. On my way home, I avoided Wenceslas Square. I was not in Wenceslas Square. I did not step out of the car on my way to and from the office. They recognized me in the car and it was like a black man's wire service; Smrkovský is here.

[...]

[Gustáv] Husák: In my opinion, the internal statement should not contain any mention about Smrkovský c. I believe it is necessary to say, in very concrete and specific terms, why we condemn the protests and why the condemnation is related to other measures. In plain terms, to state our position and also to say what to do with the situation. Černík should postpone the government meeting until we have agreed on our position. Then Černík can inform the government and also citizens on political measures. The government should implement them even if it does not have all supporting information at its disposal. I am under no illusion we will convince people.

Svoboda: We need to hear the Minister of National Defense.

Husák: We must express our opinions. We must reach an agreement, with the situation being like before August 21 ...

Dubček: The government must be tasked to propose measures. We need someone to work on it.

Černík: We have been working on concrete measures. We will not adopt any statement. As to members of the government, I can have them waiting until the morning, if necessary. I thought we would rework the letter, sit here overnight, and draft some measures. The measures will not be formulated by public servants at the Office of the Government. My people are sitting and trying to come up with something, but the measures must be implemented by government ministers. The minister must be obliged [to do it]. The government consists of ministries with thousands of public servants.

Dubček: We will have a discussion and agree to measures, if Černík agrees with the procedure. While the other comrades will be drafting the measures, we could have the discussion and coordinate the procedure.

Černík: The Presidium of the Central Committee will proceed according to its appraisals of potential conflict situations that may occur. It's getting out of our hands. As soon as the situation calms down, we will adopt measures that will be implemented in the event conflicts and disturbances occur. The leadership will be completely written off, if our political situation appraisal mentions that we do not offer any resistance to right-wing forces or that counter-revolutionary forces have started advancing. In the light of the events, it is our critical appraisal [the conclusions of which] must be implemented. Either there exist counter-revolutionary forces, there is a risk of a counter-revolution, in which case we have to take measures, or there are none. We must anticipate developments.

In my opinion, a thorough discussion of the resolution by the Presidium of the Central Committee should be followed by the matter being discussed by the Central Committee as well.

The developments so far indicate that we have deeply underestimated the situation and its political ramifications and that the party and the government have been very superficial when examining movements and trends within the society. We approach any mention concerning reactionary forces in a defensive manner. We are disoriented. This prevents us from seeing the situation realistically. We must examine movements within the society. The society is not homogeneous, which is reflected in a very strong anti-socialist orientation of a part of it. Let us not be afraid of that and let us not perceive the society as one or two nations that have nothing in common with the class-based approach to the development of different societal strata. The Marxist leadership of the party cannot abandon this view. We are not isolated and extremist forces have their connections all over the world.

I don't know whether it is possible to prove this to all around the world, if someone furnishes a proof to the opposite. There's one serious matter I want to warn you about. We must produce a clear enough statement, because the party can no longer orient itself. I am calling for it, because if we are not united, we will not gain a single millimeter, we will not make a single step forward. With the first so-called spontaneous event, we will pay for it. The Soviets will repeat a hundred times that a victory of anti-socialist forces in Czechoslovakia is unacceptable.

We have been politically underestimating the situation. The reason why we do not see movements within the society is that we do not want to admit to ourselves that there are some forces working against us. This does not make us a Marxist-Leninist party. Someone bangs the

presidium over the head [and nothing happens]. At the moment, the party is disastrously incapable of any action. The party, as a political organization in the country, must give work to people, but also be able to take action if necessary. I believe our party, as an action-capable force, is disintegrating and I do not dare foresee when its organization will break up.

The evidence I provide in support [of the above] is that the party has been fighting for the November resolution for four or five months, and stewing in its own juice for four months. We have been feeding that to the people for four months, and, in the meantime, 500,000 people have organized themselves in the Communist Party, who allow themselves to be led into anti-socialist activities that might result in a disaster, without the Communist Party and the state being aware of it.

This is to say that we have repeated warnings a hundred times, and will repeat them again for another five hundred times, but are unable to draw any conclusions. We are unable to turn the party into a united force. Even we, eight members of the Executive Committee, must be united. Otherwise the party cannot be controlled. Our ideological attitudes are a guideline for millions of people. It is necessary that Comrade Smrkovský, as a member of the party leadership, understands the challenge and expressly identifies himself with the November resolution, using politically sound reasoning, to convince those Communists who are leaving him and to get rid of those tottering around him. Otherwise his speeches are of no use.

I ask myself a question whether I can bear the historical responsibility for what will happen in this country. Political and ideological unity, that's the cornerstone. If there are any differences in opinions, they concern only the concept of the leading role of the party in the socialist society and nothing else. In many respects, the transformation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia into a truly leading force must be interpreted and perceived bearing in mind that it is the party which provides political and ideological guidance to the society, that it is a force which transforms [the society] and leads people to participation in the exercise of power. If this concept cannot prevail within our group, we will not be able to do anything. After all those years, there is not other model. If such a model exists, it will be an interim one, but it will permit new cadres to grow in it. If necessary, it will be replaced. If necessary, we will suppress our enemies. Political power must cover the party's back.

We do not have an action-capable party. The party will be pushed out to the periphery of the power struggle. I cannot just look and say nothing about it. I have my opinion. We in the leadership keep quarrelling all the time. Let us either present a different concept of the party, or demobilize. In the latter case, however, we will be yielding the ground, which I cannot agree with. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia is turning into a party other than Communist. People say: The Communists are fighting each other and the time will come when we will push them out of their positions. We will have to deal with this.

As to the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, our enemies say that fundamental political forces include the RTUM, cultural unions and independent organizations. These are anti-Communist positions. The party will show its power and take action. As a matter of fact, the party has been undergoing a revival and coming back in front of the eyes of people.

The essential question is who should be placed in the head of the party so that people would follow him. Young people follow none of us. Until we find an answer to this question, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia will not be a leading force.

As to mass media: We are facing a dilemma. This or that. There is not other way. We will adopt a preliminary censorship act. [János] Kádár advises us to use it to manage our day-to-day political matters. We will either use this tool, or manage day-to-day political business through cadres, in which case we will have to throw some people out. A year and a half has shown us that the way we have been doing things until now is not possible. Personally, I feel inclined to use Kádár's system. [I recommend] to have a look and implement it as soon as possible. [We have to] eliminate all-out criticism of leading functionaries, attacks against the Soviet Union and socialist countries, including semi-invectives, as well as criticism of the country's security and Defense capabilities. As regards these matters, I propose to implement censorship immediately. Communist journalists must be told: either you will write what the party needs, or you will be thrown out!

On state administration structures: [Frequent] cases indicate that the situation in the army is good. Still, we should have a look at the political condition of the army. We should not overlook or put up with the fact that some members of the officer corps took part in the riotous protests. Comrade Svoboda, I suggest that we consider declaring the things that have happened as constituting treason and demand a new oath of loyalty from officers. People who will accept

only some of the political postulates of the oath and not the entire oath of loyalty will have to leave the army.

As to security and police forces, we will have to insist on thorough compliance with disciplinary regulations and draw appropriate conclusions if they are not complied with. We have taken measures to increase the number of policemen. We will implement them to make the security and police forces strong.

We should draft up concrete measures around the five abovementioned issues, even at the expense of being in session for two or three days. During that time, we will put together the things that need to be dealt with. Otherwise, I am afraid, we will not find a way out of our predicament. This must be a step toward making our approach more vigorous. Strong and energetic steps will be accepted by most people. There is no other option. They have started the war and there's nothing else we can do.

Husák: The Soviet note forces us to have an unembellished view of the matters. If I get it right, we may wake up one day into another August 21. If we lose power, we will lose all other functions around it. What will that mean for the country and the political leadership? It is not possible to think that this view is exaggerated and incorrect. We can give a thought to what has led to this situation and how we have contributed to it. And we have contributed a lot.

I have read some newspapers, e.g. "Literární listy." They are full of anti-Soviet and seditious propaganda, [articles] about [Jan] Zajíc or Šumperk. So much hatred in articles about the Soviet occupation of our country. The "Zitřek" weekly writes about August 21 events and uranium in every issue. Not to speak of "Práce" and "Politika"! So many hostile articles! How could they not provoke this situation? And all this under our leadership and tolerance of some things.

These sentiments were set up by mass media. This atmosphere was present before August 21 and it is still here. It is being fed by legal mass media, not just against the USSR, but also against the party or against the Communists in Slovakia. And still we keep saying: things in our country are being consolidated for the better. How many times have we lied to ourselves like that?

The students' strike in November and [Jan] Palach in January. It is all a single concept. A conscious political concept that may fall like rain from heaven, or is being intentionally instilled into people. What has happened here is a consequence of our policy and of its implementation.

Our model produces anti-Soviet sentiments. We can repeat that over and over again. Since August, there has been no political concept work whatsoever in our leading bodies. We are so democratic we are afraid to stomp on toes of anti-socialist forces. And, similarly, we are afraid to seek help among the working class. The tragic aspect is not in that a few people go and demolish something; it is in dozens of other people just looking at it. Where can they learn that it is a dangerous thing to play with? There is not a single line in any newspapers saying that it was a wrong thing to do. Not even in official reports. A journalist dares to support the party leadership and others just fall on him.

Hundreds of thousands of people who took part in the riots live well. Why should they change their opinions? They have social certainties. But they don't care. All this means that the actual situation differs from how we perceive it. Such a situation plays into the hand of hostile forces. And if it persists for months, what kind of mindsets can it be good for? We are now embellishing the situation. A public poll shows that 5% of respondents are against the socialist system and a conclusion is immediately drawn! Our assessments of the political situation are not correct. We have underestimated some forces, and we continue to do so. We are proud of not having arrested anyone since August. Who can tell there was no politically motivated act committed in August? We will look like satraps one of these days.

The law must be obeyed also by the citizen toward the state, not just from the state toward the citizen. It affects the society which is disintegrated. We allow our police to be attacked and then say: why are the police doing nothing about it? [Because] they do not feel sure the state will protect them. And still they are expected to protect. What kinds of campaigns are broadcasted on radio and TV? We can see their mass effects. It is enough to read foreign articles and summaries of articles and broadcasts from abroad. We claim the Czech nation will endure, that we will knock the enemy down at the end of the day. This has been fed to people for months and we are just bickering as if nothing is happening. [Newspapers] write that speeches of the first secretary are stupid, but no one learns that leaflets are printed and distributed. We have not drawn any conclusions from any of such events. Any adventurer can launch campaigns among

young people and we just pretend nothing has happened, although it is clear that someone will make such an attempt again. We know the campaigns are organized by right-wing elements. We have allowed matters to run unattended. We have defended some things, but they were few and far between.

The Palach case was an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist action and Smrkovský carries [during Palach's funeral] a wreath so that the whole world can see the Chairman of the National Assembly sympathizes with anti-Soviet elements – and we keep our mouth shut. And then we tell each other that everything is consolidated and that no mobilization is needed. Our entire concept is rotten! The implementation of our resolutions is almost nonexistent. We do not maintain records. Smrkovský says he was not in Wenceslas Square. He claims it was [his] job to attend Palach's funeral. Wherever there is any buzz, he has to be there. December events were damaging for the party, and all they took was a single press statement by [Luděk] Pachman to the effect that the Executive Committee disagrees with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its resolution. And our efforts were wasted. When I was delivering a speech and the radio was present, it was an opportunity to explain my position to masses. But I have not heard anything suggesting that it was broadcasted. All I heard was music.

I will now return to the youth congress. The party leadership sent a delegation there. Smrkovský was not its leader. The head of the delegation is speaking and Smrkovský enters. The whole congress hall is running amok. Smrkovský is greeted by young people. Under such circumstances, the head of the delegation can hardly be expected to finish his speech. Smrkovský immediately asked for the floor and downplayed the speech of the head of the delegation. The national hero arrived. And, as we know, there are multiple examples like this among the top leadership. Who will elevate the authority of the Executive Committee? I know what transpired at the congress, as I was there. The speech of the head of the delegation was not appreciated by anti-Soviet forces present there. Standing ovations went to Smrkovský. He has not done anything yet to disprove this image. His speech did not avert a collision between congress participants and the delegation. Didn't he [Smrkovský] hear what was going on in the congress hall? His day-to-day conduct presents him as a national hero. I cannot help but ask myself a question whether it is possible, under the circumstances, for Smrkovský to continue as a member of the supreme body of the party. I am presenting this issue for discussion. Depending on how the situation develops,

we will have to ask this question at the meeting of the Central Committee. With this political course of the party, the departure from the leadership will also concern some other members of the Presidium of the Central Committee, who have not yet found a clear political line. If the party does not toe a uniform line, if its leadership is not unified – including the Executive Committee, the Presidium of the Central Committee, or the Central Committee – what kind of unity can we expect among lower echelons of the party?

We have allowed anti-Socialist forces too much room to move. I don't think it's relevant whether this also applies to counter-revolutionary forces. What I see as relevant is the serious internal political situation. There's a political situation hostile to the course of the party in the country, and forces capable of mounting massive actions start prevailing. What did the masses and crowds of people in the streets have in mind? They expressed it in their slogans. Reactionary forces know how to politicize such issues. This is the critical situation into which matters have got.

I believe that if we discuss these matters within the Presidium of the Central Committee, the outcome of the discussion will clearly show that errors and mistakes made by our own supreme bodies have played a significant role in the current political situation and the crisis of the party. In my opinion, the November resolution continues to be the right base for further work, but it must be clearly interpreted and [its essence] correctly implemented. What caused the protests all over the country? They were a bit calmer in Slovakia. Anti-Soviet sentiments rose steeply. They can again attract anti-left forces. Even in the party.

It is a continuation of our discussion within the Executive Committee and the Presidium of the Central Committee. We can always revisit these issues. Lessons learned from the situation can be reflected in our approach toward the implementation of the party policy.

On the Marxist character of the party: One can give a thought to what has been left of it. So many bourgeois elements have found their way to our political life. Some leading representatives have introduced marketplace elements into their speeches. Those in favor of revolutionary methods approach problems [in the same way] as the protesters. The word "Marxist" has disappeared. Nowadays it is an insult. How can ordinary people interpret that? What has remained of all the documents? We are now reaping the harvest which we allowed the enemy forces to sow.

I agree that the Presidium of the party followed by the government should take up a political position; the events are not random or accidental, but rather a product of systematic efforts of right-wing forces. Our declaration should list specific measures we intend to take.

As to additional measures: Prosecutors use allegedly inadequate regulations as an excuse. Consequently, it is necessary to pass a brief act on public order disturbances allowing the perpetrators to be brought to justice. There is no other way out. Which legal acts need to be amended? The November act, because if a state authority decides the court does not have any say in the matter, it is an anomaly. [It is also an anomaly] if they can handle the same case in different ways.

The management of mass media requires a systematic approach. The media received first documents they were [ordered] to publish. Their representatives made an agreement not to publish them and did not fulfill the task. They thus took a political action against the party.

As to magazines: Anyone who monitors weeklies knows that, for example, there is not a single issue of "Politika" or "Zítřek" which does not violate the government directive. I believe that, under the circumstances, the situation requires a radical cut in some cases and the publication of the magazine in question must be suspended. There are certain limits of patience. [Editors] have claimed these were manifestations of the original revolutionary atmosphere. Such magazines have to be stopped and appropriate cadre-related measures taken. Any half-baked measure will turn against us. Those who are afraid can sit at home and do nothing. If we worry, we will never find the way out of the crisis.

With the measures adopted by the Ministry of Interior having been made known to the public, it is now necessary to investigate the causes of the events. A few people are nabbed; then they are released – and nothing happens. It is necessary to investigate where their protests started. Prosecutors are not doing anything about the protests. There was a case in Bratislava: a member of security forces got punched in the stomach. However, prosecutors claim they are not allowed to detain the attacker for one week. Legal measures are needed. The investigation must be conducted in a way permitting the inspirers of such incidents to be identified. Public inspirers include radio, TV and press. Their activities have done a lot of damage to power [structures]. [Miloš] Čeřovský and those like him have created legal obstacles preventing a thorough investigation of such acts.

There exist permanent contacts between our people and those across the border. These are political contacts. Every piece of our in-house information is leaked in a few hours. I will give you a few facts on these issues. I warned there had been a meeting of 80 people in Vienna. They reached an agreement as to what would be done abroad and at home. You took it as a joke. We know that they are continuing; that there exist channels by means of which many people at home are controlled and instructed from abroad. We haven't expatriated a single person among those who defected. The situation about their flats has not been solved yet. People reside there without an appropriate certificate. Not a single measure could be taken against those did not return. Everything has been swept off the table. We did not approve anything. They should be given an extra year. The border is open. There are many people abroad, waiting which way the tide will turn.

Foreign journalists and the Radio Free Europe were broadcasting from Wenceslas Square. West German film crews were in Bratislava. Everything with an official permission. They were invited to come here. Ten million people agree with their opinions. Reading West German newspapers is all that it takes. Hostile elements have permissions allowing them to stay abroad. We must press on heads of personnel departments. [František] Pavlíček defected and we have left him in the position of the Art Director of the Vinohrady Theatre. All opposition forces were connected to someone. [Pavlíček] had ties to them. And there are many more like him sitting in the party apparatus!

It is necessary to draft a reply to the Soviet note and the statement. It is a political document. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia raised a question to the effect that the consolidation process would take some time. We will need to find some room. The principles issued in January must be enforced very strictly. For every organization or association, it holds true that an adopted resolution must be fulfilled. This principle must also be enforced in what we do. Throughout the party, at different levels, from the bottom upward, there are letters demanding the implementation of the resolution and you don't want to see them! I have read them.

I believe the Executive Committee and the Presidium of the Central Committee must take steps that will mark a radical turn in the implementation of our policy. They must adhere to resolutions and explain specific measures to the general public and attempt to bring the latter to

our side. I believe that people will back us up. We must make the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia a Marxist party. Those who do not want such a party can go. We will publish not only the statement, but also the set of measures. We will notify the party of our actions and tell the public how we intend to do it. We will not budge a millimeter from the line. This is the way to rescue.

[Lubomír] Štrougal: The situation is serious. Newspapers will be out normally. In addition, the “Reporter” and “Listy” weeklies have already been printed. We naturally do not know what they contain.

Dubček: I suggest checking and then doing something about them. A hundred [of our] people have been placed in relevant institutions. If there’s something against the policy of the party and the government, we will place an embargo on it. Instructors need to be checked as well.

Štrougal: The Executive Committee does not have enough clout if it cannot push through the resolution about TV. Nobody listens to me. I always explode when watching some programs. And people responsible for TV broadcasting do not stop them, do not take any remedial action. Let relevant ministers help avoid any recurrence of such situations.

Husák: With respect to magazines, the Presidium of the Central Committee they should submit one issue in advance.

Štrougal: That’s tantamount to stopping them. You do not understand the situation.

Dubček: We have appointed an instructor/supervisor. He can stop a TV program. Otherwise the Executive Committee will have no authority. If you think it is necessary to stop TV broadcasts, we will do it. This is what the leading role of the party consists in. We do not have the unity we want to have. If we did not adopt a resolution, none of us could avoid responsibility.

Husák: Černík has proposed to impose an embargo.

Dubček: If Comrade Černík proposes an embargo, it means a nationwide one. In this respect, we should show our unanimous consent. We will send out an official notification announcing that those in charge will be made responsible according to the law.

[Štefan] Sádovský: It is necessary to accept the proposal and let authorities know. The distribution of magazines in respect whereof there exists a reasonable suspicion must be stopped immediately. Havlín and Kempný should immediately sit on this and submit a report. Until the latter is available, the distribution should be stopped.

Provazník: The weeklies should be checked immediately, or their distribution stopped.

Černík: Give me your approval for that. Preliminary censorship is introduced.

[Martin] Dzúr: (... very excited, reporting on the meeting with [Andrei] Grechko)

I convened the complete Military Council. We assessed the event at the meeting. Our conclusion was that the command of the Czechoslovak Army was united and had been exercising, for the most part, exercising its best efforts to consolidate the situation. This is reflected in the implementation of the November resolution and order of the President of the republic. Although the situation in the Czechoslovak People's Army is difficult, and also complicated by the ongoing restructuring process, the armed forces fulfill their tasks and secure the Defense of the country in a responsible manner. The Czechoslovak People's Army fulfills international commitments and obligations approved by the government. It is struggling for the ideological and action unity in the armed forces, based on the November resolution. We have issued good directives and guidelines. The command of the Czechoslovak Army has drafted working assessments of all members of the command and their approach to the fulfillment of tasks. These will be used to determine binding steps and conclusions.

I have put together a 21-strong commission which will investigate matters on the spot. Its conclusions, including the strictest possible consequences, will be implemented. We will do everything that is necessary to inform the whole army about the problems. We intend to convene all editors and instruct them to condemn these act and publicize them, including photographs. This is an urgent matter. The events of March 29 must be condemned; we must apologize and make sure nothing will disturb our future coexistence [with Soviet troops].

The Military Council asks the Presidium of the Central Committee and the Federal Government to clearly define the role of our army in their statement. In my opinion, the culprits should be punished. It should be emphasized that any attack against Warsaw Treaty armies is contrary to the state's best interests. The Central Committee and the government should impose decisive measures against forces undermining the alliance with the USSR and openly declare that the government instructed the Ministries of National Defense and Interior not to deploy armed forces against anti-Socialist elements, as such deployment would result in mistrust in the army and a negative attitude of the public toward its command. The Press Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must be instructed to publish

articles and programs on the importance of the alliance with the USSR. At the same time, censorship preventing attacks against the Soviet Union must be introduced. [I propose] to approve, subject to discussion, my report, prepared in my capacity of the Minister of National Defense, and to order every professional soldier to sign a statement in which he will undertake to strengthen cooperation with the Soviet Army and Soviet troops temporarily stationed in our country in his line of work. [I propose] to take a measure under which it will be possible to use earmarked units for the purpose of preventing further provocations. The Military Council is convinced that radical measures are needed. There is no other way to play with this kind of fire. If the Central Committee does not back up our army in an earnest manner, I am expecting consequences that have been looming for some time.

Dubček: Is this a prepared position?

Dzúr: It is a position that has been drafted off-hand, which should be presented to the Presidium of the Central Committee and the Federal Government.

Svoboda: The situation is serious.

Dzúr: The Central Committee must be convened as early as possible. The Military Council is my working body.

Dubček: I have two questions. First – should we take up a position concerning the publication/media activities before the government adopts its own position? Second – does the leadership of the Ministry of National Defense regard the strength and status of our army as reliable enough in the event the government and party leadership will have to rely on it if a military intervention against an attempted coup or armed uprising? Would the Czechoslovak Army be able to suppress them using its own forces? Your statement mentions that the party leadership and the government should take up a position on promoting the importance of the Warsaw Treaty and ensuring the existence of the rule of socialism in Czechoslovakia. Are you referring to Defense against an outside enemy, or are you suggesting that the party may be unable to be the ruling party?

Dzúr: The document was prepared as a proposal of the high command of the army rather than as my personal proposal. The first time I read it was here. It is a raw document. I counted on the Presidium of the Central Committee being in session today and issuing its statement. We want to discuss our position tomorrow morning. We want to support the position of the Presidium of the

Central Committee and the government. The Military Council has been acting in accordance with the promise it gave to Grechko.

Dubček: There is a proposal to publicize the fact that there are two visits. It will leak out anyway by tomorrow.

Dzůr: It has already been published in the Soviet media. It will be published here today. Editors were after me. I did not want to give them a statement right away because I wanted to discuss it first with you. It should be given some consideration. I do not want the public to perceive it as something we do under the Soviet pressure.

As to the strength of our army, I can guarantee it will fulfill all its defensive tasks. On the other hand, although I am against demonstrations, I cannot place our army against those who just want to march along without any protests. The army will oppose the counter-revolution. If there is a clear and present danger, it will cooperate with other Warsaw Treaty armies.

Our proposal is to instruct the Press Department of the Central Committee to make sure that the community of the Warsaw Treaty nations is given wide publicity. The security of Czechoslovakia can only develop within this coalition.

I have a comment on slogans »Long live Hitler!«, »Hail to the Soviet Army!«. According to information from the Minister of Interior, the banners were prepared in advance.

As to the leadership, it is a rather difficult matter. If the political leadership of our country, the politburo and the Presidium of the Central Committee presented a united position, the situation would be much clearer. The information that Comrade Smrkovský had taken part in the Wenceslas Square protests was very unpleasant for us.

Smrkovský: That's not true.

Dzůr: I only repeat what we were told. Opposition sentiments do arise. It's not just a question of today; they also appeared earlier, when members of the leadership did not present a united front. This situation has also been reflected among members of our army.

Husák: Does this also apply to places with Soviet garrisons?

Dzůr: They [Soviet Army commanders] adopt measures to protect their garrisons. These must be perceived in a broader sense. They are convinced that our state and party leadership is not in control of the situation and that counter-revolutionary forces are reinforcing their positions. As a matter of fact, these forces do have increasingly stronger positions here, and we are afraid to call

it a counter-revolution. This is why the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet government say they will not release Czechoslovakia from their sphere of influence, no matter what.

[Peter] Colotka: Have there been any movements of Soviet troops?

Dzúr: We are not familiar with the situation at the border, not even at the border with the People's Republic of Poland. I can use other ways to learn about the situation from personnel of the Ministry of Interior. Grechko gave an order and Soviet APCs appeared in Prague earlier today.

Štrougal: There are troop movements in southern Moravia as well.

Dzúr: Their numbers will immediately be increased by 10,000 to 20,000 troops.

Dubček: The ministry leadership will take measures after the government's meeting.

Dzúr: The recommendation of the Military Council should not wait for the government's approval. The Ministry of Interior made its position known to me.

Dubček: As to the use of the army, there is a certain system.

[...]

Dubček: We should have some supporting information for the statement, which would outline some practical steps that are being made to prevent a major internal disaster in our country. I considered earlier whether we should draft a communiqué or statement describing specific measures. I think we will have to think many things over by tomorrow. Issuing a communiqué on the statement of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU is a big risk. I see a way out in a statement of the party. Or we will wait for a statement along our government line. It will not be taken into account after the statements of the national governments, Czech and Slovak...

There is a draft of the statement, which is of course insufficient, but it is necessary to take it as a basis and submit it to the Executive Committee and then to the Presidium of the Central Committee. We have to adopt practical steps and measure toward the security situation in the country, i.e. measures falling into the purview of the Ministry of Interior, so that the leadership of the state and the party is informed about developments, and also certain preventive measures to avoid a situation which could get out of hand, particularly in Prague and also in places where Soviet troops and HQs are stationed and located.

In this respect, we should propose, along the lines of the party and state authorities, practical steps and measures that would create a situation providing a guarantee that the radio, TV and press will not be used to incite such actions.

[...]

The measures will declare an embargo on all news, articles, editorials and other documents aimed at the USSR or containing elements that could create a tension between us and the Soviet Union, e.g. requirements to eliminate the presence of the Soviet Army in our country.

[...]

We will have to be united to fight the counter-revolution and then ... We have not spoken about causes. That would produce a conflicting atmosphere. In our further assessments, we will see whether this republic is strong enough to suppress the counter-revolution, if necessary. An intervention of other armed forces will be a result of a politically tense situation. We will then consider further steps to make sure the situation will not get out of hand.

Husák: Shall we give a brief report to regional and district committees to the effect that the Presidium of the Central Committee has been discussing the situation resulting from the protests?

Štrougal: I of course do not want to hold things up. We are supposed to react to the situation. We have been sitting here as the Executive Committee for some time, and the situation looks very grave. A spark is all it takes to ignite a fire. In my opinion, our statement must not deal with formalistic phenomena. And not just the events in Wenceslas Square. We have to provide more than general guarantees. After the »Smrkovský« action and events connected with Palach etc., I dare say that the party is in the gravest situation it has ever been. The party is disintegrating. After three or four months, we have an organizational split of the party in the Czech Lands at our hands. [There] is a certain organized segment of people who are able to endure anything, including [the introduction by the Soviets of a regime similar to] the fascist occupation. The party is organizationally split.

There is a different situation in Slovakia, where Husák and the leadership collectively fight against incorrect opinions and eliminate opportunistic principles from the party's work. He has practically reorganized the party.

[Josef] Špaček was to draft a resolution. However, what he has prepared is a right-wing platform. Perhaps “right-wing” is not an entirely appropriate term. The party is disintegrated. The last four or five weeks during which we did not place issues which needed to be dealt with on our agenda have thrown us into a very deep crisis. The party is indeed disintegrated.

We have to answer the questions. We want to approach practical issues related to the party in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. Organizational work should reflect the leading role of the party. The leading position should be established everywhere. The statement must provide answers to some of the questions. If we bypass the leading role of the party in the political system, we will not touch upon the causes. The party demands answers to these question. If not provided, the party will be disoriented. It will pave the way for non-democratic factions and movements which will bring about a disorganization of the society. We are having a communiqué drafted, and we do not know what to put in it. I agree with Comrades Černík and Husák. We have to tell the basics to the party and the society. This is not a propaganda document. We must strongly oppose these opinions. We must criticize that part of the media and those Communists among journalists that have been lending themselves to different things except one – the development of the party line. As to the anti-Soviet wave, we have waited until something happens. This is not just hooliganism, but a conflict of opinions. Anti-Sovietism is a basic weapon of right-wingers and anti-socialists, who want to separate the party’s policy from the basics of the action program and from the party leadership. And they have been successful. Slovakia reacted to anti-Soviet sentiments in a different way.

We have been talking about the leadership. Smrkovský has to be anywhere where something is going on. There are rumors he spoke at the regional [party] educational facility and mentioned a danger from the left. I believe he is worried about the danger from the left. Smrkovský has failed to comply with instructions concerning unity and non-unity. The collective principle has never before been violated as much as it is today. Smrkovský should get his act together. He is only after his own authority. We require trust in the party. There is also lack of unity in the Executive Committee. This is one of the reasons why the Executive Committee is unable to resolve problems. No one lusts for blood, but this is too much. I am asking myself unpleasant questions. Mass organizations are creating their own atmosphere, not a party one. If we do things the way

we have done them until now, we will separate the party from the people. This is how mass media have been acting.

Criticism and self-criticism of the non-unity of the leadership is needed. If you want to hear my opinion, the party cannot do without it and will not become united again unless it says how matters have developed since the XIIIth Congress [of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Barring that,] it is impossible to justify August 21. I rule that out. We have to make a distinction between positives and negatives. We cannot accept the opinion that the party was in command of matters. We have to carry out the analysis. Otherwise the party will not orient itself, as it is unable to answer the question what the post-January policy consists of on its own. In this respect, the leadership must define essential questions.

As to the normalization [of relations] with the USSR, we find ourselves in a terrible situation. I don't want to analyze causes or our economic needs. The political aspects are clear. We have to deal with issues in a very concrete manner, from both internal and external positions, to get out of it, to make the Soviet government and the CPSU see that the party plays its role in our country.

[...]

We have to assume an honest stance with respect to our relations with the USSR – in the draft reply to the Soviet note, some segments come from the Brno school and they are not in line with our policy. This cannot be accepted. We have to outline a plan. It is necessary to note that we have to approach problems rationally. Černík says we are nationalists. If we make a sensible presentation, we will be able to dramatically convince the masses. I agree with what Černík and Husák said here, which means we have to present a clear statement on the lack of unity within the party leadership and criticize it. The lack of unity is splitting the party. We have to adopt concrete measures and do so in a well-considered manner. However, we must not yield the ground to those who were in Wenceslas Square. We must establish bodies that would be capable of crushing the petty bourgeois manners to pieces. It is no longer possible to share power with someone else. Non one should be allowed to present the lack of unity as democratic centralism. The situation in the party is close to an organizational disintegration. There is no tool of remedy for such a situation. The disintegration can actually take place and then it will be necessary to create a new party. The responsibility is ours. We have to take up a completely different attitude

to it. The leadership must be united. It must restore and regenerate itself. This is a categorical imperative.

[Evžen] Erban: There is an agreement in that we have to produce a communiqué on the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee, the Executive Committee and the government today. The public will know that proxies of the Soviet government have talked with us. Let us be careful. It must be emphasized that, having heard the reports of the Minister of Interior and the Minister of National Defense, we are issuing a communiqué and a list of measures that will follow. This is also how the Presidium would present the report.

The November resolution has not been implemented vigorously enough. Discipline must be stressed as well. The Presidium of the Central Committee will deal with divergences from the party line and breaches of discipline, and will also draw appropriate conclusions. I agree with the criticism addressed to some members of the media. Other measures will follow. I want to talk about it at a meeting of the Presidium of the National Front. It would be good if someone from the government came as well. The top-level body of the National Front would meet tomorrow morning, discuss the situation, and take up a position. We will declare the party leadership is committed, in the spirit of the November resolution, to exercise efforts to defend the post-January policy. There are voices to the effect that Dubček and the government have betrayed the cause and that only Smrkovský is fair. Communists are disenchanted about it. I want to emphasize the single and uniform line. Normal people demand vigorous personal sanctions. We have to clearly state that the Soviets do not prevent us from implementing the post-January policy. The matter with V. Palt... is a shame ... we have a statement of the Historical Society to the effect that they will oppose our alleged attempt to liquidate Smrkovský.

Kádár said that Moscow was against Dubček and also others. The Hungarian party favours a peaceful solution. Kádár said: Seeing what is happening in your country, we are worried and monitor the developments. You cannot endure the crisis for long. The society is full of tension.

We know that the party has been gradually disintegrating. We are helpless. We are afraid to show the authority of the state. There are provocations on TV every day. Now they have adopted a more sophisticated approach, using hockey games. As long as we are bogged in the

crisis, every opportunity is good for them. Emotions will soar. A hundred people can influence millions of others.

There are talks that Smrkovský was in Wenceslas Square. The question is whether he is morally entitled to join us. It is not about forcing him here and now. There is something else at stake today. Will we want a nationalist, anti-Communist party? The party serves the people. I am juggling balls in the National Front to prevent it from becoming a tool against the party.

It must be emphasized that we are saving the January [1968]. We are thus giving an argument to Communists in the West. Tito says the Soviet invasion and occupation were conducted to prevent a continuation of the post-January policy. [Leonid] Brezhnev asks: What proof can you provide to support it? He says we use Czechoslovak specifics as an excuse. He says: We claim you have freedom of press which, in our experience, cannot be called freedom. Otherwise you would go against journalists who are opponents of the party.

[...]

As to the Presidium of the Central Committee, it must be informed. Comrade Smrkovský should rethink his position in today's politics and get rid of the forces which perceive him as their protector. He is not fulfilling what he has promised. We have to defeat political parasites. Otherwise all of us will carry the blame. Our opinions differ, and this is becoming a key issue.

Dubček: If Comrade Smrkovský did not understand, it would be a real tragedy.

Erbán: Now I do not want to dramatize matters any more. If just a half of what has been said and written about Smrkovský were true, the Soviets would start having the same feelings as half a year ago. The West would start disgorging its guaranteed information. The leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia must support our position from January's positions. If it fails, the present political crisis will continue.

Smrkovský: We all know how serious the situation is. When discussing the measures or where we should go from here – all the measures should be designed and implemented in a way that would prevent new demonstrations, new actions, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. Everything must be thoroughly considered so that there would be no undesirable action, in spite of all our efforts and will. We must not allow a situation which Marshal Grechko referred to, a situation when the Soviet would no longer talk to us. Such actions must be prevented. It would be appropriate to distribute, after the meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee

tomorrow, relevant information to lower tiers of the party along all lines – both those of the party and those of the state. I repeat that we must use all means available to prevent any actions.

As to mass media: without the impression we have obtained from the letter, it would not be a problem to pass a resolution and implement strict censorship immediately. However, there is another option, namely that the Communists working in the media could achieve what we want to achieve through the censorship themselves. They are divided. We must not be afraid to talk about it. I spoke with some journalists in the morning, whether they would be willing to accept this commitment if they were informed. In any case, we must introduce an embargo on the publication of matters that contradict the situation.

On the [Communist] party: I want to talk about its ability to act. I say the matter is about something else. We must and we should convene, within a week or ten days, the Central Committee which would discuss the document and proposals concerning future steps which still need to be finalized, and then properly inform the entire party. What we want to decide cannot be a responsibility of the Presidium of the Central Committee and of the Executive Committee only. We should present the matters to the Central Committee. It would then take decisions in all relevant matters.

Comrade Štrougal has been talking about a split, but what is our ability to act, to perform? What have we done since August along state lines? What have comrade secretaries been doing? Comrade Štrougal mentioned nine secretaries, claiming that someone wanted their heads. The fact is that we have not seen a single document from them in this body for half a year. When talking about the party's ability to act, it depends on the party's head, department leaders and secretaries. It will be necessary, in connection with the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, to address many words to our own ranks. The party apparatus will have to do better, to get all commissions moving, so that the party's leadership, Presidium and Executive Committee have good information for their deliberations and decision-making.

As to Comrade Erban: I sympathize with his attitude, as Comrade Erban's position is based on our upholding of what we call the post-January policy. However, no one, in half a year, has cared enough to examine the action program of the party. It was born in different circumstances, in different times. The question is whether it would not be advisable to modify

the action program to the circumstances we find ourselves in now and, based on the above, to identify the most fundamental problems we have to deal with – in other words, to formulate a clear and concise program indicating how to proceed with the policy of the party and the government, to carry on with the [implementation of the action program instead of allowing] deadlines elapse and leaving matters unsolved. If we took our plan of work, we could see how many matters were supposed to be resolved and how many of them remain outstanding. If the party and the state apparatus have enough topics for their work, if there is a clear and concrete program and we are able to implement it, then, in my opinion, we will carry on with the post-January policy.

Erban speaks about it. He can formulate a question and define the conditions under which the party cannot face a political conflict with people. Everything would be lost. There would be the government, the party, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, but the people would stand against us. I know that this would lead to bitter ends. Thus, the fundamental question is whether we will be able to carry on, albeit in a restricted form, with what we set up [in January].

I will not react to all accusations. I reject the allegation made by Comrade Husák. I am not a representative of right-wingers. I cannot be blamed for something that someone else has said. I cannot be blamed for what happened in December at the Parliament. I wanted to know whether I was acceptable for Soviet comrades. If I were an obstacle of good relations [I promised] I would resign. You told me you had not talked about it. I later learned that, during the last dinner in Kiev, Brezhnev said that he acknowledged that a representative of the Slovak nation would be the Speaker of the Federal Assembly. Since that time, I said: Let us put this in a resolution. Then we would not have to discuss it any more.

[...]

Dubček: I propose to suspend the meeting of the Executive Committee and work on the statement. Quite a lot of essential opinions have been voiced here. They provide guidelines as to how a comprehensive analysis of the situation. [I recommend] to finalize the proposal, submit it to the Executive Committee and then to the Presidium of the Central Committee; to prepare a memo for district committees stating that the Presidium has met today to evaluate the latest events. The memo would mention that we would take up a position, and it can also include a sentence to the effect that we condemn the things that happened and that the party leadership is

concerned about the events and their use for the purpose of attacking the party and state leadership. We will also refer to Soviet visits. Furthermore, [we will mention] that the situation in the party and in the country is difficult and that the party and the government are preparing additional measures of which they will be notified.

[...]

[Source: NA, Prague, A ÚV KSČ, f. 02/6, a.u. 18, b. 1, in Jitka Vondrová – Jaromír Navrátil: Komunistická strana Československa, vol. 4 normalizace (listopad 1968 – září 1969) (Praha – Brno 2003), pp. 242-61; translation by Jiří Mareš.]

Soviet-Czechoslovak Ice Hockey Politics

by Mikhail Prozumenschikov

Translated excerpts from Chapter 6 (“Crises of Eastern Europe in the Mirror of Sports”) of Bolshoy Sport I bol’shaya politika [Big Sport and Big Politics], Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2004)

[...] Despite the similarity of the situation in Poland and Hungary [after 1956], among them there was still at least one, but very significant difference. A declared desire by the Polish leadership to save its alliance and friendly relations with the Soviet Union was not an unfounded assertion. Meanwhile in Hungary, the former leadership of the country looked at everything that happened on the sports fields “through their fingers”¹ without attaching much importance to it, while the Polish government tried, though cautiously, but quite consistently, to control the situation, to take measures to restore order in the stadiums. Throughout the year 1958, the Central Committee of the PZPR [Polish United Workers’ Party] considered the violations of public order that took place during a friendly match between the Polish national ice hockey team and the second junior team of the USSR, during a performance of the USSR women’s team at the European basketball championship in Lodz, and in boxing competitions between boxers of Belarus and Warsaw. For the perpetrators of these violations, sufficiently strict measures of intervention were taken. All this was seen in Moscow, and evaluated accordingly. It was no coincidence, that in response to the comments of some of his colleagues in the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee [CPSU CC], Khrushchev said, “Poland is not as we would like it to be,” but [Polish communist leader Wladyslaw] Gomulka is doing the right thing: he, too, “might not agree with everything, but he cannot do everything that he wants to do.”²

[...] In the mid-1960s. a political crisis hit yet another socialist country - Czechoslovakia. And, like the events of a decade earlier, sport was an indicator of the growing tension in the country, and the exacerbation of Soviet-Czechoslovak relations. The most vulnerable point became a hockey tournament in which previous representatives of the

¹*They did not pay much attention—trans.*

² RGANI F. 2. Op. 1. D. 219. L. 139-40 (РГАНИ. Ф. 2. Оп. 1. Д. 219. Л. 139-140.)

opposition of the two countries often went beyond the purely athletic frame. It is not surprising that hockey arenas in the 1960's became the main place where political games were played out by their parties.

The unique relationship between the hockey players of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia began to take shape in the late 1940s. Initially, this relationship seemed very decent. In the USSR, hockey with a puck, or, as it was called, "Canadian hockey," before the Second World War had not been cultivated. The main winter game had been hockey played with a ball (bandy, or "Russian hockey"), the rules of which, and the organization of the game, differed significantly from overseas hockey. In the 1930's, a working team visited Moscow from Berlin, who played a demonstration match with CDKA club, players who had been forced at the time to re-qualify from "Russian" hockey-players to "Canadian." The game did not impress the spectators or even the players themselves, and reviews of it were largely of a critical nature.³

After the war, the Soviet Union seriously took up the cultivation of this manly sport, which was rapidly gaining popularity. As teachers, Czechoslovak "friends" were selected from the socialist camp in Czechoslovakia, which was regarded as having one of the strongest hockey teams in the world. But the students were more than capable: the first official match with the Czechoslovak club LTC in February 1948 ended in victory for the Soviet hockey players with a score of 6-3. In the future, the level of Soviet hockey was constantly growing, and so during the life of Stalin, when the USSR was not keen on participating in major international hockey tournaments, the chief sparring partners of Soviet hockey players turned out to be their counterparts from the countries of Eastern Europe. Thereby the mastery of Soviet hockey players grew so quickly that the outcome of most of the matches could be predicted in advance.

³ This is what sports journalists wrote about this game 70 years ago: "The only team combination is the transfer of a puck to your partner, who is located in the correct position, who goes with the puck to the goal and hits it himself into the goal or pass it back. With this situation, the puck may be hit into the goal. Other combinations of the game do not exist." // *Physkultura and Sport*. 1932. No. 3.

Feeling resentment for the “ungrateful” students of the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak team was added even more annoyance from the way these games were commented on by the media in the CSR (Czechoslovak Socialist Republic). Under Stalin and for a while after his death, the sports press of Czechoslovakia, which was under strict party control, bent over backwards to demonstrate their servile worship of their “elder brother.” Even before the Soviet Union first participated in the World Ice Hockey Championship and immediately won a gold medal [in 1954—ed.], Czechoslovak journalists tirelessly praised the Soviet national team, saying that it had no equal in the world, and argued that the Czechoslovak players still needed a long time to learn from the Russians, etc. Such pejorative self-evaluation had a negative impact on the Czechoslovak athletes, and generated among their fans a strong belief that the results of matches between the USSR and Czechoslovakia, were “predetermined at the highest level” and that the Czechoslovak players were obligated to lose against the Russians.⁴

All this led to the matches between the teams of the two countries taking place in an emotional and sometimes rather rough atmosphere; games in Prague and other Czechoslovak cities were often accompanied by anti-Soviet speeches. The pattern was clear: the more enthusiastic and ingratiating the official heads were to their Soviet “friends,” the more hostility occurred in the stands. Simple Czechoslovak fans who felt sympathy for the Soviet Union and the prevailing troubled situation, sent letters to Moscow with the wishes and suggestions, which, in their opinion, could improve relations between the countries on the ice rinks.⁵ Their letters, which were addressed to the coach of the Soviet team or to Soviet newspapers, fell at the end of their journey to the CPSU Central Committee, and there settled into the archive, without leaving any traces that the Soviet leadership had somehow analyzed or used the information received.

⁴ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 28. D. 469. L. 25. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 28. Д. 469. Л. 25.)

⁵ In one such proposal received by the CPSU CCC from Czechoslovak fans, they had to by all means “make friends” with the hockey players of the two countries: “The improvement of relations of our public with you (Soviet hockey team) would be helped if they were to see that our and your players were friends. Would it be possible, if, for instance, that on the ice they conversed between themselves, as it our players do with the Swedes or the Swiss during the time before games or during the time of intermission; would it be possible, if after the intermission our and your players came back to the ice together with one another? ...Maybe, you would achieve that which our hockey players and staff in hockey with a puck have not yet managed: to impose friendship between players.” See RGANI. F. 5. Op. 28. D. 469. L. 26

For the first time, Moscow was actually worried when they received information on the Olympic hockey tournament in 1956 [from 26 January-5 February 1956 in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy—ed.]. In the first match of the USSR and Czechoslovakia, when the score was 5-1 in favor of the Soviet hockey team, Czechoslovakia began to overtly play a violent game, resulting in a number of Soviet hockey players sustaining serious injuries. But even worse was the behavior of the Czechoslovak players on the last day of the tournament when the US – Czechoslovakia and USSR–Canada matches were supposed to occur. In the case of victory over their respective opposing teams, the USA, Canada, and the USSR would have gained an equal amount of points, and the winner of the gold medals would be determined by the number of goals scored versus the number of goals allowed. The actions of the Czechoslovak team in their last game brought about feelings of bewilderment among hockey experts and rather caustic comments by Western journalists. As opposed to the match against the USSR, which was more like a Battle on the Ice, the hockey players of Czechoslovakia not only offered no resistance to the Americans, but also seemed to have deliberately made it possible for the US team to throw as many pucks in their net as possible. Getting acquainted with the information from Italy, the Central Committee of the CPSU specially noted the place where it was said that all who had been watching this game developed a strong belief that the players from socialist Czechoslovakia had tried to retreat in such a way as to bring about a first place win for the USA team.⁶

This case forced the Soviet leadership to think seriously. While the strife was within the socialist camp, they had somehow turned a blind eye. But when it spilled out into the open, revealing forms of political confrontation to the delight of the enemies of the capitalist camp, the Soviet Union was seriously alarmed. During the time of these prolific shocks in 1956 and then followed by 1957 the heads of the two countries often discussed the problems of bilateral relations, including the issues of strengthening educational work among athletes in the USSR and CSR, and the promotion of a brotherly friendship and mutual assistance in all areas of life. Traces of specific activities, at least with regard to the Soviet team in the documents of the CPSU

⁶ The efforts of the Czechoslovak players were in vain: having beaten the Canadians 2:0, the Soviet hockey team became for the first time in their history, Olympic champions. In their “strange” game in the last match against the Americans, the Czechoslovak team harmed only the Canadian team, which as a result took third place, losing second place to the USA team.

CC, could not be found, but the fact remains that for some time the ice dust settled, although the hockey matches between the teams of both countries continued to take place in a tense atmosphere.

In the mid-1960s. the situation in Czechoslovakia deteriorated sharply. Added to the economic stagnation, there was crisis of authority: within the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the confrontation intensified between the old pro-Stalin faction led by party leader Antonín Novotný and the reform-minded movement. The representatives of this reformist trend, avowing “socialism with a human face,” wittingly or unwittingly found themselves the mouthpiece of anti-socialist forces, seeking to gradually return Czechoslovakia to the path, which was forcibly taken away from it 20 years before. At the same time, opponents of communism understood that behind the CPCz stood the CPSU and the entire Soviet Union, and memories of the events in Hungary in 1956 were still fresh. Under these conditions, the aim was “political erosion” of the state leadership, whipping through the media of anti-Soviet sentiment, while maintaining visibility of absolute loyalty to the Soviet Union and socialist ideals. Sport also featured high in these plans.

As a consequence, the growth of the political crisis also exacerbated the situation in sports arenas.

[...] As expected, the main arena of anti-Soviet statements once again became the hockey rink, where the real battle unfolded. But even here there were new nuances. In the 1950s, the Czechoslovak press had praised Soviet hockey to the heavens while scolding its own, but now the tactics changed dramatically. It is unlikely that in any other country in this period the press had written so negatively about Soviet hockey, so versed in detail the mistakes of the Soviet hockey players and so lowly assessed the level of the Soviet national team that regularly won World and European championships. As for their own team, instead of raising the level of their game, in the CSR, it was decided to make the main emphasis on a special psychological mood before the matches against the Soviet hockey players, when the Czechoslovak players would come out to fight, in the words of the Czechs themselves, with “blood in their eyes (bloody eyes).”⁷ Largely as a result of this attitude, the last match of the

⁷ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 59. D. 295. L. 49. (6 PГAHIИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 59. Д. 295. Л. 49.)

World Hockey Championship in Vienna in March 1967 was darkened by a mass fight between Soviet and Czechoslovak ice hockey players, the outrageous behavior of the fans of Czechoslovakia during the playing of the Soviet anthem, and the refusal of Czechoslovak athletes to congratulate the winners of the championship after the game.

The events in Vienna received a wide international response. Many Western newspapers relished the negative details of the game and gloated over the “hockey-military” confrontation between the two socialist countries. In Czechoslovakia itself, opinions were divided. Some of the citizens and the media criticized the Czechoslovak players for provoking the Soviet team and being responsible for rude and the incorrect behavior both on and off the ice. But most of the population believed that those to blame were the Soviet athletes, who acted too aggressively and started the actual fight at the end of the match.⁸ In Moscow, the greatest concern was the fact that such a “subjective” evaluation of the event was given by some party newspapers, including the main organ of the CPCz Central Committee: the newspaper *Rude Pravo*. According to the embassy, this one-sided position (“in which, only the Soviet athletes were to blame”) was taken by a number of senior officials of the Czechoslovak leadership: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs [Jan] Pudlak, head of the Foreign Ministry [public relations department Karel] Dufek, the director of the Central Committee International Department [Oldrich] Kaderka, etc.⁹ The Soviet embassy in Prague once again voiced a strong call “to suspend meetings between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes in the territory of Czechoslovakia in those sports that involve a harsh power struggle and cause a nervous and overly biased audience reaction (hockey, soccer, boxing, etc.), as well as to forego the assignment of Soviet judges (referees) to international competitions in which Czechoslovak athletes participate.”¹⁰

Of course, the CPSU CC could not move toward such an action. The Sports Committee was given urgent instructions to prepare proposals on a number of events aimed at normalizing relations between the Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes. Six weeks

⁸ The main complaint the Czechoslovak side put forward was that the Soviet defender, A. Raglin, who tired from the endless underhanded hits (of which the Czechoslovak papers preferred not to mention) and by the end of the game, decided to settle the score with the offenders (*those making the hits*), making it open with the help of his enormous strength.

⁹ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 59. D. 295. L. 44. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 59. Д. 295. Л. 50-52.)

¹⁰ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 59. D. 295. L. 44. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 59. Д. 295. Л. 44.)

later proposals were submitted to the Secretariat. In addition to the traditional phrases that contained a standard set of verbs to “intensify” “improve,” “strengthen,” there were also very specific suggestions. Following the advice of the Soviet embassy in Prague, the Sports Committee suggested not to have bilateral meetings in the near future in Czechoslovakia with Soviet athletes (hockey, football, gymnastics team), for all friendly competitions between the USSR and Czechoslovakia to invite judges (referees) from neutral countries, and, most importantly – to ask for the CPSU CC leadership to discuss in detail the situation in sporting contacts between the two countries at the upcoming meeting with the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. The Sports Authority also wished to invite to the USSR representatives of the Czechoslovak media and the CSR hockey team: the first to develop a joint plan for objective coverage of sports in print, and the second, to share experiences, strengthen friendship and cooperation with Soviet hockey players in a vacation on the Black Sea. However, against the proposals was the CPSU CC Secretary Yuri Andropov, who in 1967 became also the chairman of the KGB.

The Soviet leadership at that time still retained a faint hope of their Czechoslovak comrades’ assurances, solemnly promising to “bring order” to deal with those who were “pulling the strings¹¹ of individual players, coaches and sports officials,” and even considered “banning the broadcasting of events in which Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes participated.”¹² But once again promises remained promises, and they didn’t follow through.

[...]It was symbolic, and also another coincidence. In 1956 the situation in Hungary had changed so rapidly that there was no time for the use of sport for political purposes [except for the famous Soviet-Hungarian water polo confrontation at the Summer Olympics in Melbourne in December 1956, i.e., only after the Soviet invasion had taken place—ed.]. A similar situation occurred in Czechoslovakia: in 1968, sport played a special role as a catalyst for anti-Soviet sentiment in Czechoslovak society. Then sports in Czechoslovakia receded into the background, giving way to more important issues at the state level. At the Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France, in the beginning of 1968, the Czechoslovak national ice hockey team had a

¹¹ *Lit.* “*Standing behind the backs of*”

¹² RGANI. F. 5. Op. 59. D 295. L. 53. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 59. Д. 295. Л. 53.)

long-awaited revenge on the Soviet team, winning 5-4.¹³ This victory, however, did not cause the stormy emotions in Czechoslovakia as those that accompanied these matches before, and even more so – immediately after 1968. Much less had to be reported, about the manifestation of anti-Soviet sentiment in the sports competitions held in the territory of Czechoslovakia. The pro-Soviet wing of the CPCz lost more influence with each passing day, and it was no longer necessary for their political opponents to actively exploit sport for their own purposes.

[...] For the Soviet Union it was becoming increasingly difficult to find a common language, and any kind of mutually acceptable compromises, with the leaders of Czechoslovak sports. In the 1969 the Ice Hockey Federation of Czechoslovakia, without consulting with Moscow, announced at the last minute their decision to cancel Prague's hosting of the World Hockey Championship. The situation was saved by the Swedes, who once again acted as a "fire brigade" of the World Championships.¹⁴ A little later, knowing about the applications of the Soviet Union to hold the World Championship in Moscow in 1971, the Czechoslovakia Ice Hockey Federation, nevertheless, sent their own bid for the organization of the World Championships in Prague at the same time. All attempts to negotiate failed, and the organization of the championship was entrusted to the "neutral" Switzerland.

[...] These and other forms of protest against the continued Soviet occupation of the country, which were expressed by means of sport, should be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, the people of Czechoslovakia, having felt humiliated in the repression of a crushing foreign invasion, tried all means to express their attitude toward the "occupiers," taking revenge on them at least in sports.¹⁵ At the same time, as is natural, a feeling of protest,

¹³ In Grenoble, the CSR used a new method of psychological pressure on their Soviet adversaries. The match between the USSR and CSR began with a thirteen-minute delay, during which the Czechoslovak team before their own game, suddenly demanded not to allow into the match, sportsmen of the USSR, who were not fully equipped in uniform: the four leading Soviet hockey players were without plastic caps on the back of their skates. // Sm.: Spassky O.D. Alexander Ragulin. M., 2001. C. 115.

¹⁴ For three years in a row Sweden held the hockey World Championship, but if in 1968 it was planned in advance, then in 1969 and 1970, the Swedes actually saved the main hockey tournament of the year. Following Czechoslovakia from the holding of the World Championship in 1970 and from participation in it that Canada turned down, which the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) forbade them to form a team from professionals in the National Hockey League (NHL).

¹⁵ It may seem unbelievable, but in Czechoslovak society there were a fair number of people, who related "with understanding" to the actions of the USSR and its allies. The reasons for such feelings were varied and in this case there is no place for them to be analyzed, but the fact that some citizens of the CSR (albeit not very large) supported the Soviet Union, justified the actions of the Kremlin leaders in their own eyes.

running from the lower ranks of society, was skillfully used by those who wanted to turn sport into a kind of political detonator, without fear that their actions could plunge the country into bloodshed. The political weakness of Alexander Dubček, who remained in power, fell between the “hammer” of the Soviet Army and the “anvil” of radical anti-Soviet elements in the Czechoslovak leadership, and created a fertile ground for the fanning of a political fire, particularly including the sparks from sporting battles.

The best illustration of this may be a document at beginning of 1969, that went promptly to the CPSU CC from Czechoslovakia, the events in the country, which followed immediately after the broadcast of a hockey match between USSR and Czechoslovakia at the World Championships in Sweden, where the national team of Czechoslovakia defeated the Soviet team. The document is so eloquent and so accurately reflects the political situation in Czechoslovakia at that time, it makes sense to include it in full¹⁶:

Confidential

CC CPSU

Deputy Head of the Department of the Central Committee

for relations with the communist and workers

parties of socialist countries

To Comrade. Blatov A.I.

On March 28 of this year, immediately after the hockey match between the USSR and Czechoslovakia teams, in all major cities in Czechoslovakia where there are Soviet troops, began massive torch-light processions and demonstrations of young people. The gathering of demonstrators began organized and quickly, according to a predetermined plan.

In the city of Ústí nad Labem (65 km northwest of Prague) a crowd of 2,000 people surrounded the administration of the military commandant of the garrison, overturning and

¹⁶ This document consists of shortened military terms, therefore it is necessary to decipher the many acronyms used in it: CNA - The Czechslovak People's (Narodnaya) Army;; KPP - Control-Pass Point (a military checkpoint);; mrr - motorized rifle regiment;; mrd - motorized rifle division;; ar - artillery regiment;; ak - army corps;; CGF - Central Forces Group;; PrikVO - Precarpathian Military District.

burning that which was located in the square, passenger and commercial vehicles, three motorcycles, smashed all of the glass in windows, broke all doors, and cut off all communication wires. In these excesses participated servicemen of the CAN [Czechoslovak National Army—ed.].

In the city of Mladá Boleslav (40 km northeast of Prague) a crowd of delinquents numbering up to 1,000 people, among whom were 40-50 servicemen of the CNA, in the course of three hours of besieging the entrance of the military base¹⁷ 275 mrr 18 mrd. Hooligans threw stones at the gate and at the windows of the barracks. As a result, two Soviet soldiers were slightly wounded in the head and more than 200 windows were knocked out. These actions were accompanied by threats against Soviet troops and the shouting of : “Occupiers,” “Invaders,” “fascists.” Hooligans threw firecrackers, rockets, and fired several rounds from machine guns. Before the security checkpoint (KPP) of 18 mrd 275 mrr was posted black flag. At the gates of the security checkpoint regiment one of the delinquents dealt a blow with a knife on the gearshift assistant on duty, Sergeant Ephraim junior. The knife was stuck in the folds of his coat, not wounding Ephraim.

In the city of Teplice (70 km northwest of Prague) a crowd of rampaging hooligans surrounded the Soviet war commandant and knocked out almost all of the window glass.

In the city of Trutnov (110 km northeast of Prague) more than 3,000 people surrounded the military base 914 ar, tried to enter the barracks, shouting abusive remarks and throwing firecrackers.

In the city of Olomouc (60 km northeast of Brno) in front of the main office of the Military Hospital gathered more than 2,500 people with anti-Soviet slogans: “Russians, go home,” “Invaders,” etc. They damaged cars, and smashed the glass of ten windows. The demonstration [was] led by servicemen of the CNA.

In the city of Hradec Králové (90 km east of Prague) up to 20,000 demonstrators took to the streets. The crowd gathered at the monument of a tank to Soviet soldiers, became outraged over it and tried to burn it. In front of the Soviet commandant they shouted anti-Soviet slogans.

¹⁷In Russian, it literally says “military town” this didn’t sound like a term Americans would use so I changed it to “base” but I am not sure if it is an actual base--trans.

In the city of Ostrava (130 km northeast of Prague) an anti-Soviet demonstration was attended by about 10,000 people. Demonstrators turned the car of a Soviet hospital, broke glass and lights, and slashed tires.

In the city of Havlíčkův Brod (90 km southeast of Prague) up to 5,000 people gathering in front of the building of the military commandant shouted anti-Soviet slogans and broke the glass of the windows.

During the hockey game, a military commander and a member of the military council CGF were with the Soviet military delegation CMD, headed by general Bisyarinyj at 104 mrr 19 mrd of the CNA in the city of Tachov, where they were received by the commander of the Western War Division of the CAN, general Shadek. While at dinner, they heard how the entire personnel of the regiment sang the national anthem of the CSR after every goal scored. Upon leaving the town after the match, it was noted that all the windows of the barracks were open, shouting was heard, whistling, lobbing rockets, firecrackers exploded. Under the car of the CGF commander was thrown a firecracker.

On the question of how do you assess the situation in the country, with irritation Shadek said: "There's an ongoing mess and as long as this wimp Dubcek is in this leadership, there will be no order."

According to reports, anti-Soviet demonstrations and rallies continued into March 29 of the same year.¹⁸

March 30, 1969

P. Ivanshutin¹⁹

¹⁸ On the 29th of March a demonstration occurred in Prague itself: in the streets were held many thousands of anti-Soviet demonstrations, they destroyed the "Aeroflot" building in Czechoslovakia and others.

¹⁹ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 61. D. 359. L. 246-248.

General Shadek correctly assessed the situation. After “wimpy Dubcek” was replaced by the correct-for-Moscow Gustav Husak, in the spring of 1969, the uncertainty of the situation, which had been for several months in Czechoslovakia, was liquidated. Government structures, law enforcement agencies, media, social, cultural, scientific, and other organizations underwent a thorough “cleanup” of opposition elements. Having come to power, the “healthy forces” restored order in the country, maintaining a constant close contact with Moscow and representatives of the military command of the occupying forces.

Once again, sport became one of the last acceptable forms of protest. From Czechoslovakia to Moscow continued to be sent alarming reports about the situation in the country during competitions, in which Soviet athletes participated. Those who came from the Soviet Union to the CSR had to be prepared in advance that their performance (regardless, team or personal) would be accompanied by screaming, cursing, whistling, psychological pressure, and other non-sporting behavior. However, to publicly display such an attitude to sports envoys of the country of the Soviets, was already not as easy as in the spring of 1969. Police acted much more decisively, the organizers of the competition went to a variety of tricks to reduce the publicity (often at the offices of stadiums hung a sign saying, “All the tickets sold,” while entire stands were empty).²⁰

[...] Subsequently S.P. Pavlov tried many times to attract the attention of the top party leadership on this issue. Before the Ice Hockey World Championship in Switzerland in 1971, “to strengthen the propaganda work among the Soviet hockey players,” he requested that a responsible officer from the CPSU CC Propaganda Department be added to the delegation. The CC at first reacted with understanding to his request, considering a message of the USSR embassy in Switzerland that “reactionary elements, who escaped from the CSR, which could make an attempt to organize a provocation against the Soviet athletes,” were actively buying tickets for matches of the Championship.²¹ After reading the note by S.P.Pavlov, CPSU secretary P.N. Demichev questioned: how necessary was such a trip?²² No one raised more of this question.

²⁰ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 62. D. 377. L. 26. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 62. Д. 377. Л. 26.)

²¹ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 63. D. 102. L. 54. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 63. Д. 102. Л. 54.)

²² RGANI. F. 5. Op. 63. D. 102. L. 54 (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 63. Д. 102. Л. 54.)

After a year, the Sports Committee once again sounded the alarm. The World Championship was to be held in Prague, and everyone knew what kind of reception awaited the Soviet team. The CPSU CC Secretariat discussed the steps that should be taken, based on the practice of recent years, as well as taking into account the just- concluded Winter Olympic Games in Sapporo, where once again there emerged conflicts between the Soviet and Czechoslovak teams not only on the ice but also off.²³ As usual, the party-bureaucracy staff enthusiastically engaged in drafting the next plan, which merged into a single stream important and unimportant items. Organization of an evening of Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship or a shared viewing of one of the new Soviet films, perhaps, somehow, would affect the improvement of relations between the players in their teams, but given the overall situation, there was a far more important point, and this turned out to be almost in last place in the plan of events. It proposed to apply to the leadership of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic with a request to adopt effective measures to normalize the situation around the Soviet team, carrying out “designated work with the media and through the Ministry of Interior.”

With the waning of political tension in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet leaders increasingly strengthened the idea that if someone knows how to solve problems in the relationship between the two “brotherly” countries, these people are in the Kremlin and the Old Square. And, judging by the actions of Moscow, the method of solving these problems, were seen in the following way: if by all means friendship between the peoples is actively planted, then sooner or later it must bring results. So instead of reducing the amount of competition between the USSR and Czechoslovakia, as was constantly hinted to the Kremlin by the heads of the Sports Committee, and even the Foreign Ministry, Moscow demanded, on the contrary, the expansion of sports contacts.

Since 1972 there began an annual bilateral meeting held for hockey between the two countries, which, as if in mockery, tried to coincide with a month held for Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship. How these games have contributed to the strengthening of friendship can be judged by one of the reports aimed “in the order of information” in the CPSU CC. The 1976 games were

²³ As was noted in information from Sapporo, in the match between the USSR and the CSR, the Czechoslovak players acted very roughly; one player intentionally shot a puck at Soviet coach A.I. Chernyshev, and on the eve of the game, the Czechoslovak side, with clear provocational goals, tried to propose to the Soviet side that they try to conclude a deal on tying the end result of the match.

held in this already painfully familiar situation: “Numerous spectators booed the Soviet anthem, chanted threatening slogans against the Soviet coaches and players, in the second meeting under a score of 5-0 in favor of the Soviet national team, coins, the skins of oranges, cans, etc. were thrown on the ice.”²⁴ The “friendship” between the hockey players themselves was evidenced by numerous fights and confrontations on the ice, an abundance of players expelled from the game, and severe injuries received by Soviet athletes: “A.Gusev - a broken arm, G.Tsygankov - cut open face, Z.Bilyaletdinov - damage to the elbow.”²⁵

All these reports were accompanied by the already traditional alternate suggestions by the Sports Committee “of the inadvisability of bilateral sports meetings in Prague in the future, especially in hockey, during the Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship.”²⁶ In 1976 the proposals were once again subscribed to the sports department of the USSR Embassy in Prague, but any kind of reaction to these, as similar to earlier suggestions, in Moscow did not occur. A rare exception was recorded in 1979, when the All-Union Central Council of Trade-Unions (VCSPS), at the invitation of the unions of Czechoslovakia, was going to send the hockey team, “Spartak” to the CSR for pre-season training. After brief consideration the CPSU CC refused to approve Spartak’s trip, since its timing coincided with the anniversary of the invasion of the five Warsaw Pact countries into the territory of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet leadership was well aware that at this time the number of anti-Soviet demonstrations always increased.²⁷

For their part, the new leaders of Czechoslovak Sports (more loyal to the Soviet Union than their predecessors, but not as pro-Soviet-oriented as Moscow would have liked) also attempted to defuse the situation somewhat, proposing to organize a special hockey tournament for the prizes of the newspaper *Rude Pravo* to replace the annual meeting of the two players during the “Month of Friendship.”²⁸ The CSR did not refuse a “planned leak of information,” knowing that all of it would soon become known in the higher echelons of the Soviet leadership. They also did not decline cautious criticism of the organization of competitions in the “Izvestiya Prize” in Moscow to explain the reasons why, in defiance of

²⁴ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 69. D. 94. L. 36. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 69. Д. 94. Л. 36.)

²⁵ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 69. D. 94. L. 36. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 69. Д. 94. Л. 36.)

²⁶ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 69. D. 94. L. 36. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 69. Д. 94. Л. 36.)

²⁷ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 76. D. 204. L. 42. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 76. Д. 204. Л. 42.)

²⁸ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 73. D. 303. L. 3. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 73. Д. 303. Л. 3.)

the existing arrangements, a significant number of national team players of Czechoslovakia for some years would not come to a tournament in Moscow, but to secondary events in the US and Canada.²⁹

Moscow was less painfully concerned with the individual failures of Soviet players in matches against the Czechoslovak team than with the conflict that continued to erupt from time to time during these games. At the turn of the 1960s-'70s. formal meetings between the teams of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia hockey were held with varying degrees of success. The Czechoslovak team managed to gain victories over the Soviet team at the Winter Olympics in Grenoble in 1968, twice at the World Championships in Stockholm in 1969, at the World Championships in Prague in 1972 and Helsinki in 1974. The last defeat was particularly painful because the match ended in a crushing score: 7-2. However, there were no serious conclusions drawn with regard to coaches and athletes, perhaps in part because despite these setbacks, the Soviet team, except for the tournament in Prague, had still always come out the winner of the World Championships and Olympics.

But any conflict on ice or off, which came into the domain of the international community, was immediately addressed at the highest level. Knowing this, the Sports Committee and responded accordingly. During the friendly match of the two teams in Prague in 1976, as soon as forward V. Zhukov reacted "adequately" to the actions of opposite team's players, who rudely attacked the Soviet goalie Vladislav Tretiak, Sport Committee reported to the CPSU CC that after returning to Moscow a meeting was held "where the team and coaches were informed about the unacceptability of such actions."³⁰ Was there such a meeting in fact or was it a kind of evasion to soothe the top party leadership? After a quarter of a century, the athletes themselves can hardly remember.

Concerning hockey as a major stimulus, it seems that the answer must be sought in psychology. Conflicts between Czechoslovak and Soviet sportsmen were sometimes encountered in several other kinds of sports, but they were ad hoc and, as a rule, did not attract the attention of either the public or politicians. Moreover, since 1970

²⁹ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 73. D. 303. L. 4-5. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 73. Д. 303. Л. 4-5.)

³⁰ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 69. D. 94. L. 36. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 69. Д. 94. Л. 36.)

there resumed fairly close contacts between the sports organizations of the two countries and they continued to expand the number of teams and athletes who came to visit each other.

On the eve of the Olympics in 1972 and 1976. at the request of the Czechoslovak side, large groups of Czechoslovak athletes came to Moscow and, together with the Soviet athletes, participated in pre-Olympic training.

The fact that hockey was the most painful point in the relations between the two countries could not be explained, with the fact of the successful (or, conversely, unsuccessful) performance of Czech hockey players. In basketball, which was actively developed in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet athletes almost invariably won against their “friendly rivals,” but it did not cause such a violent reaction, or embitterment, as in hockey. No less popular than hockey, the football team of Czechoslovakia in 1976 managed to win European gold, beating on the way to the finale the team of the USSR, which played brilliantly in those years under the leadership of V.V.Lobanovskij. And once again, with an overall hostile attitude of the Czechoslovak spectators to the Soviet team during a match in Prague, it did not rise to scandals and investigations at the highest level. Only hockey has been and remained in the eyes of many ordinary people and officials as a symbol of the struggle for independence of Czechoslovakia from the Soviet Union and from socialism, which it was imposed on it by Moscow.

But the “hockey fever” by the end of 1970. gradually began to fade. Matches between the two countries continued to be held in a tense, sometimes too rough and tough fight, but the reaction to them was no longer such as before. The last major burst of emotion on the hockey theme, as expressed in the documents of the CPSU Central Committee, took place in the spring of 1978 at the World and European Championship that took place again in Prague. Team Czechoslovakia, twice before this won the title of world champions, and were expected for the third straight win, all the more so at home and in the year of the 70th anniversary of Czechoslovak ice hockey. These hopes seemed reasonable also because the first games of the tournament the team of Czechoslovakia confidently captured the leadership, while the significantly rejuvenated Soviet team, led by new coaches, operated at first not very confidently. Even greater frustration was waiting for the Prague spectators when, in the decisive match of the Championship, the team of the Soviet Union beat their hosts of the ice and

because of a greater goals scored difference over goals missed it regained the title of best team in Europe and the world.

Given the general anti-Soviet sentiment in the stadiums in Czechoslovakia, the World Championship was specially prepared for in advance in Czechoslovakia and the USSR. In Prague, tried to prevent possible provocations and to show the Soviets that the situation was under control. For the purpose of preparation for the championship, a special commission of the Central Committee of the CPC (*Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*) was created, headed by a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee, A.Kapekom, its work was regularly discussed at the meetings of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee. Special explanatory conversations were conducted with players and coaches of the national team of Czechoslovakia; tickets were distributed to the most “fundamental” matches in a much more organized manner than before.

Unbelievable activity was developed by the Soviet representative in Prague. The embassy organized social events for the Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes, hockey players of the Soviet Union had to participate in demonstrations to commemorate the May 1 and Victory Day, go to the factory “CDK-Praga,”³¹ which took sponsorship of the Soviet team. Parallel to this, by “recommendations” of the Embassy, the leadership of Czechoslovakia promptly took out publications of posters and magazine “Warrior” (“Soldier”), which vividly and with great overtones conveyed the above-mentioned events of World Cup 1969.³²

However, playing without the usual incidents that were common in hockey matches of the two teams was not to be. Again, the intense anti-Soviet atmosphere in the stands was accompanied by hooligan vagrancy against the Soviet athletes. Again, Czechoslovakia national team players, feeling the threat of defeat in the last match, began to provoke the Soviet hockey players, “to insult them and their behavior on the ice to try to sharpen public antipathy” to the Soviet Union team. In contrast to the players and coaches of other teams that offered warm and sincere congratulations to the winning Soviet team, Czechoslovak ice hockey players (except for Gimli and Prochazka), as well as leaders of the Czechoslovak Ice Hockey Federation, pointedly did not. There was an extremely cold attitude to the success of the Soviet national

³¹ *Českomoravská Kolben-Daněk*

³² RGANI. F. 5. Op. 75. D 310. L. 24.(РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 75. Д. 310. Л. 24.)

team in government circles in Czechoslovakia, and in the media – biased and not objective. The newspapers published the day after the championship mainly focused on the poor refereeing of the match and a last attempt was made to focus on the question of the legitimacy of the victory of the Soviet national team. The exception, perhaps, was only the actions of law enforcement agencies, which strongly suppressed rowdy antics in the stands, removing those people out of the match, which, according to Soviet officials in Prague were, “up to 200 of the most uncontrolled fans.”³³

In Moscow, the victory of the Soviet hockey team was greeted with a sense of joy and relief, as it not only demonstrated the advantages of Soviet hockey, but also prevented possible more overt anti-Sovietism and nationalism in case of victory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. At the end of the championship the situation, in Czechoslovakia remained calm, the attempts to provoke the people by Western radio stations calling to “demonstrate passive resistance against the occupation during the tournament” were generally unsuccessful. However, while making a wire message to Moscow, the Soviet Embassy officials in Prague, noted that “despite some positive developments, much still remained for their friends to do in terms of organizational and ideological-educational work in similar future events in Prague so that the atmosphere wore a sporting character and met the level of development of Soviet-Czechoslovak relations.”³⁴

It is necessary to stress once again that all these twists and turns in sporting relations with their Soviet “friends” remained “a mystery” to Soviet citizens. To them, of course, reached only fragmentary information on how “friendly” feelings toward the Soviet athletes in the People’s Democracy countries were manifested. And television sometimes unwittingly contributed to this: in order to not show viewers another brawl between the Soviet and Czechoslovak hockey players on the ice of the Prague Palace of Sports, the TV camera quickly shifted to the stands - and there the audience had anti-Soviet signs, which were made so eloquently, that their meaning was clear even to those who did not know the Czech language.

³³ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 75. D. 310. L. 25. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 75. Д. 310. Л. 25.)

³⁴ RGANI. F. 5. Op. 75. D. 310. L. 27. (РГАНИ. Ф. 5. Оп. 75. Д. 310. Л. 27.)

But none of this was in the Soviet media, where, no matter how events developed in sports arenas, invariably, only terms such as “friendly atmosphere,” “exciting event,” “true sports competition,” etc., appeared. For Soviet propaganda it was crucial that all problems, disagreements, and conflicts between “friends” did not extend beyond the narrow circle of party-sports functionaries and by any means would not have been publicized openly in Soviet society. After the final match of the hockey world championship in 1978, Soviet newspapers wrote that the tournament was held in such a warm and friendly atmosphere, and reported that “hospitable Prague said farewell to a great hockey festival.”³⁵ Strictly speaking, to write anything else was useless as an article with more “detailed” information would not pass by the censors, and its author would have received a penalty.

[Source: Excerpts from Chapter 6 (“Crises of Eastern Europe in the Mirror of Sports”) of Bolshoy Sport I bol’shaya politika [Big Sport and Big Politics] (Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2004), translated by Alex Fisher.]

³⁵ *Izvestia*, 16 May 1978.

Cable from the Soviet Embassy in Prague about Soviet-Czechoslovak Tensions, April 1967

Translated and Introduced by Mark Kramer

This cable and the attached document were transmitted by the Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, Stepan Chervonenko, to the head of the CPSU Central Committee department on intra-bloc relations, Konstantin Rusakov, in April 1967. Rusakov, in turn, circulated it to the CPSU Secretariat. It is one of several cables and reports that Chervonenko sent back to Moscow in 1967 and early 1968 — well before the Prague Spring began — warning about the growth of tension between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. (Among other cables, see in particular the lengthy, top-secret review of the whole of 1967 in Cable No. 169, 16 February 1968, from S. V. Chervonenko to Konstantin Rusakov and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 43-59.) It is ironic that a championship hockey game would have been the event in 1967 that first brought “a wave of anti-Soviet sentiments” to the surface in Czechoslovakia. Some two years later, another hockey game, which was followed by boisterous celebrations in Czechoslovakia of the national team’s victory over the Soviet Union, served as a pretext for the final Soviet crackdown against Alexander Dubček, as documented above.

In 1967 the World Ice Hockey Championships, an annual event sponsored by the International Ice Hockey League (subsequently renamed the International Ice Hockey Federation), was held in Vienna on 18-29 March. The Soviet Union dominated the competition, winning all seven of its games, including the championship game on 29 March over Czechoslovakia — the game discussed in Chervonenko’s memorandum. This was the fifth consecutive year that the Soviet team won the championship.

The 10-page report attached to Chervonenko’s cover note, which was prepared by two political officers at the embassy, Yu. Zhuravlev and I. Ivashchenko, elaborates on the reactions in Czechoslovakia to the 1967 hockey championships. The essence of the report is distilled in Chervonenko’s cable (word-for-word) and in the excerpts from the report provided here. What is interesting about the document is that it so forthrightly contravenes the myth of “friendship and fraternal ties between the Czech and Soviet peoples,” which both the CPSU and the KSČ had

long tried to foster. The Prague Spring was still almost a year away, but the incipient frictions between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia were already emerging.

When Czechoslovak officials here are identified only by their surnames, I have inserted their given names in brackets.

EMBASSY OF THE USSR
IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Prague, 1 April 1967
No. 355, Copy 1

Top Secret

CPSU CC DEPARTMENT

To: Cde. K. V. Rusakov

This is to transmit information about the reaction in the ČSSR to the game between the national hockey teams of the USSR and ČSSR at the world championships in Vienna, which took place in an unsavory and agitated atmosphere.¹ It is worth noting that recent encounters between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes have begun to go beyond questions purely of sports prestige and national pride and have acquired a political character, which might have a detrimental effect on Soviet-Czechoslovak relations.

In connection with this, the embassy believes it is necessary to reconsider: (1) the option of temporarily halting matches on Czechoslovak territory between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes in all sports that involve rough physical contact and that evoke unnecessarily agitated and subjective reactions among fans (hockey, soccer, boxing, etc.); and (2) the option of refusing to send Soviet referees to international competitions in which Czechoslovak athletes are taking part.

Attachment: as mentioned, totaling 10 pages.

¹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Chervonenko uses the exact title of the report here. The rest of the cable is also taken verbatim from the report.

USSR AMBASSADOR IN THE ČSSR

S. CHERVONENKO

EMBASSY OF THE USSR
IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Prague, 1 April 1967
Affixed to No. 355, Copy No. 1

I N F O R M A T I O N

About the Reaction in the ČSSR to the Game between the National Teams
of the USSR and the ČSSR at the World Championships in Vienna

Recently, as the Embassy has informed the Center on more than one occasion, meetings between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes have been taking place in an agitated and unsavory atmosphere, thanks to the Czechoslovak side. Significant blame for the emergence of this problem is borne by the Czechoslovak press, radio, and television, which have stirred up a huge fuss around matches between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes. In connection with this, sports contests between our countries are beginning to go beyond questions purely of sports prestige and national pride and are acquiring a political character, which could have a negative effect on Soviet-Czechoslovak relations.

The game between the Soviet and Czechoslovak national teams on 29 March at the World Hockey Championships in Vienna attracted wide coverage in the Czechoslovak press and was the subject of much discussion among the public. In reporting on this game, a number of newspapers (“Rudé právo,” “Mladá fronta,” etc.) published inappropriate, subjective views. . . .

. . . . Nothing can justify the behavior of the fans who created a scandal during the game by shouting obscenities and who then whistled during the playing of the Soviet anthem. . . .

The unpleasant aftertaste from the game also took its toll on the final ceremony. “Excited” fans, including several thousand from Czechoslovakia, stepped over the bounds of decency and brought a disgraceful end to the current world championships. . . .

During a lunch arranged by the ambassador from Iraq, which was attended by the ambassadors from several states and also by official representatives from the ČSSR government and social organizations, the ČSSR Deputy Foreign Minister, Cde. [Ján] Pudlák, had a conversation with the Soviet ambassador in which he first congratulated him on the Soviet hockey team’s performance and then said, in this connection, that in his view the contest had tarnished the Soviet team’s victory because of the fight at the end of the third period. He, Pudlák, believed that although both sides were guilty, the greater responsibility lay with the Soviet players, who should have been able to react more calmly to some of the incidents on the hockey rink. In Pudlák’s view, if such contests produce a comparable level of hostility in the future, that will impair the friendship between the Soviet and Czechoslovak peoples.

The head of the press department in the ČSSR Foreign Ministry, Cde. [Karel] Dufek, who was also present at the lunch, said somewhat diffidently that in his view the blame for the fight lies completely with the Soviet players, who began to use physical force and to hit the Czechoslovak players in the face. He said that this encounter was the reason for the wave of anti-Soviet sentiments among a major segment of the Czechoslovak public, since almost everyone in the Czechoslovak republic had been watching the game on television and had seen the uncalled-for actions of the Soviet players.

. . . . The Soviet ambassador said that there had been several occasions during these sorts of contests in Czechoslovakia when the Czechoslovak fans at the stadium had unfairly attacked the Soviet athletes even when they were competing not against a Czechoslovak team, but against a team from another country, including bourgeois countries such as Japan. Despite the clearly

superior skill of the Soviet athletes, the Czechoslovak fans usually rooted for the athletes of the opposing countries. . . . Such a situation clearly inhibits efforts to foster bonds of friendship between the Soviet and Czechoslovak peoples.

On the 30th of March, during a meeting with the Soviet ambassador, the deputy head of the KSČ CC International Department, Cde. [Oldřich] Kaderka, expressed dissatisfaction with the Soviet-Czechoslovak hockey game that took place the previous day in Vienna. In Kaderka's view, all the blame for the fight rests with the Soviet players. . . . Cde. Kaderka further said that the incident had evoked an unpleasant mood among the Czechoslovak citizenry and that although this shock (as he called it) would dissipate within several days, the situation in Vienna had given impetus to anti-socialist and, above all, anti-Soviet sentiments in Western countries, especially in Austria. Cde. Kaderka reported that in Vienna newspapers had been appearing for the past two days with headlines criticizing the Soviet players, and that this was casting a shadow over Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship. . . .

On 30 March, one of the Czechoslovak citizens employed in the Soviet embassy, Jan Svátek, said that both teams were to blame for the melee on the hockey rink, but that it was simply tasteless to have refused to shake hands with the Soviet athletes after their victory and to have refused to listen to the Soviet anthem. Even the athletes from the FRG, after losing their game to the East German team, listened respectfully to the GDR anthem and congratulated their opponents on their victory

On 29 and 30 March, numerous Czechoslovak citizens phoned the Soviet embassy and crudely and insultingly expressed their views about individual players on the Soviet team. The embassy also received letters from Czechoslovak citizens expressing their disgust at the behavior of the Soviet hockey players in the game with the ČSSR team.

The embassy has already informed the Center about the subjective and unhealthy reaction in the Czechoslovak press and society to the competition between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes and to the conduct of Soviet referees at matches in which Czechoslovak athletes take

part. The embassy believes it is necessary to reconsider: (1) the option of temporarily halting matches on Czechoslovak territory between Soviet and Czechoslovak athletes in all sports that involve rough physical contact and that evoke unnecessarily agitated and subjective reactions among fans (hockey, soccer, boxing, etc.); and (2) the option of refusing to send Soviet referees to international competitions in which Czechoslovak athletes are taking part.

[Source: Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), Moscow, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 300, Ll. 44-53; obtained and translated by Mark Kramer.]

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