

# RUSSIA AND THE CZECHS

When the Russian tanks rolled into Prague on August 21, they abruptly transformed a spring of freedom into a winter of discontent. The spring was short, the winter stretches indefinitely into the future.

The Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia is a depressing event of great significance. But the United States involvement in Vietnam, a national attachment to opinions of yester-years and the pressures of our own domestic politics, are combining to obscure that significance. Contrary to much present rhetoric, the occupation of Czechoslovakia does not indicate the continuing strength and expansive quality of world communism; it is not symmetrical with the war in Vietnam nor does it provide a rationale for that war; it does not undercut the basic criticism of those who are deeply dissatisfied with the present performance of our major political parties.

The Soviet Union chose to account for its suppression of growing Czechoslovakian freedom in terms of "counterrevolutionary forces hostile to socialism," in terms of Marxist-Leninist theory. In fact that suppression can best be understood in terms of the nation-state that is Russia. So far from bringing the various Communist parties and Communist-controlled states together, it splits them even further apart. The two largest Communist parties in Western Europe, those of Italy and France, have followed many intricate reversals in Soviet policy, but they dissented openly and strongly over Czechoslovakia. Both Yugoslavia and Rumania opposed the action and maneuvered their armies into defensive positions. Predictably, China joined in the denunciation and equally predictably the supine American Communist Party commended it.

The Czechoslovakian experiment in new forms of democratic socialism, in forms that led to increasing freedoms in political and cultural affairs, posed threats both to other East European countries and to Russia. Leaders of the other countries of the Warsaw Pact — Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria — had reason to fear for the stability of their regimes if the example of their neighbor proved contagious. And, if that example proved successful, as it seemed likely to do, Russia could fear for her control over Eastern Europe. For Western Europe, and particularly a strong Germany, would exert its traditional attraction. It is not accidental that in the days following the suppression of the Czechs, Russia made threatening noises in the direction of Germany. This not only distracts from Russia's brutality, it indicates quite accurately the true reach of her concerns. It is Russian interests not communism that must be defended at all costs.

But what, if anything, did the suppression tell us about United States foreign policy? By our actions we indicated

that we will do almost exactly what we did during the East German uprising of 1953, the Hungarian revolt of 1956, the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 — almost nothing. The one possible difference between the implementation of United States policy during those events and the implementation of U.S. policy in the case of the Czechs is that this time we removed any ambiguities about our possible reactions. In a variety of ways we signalled that we would do nothing to interfere with the orderly suppression of Czech freedoms.

There are a number of reasons given to explain U.S. policy toward the Russian-Czech affair and some of them are reasonable. Open aid, it is argued, would have strengthened Russia's bogus arguments and therefore would have hurt the Czechs. The possibility of a summit meeting, with its attendant benefits, would have been even further damaged. The hopes for the non-proliferation treaty and for limiting the nuclear arms race would diminish to the vanishing point. The United States is so heavily involved in Vietnam that it cannot exert great leverage in Eastern Europe.

Even granting a measure of validity to these arguments, they could only modify not determine United States policy. By our actions over the years we have acknowledged that Eastern Europe falls in Russia's sphere of influence and that we will not roughly disturb that arrangement. It is not surprising that those who overweight the importance of Communist ideology in Southeast Asia today should also overweight it in Eastern Europe, but their argument is no more persuasive in one area than it is in the other. The actions of Russia and of the Vietnamese can be better understood in terms of traditional political categories, and it is in terms of these categories that U.S. policies will be developed and enunciated if they are to be realistic. J.F.

## LET THE PEOPLE CHOOSE

We cannot revive old factions  
We cannot restore old policies  
Or follow an antique drum.

With apologies to T. S. Eliot, it seems that we can do these things. For in Miami and Chicago,

the two major parties nominated Richard Nixon and Hubert H. Humphrey (and George Wallace nominated a third party with which to run). Mr. Nixon, more assured and poised, is nevertheless consistent with his past, not an inconsiderable virtue. Mr. Humphrey, despite aborted attempts to suggest otherwise, represents the continuation of policies that are being vigorously carried out during the remaining days of President Johnson's term, policies the results of which helped President Johnson toward his decision to retire from the highest office in the land.

The question before the citizenry in our ongoing presidential campaign is not, therefore, whether to choose between old and new factions, old and new policies. That choice is not open to them. The question is whether old factions and old policies are going to prove adequate to present problems. Present problems include not only the war in Vietnam and disorder in the streets of America. They include the need to devise a foreign policy adequate to the changed relations between Russia, Europe and America; to the obligations placed on an abundantly rich nation in a world of poorer nations, some of which are desperately poor; to the volatile conditions of near revolutionary countries. Present problems include the strong and sometimes strident demands of black people, poor people and students to have a larger share in the political and social governance of their own destiny. And present problems include that vast, pervasive feeling of unrest and discontent that has no single focus, that stems from a deep feeling that things are out of control. It is easy to understand why more people aspire today to the role of Cassandra than to that of Pollyanna.

The need is not for a national psychiatrist but for a national leader who is responsive to what are admittedly tough, intricate and sometimes disconcertingly amorphous problems. The lackadaisical air of the present campaign suggests that many people do not feel that any of the presidential candidates is sufficiently responsive to present problems, present moods, present needs, present hopes.

We need always to be concerned about the alienated and the apathetic voters. But when the usually dedicated and active citizen is included in these groups — as he frequently is today — we need to be seriously concerned about the conditions that brought him to such a pass. Beating on an antique drum will not be sufficient to call him back to the traditional political folds.