

September 8, 1953
**Radio Free Europe Report on the Strikes in Plzen
during Early June 1953**

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Summary:

Account of a 31-year-old locksmith who took part in the protests in Plzen.

Original Language:

Czech

Contents:

Translation - English

Translation from Czech
ITEM No. 8995/53

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

POPULATION
Dissatisfaction

LABOR
Strikes

RESISTANCE AND CRITICISM
Demonstrations

June 1953 Demonstrations in Plzen

SOURCE MUNICH: A 31-year-old locksmith from Plzen who personally participated in the Plzen demonstrations.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: June 1953.

EVAL. COMMENT: This is a very interesting report describing the Plzen demonstrations in detail. The subsource was an eyewitness and active participant of the described incidents. Attention is called to the part dealing with the laxness of police organs in the early stages of the demonstrations. It seems that the police [are] not entirely convinced of the rightness of the present regime. Translation of the report is recommended. Josef Mainzer is chairman of the National Committee in Plzen. For more information about Mainzer see Item Nos: 5635/51 and 7496/53, and Monitorings of 2.2.1953; 20.3.1953; 19.6.1953.

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The unrest in Plzen started on the first [of] June at eight a.m. in the factory of the Skoda Works in Doudlevice. At about that time the workers who had stopped work at six a.m. left the factory and proceeded in a procession to the main square in Plzen. Subsource was informed of this by his friend who was employed in the said factory.

At the same time the workers in the main factory of the Skoda Works (V.I. Lenin) stopped work and were discussing and criticizing the currency reform. The Work's Militia in the meantime closed and locked all workshops to prevent the workers [from] leaving the factory. However, some of them overpowered the guards and left the factory; they were about 1,000 from the total staff of 45,000 working in the Skoda Works. They proceeded in groups toward the main square.

Subsource was not present and knows about these events from what he was told by his friends.

Subsource went at about 8:30 a.m. to Slovanská ul. [Street] where a commission was exchanging old currency for new notes in a restaurant. Since there was a long queue

trying to change the money subsource decided to come later. Since it was raining he entered the sky-scraper in Prokopova Street where he intended to [2 Lines Illegible]. His attention was attracted by fragments of conversation coming from the nearby loudspeaker. Somebody was saying: "Keep calm, comrades; be quiet, everything will settle down again." Then somebody put on the signal which drowned the discussion.

Subsource realized that something was amiss and ran to the main square; the offices of the local loudspeaker system are in the City Hall building. There was a crowd of nearly 2,000 people in the square including some workers from the Skoda Works in their overalls. Subsource adds that a number of workers left their places in the factories for the sole reason to avoid work for the day.

Some workers in the crowd were known to be faithful Communists; the reason for their presence was to watch the actions of the others. These people [later denounced] the participants in the demonstrations and caused their arrests.

In the meantime the crowd in the square began shouting: "We want a free election. We want a new government."

Subsource entered the City Hall. The seven or eight policemen standing in the entrance hall were not taking notice of the people who were coming and going. Inside the building people were wandering from room to room. All offices were empty; the officials left as soon as the crowd in the square appeared.

Meeting with no resistance the people inside the City Hall began to throw pictures of Stalin, Gottwald and Zápotocký, which were hanging in every room, out of the window. Subsource took part in this action. The pictures were trampled on by the people in the square; one elderly Communist woman tried to reprimand the people standing near to her for their behavior, but somebody silenced her by throwing one of the pictures at her.

At this point subsource lost his interest in the local loudspeaker system and proceeded toward the military guard-rooms situated in the first floor of the City Hall. There were already about 15 people in front of that room, [who] were asking an officer and a private who [were] on duty to hand [over] the chairman of the Local National Committee Mainzer who had taken refuge in the guardroom. The soldiers' reply was that Mainzer was not among them. Two people from the crowd managed to enter the room but the rest decided to leave. Subsource ran into the street and asked the crowd to enter the City Hall because the soldier did not want to hand [over] Mainzer. Hundreds of people responded; the policemen tried to close the main gate but were pushed aside by the crowd and subsource saw several people hitting a policeman. On his way back somebody pressed a rolled sheet into his hands with the request to hang it out of the window. When he [unrolled] it he saw it was a picture of President Benes. He fastened the picture outside a window on the second floor. The square was at that time full of people who were shouting anti-Communist slogans.

At about that time the police closed two of the streets leading into the square but further crowds were streaming into it from all directions. Subsource went to look for his friends from the Skoda works and found them near a delivery van belonging to the Masna ; the van was brought by a young man who was accompanied by two girls. The young man was carrying the Czechoslovak flag, one of the girls had the American flag, the other a picture of Dr. Benes. They decided to proceed toward the Skoda works to meet the workers and from there to the Plzen broadcasting station in Lochtín. They started for the Skoda works at 10:30 a.m. The delivery van with the flags and the pictures of Dr. Benes was followed by the demonstrators who were shouting various slogans, i.e. "We want free elections," "Long Live Free Europe," "We want a new government," etc.

When the demonstrators were leaving the square they were intercepted by group of armed militia-men. The crowd beat up several of them and the whole group disappeared.

When the crowd reached Fodermayer Street subsource saw a group of people beating a man near a statue in one corner of the square; he was told that the victim was Mainzer.

In the Fodermayer Street somebody spat at the demonstrators from a balcony; several demonstrators entered the respective house, brought that person into the street and beat him up. The crowd tore down the red stars from two buses which had been parked [on] a side street and destroyed the flower bed depicting the Soviet star which had replaced the U.S. Army Memorial.

The demonstrators were advancing toward the Masaryk memorial. They had to pass the Army HQ building; several officers were standing in front of the building but did not pay any attention to the demonstration procession; further on the procession, which counted about 3,000 people, was passed by a unit of militiamen. The posters placed in front of the Masaryk memorial were torn down and destroyed. The group of young people with their delivery van stopped in front of the memorial and people sang the national anthems. Two wooden pillars standing near the memorial and bearing red stars were burned.

Leaving the memorial the crowd proceeded toward the Skoda Works. On the bridge they met another unit of militiamen, and some 50 policemen. The policemen avoided the crowd and disappeared [down] a side street; they were most probably on their way to guard the houses of some Communist officials. The militia men [who] remained on the bridge [and] tried to intercept the crowd, were, however, defeated and disarmed. Then the crowd reached the fourth entrance to the Skoda Works. One man forced his way into the porters' lodge and demolished the telephone. The entrance was closed and guarded. The crowd crashed the gate, entered the yard and destroyed all propaganda posters they could reach. The majority of the crowd was intercepted by a group of militiamen who, however, did not make use of their weapons; they tried to persuade the demonstrators to leave the yard by speeches. The crowd replied with blows. The militiamen [were] followed by the Skoda Works' Fire Brigade. The firemen joined the militia and tried to disperse the crowd. However, the demonstrators attacked their [truck] and the firemen together with the militia men left their vehicles and ran for cover. One militiaman stayed behind and began firing into the crowd--the demonstrators replied with stones. In the meantime one of the girls from the delivery van escorted about 100 workers from the workshops; they joined the demonstrators. The delivery van left and the enthusiasm of the crowd was slowly ebbing away. In that moment a group of people standing near the office entrance tried to photograph the crowd. The group was immediately attacked and their cameras destroyed. After this incident the demonstrators left the yard and decided to wait outside for the morning shift to leave the factory. The militia-man, supposing that the demonstrators were afraid tried to close the gates; to clear the entrance they started beating people standing there with rifle-butts and the crowd started throwing stones and bricks at them. The militia-men succeeded to close one half of the gates; one of them began to fire into the crowd and wounded one of the workers. The enraged crowd replied with stones and bricks and smashed all office windows. The workers arriving for the afternoon shift did not enter the factory but joined the crowds. Before two p.m. two military lorries appeared bringing officials of the Skoda Works. The demonstrators stopped them but their attention was immediately diverted to two buses from PRAGUE, each containing about 40 fully equipped militia-men. The militia-men alighted and began firing in the air. Further three buses with militia-men arrived, the militia-men encircled the crowd and started to arrest people at random. They loaded them into three buses and left.

Subsource managed to run away. Near the railway station he was joined by a friend

who told him that a mutual friend had been arrested and would be transported by a further bus. They tried to ambush the bus but failed.

This was the end of the riot for subsource and a lot of other people; everybody tried to disappear quickly as possible and to avoid an arrest.

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The following information [is a conglomeration of] the experiences of subsource's friends who did not take part in the demonstration in the Skoda Works but remained in the main square.

When the demonstrators left the square for the Skoda Works, the remaining crowd concentrated their attention on the building of the district court and the adjoining prison. They intended to free the prisoners but could not succeed because the prison building was too strongly guarded. The enraged crowd managed to enter the court building; all files were thrown out of the windows and burned in the square. They found one judge who was beaten up and thrown into the river.

The City Hall windows were being systematically smashed, some people were using for this purpose old coins of low denominations.

In the afternoon the police together with the fire brigade tried to clear the square by playing water on the crowds. Somebody, however, managed to cut through the hoses. A tram car tried to pass through the crowd, but the people disconnected it from the electric net and beat up the driver.

At about five p.m. the police supported by military units closed the square and began to arrest the young people who were taking part in the riot. Those arrested were being taken away by lorries.

One of the subsource's friends who was arrested heard one of the officers giving the following order: "Let the older ones get away but arrest those young spies."

According to rumors about 3,000 people were arrested on June 1 and during the immediately following days.

Severe reprisals followed the demonstrations, especially in the Skoda Works. Every demonstrator was called by the Security department of the Skoda Works which has their own police. Every person who did not clock in or out punctually at two p.m. was considered a demonstrator, further all those who had been denounced as strikers by their Communist fellow workers. Older workers who took a passive part in the demonstrations were dismissed and could not be employed for at least three months, or had to work in the brick-yard in CERNICE. Those who had taken an active part in the demonstrations were arrested in the factory and sent to the Jáchynov mines. Subsource's friend L. Samberg [Samberk] was punished in this way.

Subsource heard that there were about six casualties during the riots, most of them militia-men who had been beaten to death; there is further a number of seriously wounded militia-men in various hospitals.

He does not know anything about any military intervention during the riots nor has he heard that the soldiers would have fired into the crowds. He says that the respective article published in the "New Yorské Listy" on 11 August does not give true information; he assumes that the correspondent was present at some place in PLZEN but most of his information received from a third person.

On Monday evening the Communists used the demonstrations as a pretext for the removal of the Masaryk Memorial. The statue was destroyed by members of the Youth Movement and some actors from the Municipal Theater. They were guarded by soldiers, police and militia-men. Several people who watched this action and tried to protest were arrested.

On Tuesday the Skoda Works factory in DOUDLEVCE was at a standstill. Several departments of the main works were idle.

On Wednesday evening militia-men clashed with the public near the so-called "Benes Cross" which stands in the park near the broadcasting studio. This cross was donated by President Benes to celebrate the memory of American soldiers who were killed during the Liberation of Western Bohemia. On that evening somebody had placed a wreath to the cross and the population began to gather in the neighborhood. It came to several incidents with the militia-men. Order was restored by soldiers who encircled the cross and arrested several people.

Most active during the riots were the young people. Young workers and students. The older generation was more careful. This can be also seen from the incident in the Skoda Works entrance. Only 100 workers leaving the morning shift joined the demonstrators.

Subsources states that the demonstrators believed that the time for overthrowing of Communist Government had come.

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