

April 30, 1968
**Transcarpathian Oblast First Secretary Yu.
Ilnytskyi's Report to P. Shelest**

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Summary:

Yu. Ilnytskyi reports on his 29 April 1968 conversation with the first secretary of the KSC's East Slovakia regional committee, Cde. Ján Koscelanský, on the on-going situation in Czechoslovakia.

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TO CPSU POLITBURO MEMBER AND UkrCP CC FIRST SECRETARY
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INFORMATIONAL REPORT

For your information, on 29 April 1968 I met the first secretary of the KSC's East Slovakia regional committee, Cde. Ján Koscelanský, and had a three-hour conversation with him. The meeting, as on the previous occasion, occurred at his suggestion and was conducted one-on-one.

At the start of our conversation, Cde. Koscelanský asked me what had happened at the April Plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, which had focused on events in Czechoslovakia. I responded that the Plenum had not specifically discussed the situation in your country, but had merely reviewed current problems on the international scene and the struggle of the CPSU to achieve unity and cohesion in the world Communist movement. Among these problems was the recent development of events in Czechoslovakia.[1] Events in the CSSR have been marked by the stepped-up activity of unsavory elements. Only if the current KSC leaders assess the situation properly and take necessary measures to overcome the difficulties they confront will events develop in the right direction.

After this, Cde. Koscelanský informed me about the proceedings of their regional conference. In his view, the conference passed off well, in a lively and critical atmosphere. The conference decided to replace two secretaries of the regional committee, Cdes. Kul'ko and Kudelásek, who were subject to harsh criticism for having adhered consistently to the old line.[2] The post of secretary of ideology was filled by the director of the Košice museum, Ladislav Olexa, and the post of secretary of the regional committee for the Košice metallurgical combine was eliminated after the removal of Cde. Kudelásek. Also replaced was the head of the party commission, Cde. Mockovčiak.[3]

Cde. Koscelanský said it will also be necessary to replace a number of department heads. The sweeping replacement of leading personnel is motivated by the fact that a majority of them have already been in office a long time and are unable to respond properly to recent events. These people are now coming under heavy criticism, and the authority of the party is falling. The masses have demanded that new people be brought into the leadership, and as a result, the replacement of cadres needs to be completed.

According to Cde. Koscelanský, the delegates at the conference very warmly greeted the telegram that our party's Transcarpathian Oblast committee sent to the conference, regarding it as an important gesture of support from the Communists of the Soviet Union. They voted unanimously to thank the oblast committee for its telegram.

A bit later, Cde. Koscelanský spoke about the state of affairs in the country. He declared that the press, television, and radio are no longer subject to any kind of censorship. In this respect he said that literary figures and journalists are referring to a law adopted under feudalism that had specified there would be no censorship.[4] So why should there be any censorship under socialism? The press, radio, and television have reached the point where they will criticize any leader for his views. Cde. Koscelanský said that the CC First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia, Cde. Biľák, had been criticized openly in the press because he told a gathering of television producers and newspaper editors that they were not behaving properly.

In Moravia, the regional committee adopted a resolution condemning a particular newspaper's treacherous behavior. Afterwards, the newspaper in question criticized

the regional committee until a new plenum was convened and the resolution was rescinded. The whole party conference proceeded through this largely reciprocal interaction between the regional committee and the newspaper.

I said to Cde. Koscelanský that I can't imagine why they are permitting immature people to spread propaganda among the population, and are not taking measures to control them. It's even possible to wage a public vendetta against any of the current leaders. In response, Cde. Koscelanský said that party officials should behave in a way that would not incur criticism from the masses or, naturally, the press. That's what you get, he said to me, when the CC organ "Rudé právo" is not controlled by the Central Committee and the editor-in-chief. The question of what materials to publish is decided spontaneously by a number of editors.[5]

Cde. Koscelanský insisted that the press is a great and nearly decisive force in society and deserves to be heeded. It gathers and formulates the views of the masses. Anyone who wants to work properly will need to have the support of the masses. Without this support, the CC could not have dismissed anyone from his post or brought in new officials. He then said that the principle of democratic centralism in the party is being violated. Many officials already are afraid of the press, radio, and television. The media reassess these people and begin to raise a fuss, and the officials themselves are unable to do anything once they are called to account. We increasingly find a pattern in which people are first subjected to public criticism and then driven from their posts.

The growing disregard of the principle of democratic centralism is also evident from an example cited by Cde. Koscelanský. Cde. Koscelanský said that yesterday he had called the CC headquarters in Prague and informed them that a delegation of Ukrainian workers from Prešov had visited the regional committee and been received by a secretary of the regional committee, Ladislav Olexa. The CC Secretary with whom Cde. Koscelanský was speaking asked who this Ladislav Olexa is, since no one knows anything about him, and his candidacy has not been vetted by the Central Committee. So, you can see that, in defiance of common sense, officials are being appointed without any input from the highest party organs.

Many meetings are under way in the country, particularly meetings of students and workers. Cde. Koscelanský said that when he attended a meeting of students, he had been asked some 1,200 questions. In answering them, it was necessary to stick to the point, lest they start whistling, as happened with the rector of the university. Among the questions asked was whether the Transcarpathian region, having been taken illegally from Czechoslovakia, would be returned.[6] I asked Cde. Koscelanský how he had responded to this question, but he avoided giving a direct answer.

Meetings have been taking place at factories to oppose the factory directors. Workers are demanding increased pay and are pressing all sorts of claims against the heads of the enterprises.

At the Košice metallurgical combine, for example, during one such meeting, the director, Cde. Knižka, was accused of receiving an excessively high salary, of owning a new car, of having a private room in the recreational facility, and of other such things. Newspapers all over the country covered this in full, and as a result, Cde. Knižka reached the point where he suddenly had a heart attack in Bratislava.

I said to Cde. Koscelanský that now you can see where "democracy" and the elimination of censorship are bound to lead. From the sidelines, it is easier to bellow and criticize than to work. And wouldn't you, too, be intimidated by this sort of vilification? As soon as you make a mistake, they use it to criticize you and dismiss you from your post. He agreed with me and said that during his remarks afterward at the factory meeting, he referred to these sorts of criticisms as "Chinese." [7] At this

particular enterprise, he declared, they've already convened meetings three times to elect the head of the trade union organization, but no one has been willing to be elected, for fear of incurring criticism. As far as Cde. Koscelanský himself is concerned, he said that he had made clear at one of the meetings that if they begin criticizing him, he will promptly react in full force.

At the meetings, assemblies, and conferences, a large number of questions were raised about events in both Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. In connection with this, Cde. Koscelanský said that they write a great deal about these events in the capitalist countries, whereas in the socialist countries, with the exception of Yugoslavia, they are silent. He asked why this is so. I responded that, as far as I know, excerpts from Dubček's speech at the CC plenum and from the Action Program were published in "Pravda." [8] I also said that "Pravda" is not able to cover other news from your country when you yourselves don't know what you want, and when the slogans proclaimed by you are not fulfilled.

Cde. Koscelanský said that ordinary people, particularly workers, always greet conversations about the USSR with stormy applause. Although there are some who oppose the Soviet Union, they do so in private and do not dare speak openly this way at meetings and assemblies.

Then Cde. Koscelanský described the recent visit by the president of the republic, Ludvík Svoboda, to Bratislava. He said the president had never encountered such a warm reception as he did here, especially among young people. Cde. Koscelanský emphasized that even though in Prague there had been demonstrations against the election of Svoboda as president, in Bratislava they had deliberately organized a wide range of meetings for the president so that the Czechs would not think the Slovaks were acting against them. At the end of May, Svoboda will visit the East Slovakian region, and they are now busy arranging for him the same sort of reception that he enjoyed in Bratislava.

Further on, Cde. Koscelanský emphasized that three forces have now emerged: the conservatives, the progressives, and the radicals (consisting mainly of Jews) who want to drag the country to the right. Among the radicals is a well-known economist, a Jew, who has broad international Zionist links (I don't recall his name). [9] There was an attempt to bring him into the CC Presidium, but, Cde. Koscelanský said, the Soviet comrades were opposed to this, and so nothing came of it. Now this is one of the reasons that the radicals are calling ever more urgently for the convocation in 1968 of an extraordinary party congress.

In general, a great struggle has emerged around this question. In the Czech lands, the conferences adopted resolutions in favor of holding a congress this year. [10] In Slovakia, they also voted in favor of holding a congress, but they did not specify when it should be held and did not indicate whether it should be an extraordinary congress or the regular 14th.

The views of the progressives and radicals about the congress are as follows: The radicals favor convening an extraordinary congress that will remove Novotný and other current CC members (roughly 40 people in all) from the CC because they are a disgrace to the party. The progressives believe that a congress must be convened, but not this year. It should come only after meticulous preparations that will allow a new program and new party statutes to be adopted. If an extraordinary congress were held prematurely, it might enable unsavory people to infiltrate the leadership.

In May, a plenum of the KSČ CC will be held, and the progressives want to gain a definitive understanding of the radicals' views about a congress. If the radicals' motive for convening a congress is only their desire to remove Novotný's group from the CC, that can be done at the plenum: These people will voluntarily relinquish their

duties as CC members, and replacements for them will be chosen from comrades who are now candidate members.

Cde. Koscelanský said that the provision in the constitution about the Communist Party's leading role in society will be removed. In response, I emphasized that in my view this would be extremely surprising and shocking, since it would be impossible to build socialism and Communism without the leading role of the party. In the process, new full-fledged parties will take shape, as cadres break apart and go their own way, and then seek to deprive the Communist Party of its leading role. In these circumstances, there will soon be 30 parties again in your country, as in the past. Why this is necessary is anyone's guess.

While agreeing that the number of parties might actually be increased, Cde. Koscelanský did not specifically address the other concerns I raised.

He repeated his earlier statements that true democracy is distinctive in that it does not provide for any kinds of secrets about matters that affect the party and the state. In this regard, everything that was discussed at the CC Plenums and at the party conferences was openly covered in the press, on radio, and on television.

At the end of the conversation, he said that political matters are not giving him any time to spend on other issues. For example, he does not know how economic matters and the spring harvest are progressing. He complained that they are working very hard and, in general, he was tired; he had put up with enough, and it would probably be better to be back at the institute delivering lectures than to be involved in politics.

We agreed that in view of the great value of these meetings, it would be worth setting up meetings of the CC secretaries of our republics - the Ukrainian and Slovak - on the Soviet-Czechoslovak border. He endorsed this proposal and said that on 3 May he would be meeting with Cde. Biľak and would inform him about our arrangement. This will be especially appropriate, he said, because Cde. Biľak is a native of our region but has not been back to East Slovakia since the day he was elected first secretary of the Slovakian CC.[11]

Bidding farewell, I said we are convinced that the Czechoslovak Communist Party includes healthy forces who correctly understand how to deal with the situation and who want to guide the party and the country along a Marxist-Leninist path. He responded that he had recently given an interview in which the correspondents asked how he viewed the prospects for carrying out the Action Program. He had answered this question by saying: "It would be good if we succeed in carrying out this Program." I, Cde. Koscelanský added, deliberately put in the word "if," because this might or might not happen.

My personal impression from the conversation with Cde. Koscelanský is that whereas during our previous meetings he had behaved with great animation and had spoken enthusiastically about future plans and prospects, this was no longer the case. It is clear that the notes of doubt and worry that I could detect in Cde. Koscelanský's remarks stem from the extreme difficulty of using theoretical concepts in practical activity.

He is beginning to question whether they will be successful in building socialism of a "Czechoslovak type." I could see that Cde. Koscelanský himself is aware that things are not going the way they planned when they embarked on a "new course," and that the situation in the country has been moving ever further to the right. But because he was one of the initiators of this "new course," his own ambition does not permit him to speak candidly about what is going on right now in the country. It is true, he said, that it would have been better if this had begun in 1960 and had all been carried

out gradually.

FIRST SECRETARY OF THE TRANSCARPATHIAN
OBLAST OF THE CP OF UKRAINE Yu. IL'NYTS'KYI

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[1]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Il'nyts'kyi's disclaimer is accurate. As the declassified transcript of the plenum ("Plenum Tsentral'nogo Komiteta KPSS - 9-10 aprelya 1968 goda"), shows, the situation in Czechoslovakia was only one of many issues discussed there.

[2]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Ján Kul'ko had been serving as a regional committee secretary since August 1965, and Alfons Kudelásek had been in that post since February 1963.

[3]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Ján Mockovčiak's surname is slightly mistransliterated in the Ukrainian, but is given in the correct form here. Mockovčiak had been in charge of the control and auditing commission since December 1962.

[4]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This refers to a decree issued by the Habsburg imperial government on 15 March 1848, the day after Prince Clemens Metternich was forced to resign as Imperial Chancellor amidst revolutionary turmoil in Vienna. The decree, which abolished all forms of censorship, was one of several bold - but ultimately inadequate - measures to forestall social upheaval. The law did not withstand the counterrevolutionary backlash of 1849, but it lasted long enough to become intertwined with the Czech "national awakening" led by František Palacký. The 1848 decree was cited in 1968 by, among others, the Club of Independent Journalists and the Club of Independent Writers that emerged within the Czechoslovak Union of Writers in March-April 1968. See "Kruh nezávislých spisovatelů," Literární listy (Prague), 4 April 1968, p. 1; "Rezoluce mimořádného sjezdu čs. novinářů k tiskovému zákonodárství," Novinář (Prague), Vol. XX, Nos. 7-8 (1968), pp. 261-262; and V. Skutiná, "Censura trva," Literární listy (Prague), 20 June 1968, p. 3. Because the revolutionary measures of March 1848 had been welcomed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, numerous Czechoslovak writers and commentators in 1968 defended their calls for free speech by pointing out that Marx himself had described a free press as "the omnipresent, all-seeing eye of the national spirit" and "the spiritual mirror in which the nation views itself."

[5]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The publication procedures for Rudé právo were mentioned by Oldřich Švestka, the editor-in-chief, during a secret conversation with editors of the CPSU daily Pravda at around this time. See "Zapis' besedy Prezidiuma TsK Kommunisticheskoi partii Chekhoslovakii, glavnyim redaktorom gazety 'Rudé právo' tov. Oldrzhikom Shvestkoi," by A. I. Lukovetz, member of the editorial board at Pravda, transmitted to the CPSU Politburo by Mikhail Zimyanin, editor-in-chief of Pravda, 20 May 1968 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 26, Ll. 33-40.

[6]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For an extended discussion of this issue, see Document No. 20 below.

[7]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This is an indirect reference to the phenomenon in China known as the "Greater Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (or Cultural Revolution, for short), which lasted from October 1966 until the death of Mao Zedong a decade later. Some of the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution, perpetrated by the Red Guards under Mao's broad direction, came at the very time that reforms were getting

under way in Czechoslovakia. The Cultural Revolution was aimed at destroying much of the Chinese Communist Party, an entity that Mao periodically scaled back through ruthless purges, and was also targeted against anyone suspected of being an "intellectual." In 1967, the so-called Cultural Revolution Authority (headed by Mao, Jiang Qing, and Lin Biao) set up a Revolutionary Committee in Shanghai, which launched a chaotic wave of terror across China. High-ranking officials were subject to public denunciations, ritual humiliation, and severe beatings, and the same practices were replicated at all levels of Chinese society. A vast number of people were tortured and killed. Despite the closed nature of Chinese society, horrific accounts of cruelty and violence made their way out of China, and official broadcasts of public denunciations were widely available. Koscelanský obviously is referring to these scenes of vicious humiliation when he refers to the criticism as "Chinese." The definitive work on the genesis of the Cultural Revolution is the three-volume study by Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, 1983, and 1997). For a concise account of the Cultural Revolution, see Jean-Louis Margolin, "China: A Long March Into Night," in Stéphane Courtois, ed., *The Black Book of Communism*, ed. by Mark Kramer, trans. by Mark Kramer and Jonathan Murphy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 513-538.

[8]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Il'nyts'kyi is correct here. Brief excerpts from the KSČ Action Program and from Dubček's speech were published in Moscow Pravda on 17 April. Presumably, Koscelanský was hoping that lengthier excerpts would appear and that Soviet journalists and commentators would refer to the Action Program more frequently and favorably.

[9]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The figure in question here is Ota Šik, who was appointed a deputy prime minister (responsible for economic affairs) in the government formed by Oldřich Černík on 8 April.

[10]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference is to an extraordinary 14th congress of the KSČ. The KSČ's regular 14th Congress was not due to convene until 1970, but by the early spring of 1968 many officials and commentators in Czechoslovakia were proposing that the congress be held a good deal earlier to accelerate the reform process and permit the formation of a new Central Committee. In late May 1968, the KSČ Central Committee approved the convocation of an extraordinary congress beginning on 9 September 1968. Following the intervention of Soviet troops on 20/21 August, a group of KSČ officials managed to convene an emergency congress in Vysočany with a somewhat limited (though surprisingly large) number of delegates, but the results of that congress were nullified by the Moscow Protocol signed by top Czechoslovak and Soviet officials on 26 August.

[11]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: See Excerpt No. 2 from Shelest's diary in my article in Issue 10 of the CWIHP Bulletin, pp. 236-239. As Koscelanský says here, Biľak had made his career in East Slovakia, where the local KSS branches traditionally had been more hardline and less urbane than their counterparts in Central and Western Slovakia. (Many Czechs tended not to distinguish among Slovaks, but the Slovaks themselves had long been cognizant of the regional differences.) A large number of officials from Biľak's network in East Slovakia were elevated to higher-level positions during and after the post-invasion "normalization."