

October 26, 1968

**P. Shelest Reports on a Visit by an Official
Party-State Delegation from the CSSR**

Citation:

"P. Shelest Reports on a Visit by an Official Party-State Delegation from the CSSR",
October 26, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 257, Ll.
2-5, original in Russian. Translated for CWHIP by Mark Kramer.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/112463>

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

C P S U C C

From 24 to 26 October 1969, a party-state delegation from the ČSSR, which was in the Soviet Union for an official, friendly visit at the invitation of the CPSU Central Committee, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, and the USSR Council of Ministers, visited Kyiv.

On the first day of the visit, I joined the chairman of the UkrSSR Council of Ministers, Cde. V. V. Shcherbyts'kyi, and the Chairman of the Presidium of the UkrSSR Supreme Soviet, Cde. A. P. Lyashko, in receiving the ČSSR party-state delegation headed by the KSČ CC First Secretary, Cde. G. Husák.[1] Joining us at the reception were the members of the UkrCP CC Politburo, the candidate members of the UkrCP CC Politburo, the first deputy Chairman of the Presidium of the UkrSSR Supreme Soviet, the deputy Chairman of the UkrSSR Council of Ministers, and others.

During the conversation, I told the Czechoslovak guests about the UkrCP's work and about the productive activity in the republic in honor of the 100th anniversary of V. I. Lenin's birth. I also told them about our comprehensive, friendly ties with the other socialist countries, in particular our ties with Czechoslovakia.

Cde. G. Husák thanked me for the heartfelt greeting extended to the delegation by the workers of the capital of Soviet Ukraine. He then gave a detailed overview of the emerging situation in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

He declared that after January 1968 the KSČ was transformed into a mere discussion club. Opportunistic groups who embrace positions hostile to Marxism-Leninism appeared within the party and even in its very highest organs. All of this had a negative influence on all aspects of the political and economic life of the country.

Cde. G. Husák emphasized the close ties between the internal counterrevolution in Czechoslovakia and the imperialist countries of the West, and he noted the "importance and necessity" of sending allied troops into the territory of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. "We regard this action," Cde. G. Husák said, "as internationalist assistance from the Soviet Union and other fraternal workers' countries to Czechoslovakia in the intensifying struggle against anti-socialist forces and as support to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia."

Further on, Cde. G. Husák indicated the difficulties hampering the work of party and state organs, which are the result of the unbridled chauvinist propaganda carried out by the mass media over the past year-and-a-half to two years.

In these circumstances, said Cde. G. Husák, we must "start all our work all over again." In his estimation, the rightist forces are further entrenched in many mass organizations of workers - for example, in professional, youth, and student unions. A difficult situation persists on the cultural front, which up to now has been subject to the influence of Western propaganda. In connection with this, Cde. G. Husák noted that not all visitors arriving in Czechoslovakia understand our difficulties. These difficulties can be alleviated only by vigorous political-educational work and even, possibly, by administrative measures.

A large group of activists, Cde. G. Husák continued, have now lined up in support of the leadership. These activists support correct policies and are aiding the struggle to fulfill the decisions of the May and September Plenums of the KSČ CC. Nonetheless, 50-60 percent of party members are doing nothing for the party. In general they are still unable to be defined. Now the KSČ is paying special attention to the re-registration of all party members and an exchange of party cards.[2]

Emphasizing the enduring need for the theoretical suitability of Communists on a Marxist-Leninist basis, Cde. G. Husák noted the great difficulties in the party's political-educational work. Because the faculties of Marxism-Leninism at the higher educational institutes, in his view, failed to come to terms with this and themselves became hotbeds of opportunism, the question has arisen about creating new party schools.[3]

Having indicated that the state system of economic management was practically destroyed, Cde. G. Husák recounted a number of important economic problems looming before the party: an increase in productivity and the stabilization of prices, wages, and foreign trade. In search of the most effective means of resolving these matters, the Czechoslovak specialists are studying the practice and experience of the Soviet Union and other fraternal countries - the GDR, Poland, Hungary, and others. It is absolutely clear to us, said Cde. G. Husák, that "we cannot develop as a country outside the camp of socialism."

We constantly think, said Cde. G. Husák, about ways to strengthen friendly ties with the socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union, and about ways to overcome misunderstandings that have arisen in the international Communist and workers' movement in connection with the Czechoslovak question.[4] Cde. G. Husák noted, in particular, that the Italian Communists still do not have a proper understanding of the Czechoslovak events.[5] We must do everything, he emphasized, to ensure that "the Czechoslovak question will be a question only of friendship between our parties and states. There should not be any other sort of Czechoslovak question in the Communist movement."

At the end of his speech, Cde. G. Husák expressed certainty that the process of consolidation in Czechoslovakia will proceed in the future with rapid steps in both the political and the economic spheres.

The next day, the ČSSR party-state delegation laid wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, at the graves of Czechoslovak soldiers in the Luk'yanov cemetery, and at the monument erected in honor of the soldiers of the Czechoslovak First Brigade, which took part under the command of Ludvík Svoboda in the battles to liberate Kyiv.

Later that day, the members of the delegation visited the Ukrainian technical design and research institute for superhard materials and instrumentation. After touring the laboratories and shops, the guests met with the staff of the institute. At the meeting, the director of the institute and Hero of Socialist Labor, V. N. Bakul', and the Chairman of the ČSSR Federal Government, Oldřich Černík, both spoke.

On that same day the Czechoslovak friends stopped by the Exhibit of Advanced Work in the UkrSSR National Economy.

On 26 October the ČSSR party-state delegation toured the Kyiv transportation system and rode to the village of Kodaky in the Vasyli'kivs'kyi region of Kyiv oblast, where they learned about the economic work and life of the collective farmers.[6] After this, a Soviet-Czechoslovak Friendship meeting took place in the village, attended by as many as 3,000 people. Those who spoke at the meeting, other than the collective farmers, included the Chairman of the UkrSSR Council of Ministers, V. V. Shcherbyts'kyi, and a KSC CC Secretary, Vasil Bil'ak.

In honor of the ČSSR party-state delegation, the CC of the Ukrainian Communist Party, the Presidium of the UkrSSR Supreme Soviet, and the UkrSSR Council of Ministers hosted a luncheon. At the luncheon, in accordance with the instructions of the UkrCP CC, the Presidium of the UkrSSR Supreme Soviet, and the UkrSSR Council

of Ministers, I gave a speech welcoming the members of the ČSSR party-state delegation. A speech responding to my remarks was delivered by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia, S. Sádovský.

On that same day the Czechoslovak friends flew off to Moscow.

The texts of the speeches of the members of the ČSSR party-stage delegation are attached.

Transmitted for informational purposes.

CC SECRETARY, CP OF UKRAINE

P. SHELEST

29 October 1969

[1]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Gustáv Husák played a key role in the Slovak Communist Party during World War II and was instrumental in the Communist takeover in Slovakia in 1947-1948, but he fell victim to the high-level purges carried out by Klement Gottwald in the early 1950s and was imprisoned in 1951 on charges of "bourgeois nationalism." He was later rehabilitated and reemerged as a key figure in the KSS. Through much of the Prague Spring, Husák had been a proponent of moderate reform (and in particular a restructuring of Czech-Slovak relations), but after the Soviet-led invasion he shifted steadily toward a hardline, anti-reformist position. Under Soviet auspices in April 1969, he replaced Dubček as First Secretary of the KSČ. Soviet leaders had backed Husák for this post mainly because they believed he would be more acceptable to the Czechoslovak population than would some of the other prospective candidates, who were widely seen in Czechoslovakia as little more than Soviet puppets. Husák consolidated his power at a KSČ Central Committee plenum in September 1969 (a month before this visit to Kyiv), ushering in a period of harsh "normalization." He remained the party leader until 1987.

[2]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: To extirpate the remnants of the Prague Spring, the new KSČ leaders authorized the head of the KSČ CC's Control and Auditing Commission, Miloš Jakeš, to oversee a large-scale purge. Hundreds of thousands of pro-reform members of the KSČ were expelled from the party and, in many cases, deprived of meaningful jobs. Many also found that their children faced exclusion or expulsion from higher education and promising career paths. The repercussions from this purge were felt for the next 20 years. See Jakeš's brief first-hand account (which seeks to defend his own unsavory role) in his recent memoir, *Dva roky Generálním tajemníkem* (Prague: Regulus, 1996), pp. 54-66.

[3]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Reformist sentiment spread into the KSČ's Higher Party School and numerous other institutes of higher education in Czechoslovakia throughout the Prague Spring. A harsh crackdown on reform-minded faculty at these schools had taken place in the mid-1960s under Novotný's auspices. The historian Milan Hübl, who had consistently spoken out in support of sweeping reform, was a particular target of Novotný's anti-reformist backlash in late 1963 and 1964. Hübl and two of his colleagues at the Higher Party School, Zdeněk Jičínský and Karel Kouba, were removed from their posts, and both Hübl and another dissident historian, Ján Mlynárik, were personally denounced by Novotný in May 1964. Several other historians at the Higher Party School were transferred to different assignments, and the historical faculty as a whole came under sharp criticism from the KSČ Presidium in 1964. In 1968, however, the reformers were back in favor. Not only was Milan Hübl restored to his post at the Higher Party School, but he was also appointed rector.

Other important changes of personnel occurred at several universities (including Charles University), at the Institute for the History of Socialism (formerly known as the Institute for the History of the KSC), at the KSC's official publishing house, and at a number of research centers affiliated with the Academy of Sciences, including the Institute for the History of the European Socialist Countries and the Institute of Czechoslovak Literature. Proposals for sweeping reform of the academic system and research facilities were actively discussed and refined in the spring and summer of 1968. Many leading scholars at the KSC's schools and institutes, at the universities, and at the Academy of Sciences institutes were prominently involved in the broader attempts to press ahead with comprehensive political reform. By writing commentaries in the press, giving public lectures, helping out with the drafting of the Action Program and the preparation of documents for the Fourteenth KSC Congress, signing pro-reform appeals and petitions, serving as members of various commissions (on rehabilitations, historical reassessments, federalization, and economic reform), and writing speeches for key party and state officials, a large number of scholars made enthusiastic contributions to the Prague Spring. This was particularly evident in the Czech lands, but it was also true in Slovakia. Husak's comments here reflect his awareness that the initial "normalization" had only partly diminished the groundswell of reformist sentiment that emerged at party schools and other higher education facilities in 1968. A more rigorous purge soon followed.

[4]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Husák is referring here to the numerous fissures that emerged in the Communist world as a result of the Soviet-led invasion. Within the Warsaw Pact itself, Albania used the invasion as an opportunity to withdraw formally from the alliance. (Albania had ceased to be a de facto member of the Warsaw Pact as far back as 1961, but had not yet formally pulled out.) Another Pact member, Romania, refused to take part in the invasion and promptly condemned it. Although Romania's defiance rapidly ebbed in late 1968 and 1969, Romanian policy never came fully back into line with the policies of the other Warsaw Pact states. Outside the Pact, the invasion was denounced by China (which was only six months away from its own military clashes with the Soviet Union on the Ussuri River) and even caused a good deal of disquiet in Cuba (though Cuban leader Fidel Castro ultimately decided to offer public support for the Soviet action). Equally important, the invasion led to a momentous rift among non-ruling Communist parties. Many of the West European Communist parties, especially the Italian and Spanish, had watched Dubček's reform program with great sympathy and hope. The violent suppression of the Prague Spring aroused open and vehement opposition to the Soviet Union within these parties and stimulated the rise of what became known as "Eurocommunism." The defection of most of the major West European Communist parties from the Soviet orbit was nearly as important in its long-term consequences as the earlier splits with Yugoslavia and China, and far more important than the break with Albania. The emergence of Eurocommunism mitigated potential Soviet influence in Western Europe and significantly altered the complexion of West European politics. More important, the Eurocommunist alternative - an alternative that, unlike the Prague Spring, could not be subdued by Soviet tanks - became a potentially attractive, and thereby disruptive, element in Eastern Europe.

[5]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: On the reaction of the Italian Communist Party to the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, see Joan Barth Urban, *Moscow and the Italian Communist Party: From Togliatti to Berlinguer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 137-169; Donald L. M. Blackmer and Annie Kriegel, *The International Role of the Communist Parties of Italy and France*, Studies in International Affairs No. 33 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for International Affairs, 1975); and George R. Urban, ed., *Eurocommunism: Its Roots and Future in Italy and Elsewhere* (New York: Universe Books, 1978).

[6]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Vasyl'kivs'kyi region (raion) of Kyiv oblast is to the southwest of the Kyiv metropolitan area, adjacent to the Kievo-Svyatoshyns'kyi raion in which Kyiv itself is located. Kodaky is located almost precisely in the center of Vasyl'kivs'kyi raion.