

**May 15, 1968**

**P. Shelest Supplements his Earlier Report on the  
Activities of Cdes. Il'nyts'kyi and Belousov in  
Czechoslovakia.**

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CPSU CCAs a supplement to my memorandum from Transcarpathian Oblast on 14 May (No. 1/27), 145 I want to report: On 14 May, the first secretary of the KSC's East Slovakian regional committee, Cde. Koscelanský, met at his initiative with two secretaries of the UkrCP's Transcarpathian Oblast committee, Cdes. Il'nyts'kyi and Belousov. 146 During this meeting, Cde. Koscelanský informed our comrades, at his initiative, about the conference of KSC regional, municipal, and district secretaries that took place on 12-13 May in Prague. 147 During the debate at this conference, Cde. Koscelanský was the first to speak (attached is the text of his speech, which he provided to Cde. Il'nyts'kyi) and offered a proposal on behalf of the East Slovakian regional delegation calling on every member of the KSC CC Presidium to express his opinion about whether the KSC Action Program should be implemented. This proposal was adopted. In his view, the most unsuccessful presentation was by the CC Presidium member Kriegel, who tried to convince everyone that no danger to socialism exists in the country. 148 The presentation by Smrkovský also displeased the participants, although it was somewhat better than the speeches that preceded it. Císar spoke more wisely. He said he had convened a meeting of the newspaper editors-in-chief in Prague and had given them clear-cut instructions on behalf of the KSC CC Presidium. These instructions envisage the creation of collective organs of supervision over radio and television. Representatives from the government, trade unions, state bank, and National Front will serve on these organs. 149 Twenty-five of the people who spoke at the conference endorsed the speech by Cde. Koscelanský. Only two dissenting views were expressed, during the speeches by the secretaries of the KSC Prague municipal committee and the KSC Brno regional committee. 150 During the conversation, Cde. Koscelanský reported that Cde. Dubcek is strongly supported by Comrade Bilak (whose speech at the conference was received warmly and enthusiastically) and Comrades Barbírek, Švestka, Vaculík, Kolder, Lenárt, Piller, Rigo, and Cerník. Smrkovský, Kriegel, Špacek, Císar, and Slavik represent only a minority on the CC Presidium. 151 In party circles it has become known, according to Cde. Koscelanský, that Smrkovský's speech at the conference was subjected to criticism within this minority group. The reason is that the small group is seeking to take over key posts in the party and government. In particular, Smrkovský is aiming to become president of the republic, Císar the KSC First Secretary, and Šik the head of the government. This group is demanding that an extraordinary KSC congress be convened promptly to change the composition of the CC. To forestall this, the East Slovakia regional delegation proposed that they select one Communist from each major party organization and have these representatives engage in discussions with certain CC members so that they will voluntarily relinquish their powers. These matters could then be resolved at the May plenum of the KSC CC. But this proposal, as Cde. Koscelanský recognizes, has its drawbacks. The minority grouping will be able to achieve its aim of removing 40 members of the CC, a development that will paralyze the work of the CC and leave no option other than to convene a party congress. For this reason, he believes it is necessary to remove certain people from the CC. To give this position greater weight, he is proposing that they convene a Central Committee plenum of the Communist Party of Slovakia on the eve of the KSC CC Plenum. At the Slovak CC plenum, appropriate decisions on this matter could be adopted, and the notion of convening an extraordinary party congress could be categorically rejected. 152 Cde. Koscelanský further reported that not only the old bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties but also the Sudeten Germans are stepping up their activity in the Czech lands. 153 He stated that Germans who formerly lived in Czechoslovakia and are now in the FRG have bought up all the hotel rooms in Karlovy Vary and are preparing to hold a congress there. Anti-socialist elements are also stepping up their activity in Slovakia. To curb this, the East Slovakia regional party committee recently carried out a parade of armed People's Militia in the Rožnava district center. This parade was widely covered in the newspaper "Pravda"—the organ of the Slovak Communist Party CC—as well as in the local newspaper. This example will be emulated in other districts of the region. The KSC East Slovakia regional committee proposed to the Slovak Communist Party CC that at all meetings where a change of personnel would be approved, Communists and vanguard workers from all regions of Slovakia should take part, amounting to some 4,000-5,000 people. In this case, Cde. Koscelanský stated, Cdes. Bilak and Barbírek, who want to meet with me [Shelest - Trans.] here, will be able to travel to the Soviet-Czechoslovak border. 154 It is precisely with this in mind that he [Koscelanský - Trans.] requested today's meeting with Cde. Il'nyts'kyi. At the end of the conversation, Cde. Koscelanský

said that this meeting must be used as much as possible to strengthen friendship between the Czechoslovak and Soviet peoples. We have no certainty, he said, that the situation in the Czech lands will be fixed anytime soon. It might be necessary for the Slovaks, together with the fraternal Soviet peoples, to liberate the Czech lands once again. 155 On 14 May I visited the frontier posts and military units deployed near the Czechoslovak border. 156 I spoke with the soldiers and officers. The mood of all of them was good, ready for combat. Everywhere I went, the soldiers and officers requested me to let the CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet government know that they are ready to fulfill the orders of the Motherland and to carry out their internationalist duty to defend the Soviet Union and other fraternal socialist countries. 157 □

P. SHELEST 15 May 1968 Uzhhorod No. 1/28145 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: See the previous document. 146 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Borys Belousov had been an oblast committee secretary in Transcarpathia since February 1965. 147 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For the proceedings stored in the Slovak archives, see "Poradca vedúcich tajomníkov krajských, okresných a mestských výborov KSC 12.-13. mája 1968," in Slovenský národný archív (SNA), F. ÚV KSS, C. 68/10, A.j. 2. 148 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: František Kriegel was consistently among the most radical supporters of political liberalization in 1968. He was a full member of the KSC Presidium from June to August 1968 and chairman of the National Front from April to early September 1968. The National Front was a grouping of parties and public organizations that had long been a figurehead for Communist domination, but Kriegel and other reformers in 1968 sought to convert the Front into a more pluralistic institution. 149

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Proposals to establish "advisory and initiating boards" for the mass media in the spring of 1968 provoked unease and opposition among journalists and writers, who feared that censorship might gradually be reimposed in Czechoslovakia, as had happened in Poland after 1956. (Censorship had been eased in Poland during Wladyslaw Gomulka's return to power in October 1956, but Gomulka soon restored the earlier restrictions and guidelines.) Although Cestmír Císar had pledged that the KSC "does not intend to resume any form of direct control over the press," many journalists and writers in Czechoslovakia were at least as wary of an internal clampdown as they were of foreign military intervention. See "Aktiv Pražských novináru," *Novinár* (Prague), Vol. XX, No. 4 (1968), p. 112. 150

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This refers to two of the leading members of the reform movement in Czechoslovakia: Bohumil Šimon (first secretary of the KSC's Prague municipal committee and a candidate member of the KSC Presidium) and Josef Špacek (first secretary of the KSC's South Moravian regional committee and a member of the KSC Presidium). The Prague municipal committee and the South Moravian regional committee were both strongholds of radical reformist sentiment.

151 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The officials mentioned here, in addition to those already identified, include František Barbírek, Oldrich Švestka, Martin Vaculík, Drahomír Kolder, Jan Piller, Josef Špacek, and Václav Slavík. Barbírek, Švestka, Kolder, Piller, and Špacek were full members of the KSC Presidium; Vaculík was still a candidate member of the KSC Presidium (though he was removed in late May); and Slavík was a member of the KSC Secretariat (beginning in April 1968) and had earlier been involved in the establishment of an Institute of Political Science under the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. 152 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Koscelanský's predictions here turned out to be ill-founded. The May plenum of the KSC Central Committee voted to convene an extraordinary KSC congress on 9 September 1968, nearly two years ahead of schedule. The decision to hold an early congress proved crucial, for it greatly reduced the amount of time available to the Soviet Union to eliminate the "threat" posed by the Prague Spring. Soviet officials believed that ardent reformers would dominate the KSC congress and would remove all the "healthy forces" (hardliners) who potentially could set up an alternative regime if Soviet troops were to move into Czechoslovakia. To ensure that the "healthy forces" would still be in a position to act, Soviet leaders realized that they would have to end the Prague Spring before the newly scheduled KSC congress took place. 153

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The ethnic Germans in the Sudetenland, along the Czechoslovak-German border, were subjected to mass reprisals in the early postwar period. After President Beneš issued Decree No. 33 on 2 August 1945, almost all ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia were deprived of their citizenship, rights, and

protection, leaving them in the status of “traitors.” (The only ones who were permitted to stay were the small number who had repeatedly spoken out against Nazi Germany.) Over the next year, more than 3 million Germans in Bohemia and Moravia were forcibly “transferred” (i.e. expelled) to Germany, where they had to forfeit all the property they had left behind. By late 1946, only around 165,000 ethnic Germans remained in the Czech lands, and they were not permitted to reclaim their citizenship until 1953. For recent analyses of the expulsions, based on newly declassified archival materials, see the relevant chapters in Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, eds., *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948* (Boulder, Col.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). (My own chapter in the Ther/Siljak volume provides extensive citations to recent works on the subject in German, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian as well as in English.) The displaced Sudeten Germans formed an association in the FRG (the Landsmannschaft) that urged the West German government to seek compensation and redress for the indiscriminate expulsions. The Landsmannschaften were influential in West German politics in the late 1940s and 1950s, but their influence began to wane in the 1960s, especially with the advent of Ostpolitik. Even so, the Sudeten Germans were unwilling to back down on their demands, and the Landsmannschaft continued to function as a highly visible – though ultimately unsuccessful – lobbying group.<sup>154</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: On 25 May, Shelest and Ukrainian prime minister Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyi (who was also a candidate member of the CPSU Politburo) met with Bilak and Barbírek in the small Slovak town of Vyšné Nemecké, just across the border from Uzhhorod. This visit, marking the start of the festive “Ukrainian Days of Culture” in Czechoslovakia, was covered extensively in the Ukrainian press. See, for example, “Torzhestva na granitse SSSR i ChSSR: Vstrecha estafet Moskva-Praga i Praga-Moskva,” *Pravda Ukrainy* (Kyiv), 26 May 1968, p. 1. What the press accounts did not mention, however, was the secret meeting that Shelest had with Bilak and Koscelanský in a mountain cottage along the border and in Uzhhorod the previous evening. (See Excerpt No. 2 from Shelest's diary and my commentary on it in Issue 10 of the CWIHP Bulletin, pp. 236-239.) The secret visit, which established a clandestine backchannel between the Soviet Politburo and the “healthy forces” in the KSC, proved to be of great importance for Soviet policy.<sup>155</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: See Excerpt No. 2 from Shelest's diaries and my commentary on it in Issue 10 of the CWIHP Bulletin, pp. 236-239.<sup>156</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: These units had been deployed there in anticipation of the forthcoming military exercises on Czechoslovak territory. More about these preparations will be featured in the next issue of the CWIHP Bulletin.<sup>157</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: These comments echo what Soviet defense minister Marshal Andrei Grechko said a month earlier, at the CPSU Central Committee plenum on 10 April 1968. After expressing alarm at the situation in Czechoslovakia, Grechko declared that “we [in the Soviet Army] are ready, at the behest of the party, to join with the armies of the [other] Warsaw Pact countries in coming to the assistance of the Czechoslovak nation if the imperialists and counterrevolutionaries try to tear Czechoslovakia away from the countries of socialism.” Quoted from “Plenum TsK KPSS – Aprel' 1968 goda: Zasedanie tret'e (Vechernoe, 10 aprelya),” 9-10 April 1968 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 2, Op. 3, D. 93, L. 7.