

November 20, 1989
**Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior Memorandum,
'Information Regarding the Development of the
Security Situation During the Period of the 17
November Anniversary'**

Citation:

"Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior Memorandum, 'Information Regarding the Development of the Security Situation During the Period of the 17 November Anniversary'", November 20, 1989, Wilson Center Digital Archive, ÚDV Archive. Documentation in connection with DMM (Defense Mobilization Measures) announcements at the occasion of the 17 November 1989 celebrations. Collection list corresponding to OV-00174/S-89.—Type-written copy. Translation for CWIHP by Vance Whitby. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/117221>

Summary:

Internal and external anti-communists have been protesting and organizing mass demonstrations in Prague, destabilizing the political situation in Czechoslovakia. The peak of the social unrest occurred on 17-19 November. It is concluded that the political, economic, and foreign pressure, as a result of these events, have provoked the start of political change in the CSSR.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Czech

Contents:

Translation - English

The Secretariat of the FMI (Federal Ministry of the Interior) operation staff[1] □□
TOP SECRET
OV-00156/S-89

Information

regarding the development of the security situation during the period of the November 17 anniversary

Internal and external enemy forces, with the aim of eliciting unrest, emotion, chaos, and mass protests in order to destabilize the internal political situation, have recently been growing in intensity and peaked between November 17-19 in Prague. Most notable has been the misuse of a student gathering on November 17 during the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the burial of Jan Opletal.[2] Western media, including broadcasters from Radio Free Europe and Voice of America, generated wide publicity for both the demonstration preparations as well as the demonstration itself. The goal was to provoke a mass showing after the pattern of demonstrations in the GDR and thereby create strenuous pressure on Party and State organs.

In connection with the preparations for the commemoration of Jan Opletal's death, there has been a notably significant radicalization of some of the university students in Prague. At the center of the political activation of student surroundings has been the Theatrical Academy of Performing Arts (TAPA) whose supporters, in collaboration with the Cultural Front, have orchestrated the main role in the organization of pressure tactics. The TAPA student rally, held on November 15, canceled, as part of its conclusion, the activities of the Socialist Youth League (SYL) with the justification that it does not have the right to represent the youth as a whole. In addition, there were demands to entertain questions regarding the role of CPCz leaders in society. An analogous situation presented itself at a gathering of University of Industrial Arts students in Prague on November 16. Additional student gatherings, planned for this week, are intended to utilize the situation to establish a new student organization-the Independent Student Association, which is to generate activities along the lines of the National Front.

Additional sources of the student political activation are the so-called Independent Youth Society, headed by Tomáš VODICKA and Matouš RAJMONT (both are secondary school students)[,] and the so-called Independent Student Society, centered on university students, headed by Milan RUŽICKA (Technical University, VUT Brno), Radek VANA (Faculty of Philosophy, Charles's University, Prague) and Petr FIALA (Faculty of Pedagogy, Charles's University, Prague). Both initiatives, in terms of subject matter, began with a policy-statement, from an appeal for a "few sentences," and proposed preparations to misuse the commemoration of Jan Opletal's death as an opportunity to denounce the role of the CPCz, as well as the activities of the SYL, and the political system of the CSSR.

In order to thwart this design, associative and academic organs took measures to divert crowds from the original rout from the Albertov Pedagogical Institute via Charles's bridge, Štěpánská (St.), Opletalova (St.), to the Main Train Station and the J. Opletal monument, to a rout from Albertov to Vyšehrad and made a public announcement that the crowd was the result of a joint activity between the SYL and unorganized students. In consideration of the situation, the associative organs brokered a compromise to the effect that the executive member of the so-called Circle of Independent Intellectuals, an academic named KATETOV, would make an appearance on behalf of the independent initiatives. His address at Albertov did not go beyond a policy-statement and was not an openly aimed attack against the socialist structure in the CSSR.

The official program was effectively disrupted by whistling and the chanting of unfriendly slogans such as "Destroy the CPCz monopoly," "We want a different government," "String up all the communists," "Destroy the army, State Security, and

the Peoples' Militia", "We don't want Jakeš," We don't want Štěpán," We want a charter," etc. Organizers, in light of the development of the situation, did not have the opportunity to establish order and secure the proper course of the demonstration. After the rally at Albertov ended, the participants broke up and reassembled at Slavín [cemetery in Vyšehrad],[3] where the official mourning portion of the commemoration concluded. Afterwards, approximately 5,000 individuals continued in a procession into the center of Prague along the B. Engels embankment, up Národní třída (St.) to Wenceslas Square. In response, Národní třída and the neighboring streets were closed by IS (Internal Security) peace-keeping units.[4]

By around 10:00 PM, approximately 3,000 people had assembled within the confines of Národní třída, of which only about 1,000 acknowledged the call to disperse and leave the area. Those remaining lingered in the area and began sitting down on the pavement in demonstration fashion and continued to chant unfriendly slogans. Over 15 calls to disperse went unheeded and the participants of the demonstration had over an hour to restore order to the area. After the calls went unheeded, measures were taken to suppress the crowd. During the course of those measures, a skirmish ensued with some of the more aggressive participants in the demonstration. After intervening, 179 individuals were detained, of whom approximately 145 were held for aggressive behavior directed at the IS department. Shortly after 11:00 PM, public order was restored. During intervention a total of 38 individuals were injured including one member of the NSC (National Security Committee) and one US citizen.

On Saturday, November 11, 1989, a group of students, primarily from TAPA and [VŠE] Prague,[5] issued a declaration condemning the intervention of peace-keeping units and proposed a weekly strike consisting of university students and pedagogues to push for the creation of a special government commission to investigate the intervention as well as other demands. In the effort to call on students to implement a general strike at all theaters in the CSSR on November 11, in excess of 400 individuals gathered at a production at the Realistický Theater in Prague.

In response to the call to theater performers, actress Milena DVORSKÁ walked out at the E.F. Burian theater on Wenceslas Square on the afternoon of November 11, 1989. All Prague theaters and a few elsewhere in the CSSR (in Liberec and Žatec) responded by suspending their performances and reading the invitation to the audience.

During the afternoon hours on Saturday November 18, 1989 a gathering of around 700 people gradually formed on Národní třída, which had been closed. After calls to disperse, the crowd broke-up prior to 6:00 PM, with intervention being carried out by peace-keeping units. 96 individuals were detained, of whom nine made displays against the NSC department.

Elsewhere around the CSSR there have been no reports of peace disturbances or public disorder.

In the effort to incite emotion, particularly among young people, and to elicit additional protests, information has been distributed by means of internal antagonists and Western communications regarding the death of Martin ŠMÍD, of the Charles's University Mathematics Faculty, from injuries sustained as a result of a confrontation with peace-keeping units. This information was disclosed by "charter 77" signatory Petr UHL to Radio Free Europe which repeatedly aired the information on Sunday November 19, 1989. Leaflets were then subsequently distributed providing information about the death with a call for a general strike on November 27, 1989. Similar leaflets were discovered in the northern Bohemian, eastern Bohemian, and southern Bohemian regions.

A further attempt to instigate anti-socialist protests and provoke the intervention of

peace-keeping units came to a head on Sunday November 11, 1989 during the afternoon and evening hours in downtown Prague. In implementing the security measures, only the accessibility and safety of the highway thoroughfare was secured; peace-keeping units were not attacked.

On November 19, 1989 National Theater play-actor Boris RÖSNER and head play-actor Milan LUKEŠ instigated the reading of a resolution to the audience during the afternoon performance on the new stage at the National Theater in Prague, in which they expressed their disagreement with the Security intervention on November 17, 1989. At the urging of LUKEŠ, the theater choir and those in attendance sang a theater hymn. Afterwards they promptly dispersed. National Theater director Jirí PAUER responded by closing the premises of the historical building and the new stage of the National Theater and canceled evening performances with the justification that the National Theater would not serve to organize illegal gatherings. After director PAUER's decision, actors from the National Theater began to assemble in the National Theater club where they decided to strike.

During the evening hours, CSSR cultural minister Milan KYMLICKA visited the National Theater. In an interview with the National Theater employees, he indicated that the CST (Czechoslovak Television) news would address the establishment of a government commission to investigate the NSC intervention on November 17, 1989. Those present promised that as long as the commission was established, the National Theater play-actors' club would rescind their decision to strike. At 7:30 all closely followed the CST television broadcast. Because no announcement was made for the creation of a government commission, National Theater play-actors, at the urging of Boris RÖSNER, undertook additional initiatives. RÖSNER, as the spokesman for the National Theater play-actors, along with three other individuals, proceeded to the front of the theater building where, after only a short time, he was able to organize a crowd of approximately 500 people. RÖSNER announced that the National Theater would strike continuously until it was called off, the crowd chanted the slogan "OUT WITH PAUER."

On November 19, 1989, shortly after 10:00 PM, at the Jirí Wolker Theater, at the location originally determined for the performance, theater employees read a declaration to the audience explaining that the theater had joined the protest strike as an expression of their disagreement with the Security intervention on 17 November 1989. December 17 was determined as a substitute date for the original performance. Patrons then quietly dispersed.

A petition denouncing the NSC intervention was also read at the Komorní Theater in Plzen, where [OBRODA] branch members Stanislav NEDVED and František JURICKA were seated in the auditorium. Similarly, the planned performance did not materialize.

During the evening hours of the same day, a "public discussion forum" took place in the play-actors' club in Prague involving the most paramount of the opposition group supporters, representatives of the Cultural Front, and university students. The play-actors' club was filled to capacity, including the vestibule, where others followed the course of the forum on a video display monitor. Included among the viewers in the vestibule were well-known actors such as HANZLÍK, BREJCHOVÁ, KANYZA, Josef DVORÁK, and others.

The goal of this forum was to unify the independent initiatives and compose joint declarations, which are to be presented to the government of the CSSR by 10 representatives on November 20, 1989. The forum was conducted by Václav HAVEL who addressed the declaration and put the various alternatives to a vote, and he then read and spoke favorably of the outcome. During the course of the discussion, appearances were also made by well-known independent group advocates including

BATEK, KANTUREK, HRADÍLEK, VONDRA, and others.

Similarly, an unidentified TAPA student emerged to read a declaration from the TAPA students. The declaration amounted to an ultimatum for the removal of the CSSR minister of the interior, the investigation and prosecution of subordinates who were involved in the intervention of November 17, 1989, the abolition of stipulations regarding the leadership role of the Party in the system, and the resignation of the current representatives of the Party and State. On November 20, 1989 a coordinating student body is to be created at the TAPA faculty, which is supposed to guarantee the distribution of this declaration and thereby aid in the actualization of the general strike on November 27.

Václav HAVEL supported the student declaration by suggesting that the coordinating committee supporting the forum should meet daily in some of the Prague theaters in order to direct and organize the student strikes; theaters, which are to similarly strike[,] would be open, however, discussion clubs would be held in place of the performances.

The aim of university students in the next few days is to travel around to various locations around the CSSR to publicize and popularize the stated declaration in the effort to convert the youth in secondary and vocational schools.

The forum was essentially divided by two differing opinions. A significantly smaller camp asserted the opinion that in essence a dialogue with the current government could be entertained provided certain changes were made, the most important of which they considered to be the resignation of comrades Jakeš, Štěpán, Zavadil, Hoffmann, Indra, and Fojtík. A notably stronger group represented by HAVEL, BATEK, and KANTUREK and the university student representatives[,] was against dialogue in any form and supported an open confrontation with the powers of the State. Both groups decided on the unconditional abolition of the principle of a leading role for the Party, anchored in the institution.

The forum culminated with a declaration read and submitted for approval by Václav HAVEL. This declaration, filled with comments from the discussion forum, will be submitted to the State organs. After singing a state hymn the participants of the forum dispersed.

□□□Conclusion □□

The development of events proves that internal enemies, with foreign support, have crossed-over to a frontal, and from their perspective, decisive attack in the effort to further their own political goals after the pattern exhibited by Poland and Hungary. To this end, it has been decided to actualize and utilize all reasonable means, primarily abusing the youth for pressure tactics. These events, according to the plans of the enemy, together with the expected economic difficulties and foreign pressure for political change, should be the beginning of a quick series of successive events resulting in principle political change in the CSSR.

Václav NOVOTNÝ

Chief of the Secretariat of the FMI Operation Staff

To be obtained by:

RA(Regional Administration) NSC Chiefs - České Budejovice, Plzeň, Ústí nad Labem, Hradec Králové, Brno, Ostrava, Banská Bystrica, Košice;

S (Slovak) NSC Chief main m. Bratislava, XII. S SNB;

MIE (Ministry of the Interior and Environment) CSR, MIE SSR.

[...]

22 Jan Opletal was a university student killed during anti-Nazi demonstrations in 1939. His funeral on 15 November was attended by thousands and ended in a large demonstration. As a result, Nazi officials closed all universities on 17 November and executed leaders of the student movement.

23 An honorary national cemetery and resting place for important Czech national figures.

24 Peace-keeping units on the basis of DMM (Defense Mobilization Measures) [code-named] "bridges" also closed bridges crossing the Vltava.

25 Vysoká Škola Ekonomická-Economic University.