

April 26, 1956

**Faculty of Mathematics and Physics at Charles
University, Prague, 'Resolution Adopted by the
Faculty Organization of the Czechoslovak Youth
Union'**

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Summary:

A student resolution written during the 1956 student protests in Czechoslovakia. It argues for a review of the national education system, specifically to allow for more focus on practical subjects than on Communism and Russian language classes. Additionally, it demands fairer political trials and punishments, while noting the overall deleterious affect that "the Soviet experience" has had on the country.

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Faculty¹ of Mathematics and Physics at Charles University, Prague

Resolution adopted by the Faculty Organization of the Czechoslovak Youth Union

In recent days the Youth Union of our Faculty has been holding discussions on the results of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the March session of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. These discussions have been very lively and, thanks to the positive atmosphere generated by the participants, honest and full of constructive criticism. The spirit of the CPSU Party Congress has communicated itself to our own political life.

For a long time it has not been common for our Union to speak so openly about important political questions. This has been the result of incorrect methods of work against which the Party, by condemning the cult of personality and all its consequences, has begun a decisive struggle. Because open discussions were impossible for such a long time, a number of questions were treated that had only a remote connection with the CPSU 20th Congress and, accordingly, certain incorrect or poorly thought out ideas came to the fore.

The participants in the talks, however, consistently presented views whose goal was to remove shortcomings in our political and cultural life, taking advantage of the new opportunities provided by our new Popular Democratic organization.

To confront the most important questions, the Faculty Committee of the Youth Union on April 26, 1956 called a plenary meeting of the Youth Union for the entire faculty which summed up the views of the preceding individual discussions. The reason for the present letter is, on the one hand, to explain the views and needs of the Youth Union Faculty Organization and, on the other hand, to request answers to certain questions which we ourselves have not been able to answer in a satisfactory way.

1) We consider it necessary that all important measures in individual areas of our national and economic life be discussed in advance with workers, in particular, workers in the areas in question, and that they be submitted for public discussion in the press. Workers' suggestions should be included in any resulting decrees unless there is proper explanation of why they should not be.

Some of the shortcomings in our political and economic life have been caused by failure to observe in practice all of the principles of socialist democracy. We maintain that it is necessary in all cases to invoke as soon as possible the principle that all leading organs and those who work for them bear full responsibility to account for their work and be subject to full scrutiny and control from below. We consider it vital that all citizens be acquainted as thoroughly as possibly² with the means they will have to exercise this scrutiny and control over their representatives at the highest echelons and, when necessary, exercise the right to recall them. We regard these measures as necessary to guarantee that past mistakes will not be repeated.

It is also necessary to improve the system of electing candidates to the National Committees and National Assembly, to ensure that candidates will not only have the capability to carry out their duties but also enjoy the confidence of their voters. We consider it necessary to begin to call as soon as possible regular meetings of voters with their representatives in the National Assembly. At these meetings workers could openly express their needs and suggestions for the work of the National Assembly and the government and the other state organs. These meetings would, however, become a mere formality if, as it happened frequently in the past, an incorrect criticism (not inciting lawbreaking) would lead to a punishment for the critic. We are

convinced that, if Socialist Democratic principles are really observed; that is, if there is a real opportunity for discussion, criticism and presentation of views, all the working masses will enthusiastically join the efforts of the Party and the government of the National Front.

We ask for prompt publication of concrete directives regarding workers' personnel policy. We consider it necessary that all persons be suitably and truthfully informed upon request about the contents of their personnel files and any conclusions a personnel department has come to which are based on them.

We consider it necessary that in working to improve our Parliament the experience of the Polish parliament (Sejm) be taken into full account.

2) We ask that our press, radio and film reporting service inform the public much more promptly, more accurately and with more independence than heretofore. Compared to the Western press and those of the other People's Democratic countries our public was informed about the results of the 20th Congress of the CPSU very late. Certain essential facts in the speeches of the leading representatives of the international workers' movement were simply hushed up. We were thus often forced to confront the paradox that we first learn about Party matters from bourgeois sources.

We consider that the fear of bourgeois views which can, after all, be objectively rebutted in discussion, is totally unsubstantiated. Removal of this fear would also remove some of its undesirable consequences.

We consider it correct³ that foreign currency funds be released for the purchase of scholarly literature and journals from the West so that these publications can be purchased by both individual scholars and students specializing in a given field. We also consider the present situation regarding translation of scholarly literature, and specifically textbooks from the West, to be wholly unacceptable.

In the area of ideological questions we do not consider it necessary to maintain a list of prohibited books, especially in such libraries as the University Library, the Main Library of the Academy of Sciences and libraries of ministries and individual educational institutions.

We also consider it essential to permit the study of Western newspapers and periodicals which represent major political currents.

We do not understand the reasons for jamming Western radio broadcasts or why this practice is necessary at all.

Information about partial successes of the capitalist states (fluctuations in unemployment, increases in production) are still often concealed. At the same time our own failures are also often hushed up, as the example of HUKO[a Slovak steel mill project] shows.

We consider it unnecessary that almost all statistical data are painstakingly concealed from the public. This situation will certainly be resolved by the decision to resume publication of the Statistical Yearbooks.

Given our peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries, we ask that travel to foreign countries be made possible other than through the Czechoslovak State Travel Agency. We urge special emphasis on exchange agreements, particularly those involving students, with minimalization⁴ of foreign currency difficulties.. We also

consider it necessary that procedures for obtaining permission to travel abroad (which at present require filling-out 14 forms) be significantly simplified.

3) The practice of mechanically adopting the Soviet experience has done great harm to our educational system and, in particular, to our economic system. It is, of course, necessary, to learn from the USSR as the first socialist state in the world, but it must always be taken into account in what way a Soviet method or approach is better than ours and to apply it in a truly creative manner. Mere copying of the USSR without regard to the differing economic and cultural differences in our two countries should not continue.

Lack of observance of these principles has severely damaged the attitudes of some of our people toward the Soviet Union. The indiscriminate adoption of Soviet works of little value into our cultural life has had a similar effect. Further harm has been done by such "manifestations of love" as the playing of the Soviet national anthem at the end of every broadcast day and the displaying of the Soviet flag at all occasions. We ask that the Soviet national anthem and the Soviet flag be present only on occasions which directly involve the Soviet Union; e.g., the November 7th and May 9th celebrations.

In order to forestall the impression that we only learn from and never teach the USSR and that our relationship with them is not equal, it would be a good idea to demonstrate more often the ways in which the USSR learns from us.

It would [be] a suitable idea for our National Assembly to pass a law regarding the display of state flags, the playing of anthems and the use of state emblems.

4) We do not consider correct the view of Mr. Novotny in his report:

"The Central Committee as the collective organ of the Party between the congresses and the center of Party and state activity in our country decides and must decide the most important questions of the Party and state. Its decisions are binding both for the work of the Party as a whole and for state economic and social organs and organizations." The conclusion reflected in this statement does not express the principle that workers must be governed according to their own convictions and thereby distorts the real content and the leading role of the Party. We ask for an explanation of the role of the non-communist parties of the National Front. They presently seem to us to function in form only.

5) We ask for a public reviewer of the Slansky trial and other political trials. We ask for a guarantee of rightful punishment for persons who tolerated illegal procedures during interrogations for those who directly carried out these procedures. We maintain that it is necessary to publish materials about the actual conduct of the trials and the investigative procedures used, and at the same time about what kind of measures will be taken to guarantee control of the legal apparatus so that such cases will not be repeated.

We ask for amnesty for convicted persons similar to the amnesty recently declared in the Polish People's Republic.

6) University reforms were designed to prepare scholars for the needs of socialism through careful selection of students, better organization of the curriculum and improved economy of university management.

In many cases, however, the results of the reforms show that the productivity of the university student has gone down rather than risen. Let us mention some basic

questions:

a) Compulsory attendance. In the past the only check on students was the quality of their performance. The present reform prescribes the way in which they are supposed to work. This constrains individuality in their work.

Most students learn much more from books and from distributed course surveys; listening to lectures which lack value is a waste of time for them. If attendance at lectures is compulsory, then the lecturer has a guaranteed audience, even though his lectures might be poor. Practice has shown that critiquing of lectures in itself rarely improves their quality -whether the fault lies with the choice of material or with the capability of the lecturer. Experience shows that if lecturers are of high quality, students will attend their lectures.

We maintain that things must move in the direction of individual students using their own source materials. If these source materials were sufficient, study programs, particularly in the natural sciences, would be much more efficient.

b) Number of hours. We consider it unacceptable that under the present plan students in their early school years must spend about 36 hours a week in the classroom. How many hours a day do the reformers think a student has to work, given the fact that lectures are supposed to be only a framework and the student's main work lies in individual study?

c) Plan of study. We note a flagrant disproportion between basic, general courses and special courses. For instance, in the first year there are 16 hours of general courses and 18 hours of special courses. Marxism is studied for 4 hours a week for 8 semesters (6 hours a week in the first year). Russian is taught 2 hours a week for 4 semesters. even though students should already know it from secondary schools.

In contrast to this, for example, physical chemistry⁵, which is supposed to prepare graduates for research work in an area which combines physics and chemistry, offers students only 2 or 3 hours a week for 4 semesters.

We ask you to note the following requests:

- 1) We ask for an immediate review of the whole educational system.
- 2) We ask that this overall review of the organization of eleven-year schools and universities be publicly discussed in the press.
- 3) We believe that the introduction of eleven-year schools was a step backwards in our educational system.
- 4) We reject any action taken that presents teachers and students with a fait accompli.
- 5) We ask that the public be systematically informed, particularly by the press, about all plans and negotiations concerning school reform.
- 6) We ask that the review look back to the outstanding traditions of Czechoslovak education and take into account educational expertise worldwide.
- 7) We ask that the review be carried out by genuine experts and pedagogues

who must be given the opportunity to learn about foreign educational systems through actual experience abroad, and not through the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Education.

8) We ask that those officials of the Ministry of Education who implemented the precipitous reforms of the past years be identified and called to account.

9) We ask that Russian courses be limited to 1 semester of scientific terminology and that similar courses in other world languages be established.

10) We ask that Marxism be taught in a way which promotes the development of the students' world views without their being burdened with historical details. We believe that six semesters of Marxism-Leninism is enough.

11) We ask that appropriate central organs support an effort to intensify international student contacts - the exchange of publications and reciprocal visits of our students and Western students. We consider it necessary to put an end to the notion and the practice that international contacts are conducted only by officials from the regional level and higher. We ask that the number of student exchanges with the USSR be increased and that study in Western countries be made possible for a specified number of students and, in particular, for young scholars in various fields.

12) With regard to the unsatisfactory state of military training at universities and the difficulties which this causes students, and in the interests of our national defense, we consider it essential that the question of the effective training of reserve officers be discussed at a special meeting with representatives of the Faculty of Military Science and, if need be, on a university wide scale with representatives of the Ministry of Defense.

7) To improve all of our political work and to increase participation and the interest of people in public life, the mass organizations must work somewhat differently as well. It is not right for them to guarantee fulfillment only of plans from above or to deal only with problems in their workplaces. They must give their members the opportunity to discuss all questions of our life, including foreign policy matters, to discuss everything openly and without fear of ill consequences from superiors. This improvement will come only when these organizations strive not only to win the confidence of the higher organs, but to see to it that their members can trust and rely on their elected organs. These organs must then defend their organizations, explain and endeavor to put through the views of the general rank-and-file, and to help the latter formulate its desires and requests.

Finally, one of the goals of our discussions and of this letter is that the Youth Union itself become such an organization as soon as possible.⁶

[1] The term "Faculty" here refers to students rather than teachers of a particular department.

[2] Possible, perhaps.

[3] The Czech phrase (now probably outdated) meant something like 'we would like to see an increase in the foreign currency released . . .'

[4] perhaps 'which will eliminate the problems with foreign currencies'

[5] I used to be a physical chemist . . .

[6] This 'Princeton' translation of the 1956 resolution was scanned, OCRed and reviewed by Ladislav Nemeč on 12 May, 1996.