

March 31, 1969

**Czechoslovak Interior Minister Jan Pelnář, Report on
Security Situation in Czechoslovakia on Night of
28-29 March 1969**

Citation:

"Czechoslovak Interior Minister Jan Pelnář, Report on Security Situation in Czechoslovakia on Night of 28-29 March 1969", March 31, 1969, Wilson Center Digital Archive, ABS, Prague, f. A 10, arch.u. 181 (ÚSD, Prague, SKV, f. C II/282); translated for CWIHP by Jiří Mareš. Published in CWIHP Working Paper #69, "The (Inter-Communist) Cold War on Ice." <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/119585>

Summary:

Detailed report prepared by the Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of Interior listing anti-Soviet protests that took place in the evening of March 28-29 following the defeat of the Soviets by the Czechoslovak national team at the hockey world championships in Stockholm.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Czech

Contents:

Translation - English

On the March 28/March 29, 1969, night, after the ice hockey match between the teams of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, public gatherings took place in many towns and cities of the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic. Apart from normal manifestations of joy over the victory of our team, some groups of citizens in some of the cities made use of the opportunity to stage overt anti-Soviet protests; buildings, in particular those housing Soviet troops, were damaged and there were other public order disturbances as well.

The most serious situation developed in Prague, Ústí nad Labem, Bratislava, Košice and other, mainly larger cities.

In Prague, the offices of the Soviet AEROFLOT airline were demolished and their equipment set afire. In Ústí nad Labem, three motorcycles and two vehicles of the Soviet Army were set afire as well. In Jaroměř (East Bohemia), the mob even attacked the hospital and broke some of its windows. The disorderly rioters also damaged some memorials. Seventeen policemen who took part in riot-control actions in the territory of the Czech Socialist Republic were injured, three of them seriously. In the course of protests in the territory of the Czech Socialist Republic, altogether 20 rioters were brought by policemen to police precincts, of whom four were detained in accordance with the Penal Code, two were proposed to be remanded into custody, and three were handed over to investigators of public prosecution offices. Intensive investigation of all cases is going on.

In Bratislava and Košice, police intervened against protesters causing serious public disturbances. The latter were throwing stones and burning paper at the policemen, and were interfering with their intervention in other ways as well. Truncheons and tear gas were needed to perform the action. Thirty-four of the intervening policemen were lightly injured, and many others sustained minor bruises etc. The rioters damaged motor vehicles of the police and firefighting units. In Bratislava, 19 people were brought to police precincts, one of whom was proposed to be remanded into custody. Investigation is going on.

The police (Public Security) had prepared forces and assets, particularly in Prague and Bratislava, in the event of public disturbances by some of the citizens who would celebrate the victory of our hockey team over the Soviet team. However, the actual scope and nature of the gatherings, mainly in Prague, and their transformation into criminal acts exceeded the expectations. Still, the police in Prague, using its forces and means and sometimes in cooperation with members of the 5th Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, prevented protests in front of the Soviet Embassy, the Soviet Military HQ in Prague and other buildings. However, its members failed to prevent other events in Prague and elsewhere, mainly because of the spontaneous nature and scope of the protests, and had a very difficult time to restore order.

Descriptions of the course of events in the towns and cities where serious public order disturbances or other serious violations of our laws took place on the March 28/March 29, 1969, night are presented below:

Capital City of Prague

At about 10 PM, some 25,000 to 30,000 people gathered in Wenceslas Square and hundreds of cars were slowly moving up and down the square and through adjacent streets, constantly honking their horns and with their headlights on. Step by step, the crowd grew to 100,000 to 150,000 people and almost completely filled Wenceslas Square, Příkopy, Mezibranská, Jindřišská, Vodičkova and other streets in the vicinity. The result of the ice hockey game was written on shop-windows, cars, buildings and other surfaces. At 10.10PM, about a thousand people gathered in Old Town Square. However, they dispersed into adjacent streets within less than an hour. The massed crowds in Wenceslas Square were chanting different slogans praising our hockey players.

At 11.15 PM, a group of about 400 people left Wenceslas Square. They marched down Na Příkopě and Revoluční streets toward the (Letná) tunnel, their probable intention being to get to the Soviet Embassy. In cooperation with members of the 5th Directorate of the Ministry of Interior, arrangements were made to stop the crowd

and prevent its further advance. The human barrier composed of members of the Municipal Police Directorate of Prague indeed stopped the advance and, at about 1.00AM, all was quiet around the Soviet Embassy.

At about the same time, some 20,000 to 25,000 people gathered in Wenceslas Square, particularly in its lower part, between Můstek and the office of the Soviet AEROFLOT airline. Some 3,000 to 4,000 people were massed on the sidewalk and street directly in front of the AEROFLOT office. The display window of the office was broken; the cause of the breaking has not yet been established. In spite of the massed people, a patrol consisting of members of the Traffic Control Squad of the Municipal Police Directorate of Prague appeared there in a short time and immediately called for additional reinforcements. Twelve policemen were dispatched to the incident site, followed by an additional 40-strong reinforcement unit; however, when they arrived, the AEROFLOT office's display window had already been broken and a group of youths were demolishing the interior equipment.

The first group of policemen dispatched to the AEROFLOT office after the Traffic Control Squad patrol's report also experienced difficulties getting to the site, as their advance was blocked by protesters. As the police patrols fought their way to the AEROFLOT office, they did their best to apprehend the perpetrators, who continued to destroy the already demolished interior equipment of the Soviet airline's office. Some items of the interior equipment had already been thrown out onto the sidewalk earlier, where the protesters burnt them. The patrols were attacked by the crowd and the perpetrators they apprehended were literally torn out of their hands by the mob and allowed to escape. Some policemen were injured as early as at that stage of their intervention; consequently, there was no other option but to protect the office against further destruction. With the assistance of the reinforcement unit and some citizens, the policemen succeeded in pushing the crowd away from the building and restoring order in front of it.

The action in front of the AEROFLOT office claimed 10 wounded policemen, two of them seriously, who were injured by paving blocks or rods. At the same time, the massed crowd in front of the AEROFLOT office kept insulting them, shouting "Gestapo - beat them!" The police bus bringing additional police reinforcements was also pelted with stones in the same area.

The above description of the situation clearly indicates that the breaking of the display window and destruction of equipment of the Soviet airline's office could not be prevented.

The disorderly conduct described above resulted in a total destruction of the ground floor rooms of the AEROFLOT office. Their equipment was completely destroyed and the front part of the office utterly demolished. More specifically: all display windows and entrance doors were broken; telegraph, telephone and office equipment destroyed; furniture and carpeting were torn, broken and burnt; typewriters and calculators were destroyed as well.

All lighting fixtures were torn off and shattered, all promotional items (leaflets, aircraft models, various souvenirs etc.) were burnt; all furniture and appliances ("ZIL" refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, coffee and tea sets) were completely destroyed. Neon signs of AEROFLOT and INTOURIST, neon panels, movies and an electrical map of international flights of AEROFLOT were destroyed as well. Documents were partly burnt; some of them were tacked on tree trunks and walls around the office. The walls and floors of rooms were scarred and soiled.

According to indicative estimates, the damage sustained by the AEROFLOT office amounts to CSK 1 million.

At 01.45 AM, policemen advancing from the statue of St. Wenceslas and also from Můstek toward the center of Wenceslas Square succeeded in dispersing and scattering the massed crowd of people to adjacent streets. At around 02.15 AM, only some 200 people remained in the bottom part of the square. At about 03.00 AM, a new throng of 300 to 400 people formed around the statue of St. Wenceslas, where they were chanting various slogans. Throughout the demonstration in Wenceslas Square, the following slogans were chanted: "Shaibu, shaibu" (Score, score!); "One, two, three, four - score"; "Long live Jiřík, long live Golonka" etc. Later on, especially during the demolition of the AEROFLOT office, the following slogans were chanted:

“CSSR – occupiers 4:3,” “Watch out, Tarasov”; “Ussuri, Ussuri”; “Go home Ivans, you have Chinese at your doorstep.” At about 03.15 AM, peace and order were restored throughout Wenceslas Square.

During the protests in Wenceslas Square, decorations and adornments around the statue of St. Wenceslas were also completely destroyed.

During the demonstration, eight people were apprehended in Wenceslas Square and brought to the Municipal Police Directorate of Prague, interrogated and later released.

North Bohemia

At 10.30 PM, 4,000 to 5,000 people gathered in front of the building of the Soviet HQ in Ústí nad Labem. They first chanted the result of the hockey match. The pressure of the crowd broke some of the building’s windows. Shortly afterward, two Soviet officers, a major and a captain, emerged from the building. The latter fired one shot into the air from his pistol, whereupon the massed crowd pulled back and responded by insults and stones and pieces of bricks thrown at the HQ building. In the course of these events, some more windows were broken, and the equipment in two rooms on the ground floor, the door to the building and plastering were damaged.

Some youths then took a jerrican with petrol from a Soviet truck parked in front of the building; another group turned over a GAZ 4x4 standing nearby, doused both vehicles with petrol and set them afire. The same people then pushed three motorcycles with sidecars parked nearby to the burning vehicles; these were burnt as well. A fire squad was summoned to the site; one of its members was injured by broken glass. The damage caused to the Soviet vehicles is approximately CSK 150,000.

Police reinforcements intervened against the people massed on the site; the policemen were attacked with stones and pieces of bricks.

Three policemen were injured, one of them seriously.

[...]

The intervention restored order and peace in Ústí nad Labem.

[...]

In Liberec, some 15,000 to 20,000 people gathered in Náměstí Bojovníků za mír (Peace Fighters’ Square) after the hockey match. Some youngsters among them were chanting slogans against Soviet leaders.

[...]

Similarly, a crowd of about a thousand people gathered in front of the Soviet HQ building in Teplice, chanting various slogans. At that time, a Soviet tank and two APCs moved in front of the building and were parked there.

[...]

Central Bohemia

In Mladá Boleslav, some 5,000 people gradually gathered on Lidové Milice (People’s Militia) street in front of the 9th of May Barracks. The largest crowd consisting mainly of young people filled the area in front of the gate of the barracks, chanting slogans such as “4:3,” “You are chickenshit” etc., and singing the Czechoslovak anthem.

Shortly after 10.00 PM, three Soviet armored cars drove out of the side entrance of the barracks, with machine guns sticking out. As the vehicles were passing by, some people started throwing stones into the windows of the barracks and bundles of firecrackers on the roof. They started chanting insulting slogans, including “Brezhnev is an asshole,” “Kosygin is an asshole,” “Ivans, take on the Chinese,” “All could see that the Russians are fucked,” or “Fascists, fascists.” At about 11.30 PM, as the

armored cars were returning to the barracks, some people tried to get closer to the vehicles, whereupon their crews reacted by firing several bursts from their submachine guns into the air. Soviet soldiers responded to the insulting slogans by throwing empty bottles and loaded cartridges at the crowd and firing flares from the windows on the street.

Also participating in the riot were about 40 Czechoslovak soldiers, who were unruly, with too long hair, and of uncouth behavior. The actions described above resulted in 81 broken window panes; where the windows were double, the number will increase.

In some cases, the police attempted to apprehend our citizens who were shouting insults, but were unable to do so because of the reaction of the crowd.

At about midnight, the gathering dispersed. No one was apprehended or brought to the police station.

[...]

North Moravia

At around 10.00 PM, crowds of citizens gathered in different towns and cities, marching in processions and chanting various slogans, most of them celebrating the victory in the hockey match. In Bruntál, Karviná, Nový Bohumín, Frýdek-Místek, Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, Fulnek, Nový Jičín, Opava and other towns, these gatherings numbered up to a thousand people. In Havířov, there were about 3,000 people and there were also some 80 hooting vehicles driving through the city. The largest crowd of about 4,000 people and many vehicles gathered in Olomouc. The city where Soviet units are garrisoned saw anti-Soviet demonstrations. The crowd was chanting slogans such as "Shaibu, shaibu" (Score, score!) and "Russians out." The whole crowd then moved in front of the Soviet HQ in Žižka Square, where it was protesting for about an hour. Some 25 windows of the Soviet HQ building were broken during the protests. The perpetrators were not identified. Members of the District Police Department in Olomouc secured the scene. Two tires of a GAZ vehicle (ID unknown) parked in front of the building were punctured. An unknown perpetrator also punctured a tyre of a parked Soviet bus. Total damage has not yet been calculated. The case is investigated by the District Police Department in Olomouc. The crowd dispersed at about midnight.

The crowd in Fulnek chanted slogans such as "Tarasov, eat your notebook," "Let us take clubs and drive Russians out"; in Rožnov, the crowd chanted "They came with tanks, but we scored four goals against them." In Ostrava, the crowd chanted "Ivan go home - this is for August."

[...]

The policemen did not use tear gas or truncheons; they only ordered the crowds to disperse and their orders were heeded. No police vehicles were damaged and no policemen injured. Soviet soldiers did not intervene against our citizens shouting slogans in front of buildings occupied by Soviet troops. In Šumperk, a Soviet patrol, whose members' names were not found out, apprehended O. B., born on [...], who had a Czechoslovak flag on his car [...] and drove at the head of the procession. The Šumperk policemen, who took him over from the Soviet patrol, established his identity and released him. In Krnov, a Soviet GAZ vehicle (ID G-ShCh 6120) parked in the square was damaged. The driver of the vehicle was not identified. Unknown perpetrators bent its windshield wipers and broke its taillights. The damage was CSK 100.

[...]

In Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, unknown perpetrators tore signs off the building of the

Soviet HQ in Náměstí míru (Peace Square).

[...]

In the District of Olomouc, the District Police Chief declared 100% readiness; his counterpart in the District of Karviná declared 50% readiness. There were no cases of serious public order disturbances involving damage to property and the whole region was, as of midnight, peaceful.

South Moravia

Some 30,000 people took part in gatherings and processions in the region of South Moravia. Twenty-five processions that marched through Brno, Břeclav, Žďár, Vyškov, Blansko, Třebíč, Uherské Hradiště, Gottwaldov, Kroměříž and Prostějov numbered about 2,000 people each. The largest crowd, some 18,000 people, gathered in Brno's Náměstí míru (Peace Square); in other places, there were 1,000 to 3,000 people. Slogans such as "The gold medal will be ours - and you will go to Siberia," "We want Svoboda," "Slivovitz for Dubček - club on the head for Brezhnev," "Now they did not have tanks and received four goals" were chanted during the gatherings and processions.

In rare cases, the slogans "Long live Hitler" and "Long live the USA" were chanted in Uherské Hradiště. The procession that marched through Prostějov carried banners with inscriptions such as "Go home Ivans, the Chinese are getting ready for you," "CSSR - occupying forces 4:3" etc. Participating in these gatherings were relatively high numbers of passenger cars and trucks. Some 400 cars drove through Brno with their lights on and horns hooting. In other towns, a total of 200 passenger cars, 20 trucks and 1 bus participated in the rallies. As a rule, the vehicles bore the result of the hockey game or the slogan "For August." Maroons [this refers to firecracker-like rockets making a loud banging noise—O.T.] were used in the processions in about 130 instances (20 in Gottwaldov, 40 in Žďár, 80 in Uherské Hradiště - close to the housing estate of Soviet military personnel, 10 in Brno). There were no cases of serious public order disturbances during the events and policemen did not have to intervene anywhere.

[...]

East Bohemia

In Havlíčkův Brod, some 500 people gathered in front of the building of the District Police Department, which also houses the Soviet HQ. The crowd was chanting various slogans, such as "Ivans go home," "Beat them," etc. In Jaroměř, about 4,000 people started marching toward a Soviet military depot and attempted to get inside its compound. The Soviet guard fired several submachine bursts in the air, whereupon the crowd withdrew. It, however, proceeded toward the military hospital, now used by the Soviet Army. There was a lot of booing and catcalls and 21 windows of the hospital were broken. The crowd withdrew only after the Soviet guard had fired several submachine bursts in the air. Wreaths laid at the Memorial of the Soviet Army were destroyed. A GAZ vehicle parked at the hospital had its tyres punctured. At 00.30 AM, the crowd dispersed.

Five to six hundred people also gathered in buildings occupied by Soviet troops in Trutnov, Rychnov nad Kněžnou and Rokytnice v Orlických horách. In Trutnov, a clash between our citizens and Soviet soldiers took place in front of the Soviet barracks. Both sides threw stones at each other. One Czechoslovak citizen was injured. Several windows of the barracks were broken as well.

In Pardubice, there was a gathering of 20,000 to 25,000 people. The crowd was chanting various slogans, and a Soviet flag with a painted swastika was carried at the head of the procession.

South Bohemia

In Slavonice, Český Krumlov and Pelhřimov, processions numbering 500 to 1,500 people were marching through the towns. They chanted anti-Soviet slogans, such as "Death to occupiers," "Chervonenko is just gaping at how we can play" etc. People shouting these slogans were not identified, as other people participating in the rallies made that impossible.

There were no cases of public order disturbances by people participating in the rallies in other towns and cities in South Bohemia.

West Bohemia

Some 30,000 people participated in the rally in Pilsen. They were marching through the city. The event did not involve any disturbances, except for the burning of a Soviet flag and its tossing out of a window of the student dormitory in Pilsen-Bory. The perpetrator has not been identified yet.

East Slovakia

After the ice hockey match, rallies took place in Košice and Prešov. In Košice, some 1,200 university students left their dormitories, carrying burning torches and shooting from starter pistols. They completely stopped the traffic and the municipal transport system, as they were joined by more people.

A group of 45 policemen was dispatched by the Municipal Police Directorate to restore order and the traffic flow. Upon their command, some of the demonstrators left, others started throwing stones and burning paper torches at them, shouting "...Gestapo, SS-men ...," etc. Tear gas and truncheons were used; the crowd turned and ran away. Two people stumbled and were run over in the process. Two policemen were injured, many others suffered minor bruises. In addition, the rioters damaged police and firefighting vehicles.

In Prešov, some 300 students and non-students took part in the rally. They carried a sports flag and dispersed without any resistance when ordered to do so by the police.

No anti-Soviet, anti-socialist or insulting slogans were chanted.

Central Slovakia

Similar rallies took place in Žilina (some 2,000 people), Banská Bystrica (about 700 people), Zvolen (500 people) and Martin (150 people). These processions marched peacefully and no circumstances requiring a police intervention occurred. The rallies dispersed by 11.00 PM. No people or policemen were injured.

West Slovakia

The gatherings and processions took place in the following towns and cities: Nitra – some 500 people, mostly students, carrying a placard with the following slogan: "Send your tanks to protect your goal..." Having marched through the city's streets, the people sang the national anthem at the castle and dispersed.

In Trnava, some 150 people appeared on streets at about 10.15 PM, chanting "Shaibu, shaibu" (Score, score!); they sang the national anthem and then dispersed.

In Šala (Galanta District), some 500 people took part in the rally. The gatherings in Trenčín, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Trenčianské Teplice and Stará Turá numbered 300, 200, 300 and 100 people, respectively. They were chanting slogans such as "...Long live Dubček and Svoboda..." "...Long live Golonka and Dzurilla, long live Czech hockey players..." In all the towns listed above, the rally was concluded by the Czechoslovak national anthem or other hymnal compositions.

The situation did not require a police intervention in any of the towns listed above.

The most serious situation developed in the city of Bratislava, where large numbers of students, citizens and other young people gathered in various squares, in particular in Námestie SNP (Slovak Uprising Square). They marched there carrying torches made from newspapers and were chanting sport slogans. Some of the university students later dispersed there; however, some of them joined other young people (including those with a criminal record) and adult citizens and proceeded toward the Soviet HQ building in Miletičova Street, where policemen intervened against them. As the rioters resisted the policemen, throwing stones etc., truncheons and tear gas were used. Thirty-two policemen sustained injuries during the riot-control actions, mostly minor ones.

As to the rioters, 19 of them were apprehended and brought to police stations. Fifteen of them were found to be university students, one was a doctor of medicine, one was a journalist and the rest were workers, drivers etc.

Windows of some police vehicles were broken by stones thrown by rioters.

Order was restored at about 00.30 AM.