

Czechs respond to normalization with consumption and apathy

By Radoslav Selucky

While thousands of articles and hundreds of books have been written about the dramatic Czechoslovakian events between January 1968 and April 1969, only a few observers have dealt with the post-Dubcek era in a comprehensive manner. This is not to say that the outside world was left without any news from the country. It has been kept informed of arrests and purges of the most prominent reformers, of the regime's ideological rigidity and of the sad atmosphere in the occupied cities. Such information, interesting though it could be, failed, however, to give a clear picture of contemporary Czechoslovakia. The outside world does not know enough about the state of Czechoslovak political, economic and cultural affairs. Moreover, it knows even less about possible alternatives for the country's development.

Shortly after replacing Mr. Dubcek as the party leader in April 1969, Mr. Gustav Husak announced his five-point normalization program: (1) revival of the party's unity; (2) strengthening of its leading role; (3) reinforcement of the authority of state organs; (4) consolidation of the national economy; (5) restoration of the brotherly relations with other Communist parties and socialist countries. Reading these five points of the normalization program as they were intended by Mr. Husak, one should interpret the term "normalization" as the return to the neo-Stalinist system which prevailed in the late 1950s.

Thus the "unity of the ruling party" could not be achieved without purging about half a million of the reform-oriented Communists. The "strengthening of the party's leading role" had to be preceded by a purge whose sole object was the leading reformers at all the levels of government: 44 cabinet ministers of the federal and the two republican governments lost their positions; no fewer than 270 members of the federal and the two republican parliaments were dismissed; about 12,700 elected members of regional, district and municipal governments were purged; at least 900 leading elected officials of trade unions were recalled; 64 members of the Communist Party's Central Committee were ex-

pelled, and some 14,000 party, trade union and governmental bureaucrats were fired. Approximately 200,000 white collars, including civil servants, managers, economists, technicians, lawyers, professors, teachers, actors, diplomats, police and army officers, journalists, writers, judges and scientists, were either demoted or deprived of their jobs. If we add to the victims of the normalization another 100,000 people who emigrated to the West, we may conclude that the country lost most of its *élite*. For a nation of 15 million people, such a sudden loss was equal to what the famous French Communist author Louis Aragon called metaphorically "the intellectual Biafra" and the Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Boll "a perfect cultural cemetery".

The "reinforcing of the authority of state organs" was just a euphemistic expression for the restoration of censorship and for tough administrative control over art, science and culture. Books of several hundred authors have been discarded by all public libraries; the mass media were provided with a list of people who must not be published; even in the scholarly

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