

army. They then consolidated their position by appointing communists to key posts in the police and by gaining control of the trade unions through infiltration. Then, through the radio and the controlled press they discredited and undermined the influence of their chief opponents by falsely accusing them of treasonable activities. A political crisis was next artificially brought about. The communists then demonstrated beyond all possibility of doubt that they were both ready and willing to use force to solve that crisis by seizing power themselves. The democratic parties and their leaders were faced, so they thought, with a choice between chaos and submission. Indeed, the choice was so influenced by the ominous attitude of a close and powerful neighbour that it could hardly be called choice at all.

Communist action committees, organized well in advance, then took charge of all activities, both national and local from government ministries and the courts to factories and football teams. All the grim mechanism of the totalitarian state was swiftly brought into play-- arrests of political opponents, prostitution of justice, control of the press, and intimidation of all non-communists. Wholesale purges of civil servants, editors, teachers, managers, and all persons of influence or responsibility were carried out. With power secured by such despotic methods, the communist government then made elaborate plans for an "election", an election in which the right to vote is a privilege reserved for those who will vote right--or rather left! Such an election is scheduled for May 30 in Czechoslovakia. Its results can be foretold with accuracy, and they will deceive no one.

The fate of Czechoslovakia is indeed a frightening case history of communist totalitarianism in action. It is well worth careful study. To understand the shock produced by the complete extinction of Czech democracy in a world not altogether unaccustomed to news of this nature, it is necessary to remember the length and the strength of the Czech democratic tradition and the peculiar significance it has long held for world democracy. Nowhere has the struggle for human freedom and liberal democracy been carried on more valiantly or more persistently than in the Bohemian lands. It was as the heirs of this great liberal and humane tradition that the Czech people were able in the twenty years between the two world wars to establish and preserve liberal democratic institutions which were a model to other less fortunate states.

The nazis were well aware that in conquering Czechoslovakia they were striking a formidable blow at world democracy. The communist dictators of today are equally conscious of the importance of the Czech democratic tradition to the western world. When the Czechs were forced by outside pressure to withdraw their acceptance of the invitation to participate in the discussions of the Marshall Plan in Paris last September, it was clear that Czechoslovakia was not to be permitted to act as a bridge between west and east. It has now become apparent to what lengths communist governments will go in preventing co-operation between the free and democratic west and the totalitarian governments of eastern Europe. The Czechs had loyally lived up to their obligations as a member of the Soviet bloc. They were a threat to no one. They were steadily and sturdily rebuilding their economy on a basis of democratic socialism. Yet their liberties have been ruthlessly wiped out by a Soviet-inspired communist fifth column.

Those in each free nation who love freedom should draw the clear lesson of the tragedy of Czechoslovakia. That lesson is that it is impossible to co-operate with communists. They do not want co-operation. They want domination. Communists will pretend to co-operate with non-Communists just so long as it is in their interests to do so. But once they are in a position to seize power, they will seize it and will then discard or destroy the non-communist allies. People in Canada, the United States, France, Italy and other countries have been long in learning this lesson. Let us hope that they have now learned it well. The things that divide the democratic parties of the free states, by whatever names they call themselves--Socialists, Liberals, Catholics, Conservatives, Progressive Conservatives--are as nothing compared with the gulf that separates them all from the communists.