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CANADA ASSESSES THE INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Speech by the Secretary of State for External Affairs,
the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, to the Ukrainian Canadian
Congress, Winnipeg, October 13, 1968.

Three years ago, at the last Congress of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee, you observed the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Committee's foundation. On that occasion, my predecessor as Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Paul Martin, spoke to the Congress about Canadian foreign policy and took as one of his main themes our relations with the Communist world, and especially the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe.

I return to that theme now, before an audience that exemplifies Canada's historic ties with the European continent. The civilization of the Ukraine, in which you and your fathers have enabled us all to share, has flourished for centuries in its own soil, and flourishes now in the no less fertile soil of Canada. No one like myself who grew up in Winnipeg could possibly be unaware of the immense contribution of Ukrainian Canadians to the development of our country. Your community is one of the major components of the Canadian mosaic. Last year, when we celebrated our centennial, all Canadians had an occasion to review with pride the strength, prosperity and unity that our country has achieved over the past 100 years by the joint efforts of people with widely-diversified origins. I have not the slightest doubt that in Canada's second century Canadians of Ukrainian background will play just as important a role as they have in the past, under wise leadership like that of Monsignor Kushnir and drawing on the talents of distinguished men in public life such as my friend Michael Starr.

I noticed in the papers you have been considering at this Congress that you are looking forward to the future and not simply recalling the achievements of the past. That is what we must all be doing at this point in Canadian history. The future of our country will be what we make it - what we do ourselves with the resources and the cultural and political heritage that have been passed on to us. Our heritage, fortunately, is largely one of peaceful progress in a stable environment, unlike many countries in other parts of the world.

During the past three years the world scene has been changing rapidly and not least in Europe. There the Communist world and the free world have been face to face for over 20 years. The issues dividing them have been the most vital and the most intractable and yet paradoxically there has been a surprising degree of stability. But it has been the stability of impasse. No progress has been made to solve the major issues such as the reunification of Germany and European security. Both sides, fearing a nuclear holocaust, have counselled caution. They still do.

But notwithstanding the impasse between East and West, significant changes have been taking place in Europe.

Over the past ten years, Western Europe has been one of the most dynamic areas of the world. During the last five years, the same kind of dynamism began to emerge in Eastern Europe as well. East-West relations were affected. The frozen postures of years began to dissolve. It even became possible to envisage an equitable European settlement, and, indeed, the development of genuine peace and co-operation between East and West, not only in Europe but in the world at large, without the abandonment of basic principles on either side. Then, suddenly, without warning, the U.S.S.R. and its allies invaded Czechoslovakia. The evolution was arrested. Hopes were deflated.

Canada cannot dissociate itself from what happens in Europe. Our interests there - not only our interest in East-West relations to which I have referred but our day-to-day relations with each European country - are all subject to evolution and change.

Europe has changed enormously in the last few years, and so has Canada. For this reason, when the present Government assumed office we immediately put in train a thoroughgoing review of several of the principal areas of Canadian foreign policy, including our relations with Europe. We want to determine for ourselves whether Canadian policies accord with contemporary conditions in Canada and the world, and whether we are using the most effective means of carrying those policies out.

As you know, these reviews have not yet been completed, and I am not, therefore, in a position to present any conclusions to you tonight. But when they are ready we shall be presenting our conclusions to Parliament and to the people for the fullest and frankest discussion.

In the meantime, however, let me assure you that, as our review proceeds, it necessarily takes account of events as they unfold. The invasion of Czechoslovakia, for example, has the greatest relevance both to our review of defence policy and our study of Canadian relations with Europe. Nor is our examination of this subject limited to the Canadian scene. We are considering with our allies in NATO the ramifications of the continuing Soviet military occupation of Czechoslovakia.

The invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and its allies was a harsh and chilling reminder that we must still live with the legacies of the past - that the peaceful evolution of Europe toward détente, out of which entente might in due course emerge, is seen as intolerable by those to whom freedom is a threat and any change a counter-revolution. Yet, if any real and enduring understanding between East and West is to be achieved, there must be a transformation of attitudes. Unless that takes place there is little hope for the development of mutual understanding.

What sort of transformation is possible? We do not expect the abandonment of their social system by the Communist states. We have no intention of abandoning ours. Given these basic positions, we can hope for progress only through the slow development of confidence, based on genuine respect for differences. No Western country had any part in the course of reform which Czechoslovakia took at the beginning of this year. Knowing the risks they ran, and respecting the choices they would make, it would have been irresponsible and wrong to have sought to influence the Czechoslovak people in their course. We responded with friendship to their friendship freely offered. We never questioned their right or intention to retain their ties with the rest of Eastern Europe. We could only hope, as the Czechoslovaks did, that the Soviet Union would not find freedom and friendship intolerably inconsistent with the principles by which its own policies are governed.

Our hopes, and the hopes, as I have said, of all on both sides who believe that genuine East-West confidence and co-operation is possible, have been callously crushed. Thinking people must now ask themselves whether peaceful co-operation is really possible, when the Soviet Union, without the least justification and ignoring the basic principles of international law and of the United Nations Charter -- the sovereign equality of states and their obligation to refrain from the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of others --, is openly coercing Czechoslovakia by military occupation. In addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations last week, I reminded delegates that, less than two years ago, as a result of an initiative by the U.S.S.R. itself, the Assembly had declared, with no dissenting voice, that: "No state has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal affairs of any other state. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the state or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are condemned".

But such principles, the Soviet Government itself now tells us, are of no importance when the U.S.S.R. decides that its own political interests are better served without them. "Nobody," we are told, "will be allowed to wrest a single link from the socialist chain." The metaphor is unfortunately all too apt.

I told the United Nations General Assembly that, for our part, Canada cannot and will not accept the claim that some alleged community of interest, be it political or cultural or economic, can ever under any circumstances entitle one country to interfere in the internal affairs of another. We recognize no "spheres of influence". States have every right to their legitimate security interests, but not at the expense of the sovereignty and

independence of others. States have every right to protect their own social and political and economic systems, but not at the expense of others whose choice is different from theirs. The principle of non-intervention is absolutely fundamental to international relations. If it is not observed, there can be no confidence between states and therefore no relations which can go beyond fear and mistrust.

When the invasion of Czechoslovakia occurred, Canada condemned it unequivocally. On the day of the invasion, I summoned the representatives of the invading powers and informed them clearly and in strong terms of our condemnation. We and like-minded fellow-members of the Security Council also requested that the Council be called into emergency session. On the following day, August 22, Canada and six other co-sponsors introduced a resolution which affirmed the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia; condemned the interference of the U.S.S.R. and other members of the Warsaw Pact in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia and called upon them to withdraw forthwith; and called upon members of the United Nations to exercise their diplomatic influence on the invading countries to bring about prompt implementation of the resolution.

When this resolution was vetoed by the U.S.S.R., Canada introduced a further resolution requesting the despatch of a special United Nations representative to Prague to seek the release and ensure the personal safety of the Czechoslovak leaders then under Soviet arrest. Happily, by the next day, we learned that the intentions of this initiative had been achieved, largely through the courage of the Czechoslovak leaders themselves.

The harsh reality remains, however, that hundreds of thousands of foreign troops, with their armour and aircraft, remain on Czechoslovak soil. In many ways the situation now is more complex and difficult than it was in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. We have no right, any more than has the Soviet Union, to interfere in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia. It would certainly be no service to the Czechoslovak Government or people for us to behave in such a way as to lend substance to the empty Soviet claims that Czechoslovakia was acting as a tool of Western interests. Nor, indeed, would it be in the interests of the West or of Czechoslovakia to ignore another reality, which is that, ultimately, only the Czechoslovak people can work out their own destiny. I am confident, nevertheless, that their ordeal will end in their triumph.

What then can we do? Certainly we cannot behave as if nothing has happened. Certainly the realities I have mentioned demand a policy designed to meet them.

The first steps were obviously to provide on an emergency basis for those refugees from Czechoslovakia who sought to come to Canada. Circumstances so far have been different from those in Hungary in 1956, so that comparably large numbers of refugees have not left Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, we took measures promptly as soon as it became clear that even a relatively small flow was about to begin, in accordance with the Government's declared policy that all those Czechoslovak refugees who want to come to Canada will be welcome.

We had also to consider how best to demonstrate in concrete form the condemnation we had expressed of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The representatives of the invading countries have sought to maintain that their action should have no effect on their relations with Canada and that, in effect, their aggression was nobody's business but their own. I have made it clear to them that that is far from our view, that our relations have inevitably been severely strained and that they cannot be restored, at least until the occupying forces are withdrawn from Czechoslovakia.

Much of the substance of those relations has been in exchange of visits by individuals and delegations, and in the exchange of information in various technical and scientific fields. Where these exchanges have had political content, it is clearly inopportune that they should continue at this time. Nor would it be consistent with our policy to embark on new projects for the present. Similarly, since the Canadian people's attitude toward the U.S.S.R. and its allies has been shaken by their aggression against Czechoslovakia, a number of visits and exchanges arranged privately have been postponed or cancelled on the initiative of the Canadian organizations concerned or on the advice of the Government.

This has not meant that all normal dealings with the Warsaw Pact countries have been brought to a halt. In the long run, it is in no one's interest to eliminate contact with the people of those countries. Where private organizations or individuals decide that, for various reasons, they wish to continue existing arrangements, it is not the Government's policy to put obstacles in their way. Many such arrangements, such as academic exchanges between universities or cultural events, are of long standing and could be re-established only with difficulty if they were now interrupted. The same is true of certain of the purely technical and scientific programmes of a long-term nature in which certain official agencies take part.

In a far broader sense, we must also bear in mind that the evolution of recent years toward co-operation instead of confrontation between East and West is our best hope -- and perhaps our only hope -- of eliminating violence from international relations.

I spoke at the beginning of the new dynamism in European affairs and the possibilities it seemed to open up. I have spoken further of the blow which the U.S.S.R. has dealt to international confidence, without which East-West dialogue can lead nowhere and we shall remain trapped in the blind alleys of the past. The deep sense of insecurity which Moscow has revealed by its action does not bode well for any progress toward even minor East-West understandings in Europe in the foreseeable future. We know that what we have been able to do and can do in future will be of little direct help to the Czechoslovaks. We welcome those who choose to come here in the bitter knowledge that those who stay in Czechoslovakia must find their way largely alone. Our policy must not make their task more difficult.

But we have a task which is also difficult and which, in the long run, is of vital importance for human survival. Five years and more of patient work seem for the moment to have been wasted. The prospects for the future seem dim. But history does not end with the arrival of the Red Army, and we should be wrong to conclude that all is lost. Our task is to find a way back to rational and constructive dialogue, without sacrifice of our principles. We have no choice but to live with the world as it is, but we shall have no real hope if we do not persist in the search for ways to change it peacefully. After what has occurred, it remains to be seen whether the Soviet leaders are capable of seeing far enough beyond their own immediate fears to grasp this fundamental fact.

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