

# THE CZECHOSLOVAK TRADE UNIONS

1870-1970

THE PRAGUE SPRING

OCCUPATION AND « NORMALISATION »

THE AFTERMATH

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International Confederation  
of Free Trade Unions

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## INTRODUCTION

by Harm G. Buiter, General Secretary of the International  
Confederation of Free Trade Unions

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Two years after the 21st of August 1968, the tragedy of Czechoslovakia is still fresh in our minds; there is no need to recall the march of events which first aroused hopes, then shock, indignation and despair throughout the world. These events have been examined from various angles by outside observers and many publications have appeared already, giving eye-witness accounts, political analyses and conclusions.

Here we have attempted something different and more specific — to describe the effects of these events on the Czechoslovak workers and the trade union movement, as reported from within. This booklet shows something of its past and of the transformations it underwent, the aspirations of the workers piercing through the stilted phrases and official jargon, their hopes unmistakably implied if not voiced. Purposely, we have left the facts and public statements to speak for themselves. They give trade union reactions through the « Spring » of 1968, through the invasion and occupation of the country by troops of the Soviet Union and four other Warsaw-Pact powers. The developments in the trade unions since then, the imposition of Soviet directives under the country's occupation, emerge clearly from the published decrees and official decisions.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions has maintained an unequivocal stand on the events throughout. It emphatically condemned the occupation and the continued interference by Soviet imperialism in the political, economic and social life of Czechoslovakia in violation of the peoples' right to self-determination, and ranged itself on the side of the Czechoslovak workers striving to achieve greater freedom for the trade union organisations defending their rights.

The recognition that the will of these workers to achieve human rights — and the right to have genuine trade unions of their own — has remained unbroken by their bitterest disillusion comes out very strongly in this booklet. It is in homage to their struggle that this modest publication is dedicated.

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## THE BIRTH OF THE TRADE UNIONS TO THE FIRST OCCUPATION (1870-1939)

The full extent of the tragedy of Czechoslovakia in 1968/69 — a tragedy also of the country's trade union movement — can only be properly appreciated and judged in terms of the historical perspective. The events of the short-lived « Czechoslovak Spring » cannot be taken out of context, or analysed separately without reference to each other. And this is especially true of what befell the nation's trade unions, a century old this year.

On 2 January 1870, representatives of various small trade union organisations met in Prague to discuss the foundation of a central federation under whose umbrella would be grouped not only the workers of Prague, but all Czech workers in what was then the Austrian Empire. The demands put forward at this conference — legal admission of the right to strike, general electoral rights, the freedom of the press — have so to speak never lost their significance for the trade unions of Czechoslovakia. Nearly 100 years later, in 1968, it was a set of practically identical demands which was the keynote of the so-called democratisation process and which gave it its basically free trade union goals.

The formation of the « Czechoslav Association of Trade Unions » (OSC — Odborové sdružení československé) on 31 January 1897 bore witness to the national tensions and differences then reigning, tensions from which the Austrian trade unions were not immune either. The « centralists » among the Czech trade unionists took the view that there could only be one trade union centre in the Austro-Hungarian Empire — that in Vienna — whilst the « autonomists » wanted their own national federation. By 1913, trade unions holding the latter view had built up a membership of 105,000, whilst the « centralist » federations could only muster 65,000. A further fragmentation ensued from the rise of the Czech Workers' Community (COD — Česká obec dělnická, founded in 1902), which experienced a rapid growth in influence before the First World War and which was composed exclusively of members of the People's Socialist Party. Just before the outbreak of war, it had a membership of almost 77,000.

The founding of the Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October 1918 also marked the beginning of a new era for the trade union

movement. It changed not only in name : the Czechoslovak Association of Trade Unions now called itself Czechoslovak and immediately became not only a powerful political force on the domestic front but also a guarantor of social progress, freedom and democracy in the confused and potentially revolutionary post-war years. By 1919, the OSC had already gathered 650,000 members : a year later the figure was 856,305. Alongside the OSC was the Czechoslovak Workers' Community with 348,349 members, the Central Trade Union Committee of the German Trade Union Federation in Czechoslovakia with 403,211 members, and various Social-Christian trade unions with a combined membership of 87,105.

The OSC took an active part in the affairs of the international free trade union movement and was represented at the Congress of the International Federation of Trade Unions in Amsterdam in 1919. For nearly 20 years it was a member of the Amsterdam trade union international, the precursor of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

The left wing having previously split off from the social democrats, revolution was in the air as the OSC Congress met in Prague at the end of January 1922. Flashpoint was reached with the vote on whether to continue affiliation with the IFTU in Amsterdam or to join the new Red Trade Union International in Moscow. In the event, the voting was 339 for the IFTU, 227 for Moscow, but for the future of trade unionism in Czechoslovakia the signs were already there for all to see. The departure of the communist-led trade unions from the OSC was merely a logical outcome of the existing conflict between democrats and communists, but it meant the end of labour unity in Czechoslovakia until another 23 years has passed, when — in 1945 — it was restored under quite different auspices.

With the founding of the « International All-Trade Union Federation », as the new Czechoslovak Communist trade union called itself (later it changed its name to Central Organisation of Industrial Federations), the trade union fronts within Czechoslovakia took on the forms they were to keep until 1938. Cautious attempts at reunification foundered on unbridgeable political differences. In spite of considerable jockeying for position, the CSC's leading role remained practically unchallenged until the fateful year of 1938. In 1930, there were altogether 1,730,494 organised workers in the country. The OSC alone grouped 600,419 of them, and of the rest 288,231 belonged to the Czechoslovak Workers' Community. The communists were left with a membership of only 113,702.

The first stage of the tragedy which began in 1938 was completed on 15 March 1939 when Hitler annexed the remainder of Czechoslovakia; it was the death blow for the up till then free Czechoslovak trade union movement. On the order of the German occupants, the existing labour centres were obliged to follow the Nazi German pattern and join a new all-embracing organisation with the name of National Centre of Workers (NOUZ). The communist trade union centre — the Organisation of Industrial Federations — had already gone into voluntary liquidation in November 1938 on express orders from Moscow.

## **FROM TRADE UNION UNITY TO TRADE UNION SUBJECTION** (1945-1948)

The end of the Second World War caught most Czechoslovak trade union officials in a state of organisational unpreparedness. It is true that the influential trade union resistance group PVVZ, which was only one among many, could point to substantial successes in the battle against the German occupier, but planning for the future was subject to unpardonable delay. Whilst the spring of 1945 found almost all the free trade union resistance groups still engaged exclusively in the physical struggle against the occupying forces, the communists were already well on the way — they actually started in January — towards completion of a practical plan of action for the new Revolutionary Trade Union Movement. This programme, astutely oriented tactically and geared to making skilful use of the radical upsurge manifested by workers in almost all countries in the last months of the war, not only proclaimed the need for trade union unity in all circumstances, but also condemned, root and branch, what it called « trade union reformism »; it was to be the foundation stone of the communists' subsequent complete takeover of power in the Czechoslovak labour movement.

This neglect of preparing a programme at an early stage was to prove fatal a few years later. While democratic trade unionists of all tendencies had only vague visions of the future, the communists had a clearly-defined trade union programme in hand. Helped by the radicalisation of public opinion which had taken

hold of almost all sections of the population at the end of the war and in the first few turbulent weeks of peace (May-June 1945), the communists found it relatively easy to attack with massive threats not only the collaborators and the discredited bourgeoisie but also « reformist » trade unionists.

Step by step, communist trade union officials of the pre-war period took over all the key posts in the new, unified trade union organisation which was being created. While the democratic trade union officials were trying to clear themselves of the « blame » of reformism in the Spring and Summer of 1945, the communists were busy consolidating their positions of power.

In January 1946, the first All-Trade Union Congress met in Prague. It led to the first open clashes between the democratic and the communist wings of the trade union movement, but as a result of the disproportion of power, any confrontation could only produce one foregone conclusion. As to the mood in the rank-and-file at the time, here is an extract from the official Trade Union History (1), published in 1963 in Prague : « At the beginning of 1946, the communists in the trade unions were slandered as being semi-usurpers who allegedly had built up after May 1945 a regime in the trade unions which ignored the views of their members ». A trade union law, which gave the unions a number of important rights, was adopted by Parliament on 16 May 1946.

In the parliamentary elections which took place ten days later, the Communist Party obtained 38 per cent of the votes, but failed in its objective of achieving an absolute majority. Nonetheless, it took advantage of the election results to put toward new aggressive claims to power. They were clearly voiced by Communist Party leader Clement Gottwald in January 1947 (2). This course inevitably led to tensions and clashes which were understandably not restricted to Parliament. In addition, the economy was badly shaken by a catastrophic drought in the Summer of 1947. The crop failure led to severe shortages in food supplies.

Tensions over the non-acceptance, under massive Soviet pressure, of Marshall Plan Aid raised the already feverish political temperature still higher. Events in Czechoslovakia now took a rapid and dramatic course, and the trade unions were pulled into the very eye of the storm.

At the end of November 1947, the Communist Party declared that it would consider a governmental crisis as tantamount to a reactionary coup d'état which it would counter most decisively.

In January 1948, the democratic governmental majority refused to put into effect a recommendation of the communist majority in

the Central Council of Trade Unions for a special payment for certain categories of civil servants. The Government decided instead to grant all public employees a compensatory allowance of 800 crowns a month.

Meeting in immediate plenary session to discuss the situation, the Central Council of Trade Unions described the anticommunist majority's action as a « threat » to the basic principles of the new trade union policy. The Revolutionary Trade Union Movement could no longer work in harness with leaders of the reactionary non-communist parties, declared President Zápotocký at the time. He went on to give warning that if the bourgeoisie wanted a trial of strength, the trade unions would not remain on the defensive; they would go all out for revolution (3).

From then on, events developed their own headlong momentum. On 17 February the non-communist government members resigned in protest against the constant interference of the communist Minister of the Interior. At a mass meeting only four days later, Gottwald made it clear that the communists would not shrink from the use of arms in their determination to win the struggle for power. The next day, 22 February, 8,000 communist works council members were ordered to the capital to make known their views on the situation. They passed — with only 10 dissenting votes — a resolution approving the Communist Party action and voted to call a general strike of limited duration for 25 February. The next day, the workers of Prague were issued with arms to guard, as the new People's Militia, against the « provocations of the bourgeoisie ». The Czechoslovak head of state, President Benes, capitulated on 25 February, and with his surrender ended the interval of democracy which had begun almost three years before, in May 1945. Czechoslovakia became a « People's Democracy ». The Central Action Committee of the National Front set in motion the purge machinery which was to continue intermittently its work in one form or another, under the most various auspices and for different reasons, for two decades, right up until the beginning of the Prague Spring in 1968...

## THE CZECHOSLOVAK TRADE UNIONS ON THE WRONG TRACK (1948-1967)

The period of nearly two decades which runs from « Red February » 1948 until the crucial session of the Party's Central Committee in December 1967 — the prelude to the Prague

Spring — constitutes the most disputed sector of Czechoslovakia's modern history and is marked in part by national catastrophes, occupation and vicious political controversies. The same aspects which were decisive for the country are also reflected in the history of the Czechoslovak trade unions. The revolution of 1948 corresponded exactly to Marxist definitions; a change in social and economic relationships took place, that is, one ruling class was replaced by another. Far-reaching new nationalisations revolutionised the foundations, but not the superstructure. The revolution of the spiritual superstructure was carried out in a primitive and unrealistic manner. By fitting the Soviet pattern onto little Czechoslovakia, by the rapid shifting around and elimination of qualified leaders, by introducing the « Stalin model » on the express orders of Stalin himself, by the political trials of the fifties which will be mentioned below, by the all-encompassing censorship and the petty-bourgeois direction of cultural policy, a road was taken which had to lead to an economic and ideological dead-end. It is significant that those who were in power only recognized after two decades that they had followed the wrong path. As a result of the close intertwining of the machinery of both the Communist Party and of the trade unions, the effects on the trade unions of this situation were considerable. It is only fair that in this connection we should merely quote the mistakes mentioned by authentic communist sources.

This « period of trial and error » is closely examined in the official « History of the Czechoslovak Trade Unions » (4) without the usual euphemisms and subsequent historical corrections : « The Revolutionary Trade Union Movement has played a significant — one may say eminent — role in the struggle against the bourgeoisie. Thus it gained not only a pre-eminent position within the State but also numerous rights. It became an important instrument and also a major support of the Communist Party... After the second trade union congress (1949), however, it became more and more evident that trade union activities could not keep pace with the stormy development of all aspects of daily life. This was especially and painfully noticeable in the factories and enterprises. At the time, many trade union officials were not prepared to see that errors had made their appearance in the wages policy, that mistaken dispositions in the factories had become excessive, and that short-term improvisations were causing more harm than good to the expanding economy. The unions neglected their controlling function, especially on how the various collective agreements were being kept. The interests of working women were also neglected and the prevention of

accidents received scant attention. The decisions of the second congress were not observed.

« The Communist Party and the supreme trade union bodies dealt with this situation on several occasions and made a series of proposals with the aim of remedying trade union action. In particular, the 10th Party Congress (1954) and the 3rd All-Trade Union Congress (1955) worked out guidelines which, had they been consequently applied, would have led the trade unions out of their crisis. But all these efforts were in vain at the time. Only after the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, when the system of the cult of personality was severely criticised, did it become possible to see the causes of the errors which had implanted themselves in the trade unions.

« The trade unions had also inherited many remnants of reformism... The fight to remove these remnants from the workers' consciousness had been severely handicapped by the influence of the cult of personality, a cult which not only overaccentuated the weight of the state machinery but also badly violated the principle of democratic centralism. Administrative measures and ruthless commands could not remove the evil, namely the workers' loss of confidence in the leadership of the Communist Party and the trade unions. The cult of personality had also very lasting and negative influence on the trade union movement. Its after-effects were painfully evident for years. »

So much for the official history. Jiri Pelikan, a prominent Czechoslovak communist who joined A. Dubcek and his reform movement in 1968 and who became cultural attaché at the Czechoslovak Embassy in Rome before falling into disgrace, recently published a book in Vienna entitled « The suppressed report » (The Piller Report of the Communist Central Party Committee on the political trials and « rehabilitation » in Czechoslovakia 1949-1968) (5). It contains revealing side-lights on the situation in the country during that period : « Already in mid-1948, social insecurity and worries about the future were expressed with insistence by the peasants and the middle classes in the cities. This situation led to protests against party and governmental policy, especially among partisans and the intellectuals. The Party leadership considered these protests as an open attempt to start a coup d'état and reacted with a change of policy. This change was marked by a sharpening of repressive measures, not only against former ruling classes but also against the mass of the population; it found its clearest expression in the so-called rationing according to class and in the introduction of the TNP.» (The term TNP stands for forced labour camps, created

by special decree in 1948. Especially ill-famed were the uranium mines of Příbram and other mines. Detention in a forced labour camp for a definite or an indefinite period was ordered by special commissions.) « Nevertheless, the tension among the middle classes did not lessen. On the contrary, as a result of almost permanent difficulties in supply of food and consumer goods, dissatisfaction grew among all social groups, especially among the working class. These difficulties could temporarily be kept in check on a short-term basis and the first two years of the Five-Year Plan led to a welcome rise in living standards and a removal of a series of injustices which had remained from the capitalist past. However, in 1951 and 1952, living standards were again stagnating and in 1953 they even sank. A part of the working class reacted by striking, and protested against the currency reform (May 1953) not only with demonstrations but also with riots.

« The February victory of the Communist Party was followed by great political élan and a growth in the working activity of the population, especially of the communists. But victory and power went to the heads of many Party officials and Party members, resulting in a sectarian attitude to non-members and a tendency to act undemocratically and to violate the laws, » says the report.

It is true that even in Czechoslovakia there were far-seeing communist officials who pointed out tactfully that it would be fatal in the long run to imitate the Soviet Union, which had developed under quite different political and economic circumstances, in all aspects of policy. Scepticism was voiced as to the new role allotted to the trade unions as an instrument of State pressure on the workers to achieve higher production.

It was feared that set-backs would occur, an apprehension which was soon to become reality. There is no doubt that in the last two decades Czechoslovakia has made great strides forward which have placed it squarely among the leading industrial nations, a fact that is often ignored. In contrast to this development, for a long time characterised more by the quantity than the quality of its production, stood the living standard of the people, of which more will be said later. The country's allotted role as an armament producer for the whole Eastern bloc and also for some developing countries was not a happy one. Already by the end of 1965, there were signs that the country was being drained by the provision of these arms supplies, that the economy was stagnating to a dangerous degree, that the trade unions were acting in a vacuum, and that their influence on the

workers was irreversibly waning. At the same time, the internal political situation was characterised by an ill-defined dissatisfaction, a general malaise which seemed to touch on all sections of the community.

It was in vain that efforts were made at the 4th All-Trade Union Congress which met in 1959 to change course. The annulling of the 1945 decree on the subject of works councils proved to be a boomerang. In their place there were set up works committees which had large powers in theory but which in practice had no influence on the decisions taken in the factory or undertaking. Also the reorganisation of the trade union structure met largely with a negative response, especially in Slovakia, where it led to the dissolution of the Slovak industrial trade union committees. While the 5th Congress, held in 1963 in Prague, claimed some successes, it had to admit that trade union activity seemed to be stagnating more and more. And the 6th Congress in 1967 had the disagreeable task of analysing a number of causes held responsible for the failure of the trade unions in the last few years.

Despite these warning signals, no readiness was shown to relinquish the obsolete and discredited concept of the transmission-belt role of the trade unions by which the successive stalinist, post-stalinist and neo-stalinist leadership imposed production-norms, wages and contracts in this or that form upon the workers. This refusal led irrevocably to a development which under the name of the « Prague Spring » not only fed the headlines of the world press but also became a milestone in the modern history of Czechoslovakia.

## THE POLITICAL TRIALS

The political trials which swept through Czechoslovakia in the nineteen fifties and part of the sixties form one of the darker chapters of modern European history — they have left an indelible mark in the minds of both Czechs and Slovaks.

As in other east bloc countries, a survey giving a complete account of the number of victims of this reign of terror, describing the length of their jail sentence and how many actually died, has never been published in Czechoslovakia.



However, according to Czechoslovak press reports of several hundred political trials over a period of ten years, a total of 16,543 persons appeared before communist special tribunals on charges of political offences between 1948 and 1953. In 211 cases, the accused were sentenced to death and executed. Two hundred and two « enemies of the state » » were sent to prison for life. In total the courts imposed prison sentences of 42,179 years and 12 weeks. Seven hundred and thirty cases were found not guilty, mostly in 1948, when at least some of the judges were still clinging to their impartiality. During this period 38 persons were condemned in their absence — nine to death, four to life imprisonment, and the rest to prison terms totalling 332 years. On top of these jail sentences, fines were also imposed with the main of destroying the financial platform of the supporters of the « enemies of the state ». According to the reports mentioned above, fines totalling more than 8,000 million crowns were imposed between 1948 and 1953; in default of payment, offenders were put to work in labour camps.

Grim though this toll may be, it should be emphasized that it represents only a fraction of the total — a mere ripple in the wave of political trials which broke over Czechoslovakia in the fifties and, to a slightly lesser extent, in the sixties. It is a matter of fact that during these years the authorities only published reports on those political trials out of which propaganda capital could be made.

Statistics established by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Justice in 1965 and classified as strictly confidential gave the percentage of political trials handled by the various courts between 1948 and 1964 at which newspaper reporters were present or admitted as 15.4. From this coefficient it can be calculated that in all probability the real number of people made answerable to the courts for political offences of varying degrees of seriousness reached, in the years 1948 to 1964, a total of around 150,000. In addition, immediately after 1948, countless labour camps sprang up to which anyone could be consigned for an unlimited period and without legal proceedings by the relevant regional committee — all that was needed was the « suspicion » that the person involved was an « enemy of the state ». Only in 1968 did it become known that between 400,000 and 450,000 Czechoslovak citizens underwent longer or shorter periods of « re-education » in these labour camps, which were not finally abolished until the early 1960s. In this connexion, if it is further taken into account that for everybody involved with the communist courts for alleged plotting to endanger the state, there were

five family members or near relations directly concerned with his fate, the conclusion is easily reached that over this period at least a quarter of the whole Czechoslovak population was affected by political trials.

Discussing the number of political detainees over the period 1949 to 1951, J. Pelikan wrote (6) :

« On 1 November 1949, 6,136 out of 23,141 prisoners in the Czech provinces were in jail for political offences. On 1 March 1950, the figures were 8,491 out of 26,748, and on 1 May had reached 9,765 out of 28,281. These data are from Bohemia and Moravia.

By the middle of 1950, 11,026 persons were detained for activities hostile to the state (mostly blue and white-collar workers).

The number of death sentences was likewise extremely high : from October 1948 to the end of 1952, the state tribunal handed down 233 death sentences, 178 of which were carried out. The figure was so high that at the beginning of 1951 the Minister of Justice explained delays in starting trials in the following terms : ' It is not possible to pass final judgement on all these cases sooner, since the number of death sentences would otherwise mount up too quickly. '

All death sentences were decided by party bodies — the Security Commission of the Central Committee of the Czech Communist Party, later the Central Committee's political secretariat. »

## THE QUESTION OF LIVING STANDARDS

Figures gleaned from the « Czechoslovak Official Statistics Yearbook » for 1963 and 1967 show that between 1955 and 1960 the living standard of Czechoslovak workers gave legitimate grounds for complaint.

According to official Czechoslovak sources, average wages rose from 1,186 crowns in 1955 to 1,503 crowns in 1966. The total increase for 11 years of 317 crowns amounts to an annual growth rate over this period of 28 crowns; an average of something

over 2 per cent. In the meantime, however, work norms were being increased by 20 to 30 per cent. For shopworkers, the annual rate of wage increase was only 23 crowns in this period, which can hardly have done more than compensate for the few official price rises.

Bearing in mind that the subsistence level for Czechoslovakia in the years 1955 to 1966 hovered between 1,200 and 1,400 crowns, one may conclude that there were at least three million Czechoslovak blue and white-collar workers whose pay remained on or below this base line, whilst another three million pensioners had to make do with incomes which were well below the minimum level.

However unsatisfactory the fifties and sixties have been from the living standards point of view, it must in all fairness be noted that over the last 20 years Czechoslovakia has developed its social security insurance and welfare systems in exemplary fashion. It nonetheless remains a fact that in the past Czechoslovak workers have had to make do with a standard of living which in no way reflected the demands made upon them and which built up a head of latent discontent directed primarily at the inertia of the trade unions.

Alongside the wave of political trials and persecution which disfigured the '50s, no understanding of the complex and turbulent events of 1968 and 1969 is possible without reference to this history of inadequate living standards.

## **BETWEEN HOPE AND FEAR**

(January to March 1968)

The beginning of the end for A. Novotny and the political course he had come to symbolise for over a decade had already set in at the plenary session of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's Central Committee in October 1967. The decline continued through the December plenary, and the curtain finally fell at the meeting which ended on 5 January 1968. It was a period of internecine Party strife, a free-for-all power struggle waged with all conceivable means, over one main issue: the separation of the highest State and Party offices. In effect, the struggle centred on the personality cult of Novotny, who had inflicted

considerable damage on both State, Party and society in general by his personal assumption of almost unlimited powers. The official announcement that after a bitter struggle Alexander Dubcek had been elected the new First Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee was enough to range the trade unions on his side, but it was not until four weeks after this sensational changing of the guard that the then President of the Trade Unions, M. Pastyrík, made a pronouncement on the subject. On February 4 he wrote in the trade union newspaper « Prace »:

« For a long time now, we who are active in the trade unions have been aware that something in the mechanism of our socialist society was not working properly. A diminution of activity was to be observed everywhere. Trade union bodies and organisations have been functioning as if crippled, and this has inevitably had an effect on the members too. It has also become clear that the trade unions cannot in the long run be merely the passive executors of decisions taken elsewhere. The role of the trade unions cannot be one of simple acquiescence. Whilst the trade unions are happy to act as the eyes and hands of the Party among the masses, they must also be accorded the right of co-determination, something which they have not enjoyed so far. »

The hesitation of the trade union leadership in adopting an unambiguous attitude to the new situation prompted criticism from many officials which would have been unthinkable only a few weeks before — and which would have had unpleasant consequences for the protagonists. I. Halada, for example, a prominent metalworkers official, wrote in « Prace » on 28 February:

« Most leading officials of the intermediate and central trade union bodies feel themselves responsible only to Party officials, since it was the Party which placed them in their present positions. Party circles, however, do not feel reciprocally responsible to the trade union officials whom they have elected. This is democracy turned upside down.

For the last twenty years there has been talk of a trade union policy which has never come into existence. The undemocratic spirit which has hitherto imbued the trade union apparatus has never allowed such a line to be taken. »

« Prace's » edition of 9 March is a unique document of the time. In it were published, almost side by side, an « announcement by the Central Council of Trade Unions », and a « protest by the communist faction in the top trade union bodies (here making its appearance for the first time) against the passive attitude of the trade union leadership. » The protest stated :

« We express our dissatisfaction at the fact that even after harsh criticism during the Czechoslovak Communist Party's General Assembly the highest representatives of the Central Council of Trade Unions, headed by Comrade Pastyrik, were not prepared to call an immediate Central Council meeting to put forward the view of the trade unions on the Central Committee's December and January sessions. We feel that the criticisms advanced among all the trade union organisations with regard to this hesitation were justified, that is to say that we stand by them. We are further of the opinion that the relationship between Party and trade unions must be regulated on a new basis. »

The trade unions must create an image of their own ; this was the watchword of the long awaited fifth Plenary Session of the trade union Central Council which opened on March 21, 1968. Following a recommendation by the Council's communist faction, Pastyrik's resignation was not accepted; it was decided to depose him instead. By contrast, the resignation of the long-standing Central Council Secretaries B. Kozelka and V. Pasek was approved. Karel Polacek, Central Council Vice-President and head of the Metalworkers' Union, was elected as the new President of the Trade Unions. The meeting elected Jan Duzi as Vice-President and member of the Central Council Praesidium, M. Kimlik was entrusted with the post of Secretary, and V. Daubner, the President of the Slovak Trade Union Council, was made honorary Vice-President.

After his election — not entirely unopposed — to the Presidency, Polacek declared :

« In view of the situation in which the trade union movement finds itself today, it will be necessary to contemplate further changes of leadership. At the same time, I would recommend proceeding very circumspectly. We must devote all our energy to eliminating shortcomings in our work as quickly as possible in order to regain the confidence of our members. The gulf between word and deed must be bridged. In the future

there must be no tasks which cannot be made to fit reality. Whilst the role of « transmission belt » generally assigned to the trade unions has been denounced repeatedly, virtually nothing has been done to remedy the situation. Party policy has always taken priority; a **true and genuine trade union policy has been nothing more than a Cinderella**. So it was that Party organs took a direct hand in solving problems which were purely the responsibility of the trade unions and could only be settled by them. The trade unions fell into the position of simple Party hacks. It was therefore hardly surprising that more and more people began to question the use of the trade unions. Of course, nobody actually dared to give an answer to this burning and topical question; nobody pointed the way out of the vicious circle. Everything revolved round the fulfilling of production plans, and in the process the demands of the manual and white-collar workers were criminally neglected. »

## THE REBIRTH OF THE TRADE UNIONS

(April - August 1968)

It was in an atmosphere of considerable tension that the sixth Plenary Session of the Trade Union Council met in Prague to consider latest developments and future tasks for the labour movement. It was thought advisable to back only such demands as could be achieved at the time and which were likely to have a calming effect on the main body of the workers. Accordingly, a large number of highly topical demands were put forward; they served the additional purpose of emphasizing the new spirit of the trade union leadership and its willingness to listen once more to the views of the rank and file. An end to the anti-social tax on pensions, from 1 January 1969, was called for. In addition, the Central Council demanded that the basic rates for pensions be raised by an average of eight per cent from the same date. There were also calls for a fairer grading of pensions. Other demands were for the extension of maternity leave and new family allowance rates, irrespective of parental income.

Polacek made a speech referring to the vital tasks which give meaning, purpose and substance to every trade union activity. He

pledged priority treatment for the protection of members' interests and went on to declare on the question of strikes :

« It goes without saying that strikes are admissible, but they should only be used only as the very last resort when all other possibilities open to the trade union as legitimate defender of the workers' interests have been exhausted. The trade unions cannot renounce strike action as a final weapon against the brutal violation of the workers' rights. »

In another speech, Duzi, the Vice-President, denounced activities which had nothing to do with trade unionism :

« Many resolutions have been put forward demanding that the trade unions should respect their traditional mission, that is, the defence of the workers' interests whilst upholding the principle of freedom of choice. This presupposes our disassociation from everything which has distorted the attitude and vocation of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement in the past. We must reject all tasks which tie our hands on the pretext of joint responsibility with State, economic or other bodies. Some resolutions have demanded that the trade unions should stand aside from politics. It has also been mooted that the trade unions should form an oppositional force to counterbalance the weight of the political parties.

As far as the relationship between the trade unions and the Czechoslovak Communist Party is concerned, there must be no confusion. We freely acknowledge the leading role of the Party in society. We reject interference in our affairs as perpetrated by the old Czechoslovak Communist Party leadership over many years. On the question of the relationship of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement with the State, we start out from the recognition that we are dealing with a socialist State, but the trade unions are not a State or a semi-State organisation. Furthermore, they are not an instrument nor a servant, and certainly not a transmission belt. Nor are they a centre for exhortation. »

Incontestably, the climax of the struggle for internal trade union reform was reached at the nationwide Conference of Delegates from the local trade union organisations which was held in Prague from 18 to 20 June. It was certainly true that the draft of the new trade union programme was found on submission to the delegates for approval to be in need of modification in several

important points, particularly as regards future trade union activity in the field of social and wages policy. Above all, there was indignation over the fact that the right to strike was only expressly proclaimed in Chapter IV, sub-section (c) of the guidelines for the creation of workers' councils. In spite of all the shortcomings of the Conference and the criticisms of the new programme, the Czechoslovak trade union movement experienced a sort of euphoria during these weeks preceding the occupation. In hundreds of enterprises, the ground was being prepared for the creation of workers' councils, a move which to countless Czechoslovak workers seemed to offer the only ray of hope in the existing economic miasma. The subsequent fate of the workers' councils — their introduction banned and their activities halted during the « normalisation » of 1969, final abolition in July the following year — is just one of the many aspects of the Czechoslovak tragedy.

## THE OCCUPATION — TRADE UNION REACTIONS

The Czechoslovaks themselves are the best informants on what actually happened during the Soviet invasion of their country. Their eye-witness reports, radio and press accounts and resolutions during those turbulent days are essential reading for anyone wishing to form a judgement on the matter. Many of these reports on events in Prague between 20 and 22 August have been compiled for publication by the Historical Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences : the German translation of this « Czech Black Book » came out in 1969 under the imprint of the Seewald-Verlag in Stuttgart. (The authors, contributors and publishers of this unique reportage have since fallen victim to the normalisation.) The surge of resistance encountered by the invading forces in the first few days of the occupation needs no further historical documentation : we may content ourselves here with reproducing an excerpt from an anguished appeal issued on 20 August by the Praesidium of the Central Council of Trade Unions and the Presidents of the individual trade unions, an appeal which reflects what must have been the feelings of practically all Czechoslovak workers at the time :

« Trade unionists, workers of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic ! Since the tragic night of 20-21 August

when the troops of the five Warsaw Pact countries illegally crossed the frontiers of our nation and occupied the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, our people have experienced difficult and troubled times.

Since this time we have been living in constant fear for the fate and future of our homeland, and for the fate of socialism in Czechoslovakia. This tragic interference will have far-reaching consequences, not only for our Czechoslovak Republic, but also for all progressive forces and the entire labour movement. When today we consider the injustice which has befallen our peoples, when we recall the days and nights in which we feared for the fate of our country, we become fully aware of the extent to which our people yearn for genuine socialist freedom, and how foreign all forms of forces are to them. The humiliation and wounding of our national pride which we have lived through have led our people even closer to the progressive centre of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement... »

#### **FROM « NORMALISATION »...**

(September 1968 to May 1969)

At the beginning of September 1968 — a few days after the humiliating invasion of a « brother nation » — it still looked as if the Czechoslovak trade union movement would be able to continue its process of reform, apart from a few small cuts rendered necessary by the new situation, without appreciable outside interference. Another six months were enough to wipe out all traces of this lingering optimism, which was in truth more a case of wishful thinking than a rational appraisal of the situation. By March 1969, at the Seventh All-Trade Union Congress, it was already clear that all the high hopes were unfounded and that there was nothing anyone could do to prevent the trade union reforms which a year before had rallied and mobilised millions of Czechoslovak workers from being inexorably « normalised » to death.

The first meeting of the Central Council of Trade Unions after the occupation was held in Prague on 3 September in the presence of all the individual trade union Presidents. It became

clear during the session that the trade unions would support a reasonable consolidation and normalisation on the economic and political fronts — if this would speed up the final withdrawal of the occupying forces.

At the end of the month, the Council met again for its ninth Plenary Session. The meeting acquired international significance for the standpoint it adopted to the negotiations on the Czechoslovak question — by now a topic of the utmost importance for both western and eastern European trade union organisations — conducted by the World Federation of Trade Unions in Budapest. In his report on this summit meeting, Polacek stated :

« Following a suggestion by Gaspar, the General Secretary of the Hungarian trade unions, we were recommended to debate a communiqué which had been prepared by the Hungarian trade unions and which purportedly expounded the why and the wherefore of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the five Warsaw Pact Countries. When at last we had the communiqué in front of us, we could not but observe that in this document political affirmations concerning the events in Czechoslovakia were set down in a manner unacceptable to the Czechoslovak trade unions.

I explained to the participants at the meeting why we could not agree with this draft communiqué and apprised them of the standpoint adopted by the Praesidium of the Central Council of Trade Unions on this question. I expressly emphasized that the occupation of Czechoslovakia had taken place without the knowledge of the President of the Republic or the Government, the National Assembly or the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In the spirit of the demands of all our trade union bodies I interpreted for them the unanimous view of the Czech manual and white collar workers as regards the occupation. Finally I informed the representatives of the five central trade unions that the Plenum of the Central Council of Trade Unions had with approval taken note of the communiqué from the World Federation of Trade Unions, condemning the occupation.

This statement of mine met with no agreement among the representatives of the five central trade unions, who then put forward their points of view.

Finally we proposed forming a working party to consider a new communiqué which had in the meantime been

drawn up by our delegation. As it was not possible to reach any agreement after several hours of deliberations, at my request the trade union Presidents of the six countries met together to try and settle the outstanding differences at the highest level. After further hard bargaining agreement was reached on the text of a new communiqué. »

It was not long before the trade union leadership intimated that they had decided, under pressure of circumstances and contrary to previous declarations, to change course. In a policy statement entitled : « We are facing difficult times », Duzi wrote in « Prace » on 18 October 1969 :

« As socialist trade unionists we are all agreed that a return to the pre-January 1968 situation with its arbitrary methods and abuses of personal power, is not possible. On the other hand we cannot continue to hold the naive view that a return to the conditions which existed before August is possible either. We cannot and must not conceal the fact that this period was also characterised by negative tendencies. Furthermore the fact must not be overlooked that during this period anti-socialist forces came into play in an endeavour to discredit the socialist system, which denied the working class the right to be the leading force of the country and which were at pains to undermine the socialist regime from inside. These harsh realities presented a potential danger for the socialist system, all the more so since on our side there was not sufficient determination and courage to proceed in a concerted manner against the phenomenon. Quite simply, it became clear that tolerance for political reasons had its real limits. »

The occupation of Czechoslovakia caught the trade union movement in a particularly difficult situation, struggling as it was in the throes of violent internal change. The uninvited entry of foreign troops aggravated an already complicated position, which explains why the movement was so hard hit by subsequent events. At the same time, the fact that in the few months from March to August it was able to throw off its spurious political trappings and bid openly for a genuine trade union democracy (in so far as this can ever be achieved under a national-communist regime), says a great deal for the healthy roots of the movement.

When it was decided that the trade union reform implicitly demanded structural changes as well, the fate of the thirteen

existing national trade unions was sealed. In their appeared 31 Czech and 27 Slovak industrial trade unions.

The changed situation in the country after the occupation meant that it was no longer so easy to respond to basic demands for the restoration to the trade unions of their original and particular role as constant defender of their members' interests. There were more reshuffles and realignments among the more important social groups in the trade unions : new viewpoints and demands were formulated, different spokesmen appointed, and even sometimes new organisations brought into being. Programmes were drawn up incorporating firm guarantees for minority groups.

The federalisation of the trade unions was further complicated by the different aims which it had to serve : in the first place it had to operate along national lines; secondly, it had to provide for a much wider occupational diversity; and thirdly it was intended to increase the powers of the local, grass-roots organisations. Understandably, difficulties were encountered, and at least one group — the engine drivers — were not allowed to push their « federation » through although they were clearly in the right and could even quote in support an International Labour Organisation Recommendation on Freedom of Association which had been signed at the time by Czechoslovakia. Nonetheless, there was a fundamental change in the new structure : whereas in the past union work at rank and file level was arranged to fit patterns imposed from above by the central organisation, the new intention was to remodel the centre to meet the requirements of the grass roots.

The founding congresses of the new industrial unions took place in the months from October 1968 to January 1969. As noted above, 31 Czech and 27 Slovak unions now mark the face of an internally and externally changed labour movement which no longer wants the role of « transmission belt » but which nonetheless « recognizes the leading role of the Czechoslovak Communist Party ».

The first highpoint of 1969 was the first Congress of the affiliated organisations of the Czech Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, held in Prague in a tension-laden atmosphere from 21 to 23 January. Differences of opinion did not always remain hidden : R. Pacovsky's assertion that the Czech trade unions were firmly resolved to preserve their newly acquired autonomy, and to take the consequences, was followed by a warning from Prime Minister Cernik, speaking on behalf of the government, that « some of the trade union demands recently advanced are,

given the circumstances, unfulfillable, and their consequences are liable to give rise to situations of serious conflict »; whilst V. Toman, President of the Metalworkers' Union, declared roundly that the recent tensions and their attendant threats of political crisis were not the work of the trade unions but had been brought about « by those who sought right-wing inclined and extreme forces among the workers. Our credo continues to be : democracy, truth, humanism and freedom ! » he concluded.

The corresponding Congress of the Slovak Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, which took place only a week later in Bratislava, was a complete contrast. Unlike the meeting in Prague, the proceedings gave a vague impression of having been stage-managed to produce the kind of subdued atmosphere which had been well known in the past and which prompted one metalworker to observe : « I have the impression that I am not at a Congress dealing with problems and forward-looking programmes, but at a conflict-free and peaceful routine meeting of top trade union officials ».

A plenary proposal to observe a minute's silence in homage to Jan Palach, the student who burned himself alive in protest against the invasion, was rejected.

By now there were grave doubts about the proposed reforms due to be decided at the seventh All-Trade Union Congress which was held in Prague from 4 to 7 March. The main speech, however, delivered by Polacek, was still positive in tone : after referring in his opening remarks to the tremendous response which the « tidal wave of trade union reform » had found among the ordinary members, he defined the unions' attitude to the Communist Party as follows :

« The basic attitude of the trade unions towards the Party cannot immobilise the independent approach of the trade unions, restrict their own views, or even push them back to a secondary role as mere executors of Party decisions. In future we will press our own point of view, with the aim of preventing policies from being formulated only in private, behind closed doors. But it will never be our wish to stand in opposition to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia ! »

Polacek also dealt at length with future trade union policy, which, he said, would have to steer clear of both cheap promises and peremptory demands. At the present time the possibilities of solving all the social problems accumulated in the past were very limited and should not be overstrained, but the unions

would vigorously resist any attempt to whittle down real wages. He had to admit that the economy of the country was in a very bad way and required drastic and perhaps unpleasant action to put it on the road to recovery.

In this connexion, an open letter addressed to congress delegates in the columns of the trade union weekly « Svet Prace » on 5 March came as something of a bombshell : it reveals — in a way which would not have been considered prudent in the past — the disastrous nature of the official economic policy which had been pursued through thick and thin, despite mounting evidence of its inefficiency, over two whole decades. According to this source, only 50 per cent use was being made of the country's production capacity; wastage of materials was also considerably greater than in other countries. Economic efficiency was particularly impaired by an annual rise in production costs of 2 per cent (whereas on a world average there is an equal annual decrease). A defective employment policy resulted in artificially depressed wages for many workers. With regard to the productivity of labour the open letter, on the basis of researches carried out by the editorial staff, alleged that in the whole of Czechoslovakia on average no more than four hours are worked per day; in other words, only half of the « working population » is really working, although all of it draws full pay. All these deficiencies add up to an enormous financial loss for the Czechoslovak economy estimated at 60,000 million crowns per year — i.e., about one third of the whole national income.

The adoption of the trade union Charter (which did not incorporate the right to strike as had been demanded), the new programme and a resolution brought the Congress to a close. Elections for positions in the top governing bodies went ' according to expectations '. In the Executive Committee — enlarged to 140 members — no fewer than 103 out of 121, or 85 per cent, of the sitting members failed to gain re-election.

The apparently auspicious conclusion of the structural reform was greeted with obvious relief by Czech and Slovak trade union centres as a firm promise for the future. The trade unions now wanted a breathing space — time to consider calmly the next steps on the way to full trade union independence and the implementation of new tasks and policies. This was not to be, however; with the political climate worsening dangerously in the middle of March, the trade unions were again obliged to take up the cudgels, this time in defence of what had been gained. Nonetheless, they were unable to prevent the removal of Party First Secretary Dubcek, who made way for Dr. Gustav Husak

on the decision of the Central Committee plenary session of 17 April. There was an instinctive feeling among trade unionists — long since accustomed to reading between the lines — that the « increased sense of reality » reflected in the person of the new First Secretary bode no good. And in actual fact Husak lost no time in living up to his reputation of hostility to the trade unions. On 29 May 1969, he stated before the Plenum of the Communist Party Central Committee :

« Negative and opportunist tendencies have established themselves in some of the organs of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement. Right wing opportunist forces as well as outspokenly anti-socialist elements have last year and also at the beginning of this year exploited the at times turbulent political situation to secure for themselves certain positions not only in the factories but also in the highest trade union bodies. With the motto of « creating trade unions without communists » and in complicity with Party members who have become prone to opportunist and nationalist tendencies, they have been able to seize post on top trade union bodies. Agreements were concluded with students and intellectuals, and forms of joint action were undertaken, without the knowledge of the National Front or of the Communist Party. Up to now these forces have been active in the trade union movement and they are fighting not only to exert influence on the working class in general, but also — and they want this even more — to gain control of the factories themselves... »

### ... TO RENEWED SUBJECTION

(June 1969 to May 1970)

After the repeated disturbances which marked the first anniversary of the occupation, the trade union Praesidium held an extraordinary meeting in Prague on 3 September to hear a report on the trade union part in the matter. The following is an excerpt from the speech of the Vice-President, J. Duzi :

« We already knew beforehand that the anti-socialist elements, the right wing opportunists and counter-revolutionaries who have not yet been completely neutralised, were firmly resolved to misuse a number

of trade union bodies for their own purpose. Today we can admit without further ado, now that we have averted a great danger, that during these days we have been in readiness, that daily, indeed almost hourly, we have been keeping a close watch on the situation in the country and that we have been able to resolve situations of conflict in several localities.

» In Bohemia and Moravia these activities by right wing, opportunist and anti-socialist elements had a decidedly political, anti-communist and anti-State character. The aim of the elements hostile to the State was to organise strikes in the factories and uncontrollable brawls in the streets and public places of our cities. »

In conclusion Duzi made known in his report on activities that the order had in the meantime gone out to all trade union organisations to enquire into how trade union leaders in particular had behaved in the provinces. Officials who had supported right-wing and opportunist forces could count on a speedy removal from office. « The trade unions cannot afford to tolerate elements in their midst who do not support the regime, » he declared. This was only a beginning. More threats soon followed and were quickly transformed into reality. On 7 October, Duzi came back to the question of « cleaning up » the trade unions in an article in « Prace » :

« We cannot conceal that in a few industrial unions and organisations the leadership has been taken over by forces who propagate « neutralism » and who stand for the « mastery of the elite » and not of the working class. We must now purge our ranks of those who have misused the trade union rank and file for their reactionary designs and who have fostered an arrant chauvinism and anti-soviet line under the cloak of false patriotism. Those officials who are responsible for the crises after August 1968 and who unleash the orgies of anti-communist hate cannot continue to remain in the trade union set-up. Some trade union officials and employees of the trade union institute were also in the service of right-wing opportunism and have in the recent past repeatedly held up the western reformist trade unions to us as an example. »

On 5 November it was Polacek's turn. Speaking at a trade union meeting, he declared :

« It is no disgrace to have to admit that the trade unions have erred in many things. But at any rate one should



also note that the trade unions are determined to make good these shortcomings. To do this it will be necessary to invalidate certain decisions which have been adopted by the trade unions on various levels. It is time that all those who have compromised themselves disappeared from our ranks, and it is also high time that we inside the trade union movement see to putting things in order so that the trade unions can return to those tasks which are peculiar to it under socialism. »

In many ways it was not surprising that the Czech metalworkers were the first candidates for the coming purge. In the first place, they had played an important part in the « Czechoslovak spring », and secondly, as one of the most powerful and influential groups in the country (with nearly a million members), their resistance had to be broken first before cleaning-up operations could be extended to other trade unions. The union's fifth Plenary meeting was chosen as the hour of destiny. Although known to have tendered his resignation before the meeting, Toman, the President, was forced to give a « report on activities » which repudiated everything that he had vehemently and passionately advocated since 1968. He acknowledged that for a long time right-wing opportunist elements had dominated the metalworkers' union, that many officials had acted under the influence of foreign and dubious ideologies, that individuals had stage-managed riots and organised strikes to which leading bodies had turned a blind eye, that the alliance of the metalworkers with the students had been a fatal mistake, and that the inclusion of a passage concerning human rights in the trade union Constitution amounted almost to provocation. He went on :

« Today we know that our Congress was used as an object of speculation by anti-socialist forces. With the hectic Congress atmosphere artificially whipped up by some delegates, it was possible at that time for certain demands to be put down in the Congress decisions which actually have nothing to do with trade unionism. Normalisation requires that we do not eternally insist upon the resolutions which we adopted at the time on the various issues. »

At the end of his statement Toman expressed his apologies to Husák and Bilák (a prominent hard-liner) whom in January 1969 he had accused in a letter of adopting an anti-trade union attitude. As he explained it, this letter was written only because at the time it was drafted the information to hand was « false ». In spite of this genuflection, his resignation was accepted. The

Executive further decided to sack over two dozen other officials who were accused of being in the pay of foreigners... These sackings are of fundamental importance, since they were the forerunners of a series of purges which in the spring of 1970 claimed ten thousand victims among Czech and Slovak trade union officials.

Events now followed each other thick and fast, and almost all of them were connected in some way with the purges. At a meeting of the Central Council of Trade Unions on 15 November 1969, 13 prominent officials, who had purportedly « requested » their own removal, were dismissed from office. They included such men as B. Karbus, S. Hrzina, L. Hudec, A. Rychtarik, V. Fisar and others who in 1968 had had a considerable hand in shaping the new trade union image.

By December 1969, the writing was also on the wall for the workers' councils. At a meeting of the building workers' union in Prague, one of the proposals was to annul an earlier decision by the union's executive concerning the law on the « socialist undertaking » : the general view was that under present conditions the so-called workers' councils were not only superfluous, but also politically and economically harmful to the highest degree.

On 13 January, there was another statement from Duži in the newspaper « Práce ». By way of introduction, he declared that in spite of intense political engagement, the « consolidation » of the trade unions was making only moderate progress and would not be concluded for some time. He went on :

« Since April 1969, when the new Party leadership took over power, efforts have been under way on a large scale to separate the sheep from the goats in the trade unions. We have spoken out clearly and unequivocally in favour of the new Marxist-Leninist policy, yet there are still trade unionists barring our way who continue to pursue their opportunist and right-wing line, with only one object in view : to come through the cleaning-up process unscathed.

» We want to make it absolutely clear that the battle raging at the moment against the right-wing opportunists has nothing to do with intimidation in the usual sense. Now we are only just at the beginning of the consolidation in the trade union movement. We have already invalidated countless decisions, resolutions and proclamations which have been adopted in the last eighteen months by a number of trade union bodies, since they

run counter to the line of the new Party leadership. At the moment the sole duty of the trade unions is to apply themselves with the greatest intensity to the development of initiatives and the principle of socialist emulation. In recent times labour discipline in the factories has improved considerably and we are now in the process of settling accounts with all those who have recently undermined labour morale for one reason or another. »

On 28 January, the Central Committee of the Communist Party broke the sensational news that among many other officials, Karel Polacek had requested that the Party divest him of all his functions forthwith. The request was to be seen as an admission of personal responsibility for what had happened to the trade unions over the last eighteen months. His wish was promptly granted, and his prospective successor was named as Jan Piller, who had never previously in his Party career held trade union office.

In the meantime it was becoming clear exactly what « normalisation » was to mean for the trade unions. When the Czech union of teachers and cultural workers published its new and « redefined » Constitution, it was significant that the modifications were made without any Congress decision — they were drafted at the wish of the Party and on the order of the Central Council of Trade Unions. The new paragraph 18, on legal protection, runs :

« Members of the trade union federation who discredit the thinking of socialism, Marx-Leninism and of proletarian internationalism can be afforded no protection by the federation according to the terms of this paragraph. »

Almost all the Czech and Slovak trade unions have since set about similar modifications of their Constitutions.

The « wave of resignations » soon assumed the form of a mass purge. Up to the end of January 1970, 51,490 Czech trade union officials (at organisation, area, local and plant level) were disposed of. The corresponding figure in Slovakia was 13,740. When one considers that at the beginning of 1970 the Czech trade unions had 4,017,610 members and the Slovak unions 1,254,600, one can measure the full implications of the clear-out.

Clearly, it was not possible to conceal this « cleansing operation » altogether from the rank and file. At the end of February 1970, the President of the Czech Trade Union Council, Rudolf Pacovsky, speaking at a trade union meeting in Prague, decided

to clear up some of the persistent « rumours » going around :

« We can quite rightly assert today that we have succeeded in cleansing the ranks of the Czech Trade Union Council, the central committees of the individual trade unions, the area committees and also the majority of the local committees of all the important representatives and advocates of the right wing opportunist tendencies. 17 officials of the Czech Trade Union Council have either resigned from their posts or been removed. In the industrial unions we have had to dispense with 177 officials initially. In the area trade union councils about 20 % of all the officials have been removed from office. 13 % of all the Presidents of the local trade union councils have been induced to step down. Most trade union bodies have in the meantime either invalidated certain documents entirely, or reformulated and reinterpreted them.

« Unfortunately we also have to note that there are still some trade union officials in the factories who have quite simply refused to take note of the decisions of the Czech Trade Union Council. »

The climax of this development so far was a meeting of the Czech Trade Union Council which took place in Prague on 21 May 1970 in the presence of Jan Piller, the President of the Central Council of Czechoslovak Trade Unions. There was only one item on the agenda : the question of leading officials. At the suggestion of the Central Council Praesidium, Rudolf Pacovsky, the President of the Czech trade unions and an outspoken champion of the new trade union line, was summarily dismissed. The reason : political errors in the years 1968-69. Appointed in his place was J. Hlavicka, who had already as Secretary of the Central Council steered a disastrous trade union course under Novotny. (Indeed, he was dismissed for this reason in the Spring of 1968.) In addition, 26 plenary members of the Czech Trade Union Council were replaced; of these, 14 were Presidents of Czech trade unions. Once the whole Praesidium of the Czech Trade Union Council had resigned, it was possible to proceed with a wholesale reorganisation of this body. The present holders of power have thereby for the time being achieved a great deal : after the « normalisation » the trade unions can now be made to toe the line once more.

Characteristic of the mood in Czechoslovakia is the recent self-criticism of the former President of the Czechoslovak trade

unions, K. Polacek, who fought with the reformers until about April 1969 before going over to Husak's side. Despite this he lost his job. A short while ago he acknowledged his « mistakes » in the Central Communist Party organ « Rude pravo » : « I myself succumbed to the illusion that the trade unions could represent a narrow political force in the State. My mistaken views resulted in disorienting many officials. Through my fault the efforts of the Party to consolidate society were seriously hampered. I want to make good my mistakes by honourable work. »

### THE TRADE UNION REFORMS IN ORTHODOX COMMUNIST EYES

The Czechoslovak trade unions could not remain unaffected by the pre-August 1968 general wave of reform. As far as the trade unions were concerned, the aims of the reformers were obvious : after two decades of abortive trade union policies and misplaced emphases, the objective was to create a new image for the labour movement as a body genuinely representative of the workers.

The general opinion was that the trade unions must in future be independent, above all independent of the Communist Party. A fundamental change in wages policy was just as natural in this context as the democratisation of the trade union apparatus, the introduction of workers' councils, the statutory recognition of the right to strike, and a great deal more. The State trade unions, hitherto content to pass on orders, were to be transformed into genuine spokesmen for the workers. The aims and importance of this transformation — and thus also the reasons behind the subsequent tragic turn of events for the trade unions — can be very clearly gauged by a glance at recent official reinterpretations of the 1968 objectives. « Pravda », the Communist Party organ in Pilsen, carried on 24 and 28 April 1970 the following evaluation of trade union opportunism :

« Today we know after the painful experiences of the last two years that the actual meaning of « January » was interpreted in various ways from top to bottom. In many cases the reform brought to power sworn enemies of socialism who had rightly been prosecuted in the

1950s. Opportunists and careerists swelled the ranks of the new trade union reformers. Little by little the unions came under the sway of right-wing, opportunist and anti-socialist forces. A flood of wage demands gained for the new men respect and influence. An increase in various bonuses was advocated, as well as an all-round reduction in working hours. But this was immediately accompanied by voices clamoring against the leading role of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. A witch hunt was stirred up against honourable communist trade union officials and a call was made for their dismissal forthwith. The general opinion was that the trade unions must have their « own » programme, that it was impossible to continue mixing trade unionism with politics as hitherto, and that the right to strike must be recognised for the trade unions. Good honest trade union officials were not only harassed but also frequently slandered. Elements hostile to the Party gradually pushed themselves to the fore in the trade union movement. In the factories « Action committees » were formed and arrogated to themselves powers which did not belong to them. There was talk about « absolute democracy and freedom », and this was naturally taken to mean taking power away from all those who stood on a Marxist-Leninist platform and who were against the « new » trade union policies. At the Skoda works in Pilsen the WFTU was even criticised immoderately. At a meeting of the trade union coordinating committee the « inconsistency and lack of principles » of the World Federation of Trade Unions in connection with the occupation was denounced and the Central Council in Prague was instructed to bring this to the notice of the WFTU. Without the knowledge of the central authorities the Pilsen trade unionists broke off all relations with the socialist trade unions, and instead further extended ties with the western reformist trade unionists. »

## CONCLUSION

Nineteen seventy marks the end of the first 100 years of the Czechoslovak trade unions' chequered existence. It has been a turbulent history, permanently scarred not only by purely national disasters but also by two occupations. In 1939 the Nazis marched in; in 1968 it was the Soviets, backed up by troops from Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and East Germany, who forcibly extinguished a whole people's striving for a measure of personal freedom. It is a sobering thought that as early as 1870 Prague workers were demanding statutory the right to strike; 100 years later the demand has lost none of its topicality.

When the Czechoslovak Republic was founded in 1918 — and in the following two decades it was to make huge strides in the field of social policy — the new State was able to lean heavily on the support of free trade unions which could already look back on almost half a century's tradition of responsible and representative care for the interests of both manual and non-manual workers. This tradition was further reflected in the decisive role played in the inter-war years by the same unions in the affairs of the Amsterdam trade union international, the predecessor of the IOFTU.

Throughout the Second World War, the Czechoslovak labour movement remained true to its long-established free trade union principles. The fact that thousands of trade unionists felt a moral obligation to join the resistance movement and later paid for these convictions with their lives in Nazi concentration camps is ample testimony to the strength of the tradition. After 1945, with the rehabilitation of Czechoslovakia, the free trade unions seemed destined to be a major influence in the reconstruction of the war-shattered State. These fond hopes were abruptly ended by the communist seizure of power in 1948 and the subsequent remodelling of the labour movement along State trade union lines. But the aims and ideals of free trade unionism were not dead; they lived on in the minds of the workers through the

ensuing period of political, economic and trade union « deformations » and surfaced once again when the « Prague Spring » temporarily loosened the chains which had bound the trade unions ever closer to the Communist Party in the years from 1948 to 1967. The 1968 rebirth of the trade unions came about virtually overnight; the desire, never completely stifled, to be free and independent — independent of the Communist Party and free in the sense of being able to foster the interests of all manual and white collar workers — welled up into the open and quickly found expression in the revised trade union programme and the new demands (notably for the right to strike and the introduction of workers' councils) which we have noted above.

The August occupation brought these developments to a sudden halt. Hopes expressed a few months later that it would still be possible to press forward with at least part of the trade union reforms proved unjustified. It must now be regretfully recognised that the Czechoslovak trade unions are in full and inexorable retreat towards the bad old days of complete subjection to the State.

In the meantime, tens of thousands of trade unionists who identified themselves with the reform process of 1968 have fallen victim to purges on an ever increasing scale. The same fate is in store for many more. There is nevertheless one important lesson to be drawn from the Czechoslovak tragedy, a lesson which will not be lost on future generations of trade unionists : once implanted, the ideals and traditions of free trade unionism in its broadest sense are not to be destroyed by force.



## REFERENCES

- (1) *Nástin dějin československého odborového hnutí* (History of the Czechoslovak trade union movement), Prague, 1963, page 360.
- (2) *Ibid.*, page 368.
- (3) *Ibid.*, page 381.
- (4) *Ibid.*, pages 420 - 432.
- (5) Pellikan, Jiri : *Das Unterdrückte Dossier*. (The Piller Report) In German. Report of the Commission of the CP Central Committee on political trials and « rehabilitations » in Czechoslovakia, 1949-1968. Europa Verlag, Vienna, 1970. Pages 63-67.
- (6) *Ibid.*, pages 67, 68.

## APPENDIX

### STATEMENTS BY THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS ON THE OCCUPATION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

I

21 August 1968

Telegram sent by Harm Bulters, ICFTU General Secretary, to U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, on 21 August 1968 :

« The international free labour movement, on behalf of 63 million workers organised in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, expresses profound horror and indignation at the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and her Polish, Hungarian and East German henchmen, and its solidarity with the unhappy Czechoslovak people, once again as in Hitler's time the victim of brutal aggression perpetrated under the most threadbare pretexts.

« Events of the last few weeks have irrefutably proved that twelve years after Hungary, fifteen after East Berlin, Soviet communism has not changed its nature or approach. As soon as, in any country within the Soviet orbit, there is a move towards greater liberty, the Kremlin rulers, prisoners of their own evil system, feel bound to rush in with tanks and guns to stamp out any spark of freedom.

« In view of this flagrant violation of human rights and of the Charter of the United Nations, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions urges the Secretary-General of the United Nations to call an immediate meeting of UN Security Council to condemn the occupation and to rule that all foreign troops must leave Czechoslovakia immediately. »

II

7 September 1968

Statement by the International Free Trade Union Conference on Czechoslovakia, Brussels, 7 September 1968 :

The International Free Trade Union Conference on Czechoslovakia, convened by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and attended by members of the ICFTU Executive Board Sub-Committee, ICFTU-affiliated European trade union organisations and representatives of the International Trade Secretariats :

EXPRESSES profound sympathy and support to the Czechoslovak workers who, once again, as in Hitler's time, have been the victims of brutal aggression perpetrated under the most threadbare pretexts;

EMPHATICALLY REAFFIRMS the international free trade union movement's condemnation of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by troops of the USSR, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and

Bulgaria as a flagrant violation of human rights, the most elementary principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations;

DENOUNCES the Moscow « Diktat » which has been forced upon Czechoslovakia in an attempt to whitewash before world public opinion the continued occupation of Czechoslovakia by foreign troops and the control of its public life by Russian secret police, which in practice has turned the sovereign state of Czechoslovakia into a « protectorate ». The Kremlin action against Czechoslovakia demonstrates that the Soviet rulers' concept of totalitarian and dogmatic communism makes it impossible for them to accept any changes towards freedom. It reveals the bankruptcy of this system which has to resort to force and repression to maintain its grip on a people striving for freedom and democracy;

VOICES deep concern over the repercussions of the vicious assault on Czechoslovakia for world peace, particularly in view of the military build-up along the borders of peaceful countries;

CONDEMNS the absence of protest from the so-called trade union organisations of the invading countries, which allowed their governments' military action to go unchallenged; the Conference is convinced that free trade unions cannot have any contacts with such organisations;

SALUTES the Czechoslovak people, and especially the workers, and pledges the continued solidarity of the whole international free trade union movement with their heroic struggle for full human and trade union rights;

APPEALS to the United Nations, all governments and to world public opinion to continue to exercise all possible pressure to secure the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Czechoslovakia and full guarantees for her independence and sovereignty;

WELCOMES the action so far undertaken by free trade unions in protest at the occupation of Czechoslovakia and calls on workers' organizations all over the world to continue to champion the cause of Czechoslovak freedom; it appeals to the free trade union movement to participate generously in all practical steps to help the victims of the aggression;

STRESSES most emphatically that the international free trade union movement is more determined than ever to carry on its struggle for human and trade union rights and calls on trade union organisations everywhere to join it in this great task.

### III

22 November 1968

ICFTU Executive Board Resolution on Czechoslovakia, Brussels, 22 November 1968.

The Executive Board, in endorsing the statement on Czechoslovakia adopted by the International Free Trade Union Conference on Czechoslovakia (Brussels, 7 September 1968),

EXPRESSES the profound sympathy and solidarity of the entire free trade union movement with the Czech and Slovak people in their courageous struggle for preserving the changes towards human freedom and democratic reforms initiated before the aggression perpetrated against their country;

SALUTES in particular the workers of Czechoslovakia striving to achieve greater freedom for the trade unions of their country to reflect the experience and working class interests of their members;

CONDEMNS most emphatically the continued interference by Soviet imperialism in the political, economic, social and cultural life of Czechoslovakia in violation of the universally recognised right of all peoples to self-determination;

VOICES again its deep concern over the repercussions of the vicious assault on Czechoslovakia for world peace, particularly in view of the Soviet military build-up along the borders of peaceful countries;

REITERATES the appeal to the United Nations, all governments and to world public opinion to continue to exercise all possible pressure to secure the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Czechoslovakia and full guarantees for her independence and sovereignty;

CALLS on workers' organisations all over the world to continue to champion most vigorously the cause of Czechoslovak freedom; and

RE-EMPHASISES that the international free trade union movement is more determined than ever to carry on its struggle for human and trade union rights and calls on trade union organisations everywhere to join it in this great task.

### IV

8 July 1969

ICFTU Ninth World Congress Resolution on the world political situation :

The Ninth World Congress of the ICFTU, meeting in Brussels from 2 to 8 July 1969,

EXPRESSES the profound sympathy and solidarity of the international free trade union movement with the peoples of Czechoslovakia whose hopes for changes towards more human freedom and democratic reform have been brutally crushed by the vicious aggression perpetrated against their country by the Soviet Union and its satellites;

REITERATES the appeal of the ICFTU to the United Nations, to governments and to world public opinion to exert every possible pressure to secure the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Czechoslovakia and full guarantees for her independence and sovereignty; denounces the pernicious doctrine of « limited sovereignty » as an instrument of Soviet imperialism which flagrantly violates the universally recognised right of all peoples to self-determination, and assures the peoples of Czechoslovakia that free labour will continue to champion their cause.