

February 23, 1989

Czechoslovakia: Conviction of Havel Isolates Regime

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Summary:

An analysis of the conviction of Vaclav Havel, including its political and diplomatic implications.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

~~Top Secret~~

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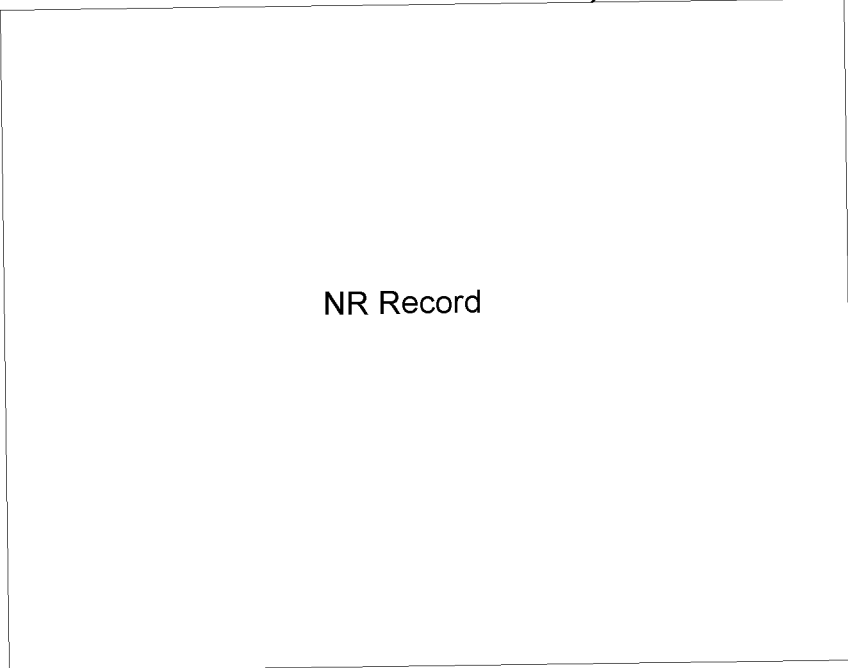
CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Conviction of Havel Isolates Regime

The conviction of Vaclav Havel on Tuesday shows the regime's determination to confront the recent upsurge in dissent, but the move will lead to more Western and Soviet criticism and will increase tensions between hardliners and pragmatists in the party. Police also arrested Charter 77 spokesman Tomas Hradilck on Wednesday for "incitement," and seven other dissidents were convicted yesterday. Two received sentences similar to that given Havel, and the other five got suspended sentences. Several Western governments, including West Germany and Austria, have criticized Prague's actions, and a Soviet press article urged the Czechoslovaks to rethink their policy on dissent, echoing earlier indications of Moscow's displeasure.

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Comment: The hardliners who dominate the Jakes regime appear convinced that only a crackdown will stem dissident defiance and are prepared to ignore foreign criticism. Pressure from Moscow may, however, encourage more pragmatic members in the leadership to push for leniency. The sentences imposed could still be suspended or reduced if the pragmatists argue convincingly that imprisonment might incite more demonstrations. The orthodox leaders in East Germany and Bulgaria, who also are trying to resist General Secretary Gorbachev, will applaud Havel's conviction.

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