

November 20, 1989

Czechoslovakia: Aftermath of the Demonstration□□□

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Summary:

An analysis of the recent demonstrations in Czechoslovakia and its effects on the Party's rule.

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Aftermath of the Demonstration

The alleged death of a student demonstrator by police on Friday is fueling plans for further protests and appears to have thrown the regime into disarray; Soviet pressure will add to the hardliners' discomfit.

The brutal suppression on Friday of a rally by 50,000 protesters in Prague has prompted new challenges to the regime. Two thousand mourners assembled on Saturday at Wenceslaus Square where a 20-year-old student reportedly was beaten to death by police, and 30,000 protesters returned there yesterday to call for the leadership's ouster. Leading dissident Vaclav Havel told [redacted] that the student's funeral would be an antiregime rally. [redacted]

The Czechoslovak regime also appears to be under pressure from Moscow. Party ideologue Jan Fojtik, in Moscow for talks with his Soviet counterparts, said Friday that the Czechoslovaks will reassess the Soviet invasion in 1968 and the Prague Spring. [redacted]

There are other signs that the government is in disarray. At least one official claims he and others have turned down ministerial appointments for fear of being compromised by association with the Jakes leadership. The newspapers of two formerly subservient political parties condemned the suppression of Friday's demonstration and praised the students. More than 20 legislators—including at least two Communist delegates—plan to vote against a new law restricting independent publications. [redacted]

Comment: The regime almost certainly has undermined its position and added to internal disunity by its brutality. Popular resentment and finger pointing by other leaders anxious to escape responsibility for killing a protester probably will center on hardliners such as General Secretary Jakes and Fojtik. Miroslav Stepan, Prague party chief and presumed contender for Jakes's job, could also be held accountable. A party plenum on 14 and 15 December could serve as the occasion for moderates and opportunists alike to press for major changes in leadership and policies. The regime's in-house critics probably will use Moscow's apparent pressure on the hardliners and additional signs of public unrest to step up pressure for significant political and economic reforms. [redacted]

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