

Czechoslovakia
-----Czechoslovakia Oppressive, Flunks Human Rights Test

(Text: Zimmermann CSCE statement)

Vienna -- Because of its disregard for the human rights of its citizens, Czechoslovakia is unfit to host any follow-up to the current Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) meeting in Vienna, Ambassador Warren Zimmermann has declared.

Speaking to the heads of the other 34 CSCE delegations November 15, Zimmermann criticized Czechoslovak authorities for their harassment and repression of persons attempting to participate in a symposium in Prague over the November 12-13 weekend on the place of Czechoslovakia in European history.

Czech authorities, through their behavior, again demonstrated their disregard for the rights of their own citizens and for international undertakings to which they are a party, said Zimmermann. Under these circumstances, "the United States will not join any consensus to any proposal that any post-Vienna follow-up meeting be held in Czechoslovakia. That decision is irrevocable; it will not be subject to review or change during the life of the Vienna meeting," the U.S. diplomat stated.

"The Czechoslovakia government does not want to understand that freedom is like the hydra of classical mythology -- if you cut off one of its heads, new heads will grow. And it does not want to understand that, in the end, freedom will prevail," Zimmermann concluded.

Following is the text of Zimmermann's remarks:

(Begin text)

Last weekend, a symposium -- "Czechoslovakia '88" -- was to have been held in Prague to assess the place of Czechoslovakia in European history. Given the historical significance of Czechoslovakia, not to mention its deep intellectual and cultural traditions, such a symposium promised to increase knowledge and understanding of a country whose people have suffered much and achieved much.

Unfortunately, in line with a different tradition -- one of scorn for individual expression -- the Czechoslovak government prevented the meeting from taking place. Several interested visitors from abroad, including some Americans, were permitted to enter Prague, but all were kept under close and usually obtrusive police surveillance. None of the Czechoslovak citizens who organized the event or planned to participate in it were available to meet with them. At least 20 such persons had either been taken away by the police and were sitting somewhere in detention, or were threatened with detention if they were found in Prague.

The chairman of the organizing committee, Vaclav Havel, was able to avoid detention until Friday. Just as he entered the hotel where the foreign visitors were gathered and opened the meeting, the police grabbed him and took him away as well. The foreign participants were

subsequently warned that their efforts to take part in the symposium "would be considered as a manifestation of hostility to Czechoslovakia" and threatened that the authorities would "draw relevant consequences" against these people.

Organized on the well-founded belief that the Czechoslovak authorities would not respect the rights of their citizens, a parallel symposium was held here in Vienna. The papers prepared for the Prague symposium were discussed. I have read most of them. I would suggest that the Czechoslovak delegation do the same, for I would like to hear from that delegation exactly what it is in those papers that so threatened the government it represents. Was it a call for respect for human rights and freedom of expression? Was it a differing, possibly even a more objective interpretation of Czechoslovak history? Or was the threat simply that some individuals tried to assemble to discuss the history of their own country without government approval?

I can see no danger in the ideas expressed in those papers, nor in the discussion of them that should have been made in Prague and had instead to be made in Vienna. Instead, the danger is to be found in the actions of the Czechoslovak authorities against the organizers. The contempt they displayed for the rights of Czechoslovak citizens amounts to contempt for the Vienna meeting and the CSCE process in which Czechoslovakia pledged to respect those rights.

This is not the first time such contempt has been evident. In the past six months alone, I can recall several blatant violations of Czechoslovakia's commitments regarding human rights. In April, a religious gathering in Bratislava was broken up and human rights activists Pavel Wonka died in a Czechoslovak prison. In June, several foreigners -- including 10 Americans -- were expelled after attending another independent gathering that was not tolerated. In September, Czechoslovak police physically assaulted Michael Wise, an American citizen and Reuters correspondent who was carrying out his activities as a journalist accredited by the Czechoslovak authorities themselves. A little more than two weeks ago, the police took action against a demonstration marking the 70th anniversary of the Czechoslovak republic and detained dozens of individuals.

Today, in addition to the news regarding the Czechoslovak history symposium, we fear for the health of Jiri Wolf, who has served about half his adult life in prison or detention for his defense of human rights. We are similarly concerned for Augustin Navratil, currently in a psychiatric ward, and Ivan Polansky, also in prison.

One must set this record of current and continuing human rights abuses against Czechoslovakia's role and aspirations at this Vienna CSCE meeting. In counterpoint to its manifold police actions against its own people, the Czechoslovak government is in the vanguard of those who seek here in Vienna to divest our concluding document of significant meaning in the area of human rights. Yet, even as these parallel policies are carried out in Vienna and Prague, Czechoslovakia has been pressing its case to host a follow-up meeting in the field of economic cooperation.

The view of the United States government about a post-Vienna economic conference is a skeptical one; that view has not changed. But the pattern of repression in Czechoslovakia, together with the

persistent efforts of the Czechoslovak delegation to secure approval for Prague as host for an economic follow-up, lead me to state for the record the U.S. position on the candidacy of Czechoslovakia.

Our view of the overall qualifications for hosting a CSCE follow-up meeting has been made clear many times. A prospective host should have a credible record on the subject to be discussed. Beyond that, a prospective host should reflect the commitment to openness and access, for its visitors and for its own citizens, that has been so well exemplified by the government of Austria at the Vienna meeting.

By this simple and reasonable standard, the government of Czechoslovakia fails -- and fails abysmally. For that reason, the United States will not join any consensus to any proposal that any post-Vienna follow-up meeting be held in Czechoslovakia. That decision is irrevocable; it will not be subject to review or change during the life of the Vienna meeting.

It's a lesson often taught, but rarely learned, that dictatorships tend to exacerbate the very problems which they seek by repression to eliminate. Ironically, several of the would-be participants in the abortive symposium treated that theme in their discussion papers.

Jiri Hajek, a former foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, wrote: "At present the Prague Spring is actually getting its rehabilitation from where in 1968 the brutal blow was aimed against it. It becomes all the more necessary to revive its spirit in the country of its origin." And Vaclav Havel, the chairman of the symposium, wrote that an independent culture in a closed society can be a double-edged weapon: "It gives to any intellectual activity a dimension it does not have in open societies an added "radioactivity" -- otherwise people would not be put in jail for their writings."

The Czechoslovak government does not want to understand this. It wants to believe, as Rude Pravo charged yesterday, that the events of last week and previous weeks were the work of aliens, foreign radios, NATO types. The Czechoslovak government does not want to understand the obvious truth that dissent in Czechoslovakia is not provoked from outside, as it ludicrously asserts, but is the product of its own policies of repression. It does not want to understand that repression only breeds a greater desire for liberty.

The evidence is right before its eyes -- last Friday, the day that the "Czechoslovakia '88" symposium was suppressed, a Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee was established in Prague. The Czechoslovakia government does not want to understand that freedom is like the hydra of classical mythology -- if you cut off one of its heads, new heads will grow. And it does not want to understand that, in the end, freedom will prevail.

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