

## Module 05: 1968 — A Generation in Revolt?

### Evidence 14: "The Warsaw Letter:" Letter From Warsaw Pact Leaders to Czech Officials, July 1968

# A

#### Introduction

On July 14-15, the leaders of the Soviet Union, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria met in Warsaw to discuss the events taking place in Czechoslovakia. On the heels of the publication of "The Two Thousand Words," the Warsaw Pact leaders feared that the "experiments" in multi-party democracy and, most importantly, the expansion of freedom of the press would lead Czechoslovakia to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, an event they considered intolerable. The meeting led to what has become known as "The Warsaw Letter," in which they outlined their interests in the "deteriorating situation" in Czechoslovakia and warned of the consequences of continued "deviation" from Marxism-Leninism.

#### Questions to Consider

- What are the primary concerns of the Warsaw Pact leaders?
- How do they justify their interest in maintaining socialism in Czechoslovakia?
- How do they understand the critique offered in "The Two Thousand Words?"

#### Document

To the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

Dear Comrades,

On behalf of the Central Committees of the communist and workers' parties of Bulgaria, Hungary, the GDR, Poland, and the Soviet Union, we are sending you this letter, which is motivated by sincere friendship based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, and by concern for our common aim of strengthening the positions of socialism and the security of the commonwealth of socialist states.

The course of events in your country arouses great apprehension. We are firmly convinced that the stance adopted by reactionaries against your party and the foundations of the social system in the CSSR, a stance backed by imperialism, is threatening to divert your country from the road of socialism and, consequently, is endangering the interest of the whole socialist commonwealth. . . .

We want you to understand us well and evaluate our intentions correctly.

It was not and is not our intention to interfere in matters that are purely the internal affair of your party and state, or to violate the principles of respect for independence and equality in relations between communist parties and socialist countries.

We are not interfering in the methods of planning and running Czechoslovakia's socialist economy, nor are we interfering in the measures you have adopted to improve the structure of your economy and promote socialist democracy.

We welcome the basing of relations between Czechs and Slovaks on sound foundations of fraternal cooperation within the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

But at the same time we cannot agree that hostile forces should push your country off the socialist path and threaten to detach Czechoslovakia from the socialist community. This is no longer your affair alone. It is the common cause of all communist and workers' parties and states, which are bound by alliance, cooperation, and friendship. It is the common cause of our countries, which have united in the Warsaw Pact to safeguard their independence, to preserve peace, to maintain security in Europe, and to erect an impregnable barrier to the intrigues of aggressive and vengeful imperialist forces. . . .

By exploiting the party's weakened leadership in the country and by demagogically using the slogan of "democratization," reactionary forces have unleashed a campaign against the CPCz [Czechoslovakian Communist Party] and against its honest and dedicated cadres, with the evident intention of destroying the leading role of the party, undermining the socialist system, and setting Czechoslovakia against the other socialist

countries.

The political organizations and clubs that have recently emerged outside the National Front have essentially become staffs for the reactionary forces. The social democrats are arduously seeking to ensure that their party is formally established. They are organizing illegal committees and trying to split the labor movement in Czechoslovakia and force their way into the running of the state with the aim of restoring a bourgeois system. Anti-socialist and revisionist forces have seized the press, radio, and television and turned them into a tribute for attacks against the communist party in order to disorient the working class and all working people. They engaged in unrestrained, anti-socialist demagoguery aimed at undermining Czechoslovakia's friendly relations with the USSR and other socialist countries. Some in the mass media are genuinely intent on perpetrating systematic moral terror against people who oppose the forces of reaction or who are voicing concern at the course of events.

Despite the resolution of the CPCz CC's May plenum, which cited the threat posed by right-wing and anti-communist forces as the main danger, reactionary attacks have escalated without encountering any resistance. For the very reason, the reactionary forces were given the opportunity, in public, to publish their political platform under the title "Two Thousand Words," which contains an open call for a struggle against the communist party and against the constitutional system, as well as a call for strikes and chaos. This appeal is a serious threat to the party, the National Front, and the socialist state. It is an attempt to foment anarchy. The declaration is, in its essence, the organizational-political platform of counterrevolution. No one ought to be misled by its authors, who claim they do not intend to overthrow the socialist system, that they do not wish to act without the communists, and that they do not want to undermine ties with the socialist countries. These are merely empty phrases, aimed at legalizing the platform of counterrevolution and overcoming the vigilance of the party, the working class, and all working people. . . .

The entire course of events in your country during recent months demonstrates that the forces of counterrevolution, backed by imperialist centers, have launched a comprehensive assault on the socialist system and have not been rebuffed or opposed by the party and the people's regime. There is no doubt that centers of international imperialist reaction

have become involved in the events in Czechoslovakia, doing everything possible to aggravate and complicate the situation and to incite anti-socialist forces. Under the guise of praising "democratization" and "liberalization" in the CSSR, the bourgeois press is conducting a subversive campaign against fraternal socialist countries. The ruling circles of the FRG are particularly active and are trying to exploit events in Czechoslovakia, to provoke friction between socialist countries, to isolate the GDR, and to carry out their revanchist objectives.

Comrades, can you not see this danger? Is it possible to remain passive under the circumstances and to confine yourselves to declarations and assurances of loyalty to the cause of socialism and commitments of alliance? Can you not see that counterrevolution is seizing one position after another from you? And that the party is losing control over the course of events and is retreating further and further under pressure from anti-communist forces? . . .

The defense of the power of the working class, of all working people, and of socialist achievements in Czechoslovakia demands:

- a decisive and bold stance against right-wing and anti-socialist forces, and the mobilization of all means of defense created by the socialist state;
- an end to the activities of all political organizations acting against socialism;
- a reassertion of control by the party over the mass media—the press, radio, and television—so that they will be used in the interests of the working class, of all working people, and of socialism;
- a closing of the ranks of the party on the foundations of the principles of Marxism-Leninism, unflinching adherence to the principles of democratic centralism, and a struggle against those whose activity aids hostile forces.

We know that in Czechoslovakia there are forces capable of defending the socialist system and defeating anti-socialist elements. The working class, working peasants, the progressive intelligentsia, and the overwhelming majority of the working people of the republic are prepared to do all that is inevitable for the future advancement of socialist society. The task of the day is to give these healthy forces a clear perspective, lift them to action,

and mobilize their energies in the struggle against the forces of counterrevolution in order to save and consolidate socialism in Czechoslovakia.

Confronted by the threat of counterrevolution, the voice of the working class must resound with full strength in response to a call by the communist party. The working class together with the working peasantry has expended maximum efforts for the victory of the socialist revolution. The preservation of the socialist achievements is something they cherish most.

We are convinced that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, aware of its responsibility, will take urgent measures to block the road to reaction. In this struggle you can count on the solidarity and comprehensive assistance of the fraternal socialist parties.

Source:

Jaromír Navrátil et al, eds., *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, translated by Mark Kramer, Joy Moss, and Ruth Tosek (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 234-238.

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