

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA DIVIDED OVER CZECH EVENTS

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As is the case with several pro-Moscow Communist parties in different countries, the leadership of the pro-Moscow CP in India also has been seriously divided on the military invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact powers in the name of fighting a "counterrevolution" in that country.

The National Council of the CP, which concluded a ten-day session in Delhi on September 9, has failed to evolve a definite stand on the events in Czechoslovakia. It could not even agree on a document meant to be circulated among party members for inner-party discussions. Instead the National Council constituted two separate committees to prepare draft documents to be circulated for discussions with a view to "unifying the understanding of the party."

One of the committees thus set up consists of the hard-line defenders of the Kremlin bureaucracy, including S.A. Dange, chairman of the CPI; C. Rajeshwar Rao, general secretary; N.K. Krishnan (Madras); S.G. Sardesai (Maharashtra); M. Kalyanasundaram (Madras); Biswanath Mukherjee (West Bengal); and Kali Shankar Shukla (Uttar Pradesh).

The other committee, representing strong critics of the Soviet action and supporters of the Czechoslovak experiment of "liberalisation," includes Bhupesh Gupta, M.P. from West Bengal; Dr. G. Adhikari, the party's top theoretician in Bombay; Satyapal Dang (Punjab); A. Ahmed, M.P. from Uttar Pradesh; Achutha Menon (Kerala); H.K. Vyas (Rajasthan); and Yogendra Sharma, M.P. from Uttar Pradesh.

A "compromise" resolution released to the press on behalf of the National Council, however, did not specifically condemn Soviet action or demand withdrawal of Soviet troops, but expressed fraternal sympathy with the people of Czechoslovakia in their "struggle for firm defence of socialism."

It also expressed the hope that all necessary steps would be taken by the Czech and Soviet leaderships to ensure "speedy and effective implementation of their respective obligation" under the Moscow agreement reached by the Soviet leadership with Czechoslovak leaders.

The statement supported the decisions of the January and May plenary meetings of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia. At the

same time it stressed that "collective spirit and mutual cooperation in faithfully implementing the terms of the Moscow agreement can alone provide a solution of the problem on the basis of proletarian internationalism."

The National Council meeting was called to discuss the Czech events as the party's Central Executive Committee found itself hopelessly divided. Chairman Dange -- a faithful Moscow protégé -- stoutly defended the Soviet action as an "inevitable" measure to crush a "counterrevolution" in Czechoslovakia, while the opposition to the pro-Moscow group, led by Dr. Adhifari, justified the Action Programme of the Czechoslovak CP and condemned the invasion.

Initially it would appear that the defenders of Soviet action had a slight majority in the National Council meeting; but the balance was tilted against them with the dramatic arrival from Prague of Somnath Lahiri, a West Bengal leader (a minister in the former West Bengal United Front government).

Lahiri was undergoing medical treatment in Prague during the Soviet invasion. Although the Czech Communist doctors promised him safe conduct, he decided "as a matter of conscience" to get himself smuggled out of the country across the Austrian border to be able to report to the National Council.

According to a report appearing in National Herald of Delhi, September 7, Lahiri told the council: "From what I have seen of occupation in Czechoslovakia, if this is defence of socialism then slavery is better...You want socialism and defend Soviet action in the name of socialism. Can a slave country be socialist? Is socialism possible without independence?"

Lahiri reportedly gave an account of what he had himself "seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears" from the Czech Communists at different levels of the party hierarchy.

Two important documents sent by Indian Communists stationed in Prague giving a graphic account of conditions in Czechoslovakia were also read at the meeting along with a letter critical of the Soviet action released by the CP-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions both in the workers states and the capitalist countries.

The WFTU, in what was described as a mandatory circular to all its affiliates, issued before the signing of the Mos-

cow agreement, called upon trade unions of the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries to "urgently and immediately" demand from their governments the withdrawal of all their troops from Czechoslovakia.

The circular also noted that the trade unions of the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact powers had refused to respond to its call and characterised this development "as a lamentable state of disruption in the WFTU."

This caused a great deal of discomfiture to the supporters of the Soviet action. Dange happens to be a vice-chairman of the WFTU.

The documents sent by Indian Communists included a letter from the Kerala party leader Unni Raja, a member of the Central Executive now in Czechoslovakia. This was a detailed account of discussions of the invasion he had had with Czech citizens in the streets of Prague and also with Soviet soldiers and other sources.

This critical view was further strengthened by a similar account of S. Chatterjee, All-India Trade Union Congress representative in the WFTU, and his wife. The main points made by them were reported as follows:

Within two hours of the Soviet occupation of the official Prague Radio, a new Prague Radio got into action, led and guided by the official leadership, that has managed to stay within Prague itself. It issued directions to the people of what they should do and its messages reached every nook and corner of Czechoslovakia. An interesting incident was that at once, immediately following the occupation, 20,000 students spontaneously rallied demanding withdrawal of foreign troops. They were peaceful but were being provoked. The Free Prague Radio immediately gave a call to the demonstrators to disperse from the gate forthwith.

The Soviet soldiers, according to these reports, "literally went without food except for what they had brought from their own country. No shop in Prague would sell anything to the occupying soldier." According to eyewitness accounts of these Indian Communists, they saw a group of Soviet soldiers offering either rubles or Czechoslovakian currency at a stall, offering any price for food. The shop manager flatly answered: "We do not sell food to the occupation troops. Shoot us dead and take away what you like."

The occupation authorities had come with ready-made lists of Communist functionaries and other influential people to be arrested along with their car numbers, names of streets and houses, but

the Free Prague Radio gave a call to remove the names of the streets and numbers of every house, and it was done throughout Prague and all over Czechoslovakia within half an hour. The Indian Communists saw slogans painted on the walls: "Moscow -- 1,800 KM -- Free food -- Free protection -- Go."

These disclosures evidently changed the relationship of forces within the National Council of the CPI. Party Secretary Rajeshwar Rao announced that the council must disperse because the documents submitted to them so far had become obsolete. He wanted the Central Executive Committee to meet again to take stock of the situation and come forward with a proper line which could serve as a basis for discussion.

Dange and his supporters insisted that sentiments should not have any place in the framing of party resolutions. A compromise resolution submitted by H.K. Vyas of Rajasthan to avoid an open split was found unacceptable to Dange's supporters. The two groups met separately to discuss their respective strategies. Only a day later another compromise statement was adopted by the council.

The Dange faction has suffered a major defeat inside the National Council. In reality, the debate on the Czech events has only begun among the Indian Stalinists, both inside the CPI and in the pro-Peking Communist party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)]. The upshot of the discussions in the National Council is that it has withheld its judgment on the correctness or otherwise of the Soviet intervention. The public resolution stating both the Soviet and Czech points of view is heavily weighted in favour of Czechoslovakia.

The CPI(M), however, has justified the Soviet intervention as a step "to defend socialist gains in Czechoslovakia against the counterrevolutionary forces inside and the militarist and imperialist forces outside." The leadership of the CPI(M), unlike that of the CPI, has been able to put up more durable "common fronts" on the issue.

Along with the Castroist leadership of the Cuban Communist party, the Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) has argued that "this extraordinary step on the part of the Soviet leaders and their allies appears to be a priceless penalty they are paying with compound interest for their gross right opportunist and revisionist sins. The step will no doubt lead to widespread confusion as it cannot be defended in the commonly understood terms of democracy, independence and equality of nations. That socialism which is the real guarantor of all these values should appear to violate them is only due to the depths of revisionism reached by Soviet policies accompanied

by Czech distortions." (Peoples Democracy, August 25.)

Significantly enough the CPI(M) is the first left-wing party in this country to publish Fidel Castro's speech on the Czechoslovak developments in full. The CPI(M) publishing house has also published recently the Bolivian diary of Che Guevara -- indicating that the CPI(M) is getting closer to the Cuban leadership on several international problems, although on the domestic front it is still pursuing an opportunist policy of coalitions and united fronts with bourgeois parties.

Among the Marxist parties that have condemned the Soviet intervention and demanded withdrawal of Warsaw Pact troops from Czechoslovakia are the Socialist Workers party, Indian section of the Fourth International, and the Revolutionary Socialist party of India, a centrist group.

As for the bourgeois political par-

ties and press in India, both have fully exploited the Czech events to discredit the name of communism and mount anti-Soviet agitation in a big way. The right-wing parties like the Swatantra party and Jan Sangh, supported by sections of the Congress party and reformist socialists -- Praja Socialist party (PSP) and the Samyukta Socialist party (SSP) -- took the initiative in organising anti-Soviet demonstrations.

The Indian parliament adopted a motion expressing "concern" about the Soviet action and demanding withdrawal of Warsaw Pact troops from Czechoslovakia. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi did not accept an amendment moved by a member of the ruling Congress party -- supported by the non-Communist opposition -- seeking to "condemn the Soviet aggression." She pleaded that the strong word "condemn" was not in the vocabulary used by her government in its dealing with the "friendly" Soviet Union.