Czechoslovakia — A Cause for Hope

THE RECENT unhappy events in Czechoslovakia present us, paradoxically, with a cause for hope, a pattern for courage. The Czech people have lost a government of their own choice, but they have not lost the democracy that was in them. As you know, millions of Germans held on to their faith in the dignity of the human being long after Hitler denied them that dignity. In the same way there are millions of Czechs who remain loyal democrats today, and who will fight everlastingly back against this new effort to destroy the free democratic institutions they have so laboriously carved out of their hardships during two world wars.

The Communists, like any people carried along on a tide of belief that the state, and the state alone, is entitled to authority over the lives and thoughts of people, forget some basic things. The Communists, like the Nazis, forget that eventually every act of force breeds a counterforce that one day will be active. The Communists forget that their every move to snatch from the common man his right to a life of his own design will drive that man into a brotherhood with his fellows dedicated to regain that right for himself and his fellowship in democracy.

That fact was established among men in Germany just 100 years ago, when German liberals rose against the monarchical tyranny that frustrated their dawning sense of the political rights of man. In 1848 there were strong liberal forces in Germany that still survive those terrible experiences. In 1948 there are liberal forces in Czechoslovakia that will survive difficult ordeals. That survival is not reckoned with in the Communist plan by which Czechoslovakia was recently taken.

What the new, totalitarian forms of aggression against man in the 20th Century are, the western democracies were slow to grasp. It took the democratic world too long to comprehend the true international meaning of Hitler’s imperialism. When the western democracies did, indeed and at last, realize that Hitler was driving western civilization toward a new chaos, it took action that was swift and decisive. Pacific nations that had no arms and no armies, created arms and trained soldiers to use them. Hitler was prevented from pushing the Western world into the abyss of irrevocable destruction.

GOVERNMENTS of the western democracies were slow, indeed, in their understanding of what totalitarianism meant, whether it carried the Fascist, or the Nazi, or the Communist label. This time we can recognize the signs without hesitation. The western world has begun to take action, now, against a broader disaster. A new spirit of cooperation is emerging in Washington, in Paris, in London, in the Hague, and in the other capitals of the 16 nations that have proposed to join their energies and their resources in a mighty effort.

This is proposed as the mightiest effort ever made, short of the cooperative effort that goes into fighting a war. It is an effort for peace, not for war; for construction, not for destruction; for strength without the misuse of power; for freedom from fear that is not expressed in violence.

Proposals have been made for the collaboration of free peoples, whose combined strength will be greater than the strength of any bloc artificially created by imperialist militarism or political trickery. In the end such unity will be stronger because it will rest on the will of free peoples, than any such blocs as may be forged by the temporary subjugation of the Czechs or of those other nations now suffering under the indignities of minority dictatorships.

The economic and spiritual recovery of western Europe now is the only real answer to the tactics that have succeeded in Czechoslovakia. Those same tactics failed in France, where there was also a considerable Communist minority. They failed because the French people rejected a system that would limit their individual liberties. Those same tactics failed in Italy, where there is also a considerable Communist minority because the Italians, having once suffered the indignities of dictatorship, want no more of it.

These two more fortunate countries, France and Italy, were able to exercise their popular volitions, unlike the Czechs and the Slovaks and those other people of central Europe, because they were under neither military, nor economic, nor political threat from without. These western powers were free to make their own decisions unlike the Czechs, who were ordered, under threats not hard to imagine, to withdraw from the Paris conferences on European recovery. They decided that their destinies lay in the direction of freedom and economic cooperation.

WHY DID THE Czech democracy fall when the others did not? There were three cardinal reasons: military encirclement, political infiltration, and economic isolation from the resources of the West. These three causes were compounded. The deadly political climate they created in Czechoslovakia differed slightly from that which in the last three years has become so dismally familiar to the people of eastern Europe.

But to find the pattern, the technique, for bringing about the fall of Czechoslovakia, you have only to

By Richard M. Scammon
Chief, Elections and Political Parties Branch, Civil Administration Division, OMGUS

The Czech people have lost a government of their own choice, but they have not lost the democracy that was in them. So stated Richard M. Scammon, chief of the Elections and Political Parties Branch, Civil Administration, OMGUS, in a radio broadcast to the German people. Mr. Scammon spoke from Berlin March 4 in the 16th of a weekly series of MG radio talks.
look back to the early days of 1933 and the seizure of power by the Nazis here in Germany.

The circumstances are very similar. Germany had a political party committed to dictatorship and threatened with defeat by the democratic forces in the next election. The Nazi party knew, from the heavy losses it had suffered in the Reichstag elections of November, 1932, that it would be cut down still further by the good sense of the German people.

The same held true this year in Czechoslovakia. There were the same signs that the new fascism, like the old, was losing even a part of the minority support it had controlled, and that the next democratic elections would end its lingering hopes of winning a majority of the people to the support of totalitarianism.

But totalitarians in both countries, then and now, had temporary control of the police and the army. Moderate groups, reluctant to believe the extremes to which the seekers of power would go, had unwisely cooperated to the extent of letting these all-important agencies of force slip from their grasp.

As a result, it was possible in both countries, then, in 1933, and now, in 1948, to govern the people without the people’s representatives. In Berlin it was by decree. In Prague it is by postponing the meeting of Parliament. In the intervening time the totalitarians—Fascist and Communist—hauled out the oldest trick in the political world—the shabby, time-worn plot. Here in Germany the Reichstag deliberately was burned by the Nazis; in Czechoslovakia the Communists reported the discovery of a so-called “reactionary plot against the people.”

In Germany the new elections of March, 1933, could thus be held in an atmosphere of fire and compulsion, with the opposition limited in their effective ability to fight back against the power-hungry architects of dictatorship. Even so, it was necessary to unseat many delegates and to browbeat others to bring Nazism into full power.

Only in one respect does the experience in Czechoslovakia differ from the German pattern: there full power had already been seized, and the suppression of democratic political parties is already under way, before the new elections can take place and as a preparation for the perversion of the ballot.

It is clear that these elections in Czechoslovakia will be held, and that the red Fascists, like their brown brothers, will announce an overwhelming victory. All the tarnished old trappings of “national unity” will be resurrected and paraded before a terrorized population that knows that the words “national unity” means, to the Communists, the unity of the graveyard and the concentration camp.

The lesson of Czechoslovakia is an obvious one: that there can be no compromise with totalitarianism, no compromise with those who seek to destroy the very democracy they pretend to defend. Neither the Fascists nor the Communists know the meaning of the word “democracy”. Neither the brown nor the red dictator has ever triumphed through the will of the people, nor can they do so as long as the democratic forces of society resist them.

It is true the lines are now politically drawn between two systems of government. For no longer does Czechoslovakia stand to the east of that geographic line as an island of democracy in a sea of red absolutism. But let no one conclude that this line must mean the permanent division of the world, or of Germany which it crosses. The end of Nazi totalitarianism began when Hitler seized Czechoslovakia. The end of the westward advance of Communist totalitarianism may well be—indeed must be—Czechoslovakia. For European cultural and economic recovery will reach to that new borderline, with all resources of the western world, and look across it.

Not only is the door open for the hoped-for unification of Germany, but the natural and historical interdependence between the western and the eastern parts of Europe will irresistibly break through such false and artificial political barriers.

Gradually the goods and services needed on either side of the line from the other will flow across with quickening movement. For not even the most cynical government to the East would be so stupid as to deny itself the economic advantages—yes, the economic necessities—of trade with the West.

This will become an increasing compulsion upon the East as the vast productive capacity of the West is tapped. In the process of economic contact through the iron curtain the spiritual allies of the West among the masses of the unwilling totalitarian countries will gain strength, and resistance will be kept alive, and increasingly active.

Today’s tragedy of Prague is tomorrow’s triumph of democracy, as surely and certainly as the tragedy of Munich 10 years ago sounded the signal of awakening and attack against the menace of Hitlerism.

Travel Abroad Approved

The Berlin Branch of the Joint Export-Import Agency has approved applications for 24 Berlin businessmen to travel abroad, under a program initiated in the latter part of 1947.

These representatives have conducted or will conduct negotiations in England, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

The fields represented include radio and tubes; batteries; textiles; designs for cretonne and wall paper; engineering advice in the operation of sulphuric acid plants; construction of plants; paper working machines; office machines; special processing of wood scraps into a hard plastic, and construction of special kilns for processing slate and shale into building material.

Reichspost Survey Made

In view of the urgent need for additional building space to accommodate expanding Reichspost services, the Bizonal Department of Posts and Telecommunications has completed a survey of all Reichspost buildings and real property under requisition by the occupational forces and by Germans other than Reichspost personnel. This information will be used as the basis for releasing the maximum number of these properties.