

'Czechoslovakia has been totally occupied by troops from the Soviet Union and its hard-line allies' from Le Monde (22 August 1968)

Caption: On 22 August 1968, the French newspaper Le Monde examines Western reactions to the military intervention in Czechoslovakia by five Member States of the Warsaw Pact, including the Soviet Union, on the night of 21 to 22 August 1968.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 22.08.1968, n° 7 342; 25e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Les troupes de l'Union soviétique et de ses alliés orthodoxes ont occupé la totalité du territoire tchécoslovaque", p. 1.

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The events of Tuesday night

Czechoslovakia has been totally occupied by troops from the Soviet Union and its hard-line allies

The French Communist Party expresses its disapproval. General de Gaulle denounces Moscow's 'power bloc politics'.

Last night, Soviet troops and troops from the four states that signed the Warsaw letter, invaded Czechoslovakia. There has been no fighting as yet, but, despite the authorities' call for calm, there have been some incidents, particularly in Prague, and in several places Soviet troops have opened fire. Tanks have been set alight and barricades erected.

The Czech news agency CTK has reported at least five dead and twenty-five injured. But Radio Gottwaldova, the only radio station that the Russians have apparently not been able to seize, reports that some 20 Slovak schoolchildren were killed by Russian soldiers at whom they had been throwing stones.

It has been announced from Vienna that the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs has sent official notes of protest to the ambassadors of the five states involved in the invasion. In New York, it is announced that the Czechoslovak delegation to the United Nations has made this protest note public.

The Soviets took control of several public buildings, including the Ministry of Defence, Radio Prague and the offices of the party newspaper, 'Rude Pravo', arresting the editors. In response to onlookers who asked them why they were there, young Russian soldiers said that they had come to free the country from the Germans, just as in 1945.

The Central Committee Plenum has been convened for Wednesday evening. It appears that Mr Dubcek and a number of his colleagues will not attend. The building in which he has been conferring with them since morning is surrounded by Soviet troops, and they are, to all intents and purposes, under arrest. It appears that Mr Dubcek met a parliamentary delegation led by Mr Fierlinger, who played a leading role in preparing the Prague coup in 1948. Mr Cisar, one of the main leaders of the 'Prague Spring', has been arrested. President Svoboda, for his part, is practically a prisoner in his Hradcany residence.

The Presidium of the Czech Parliament is now meeting and, according to a statement issued by the CTK agency in the early afternoon, 'is making every effort to contact the President of the Republic and the President of the Council.'

Eleven Ministers who were able to meet on Wednesday issued a statement protesting against the 'occupation of Czechoslovakia'.

The Presidium of the Communist Party whose First Secretary, Mr Bilak, is not among the most liberal, has issued a statement of loyalty to the Dubcek team.

In the early afternoon, Radio Moscow broadcast an 'appeal for help' from a group of eminent Czechoslovaks which led to the intervention, but no names were given. Through its Ambassadors in Washington, London and Paris, the Soviet Government, which had had published overnight by the Tass agency an extremely vague statement justifying the invasion, sent verbal messages to President Johnson, Mr Wilson and General de Gaulle to inform them of the situation. The French President has asked Mr Couve de Murville and Mr Debray to meet him in Colombey. In the early afternoon, he issued a statement condemning the USSR for 'not having abandoned power bloc politics' and said that, 'besides constituting an attack on the rights and destiny of a friendly state', they would frustrate ongoing attempts to achieve détente.

The French Communist Party expressed its surprise and disapproval, while the CGT trade union said that workers could only deplore this invasion. The Unified Socialist Party, the Convention of Republican Institutions, the Union of Socialist Associations and Clubs, the Union of Clubs for Left-Wing Renewal, the

Human Rights League and several centrist politicians, as well as the CFDT and Force Ouvrière trade unions, reacted no less forthrightly. In Rome, the policy committee of the Italian Communist Party declared that 'there was no justification for the military intervention in Czechoslovakia' and reaffirmed its support for the Government in Prague.

Feelings are running high around the world. The British and German Governments have condemned the Soviet intervention. Marshal Tito and Mr Ceausescu have expressed their disapproval.