

'An end to the dream of freedom?' from the Luxemburger Wort (21 August 1968)

Caption: On 21 August 1968, the daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort condemns the actions of Moscow and the entry of troops from the Member States of the Warsaw Pact into Czechoslovakia during the night of 20–21 August 1968.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 21.08.1968, n° 234; 121e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Freiheitstraum ausgeträumt?", auteur:R. N. , p. 1.

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An end to the dream of freedom?

Only a few weeks ago, the Czechoslovak author, Antonin Liehm, wrote that the people of Prague would enjoy the beautiful dream of their freedom, a dream 'from which we never wish to awake', and only last Saturday, when the Bratislava ideological truce seemed to have come to an end and the Soviet press was again firing broadsides at the Prague reformists, Czechoslovakia's Foreign Minister, Professor Hajek, was still saying: 'One dark cloud doesn't mean there will be a storm.' Even the press in the CSSR, which for months hadn't been backward in refuting the slurs from Moscow, reacted calmly and with restraint, trying rather to play down the Soviet attacks of the last few days in order to avoid any increase in tension.

Moscow seemed to be pursuing a clear objective. It wanted to use the time until the ordinary congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, scheduled for 9 September, to bolster its conservative vassals in the Czechoslovak Central Committee and to hinder a further weakening of their already vulnerable position.

And suddenly, overnight, the dream of freedom has come to an end; the storm is far worse than expected. Under cover of darkness, Soviet, Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Eastern Zone troops invaded the country, which they have now occupied. The fact that Ulbricht's soldiery is involved in this villainy is the crowning insult in the tragedy of Czechoslovakia. Now the recent vision in Karlsbad of the strangely shifty grin adorning that despicable goateed face suddenly makes sense. He has now proved himself the worthy successor of that son of Braunau whose armies overran and bled dry the country on the Vltava exactly thirty years ago.

What prompted the Soviets and their conservative allies to stoke the fire once more, at a time when the world is dreaming of détente, is still entirely unclear. This move by Moscow is completely at odds with the Warsaw Pact, which states in Article 8:

'The Contracting Parties declare that they will act in a spirit of friendship and co-operation to promote the further development and strengthening of the economic and cultural ties among them, in accordance with the principles of respect for each other's independence and sovereignty and of non-intervention in each other's domestic affairs.'

Is it a case of Russian imperialism fearing damage to its existing position of power or did the Soviet Union really feel threatened by the moves towards reform in Czechoslovakia? Did it believe these reforms could spread to other countries in the Eastern bloc and ultimately to the USSR? It is no secret that there were differences of opinion within the Soviet power structure regarding the events in Prague, mainly between Brezhnev and Kosygin. The Soviet Premier, himself an economist, was by no means hostile to the Prague reforms. What effects the Soviet invasion of the CSSR will have on the political situation inside the Soviet Union cannot yet be predicted, however.

The TASS communiqué asserting that Prague requested Soviet help must undoubtedly count as the most shameful thing to have befallen Czechoslovakia since Hitler's attack thirty years ago.