

“Clean-up” operations in Czechoslovakia' from the Luxemburger Wort (27 February 1948)

Caption: On 27 February 1948, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort comments on the purges carried out in Czechoslovakia by the new Government led by Klement Gottwald with a view to stabilising the Communist power structure.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 27.02.1948, n° 58; 101e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "'Säuberungs"-Aktionen in der Tschechoslowakei", p. 1.

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‘Clean-up’ operations in Czechoslovakia

The action committees operate according to proven ‘People’s Democracy’ methods — President Beneš remains silent

Prague, 27 February. (AP). Czechoslovakia has lived through its first day under Communist rule. President Edvard Beneš remains silent. He has not yet given his radio address to the Czechoslovak people, and nobody knows whether he will speak at all. It seemed yesterday as if Beneš was cut off from the outside world. Rumour has it that he is considering resigning. The decision is likely to be taken today, when Beneš receives the new Cabinet. This information, from a hitherto reliable source, even suggested that former President Zdenek Fierlinger might become Beneš’ successor. It is known that Fierlinger, who had been temporarily removed from the leadership of the Social Democratic Party, has now been reinstated as its Chairman.

In the meantime, what are known as ‘action committees’ have started their operations. Their purge groups are reorganising everything that comes their way, in other words, they are bringing everything into line with the Communist programme. One of these action committees is sorting out the Parliament. The *Mlada Fronta*, the Communist youth front’s paper, doubts whether the committee will recognise even a single one of the departing Ministers in their capacity as Members of Parliament. They will probably only tolerate Members who are willing to fall in line with the ‘new National Front’.

It is indicative of the situation that the committee does not count a single member from the National Socialists among its ranks, although they are nominally part of the new coalition government. The State radio declared yesterday that the work of that party would not be continued until the position had been clarified and new party leaders had been found.

The President of the Catholic People’s Party, Mgr Jan Srámek, who had headed the Czechoslovak government-in-exile during the war, has informed the Speaker of Parliament in writing that he is giving up his seat. The Communist Minister for Information issued a ban on the Catholic weeklies *Katolika*, *Vodelo*, *Novy Narod* and *Toszovac*. However, authorisation was given for the organ of the Catholic People’s Party, *Ladova Demokracie*, to resume publication, this at the instigation of the new Minister for Health, Mr Jozef Plojhar, a left-wing member of the Catholic People’s Party and longstanding Communist sympathiser. The party organ of the National Socialists, on the other hand, has ceased publication.

The committees are even purging the sports and scouts associations. Two freedom fighters, who had saved the Prague radio station from the retreating Germans, were removed from their posts.

Last night, the new journal of the Army Members’ Association in Bratislava announced the resignation of Dr Jozef Lettrich as Chairman of the Slovak Democratic Party. It was Lettrich who had once prevented Klement Gottwald from seizing government power in Slovakia.

The new government’s next objectives are, apparently, the drafting of a new constitution and the speedy fulfilment of the unions’ demands for the nationalisation of all businesses employing more than 50 employees. The trade union organ *Prace* has announced that the first measure would consist in the reorganisation of the diplomatic corps.

On the subject of yesterday’s student demonstrations, reports announced that several demonstrators had been injured by shots fired by the police. The Ministry of the Interior, however, denied these reports in a radio broadcast.

Joint American-British-French statement on the events in Prague

Paris, 27 Feb. France, Great Britain and the United States issued a joint statement yesterday that the governments of the three world powers had been closely monitoring the events in Czechoslovakia and saw them as a threat to the principles of freedom to which all democratic states had committed themselves. The governments were bound to condemn a situation of which the consequences would be devastating for the

Czechoslovak people who had clearly demonstrated their love of freedom during all the tribulations of the Second World War.

The statement continued: 'The governments have noted that, by means of an artificial and carefully engineered crisis, the use of certain methods, already tried out in other countries, has led to the suspension of the freedom to exercise parliamentary rights and to the establishment of a clandestine dictatorship of a single party under the pretext of a government of national unity.'

Reliable reports from Paris claim that further talks between the three Western governments on the subject of Czechoslovakia are under way. If America and Great Britain decided to refuse recognition of the new Czechoslovak Government, France would be likely to follow suit. A spokesman for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs had previously stated that no decision had yet been taken on France's future relations with Prague. Great importance is attached to French participation in the joint statement, since France itself has to cope with the activities of a large Communist party in its own country.

Yesterday, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin received the Czechoslovak envoy in London. However, no reports about this meeting have been issued.

The Ministry of Information in Prague prohibited the publication of the joint statements issued by the three Western governments.