

Appeal to the Communist Parties of fraternal countries (21 August 1968)

Caption: On 21 August 1968, fearing a surge of protest in the country, members of the Communist Party's Central Committee, of the government and of Czechoslovakia's National Assembly call for help from governments and sister Communist Parties.

Source: Pravda. 22.08.1968, n° 235. Moskva. "Obrashchenie gruppy chlenov TsK KPCh, Pravitel'stva i natsional'nogo sobraniia ChSSR", p. 1, 4.

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Appeal by a group of members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Government and National Assembly of the Czech Soviet Socialist Republic (21 August 1968)

A group of members of the Central Committee of the Czech Soviet Socialist Republic and the Government and National Assembly appeal to the governments and Communist Parties of fraternal countries for aid.

Citizens of Czechoslovakia, workers, peasants, worker-intellectuals, men, women and young people!

We appeal to you all, without distinction of political affiliation, nationality, creed or social status, and to those who value our Socialist motherland and for whom it is their motherland. We address you all at a time when the fate of our nation hangs in the balance, a time that will henceforth be considered a key moment in our history and in our social and democratic development; when what is at issue are the values won after 20 years of effort, sacrifice and hard work; at a time when everything is at stake.

We are addressing you at a time when the achievements of our Socialist system are being threatened by forces that are exploiting the progressive policies launched by the Party itself at the January plenary of the CCP Central Committee and implemented since then by the Party with the aim of achieving genuine democracy and genuine humanism, ideals that are dear to all honest people in our motherland.

In January, at the Party's initiative, we began seeking a new form of Socialism which would correspond to our way of life and the thinking of our people and upon which all social and individual horizons would be based. The Party has openly criticised the mistakes of the past. It has completely disassociated itself from the period of the cult of personality, which really did distort the humanistic and democratic aspects of Socialism. With the active participation and support of all right-minded patriots, the Party has decisively entered a new phase with the most sincere of intentions to correct past mistakes and create conditions that will allow our people to live full, rich and happy lives.

The basic civil rights which were always intimately associated with our people's understanding of democracy and humanism were once again re-instated in the thinking and progressive spirit of the action plan that provides the long-term framework for our Socialist revival programme and which has received unprecedented mass support from our people.

This unanimous support basically confirms the correctness, strength and attractiveness of the new path we have chosen. It proves that, despite the shortcomings of the pre-January period, the Socialist idea is deep-rooted in our people. Our people consider Socialism as a natural context for their existence. Their pursuit of truth and justice has found true expression in the progressive ideas that were formed at January's plenary. These ideas have helped to lead our people from unhealthy indifference, opening the gate to a powerful flow of sound and untapped initiatives. Our people have come through this historical test with flying colours, proving their great maturity once again.

Unfortunately, the forces that waited so long for an opportunity to discredit the Party and challenge its political and moral right to govern society exploited this period of trial and error and social reform to enter the political arena. Certain groups within the Party and its agencies are actually sympathetic to these right-wing forces and are therefore in non-conformity with the principles and aims of the Party and the ideals of proletarian internationalism. They combined forces to chip away at the constitutional nature of our political reforms and concentrated on sabotaging all the efforts made by the Party and government bodies to achieve the objectives put forward in January. They launched a campaign to discredit individual civil servants, including those from the new leadership of the CCP who had the courage to draw attention publicly to the danger and see the actual situation in all its complexity. They have violated our social order and given rise to vile, nationalistic passions. They have not been averse to slandering our Czech Socialist motherland, the honest work of our people, party, army and security agencies. They have demanded a change to our foreign policy. Their smear campaign even went as far as attacking the Soviet Union, particularly in connection with the Warsaw Pact armed forces' training exercises and the fraternal relations between the Socialist countries.

Thus they created an atmosphere that was completely inadmissible for Socialist countries.

The CCP, the Government and the National Front have displayed exceptional patience and understanding.

However, it has been stressed on many occasions, notably at the May plenary, that the immediate task is to thwart the plans of the anti-Socialist right-wingers, ensure that no mistakes are made that would jeopardise the implementation of the action plan and see to it that the party-line be set, not by extremists, but by the healthy, progressive core of the party. Full public support must be given to the Party and state structures, the army, the security services, the office of the public prosecutor, the courts, the popular militia. In a word, we need to stabilise the situation.

However, right-wing extremists see the Party's generosity, patience and democratic means of solving serious political issues as a weakness rather than a strength and have intensified their activities. During the period when thousands gathered spontaneously in Prague, things got out of hand to the point where the various elements were attacking the Party and insulting its representatives, some of whom they often actually forced to take part in these rallies. A public campaign was launched in the city centre to collect signatures for a petition to abolish the popular militia. The Communists defending their point of view at these spontaneous street rallies were rudely shouted down, and physical force was used against them on more than one occasion. Many of those who signed the letter at the 'Avto-Praga' factory were shamelessly persecuted to the point of being fired. The press, albeit indirectly, is continuing its smear campaign against leading officials, using more subtle means. This well-organised, subversive activity culminated over the last few days when groups of right-wing extremists launched a full-scale attack against the CCP Central Committee building in Prague. The extremists thus did not listen to the Party's appeal and instead have stepped up their subversive activities, striving to cause conflict in our country by any means. A situation has consequently arisen whereby the obligations set out in the Bratislava Declaration of the six fraternal Communist and working-class parties, signed by representatives of our Party, are being openly and systematically violated.

Citizens! Everything that working man has achieved over the last 20 years, all the achievements of Socialism are now at stake. It is not only the Socialist democracy about which we spoke in January that is under threat, but the very foundation of Socialism, our Republic.

Conscious of our obligation to our people, full of a sense of genuine patriotism and international Socialist solidarity and recognising our international obligations, we took the initiative to rally the patriotic forces for the sake of our Socialist future and our motherland. The danger of a fratricidal struggle that the reactionary forces were plotting and which would be a tragic repetition of Lipan (*referring to the battle of Lipan in 1434 — Ed.*) forced us to take a historical decision to request assistance from the Soviet Union and other fraternal Socialist countries. Our allies rendered us assistance as they did in 1945 when the issue was to be, or not to be.

We call upon all citizens to support our allies' military units in any way they can. Once the danger of a reactionary coup has been eliminated, the allied forces will leave Czechoslovakia. All foreigners presently on Czechoslovak soil may continue to enjoy our hospitality; their security and inviolability will be fully guaranteed, providing that they act within the confines of our laws.

Governed by a deep feeling of responsibility to our nation, to our working class, to the people of our own country, to the international working class and to the global Communist movement, we are, at this grave time, appealing to you, citizens of the Republic, to rally round the pragmatic core of the Party, which is dedicated to the causes of Socialism and progress and to following the path set out in January and which holds dear our friendly relations with the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries.

With complete confidence in your good sense, maturity and political awareness, we call upon you all, honest citizens of our homeland, workers, peasants, intellectuals, men, women, young people, the healthy forces of the National Front, military service personnel, employees of the security agencies, Communists and non-Communists and all honest people, to engage in practical activities that will disrupt any future attacks by the

reactionaries, whether inside or outside the Party. Do not tolerate chaos, havoc or anarchy; preserve calm and order.

We reject the practice of any of the policies that were in place before January. We will not allow a return to the discredited methods in place before January, methods which were vigorously rejected by an overwhelming majority of our people, which jeopardised the Party's leading role and the Socialist achievements of our workers and which helped to bring about a situation where there was a serious risk of armed conflict. Quite the contrary; we wish to defend and implement fully the progressive ideas put forward in January, leading to the creation of a truly modern Socialist society, a regenerated, humane society as envisaged by the founders of Marxism-Leninism and which those who came after the October Revolution began to establish.

We are, and always will be, true to our progressive, national traditions, the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Republic, the gospel of the anti-Fascist struggle, national and democratic values, the traditions of the Slovak national uprising, the Prague uprising of May 1945 and the revolutionary appeal of February 1948: 'Forward, no step back!' We shall cherish our fraternal bonds of unity and friendship with the Soviet Union, with its people, with the peoples of all Socialist countries throughout the world and with all forces of peace, democracy, progress and Socialism. These are the values which will guarantee our independence, our sovereignty, national and state sovereignty, without which we would, once again, be faced with the threat of a new Munich and those who, in 1938, instigated it. Czechoslovakia can develop only as a Socialist country and as an indissoluble part of the Socialist community. Its strength and resistance have created a foundation to allow the international revolutionary movement to develop. Any weakening or breach in the Socialist camp would cause unimaginable damage to revolutionary progress and to Socialism throughout the world.

We appeal to you, dear citizens, with complete confidence that, by acting together, we will erect a bulwark against the dangers that face us, overcome the current difficult situation and ensure prosperity now and in the future for our country and for this generation and generations to come.

We call upon you all, from the Sumava Mountains to Cierna nad Tisou; from Krkonos to the banks of the Danube, to grasp the greatness and importance of these times, when everything with which we associate the concepts of 'Democracy' and 'Socialism' is at stake. We call on you to acknowledge your responsibility and maintain the unity and mutual trust that we require in order to face the coming days.

Our governing principles are henceforth foresight, order, progress, truth and the future of Socialism, state sovereignty and solidarity.

Long life and prosperity to Socialist Democracy in Czechoslovakia!