

'Our armies guarantee peace' from Neues Deutschland (23 August 1968)

Caption: On 23 August 1968, the East German Communist daily newspaper Neues Deutschland supports the entry of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia, seeing the move as a sign of solidarity with the Czechoslovak people.

Source: Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands. 23.08.1968, Nr. 231. Berlin-Ost: Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands. "Unsere Armeen sichern den Frieden", p. 1-2.

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Our armies guarantee peace

The action to demonstrate solidarity with the people of the CSSR, with our Czechoslovak comrades who have taken up the fight against the counter-revolution in their country, has been taken on behalf of the Socialist cause and, at the same time, of peace in Europe.

It is, after all, our policy's aim to ensure that the progress of Socialism is secured and to create the best conditions for the development of our social system. This includes, above all, keeping the peace, securing the borders of our Socialist community. To put it the opposite way around: peace in Europe is upheld by the pillar that is the Socialist community's power, above all by the Soviet Union's strength and steadfastness. An indication of where an individual stands on the issues of Socialism and peace is their attitude towards the Soviet Union.

Keeping the peace and defending Socialism — our policy pursues this aim firmly and consistently. The means used to that end are dictated by requirements at the time. We are strengthening our Republic in all areas, economic, political, ideological and military, in order to be ready for any eventuality. And now a situation has arisen in which we had to put our armed forces in the field in order to safeguard peace, just as we did on 13 August seven years ago.

Why had the situation become so serious? The stability of peace in Europe is threatened by the fact that a European country, the Federal Republic, is trying to change the status quo. The Federal Government has publicly announced this as their goal. The enemy had succeeded in a political and ideological invasion of the CSSR. The negotiations in Cierna nad Tisou and Bratislava three weeks ago raised hopes that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) would be able to stem the invasion and crush the counter-revolution without such substantial aid. But the group who had taken over as Party leaders, irresponsible, unprincipled politicians disloyal to the Party, betrayed the Bratislava agreement. Mouthpieces of anti-Communist propaganda were able to continue their rabble-rousing, counter-revolutionary organisations were able to continue their activities, witch-hunts for respected Communists were intensified and were even organised by Party leaders. As regards its power to fight, the KSC was paralysed to a considerable degree. Meanwhile, the counter-revolutionaries indulged in some gangster-style tactics, like abducting Oldrich Svestka, member of the Presidium of the Party and Editor-in-Chief of 'Rudé Právo'.

The comrades who turned to their sister countries for help state in their appeal: 'In this way a situation has arisen in which the agreements resulting from the Bratislava Declaration by the six sister Communist and Workers' Parties, also signed by our Party representatives, have been publicly and systematically breached.' Now they needed the help of their sister parties. In accordance with the agreement signed in Bratislava, the sister parties offered their help.

In order to appreciate the full significance of this action taken for peace, we need to imagine what might have happened if matters had continued in this way. If the counter-revolution had won, we would have had on our southern border a country outside the Socialist community. This would have been a serious breach in the Socialist countries' front against the class enemy. One day, perhaps, even NATO would have extended as far east as the Carpathians. We know what West German militarists are like. Such a success would have made them completely arrogant and spurred them on to further adventures. The CSSR's defection to the imperialist camp would have meant war.

Only a completely irresponsible Socialist Party leadership and government could simply stand and watch such a situation unfolding. Naturally, we did not simply stand and watch, we acted. The Executive Committee, the Council of State (*Staatsrat*) and the Council of Ministers (*Ministerrat*) made the following declaration: 'In the interests of their security, in the interests of the people and of world peace, the Socialist sister countries could not permit themselves to allow the CSSR to be detached from the community of Socialist countries.'

The Socialist sister countries' operation is a triumph for the cause of peace and Socialism. It is a severe defeat for the aggressive imperialist powers, particularly for West German imperialism. What goal had

Franz Josef Strauss, Kurt Georg Kiesinger and Willy Brandt set themselves with their policy towards Eastern Europe (*Ostpolitik*)? They wanted to undermine the Socialist order from within, to destroy the power of the governing Workers' and Farmers' Party, steadily to increase their influence and finally restore imperialist rule. Recently, they had been concentrating their efforts on the CSSR. They were initially successful and could hardly contain their expressions of joy. On 21 August, it all came to an end. Their *Ostpolitik* is in pieces. Willy Brandt hurried back from his holiday to stand sheepishly in front of the microphone and admit that he had not believed that it could happen.

The imperialists are currently keeping up a deafening howl, and that will undoubtedly continue for another couple of weeks. But, to be honest, we would rather hear their howls of anger than their howls of triumph. It is no surprise to us that they would take our action to defend the Socialist order in the CSSR and to keep the peace in Europe as an excuse to hound Communists. We know our enemy, and we know what reactions to expect of them.

On the other hand, however, it is just as easy to predict what a Socialist will do if Socialism is threatened in their own country or in a sister country. They will do their utmost to protect Socialism, to defend the external borders of the Socialist community, to keep the peace. Some people who have not yet understood this are surprised by the behaviour of the sister parties. However, our parties and our countries simply could not act in any other way. It was our duty as internationalists to take action in this way. For us, it was the most natural thing in the world.