

In Czechoslovakia—One Year Later

By KAREL HUJER

Last July, with the approaching first anniversary of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, we were on the road driving to the fascinating castle of the seventeenth century feudal lord, Count Spork, near the historical town Dvur Kralove in eastern Bohemia. The road leads through a beautiful section described as "Czech Paradise." But the charm of the little towns and villages such as Semily or Pecka was ominously stigmatized by countless Soviet military vehicles which incidentally for our review were moving in an opposite direction. The Soviet army of occupation, minus all the satrap armies of the so-called Warsaw pact, was having its maneuvers. Indeed, they added a meaningful symptom to our impressions that significant day in July.

Maneuvers offer Russian soldiers their only opportunity to leave their close confinement in the barracks lest they be contaminated with dangerous ideas of western liberalism that has deep tradition in Czechoslovakia. Only Russian officers could be seen in the streets of Mlada Boleslav, a large center of Russian encampment. From here and from my nearby college town, Turnov, in eastern Bohemia, Czech soldiers had been moved to far off eastern Slovakia, replaced by these Russian soldiers. When they entered the stores, Russian army officers were either ignored or treated curtly. They bought up anything available in textiles, paying with suspiciously new Czech banknotes. They continued to exhaust the Czech market already at the rock bottom of its depression. The officers would buy shoes of any size because it is notorious that shoes are very scarce in Russia. The Czechs joke about this. They say that after Soviet cosmonauts land on Mars, every Russian will be able to buy a pair of shoes.

A few Czechs we saw along the roads looked on sullenly. Gone was the hilarious welcome which had greeted Russian armies after the vanishing Nazi tyranny toward the end of World War II. One sign

which was still legible behind the faint whitewash was symbolic of the enduring post-invasion mood of a humiliated nation: "Six years we waited for you, twenty years we were hopeful, and now in one thousand years we will not forget you." The embarrassing isolation of the Russian invaders is evident in a curious fact. Any girl trying to fraternize with Russians finds herself in danger of having her hair sheared off, a queer quasi-non-violent passive resistance. Also, young girls are not permitted outdoors evenings near Russian encampments.

Signs all over the country still show names of cherished heroes of that Czechoslovak springtime: Dufcek-Svoboda-Smrkovsky. They remain in that part of Bohemia which is along the historical invasion route from Lusatia. One citizen described the scene he had witnessed one year ago near Liberec. From a high elevation he observed a fantastic cloud of streaming tanks well inside the country on the morning of Aug. 21, commenting: "Even Hitler came in the daylight." He reminded us of the historical case of Hacha, President of post-Munich dismembered Czechoslovakia, in 1939. At that time President Hacha was called on the carpet in Berlin. Hitler offered him a telephone receiver with an open line to the leaders of the Czech government and stated: "Tomorrow (March 15) at 6 a.m. the Reich's army will enter Czechoslovakia. Call your government to renounce all resistance or Prague will be destroyed." Hitler did not pretend to be a friend. The Russians did, especially with the ink of the Bratislava proclamation hardly dry, and the "friends," in Tartar fashion, invaded the country at midnight.

In Miletin, an idyllic community, one young man sadly stated: "It is all due to the Yalta agreement." At Yalta, even before the end of World War II, politicians decided the destiny of the small nations between the Baltic and Adriatic sea and signed them over into Soviet vassalage. For the next 20 years, under the guidance of the KGB (Soviet secret police)

counsellors, Czechoslovakia was then impoverished by Communists, worse than any colonial system ever in the past. Simple folks around the Bohemian countryside are astonishingly alert politically. In another village I heard reference to the American ambassador in Prague, Mr. Jacob D. Beam. Why was he silent during last year's tragic August days? Was not this the time President Johnson returned to his Texas ranch, leaving a green light for Brezhnev? Why was not the Washington-Moscow hot line used at the time of the August invasion? Johnson used it later at Christmas, during the lunar circumnavigations, when he offered the Soviet Union scientific co-operation. Here again is another incident in a small country, of which Chamberlain said 30 years ago: "Nobody knows anything."

Indeed, the former American Ambassador to Prague, Jacob Beam, behaved so well diplomatically during the invasion that he was promoted and became the Ambassador to Moscow. According to the Washington correspondent of

The New York Times, Peter Grosse, Mr. Beam now will have two tasks: The conduct of dealings on the control of nuclear weapons and the amendment of Soviet-American relations damaged by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In other words, a small nation is once again expendable. But the warning is imminent: Whatever agreement is made with the Soviet Union is sure to be only of short range expediency. As Hitler once formulated his program in *Mein Kampf*, so is it more than distinctly stated in the doctrines of communism.

The Czechoslovak experiment before the Russian invasion was based on a long range view. Masters of the Kremlin, intoxicated with power, could not see it. Plenipotentiaries of big powers who hold the destiny of man in their hands, outside of a few polite words, did not act. But their nations will pay the penalty and sooner or later history will condemn them just as judgment was passed over the Big Four of Munich a third of a century ago.