

November 29, 1989

Czechoslovakia: Government Agrees to Share Power□□□

Citation:

"Czechoslovakia: Government Agrees to Share Power", November 29, 1989, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Approved for Release by the Central Intelligence Agency, October 29, 2019. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/209491>

Summary:

An analysis of the Czechoslovak regime's decision to respond to public demands and host free elections.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

1439

~~Top Secret~~**CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Government Agrees To Share Power**

The regime's agreement to demands for a new government independent of the Communist Party paves the way for free elections and further political liberalization.

Premier Adamec, during negotiations yesterday with Civic Forum leader Vaclav Havel, agreed to form a "broad coalition government" composed primarily of experts and professionals by Sunday. He promised to ask the Federal Assembly to drop the constitutional clause guaranteeing the Communist Party a leading role; to open the National Front, the Communist-controlled umbrella organization, to independent groups; and to remove Marxism-Leninism as the basis of education.

The Communist Party's rank and file is also continuing to press reforms on the leadership. The Slovak Communist Party purged several hardliners at an extraordinary plenum on Monday and called for free elections, an end to the party's leading role, and a reassessment of the Prague Spring as a "restoration of socialism." The new reform Communist group, Democratic Forum, has urged that the extraordinary party congress set for January be held sooner.

Comment: The Civic Forum is wasting no time using the new political mandate it got from the overwhelming popular support for the general strike to press for sweeping reforms. It almost certainly considers a technocratic coalition government and the abolition of the party's leading role just the first steps toward political pluralism and economic renovation. The Forum's next goal is sure to be to negotiate a timetable for free elections and to ensure a political environment conducive to unfettered campaigning.

The Communist Party appears incapable of stopping the rapid liberalization, particularly because many rank-and-file members are voicing support for the opposition's demands for pluralism and free elections. Although some hardliners will continue to resist, party reformers apparently are preparing for the worst by moving to create a party that can compete in free elections.

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29 November 1989