

**May 14, 1968**

**Report by KGB Lt. Col. Zabchenko on his meeting  
with a Slovakian Interior Ministry Colonel**

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R E P O R T On 13 May, I had a meeting with the head of the Interior Ministry Directorate in the East Slovakian region, Colonel J. S. Majer, at his request. 93 He arrived at the meeting alone. According to Cde. Majer, his deputy from State Security, Lieut.-Colonel A. A. Dovin, was home sick from a serious nervous disorder. Accompanying me was the head of the 5th Department, Cde. Maiorchuk. 94 Having said nothing about the reasons for and goals of the meeting, Cde. Majer began, at his own initiative, to speak about the situation in his country, which in his view is becoming more complicated and is characterized by the following: 1. The anti-socialist forces and demagogic and anarchical elements are stepping up their activity. The mass media—the press, radio, and television—remain in the hands of right-wing intellectuals, including many Zionists. 95 The press, radio, and television are ever more vigorously exploiting for their own ends the agitation, demagoguery, and incitement of passions around the so-called rehabilitations. Cde. Majer gave a direct assurance that something will be done to counter this. On 3 May in Prague a meeting of 50,000 students took place. 96 Speakers who endorsed Marxist positions were booed and jeered. Several days ago, at the grave of one of the founders of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak who was a former general in the French service, Štefánik (roughly 60 kilometers from Bratislava), a demonstration of 100,000 people took place, featuring many speeches hostile to socialist Czechoslovakia. 97 At other meetings and demonstrations, too, the participants are carrying anti-Communist banners and yelling anti-Communist slogans. 2. Three groups have taken shape in the KSC CC Presidium: □□- conservatives, □□- centrists, □□- rightists. With regard to the conservatives, Cde. Majer was not able to report anything concrete. It is generally understood that they are adopting a wait-and-see position. The centrists, headed by Cde. Dubcek, also include Cde. Lenárt, Cde. Cerník, the secretary of the Slovak Communist Party CC, Cde. Bilak, and the secretary of the party committee at the Košice metallurgical combine, Cde. Rigo—all of whom firmly support socialism and friendship with the USSR. 98 The right wing is headed by Smrkovský. 99 They are supported by pro-Zionist circles, including Goldstücker, the rector of Charles University (in Prague); Kriegel, a member of the CC Presidium; and Ota Šik. They advocate an orientation toward the West. 100 They are heatedly debating the question of whether to convene an Extraordinary Congress. Four regional organizations have declared their support for convening it. 101 Among these is the Prague organization. This is especially unfortunate because the Prague committee is the largest and most influential of the party organizations, and includes many intellectuals among its members. In the Central Committee the rightist group headed by Smrkovský has spoken in favor of a congress. Cde. Majer affirms that a serious danger has arisen that if an extraordinary congress is convened under current circumstances, the top of the party will be hijacked by rightists. He explains that this will be the likely result of the congress because pro-Zionist elements who have a stake in it enjoy wide support in the provincial party organizations, which in turn will have a strong influence on the congress delegates. They are also raising large amounts of money for this purpose, and, as indicated above, the press, radio, and television are in their hands. 3. Many reactionary organizations have been formed. The largest of them (with nearly 100,000 people) is the so-called Organization of Politically Active Non-Communists. 102 Others include youth organizations, professional groups, sport clubs, Legionnaires (participants in the Czechoslovak rebellion in Siberia and their successors), cultural organizations, and others. 103 4. The working class is standing on the sidelines, away from these events. This can be explained by the fact that the KSC, despite having a stake in activating workers, has been deprived of the means of activating them through the press, the radio, and so forth. 5. Colonel Majer showed me a leaflet he had been given, which had been typeset in Czech on a sheet of paper a bit smaller than the standard size. The leaflet was phrased in a Marxist-Leninist spirit and was written skillfully for public consumption. It says that events in the CSSR are nothing other than a struggle between socialism and capitalism, and that the question has arisen of who-whom. 104 It also says that the reactionary, bourgeois forces are trying, by means of demagoguery, imprecations, and wild speculation about the inevitable mistakes of the recent past, to lead Czechoslovak workers astray, do away with socialist gains, and plunge the country into the grip of imperialism. It then calls on workers to rise up in defense of the KSC and socialist gains, to put an end to the anti-popular actions of the reactionaries, and to defend their own rights. Cde. Majer says that these sorts of leaflets were distributed in large quantities in Prague. I get the impression that he

suspects the Soviet organs are in some way involved in the dissemination of the leaflets. In an emphatically worried manner, he further said that reactionary leaflets in the form of brochures also are being distributed in the country.<sup>6</sup> The situation in Slovakia is significantly better than in the Czech lands, and in Eastern Slovakia it is better than in Western Slovakia.<sup>7</sup> Cde. Majer is very much interested in the reasons for and results of the meeting that took place in Moscow among the leaders of the CPSU, the MSzMP, the PZPR, the SED, and the Communist Party of Bulgaria. <sup>105</sup> We got the impression that this was one of the tasks he had been assigned in asking for this meeting. It is possible that the first secretary of the East Slovakia regional committee of the Slovak Communist Party, Cde. Koscelanský, was the one who gave him this assignment, though perhaps not at his own initiative.<sup>8</sup> On the situation in the army, Cde. Majer said only that it is unfortunate that almost the entire General Staff has been replaced. <sup>106</sup> Cde. Majer refrained from characterizing ethnic relations and the behavior of ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans). <sup>107</sup> With regard to the Ukrainians, he said that in his region they number only 150 (though in reality the number is around 100,000). <sup>108</sup> He recounted a meeting he had with the head of the State Security directorate in the neighboring province of Poland, a colonel. The colonel had asked: "Where are you going, where are the Jews taking you?" <sup>11</sup> On the situation in the CSSR State Security organs. On 7-8 May a conference of the heads of regional Interior Ministry organizations and of the central apparatus took place in Prague. In a report to the conference, Minister Pavel did not give any sort of practical or basic guidelines of how to act in local branches. He does not take account of any sort of advice or opinions from the locales. He is occupying his post temporarily, as he himself said, giving himself only a year or two to serve in the post of minister. Cde. Majer speaks about him with irony and says that he will act not in accordance with what Pavel says, but in accordance with the orders of the former minister, since these orders have not been rescinded by anyone and are not in contradiction with the policy of the KSC. However, Pavel spoke (as Cde. Majer suggests, with the aim of demagoguery) in his report about indestructible friendship with the Soviet Union. These words were met with stormy applause from the participants, and, as Cde. Majer observed, this reaction in the hall evoked displeasure from the minister, who concealed his sentiments only with great difficulty. <sup>111</sup> When the general part of the conference was over, the minister left. The leaders of the regional directorates managed to get him to come to their separate conference. They asked him sharp questions, including for example: "Not a single reasonable state, neither in the past nor at present, has refused to use such instruments as agent networks and operational equipment to defend its internal security. Why does the CSSR intend to refuse these things, as minister Pavel himself said in an interview with journalists?" Having been deprived of the opportunity to give an evasive answer, he was forced to say that all these things can be used, but not against honest people. Yesterday or the day before, Pavel appeared on television. His comments there were much better than the interview he gave to journalists on the eve of the conference and the speech he gave at the conference. This had a positive influence on the mood of State Security officials, who surmised that they had prompted these latest comments from Pavel. The personnel of the country's State Security organs are top-notch. Without exception, they all firmly support socialist positions and friendship with the Soviet Union. <sup>112</sup> They, as Cde. Majer says, are unable to conceive of any other route.<sup>12</sup> It was noticeable that Cde. Majer was unusually optimistic and sought to "reassure" us. He affirmed that they are in a position to control everything and restore order. We get the impression that he subtly, through hints, tried to give us the idea that this assessment of events should be provided to our superiors.<sup>13</sup> Cde. Majer reported that the CSSR deputy interior minister, Cde. Záruba, would like to award a medal of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Society to Colonel Cde. Trojak. <sup>113</sup> He subtly gave the hint that if such a meeting were held, Cde. Záruba possibly would recount something that would be of interest to us. At the end of the meeting, Cde. Majer invited my wife, my children, and me to come to his house on 18-19 May. HEAD OF THE DIRECTORATE OF THE KGB UNDER THE UKRSSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS IN TRANS-CARPATIAN OBLAST LIEUTENANT-COLONEL □□□□□

A. ZHABCHENKO <sup>14</sup> May 1968 Uzhorod No. 327393 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Ján Majer, a career officer in the State Security organs, actively supported the August 1968

invasion and was appointed first deputy interior minister in 1969.<sup>94</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Major Volodymyr Maiorchuk had been head of the 5th Department (responsible for border security) of the Ukrainian KGB in Transcarpathian Oblast since July 1967.<sup>95</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Here (and elsewhere in Soviet documents) the term "Zionists" is a codeword for Jews.<sup>96</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The mass meeting of young people in Old Town Square (Staromestké náměstí) on 3 May, organized by KAN (see below) and student groups as a follow-up to the boisterous May Day rallies, featured harsh criticism of the KSC and of Soviet relations with Czechoslovakia. It also featured condemnations of the anti-Semitic campaign under way in Poland. The outpouring of criticism at the meeting was so unsparing that it prompted a lengthy rebuke in *Rudé právo* on 5 May; but this response, far from curbing student unrest, emboldened many of the youth organizers.<sup>97</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference here is to General Milan Štefánik, a co-founder of Czechoslovakia, who died in a plane crash in 1919 at the age of 38. The demonstration at Štefánik's grave on 5 May was convened to express dissatisfaction with the pace of efforts in 1968 to reconfigure Czech-Slovak relations. Although the speakers did not call for Slovak independence, many criticized what they regarded as "deliberate obstructiveness" and "condescension" on the part of the Czechs.<sup>98</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The officials mentioned here, along with Alexander Dubcek and prime minister Oldrich Cerník, include Jozef Lenárt, Vasil Bilak, and Emil Rigo, all of whom except Lenárt were full members of the KSC Presidium. Lenárt had been a full member until 5 April 1968, but he was demoted to candidate status when he became a KSC Secretary.<sup>99</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Josef Smrkovský, an influential proponent of reform in 1968, had been appointed to the KSC Presidium on 5 April. Although Smrkovský was not among the most radical officials in 1968, he did embrace measures that, in cumulation, brought far-reaching liberalization. In early February 1968, he wrote a celebrated "manifesto" in *Rudé právo* (following up on another widely discussed article he published in *Práce* on 21 January) that laid out the types of reforms the new KSC leaders were hoping to pursue. See "Jak nyní dál: Nad závery lednového pléna ÚV KSC," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 9 February 1968, p. 2.<sup>100</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The references here are to three prominent Czech Jews: Edward Goldstücker, the head of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union and former prorector of Charles University; František Kriegel, a full member of the KSC Presidium from April to August 1968 who supported radical liberalization; and Ota Šik, a distinguished economist and supporter of free-market reform who was appointed a deputy prime minister on 8 April.<sup>101</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The four organizations supporting an early Congress were the South Moravian, South Bohemian, and West Bohemian regional committees and the Prague municipal committee.<sup>102</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference here is to the Club of Politically Active Non-Communists (Klub angažovaných nestraníků, or KAN), which was set up in April 1968 by a group of 144 leading intellectuals and other prominent figures. The club was intended as a political outlet for non-Communist proponents of far-reaching political and economic reform and, eventually, as the foundation for a liberal democratic party. The two main organizers were Jirína Mlynková and Ludvík Rybacek, who published several early statements of the group's aims in the writers' weekly *Literární listy*. The club's Manifesto, which was released on 13 May 1968 under the signature of the founding members as well as a few other well-known individuals, including both members and non-members of KAN, proclaimed a commitment to liberal democracy, political pluralism, and the principles embodied in the United Nations (UN) Declaration on Human Rights. See "Manifest Klubu angažovaných nestraníků," *Svobodné Slovo* (Prague), 11 July 1968, p. 1. KAN's manifesto indicated that the club would seek to foster public debate about these principles and to enable members and supporters of KAN to take an active part in elections to the National Assembly. To this end, KAN helped organize the mass demonstration in Prague on 3 May as well as many other meetings and public rallies. The club also applied to participate in the National Front and received tentative indications that its bid would be approved. The application was still formally pending, however, when Soviet tanks moved into Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968. By that point, the club had been a constant target of Soviet criticism, and thus it was not surprising when Soviet leaders insisted that the group be forcibly disbanded. In September 1968, under the terms of the Moscow Protocol, KAN was permanently banned. During the years of "normalization" under Husák and Jakeš, scattered

attempts to rekindle public support for KAN were quickly and brutally squelched. Not until after Communism collapsed in Czechoslovakia in late 1989 was KAN finally resurrected. The club never again approached the visibility it attained in 1968, but as of March 1993 it still claimed – perhaps in an overstatement – several thousand members in the Czech Republic. In the spring of 1995 KAN's leadership voted to merge with the Christian Democratic Party (KDS). The Slovak branch of the group was always very small both in 1968 and after 1989, and it ceased to exist altogether when the Czechoslovak state split apart at the end of 1992.<sup>103</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For overviews of these organizations, see Galia Golan, *Reform Rule in Czechoslovakia: The Dubcek Era, 1968-1969* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Vladimír Horský, *Prag 1968: Systemveränderung und Systemverteidigung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975), pp. 101-257; Vladimír V. Kusin, *Political Grouping in the Czechoslovak Reform Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1972); and Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 563-613.<sup>104</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This phrase in Russian *kto-kogo* (or in Czech *kdo-koho*) is the famous expression first used by Lenin during the Bolsheviks' rise to power. It casts all political activity in a zero-sum framework whereby one side's gains can come only at all others' expense.<sup>105</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference here is to a meeting on 8 May 1968, four days after Soviet and Czechoslovak leaders had held bilateral talks in Moscow. The full transcript of the five-country meeting is available in "Zapis' besedy v TsK KPSS s rukovoditeliyami bratskikh partii Bolgarii, Vengrii, Germanii, Pol'shi," 8 May 1968 (Top Secret), in ÚSD-SK, 07/15, Archivná jednotka (A.j.) 8, Ll. 151-182.<sup>106</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This claim is exaggerated. Although a large number of senior military officers had been replaced, the changes did not yet affect "almost the entire General Staff." See Michael Štěpánek-Stemmer, *Die tschechoslowakische Armee: Militär-historische und paktpolitische Aspekte des 'Prager Frühlings' 1968* (Köln: Sonderveröffentlichung des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 1979), pp. 117-134.<sup>107</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Omitted from this list is the large Gypsie (Roma) minority in Czechoslovakia, which may have numbered as many as 250,000-350,000. In part because the Gypsies/Roma were not politically organized in 1968 and in part because of engrained discrimination, the Gypsies/Roma were not accorded the same status that other minorities received under Constitutional Act No. 144, adopted in October 1968 in connection with the federalization of Czechoslovakia.<sup>108</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Actually, the number of Ruthenians (described here as Ukrainians) in Czechoslovakia was a good deal smaller than 100,000 – most likely around 60,000. Of these, most (roughly 40,000) lived in the Prešov region of Slovakia, and another 21,000 lived in the Czech lands. For more on the Ruthenian (Rusyn) community in Czechoslovakia, see the relevant annotations in Document No. 2 above and Document No. 20 below. Contrary to Il'nyts'kyi's allegations, the Ruthenians' demands in 1968 did not include the recovery of Transcarpathian Oblast/Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The large majority of Ruthenians in Czechoslovakia, as well as the Slovak and central Czechoslovak authorities, realized that it would be pointless to try to reclaim that territory from Soviet Ukraine.<sup>109</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: At the time, an anti-Semitic campaign was under way in Poland led by Edward Gierek and Mieczyslaw Moczar's "Partisans." This may have helped prompt the Polish colonel's question.<sup>110</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference here is to Josef Pavel, an ardent reformer who had been appointed minister of the interior in March 1968, with responsibility for the State Security organs as well as the regular police. In Czechoslovakia, as in other Warsaw Pact countries, the local police were controlled by the central ministry of interior rather than by local governments. Although local officials obviously had some influence over the police within their jurisdiction (both directly and indirectly), the centralized administrative structure often caused friction between the central ministries and local officials.<sup>111</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Pavel had taken a number of steps by this point that indicated his wariness of the Soviet KGB's role in Czechoslovakia, a position that infuriated Moscow. This was one of the reasons that Soviet leaders repeatedly demanded that Pavel be replaced.<sup>112</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: For the most part, this assessment was accurate. Although Soviet leaders were concerned that reformist sentiments might eventually spread into the Czechoslovak State Security (Státní bezpečnost, or StB) organs, they had far greater confidence about the reliability of the StB than about the reliability of the

Czechoslovak army. At Moscow's behest, the Czechoslovak army was confined to its barracks when Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia and for several days thereafter. By contrast, Soviet commanders relied on the StB for supporting functions during the invasion. In the early morning hours of 21 August, StB units arrested Dubcek and other leading KSC reformers.<sup>113</sup> TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Colonel Jan Záruba was actually the first deputy interior minister, not just a deputy minister. He had been appointed to that job in April 1965 at the same time that Josef Kudrna was appointed minister; but unlike Kudrna, who was forced to resign in March 1968, Záruba had held onto his post.