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**P. Shelest Reports on Miloš Krno's Evaluation of the
Czechoslovak Crisis**

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Summary:

P. Shelest reports to the CPSU CC on Slovak writer Miloš Krno's evaluation of events in Czechoslovakia.

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Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

SecretCPSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE Slovak writer, Miloš Krno, who is a Communist and former partisan, has just been in the city of Kyiv. 229 He has traveled to Ukraine numerous times in the past and was a counselor at the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow at the end of the 1940s. 230 Krno is the author of several stories published in Ukraine, in particular a story about a Hero of the Soviet Union, Ján Nálepka. 231 This story was dedicated to friendship between the Soviet and Slovak peoples. Evaluating the situation in Czechoslovakia, Krno spoke in support of strengthening friendship with the Soviet people and with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. However, in conversations pertaining to the current and future state of affairs in the CSSR, his unease was palpable, and he seemed somewhat reticent. In his view, the reasons for the ongoing events in the CSSR are as follows: ". . . Because of the rude leadership of Novotný and his cronies, an extremely tense situation emerged in the country, especially in a material sense. Overall, living conditions in Czechoslovakia aren't all that bad nowadays, but in neighboring countries—the FRG and Austria—the standard of living is much higher. Enemies of the party are citing this and are now exploiting every mistake committed by the previous leadership, which was installed by Khrushchev. They say to the population: you see how socialism stultifies the development of the country and takes a negative toll on our material conditions. 232 If there were no Communist Party, thousands of innocent people would not have suffered, and all of us would be much better off materially." Krno indicates that many people, including workers, are being allured by this agitation. It could even lead to an attempt at a coup d'état. 233 There are three forces that might prevent it, and Krno is almost certain about this: 1. The leadership of the Communist Party, if it displays firmness and regains control of the situation in the country. 2. The working class, the majority of which still supports the Communist Party, forming armed patrols and a newly organized Communist division. 234 3. In an extreme case, intervention by the Warsaw Pact countries. On the question of the reactionary forces, he said the following: The National Front includes three parties: the Communist, Socialist, and People's (Catholic). Until recently the last two of these parties consisted of only a few dozen members and were purely nominal. But now the opposition forces have taken them over. The Socialist Party already numbers 300,000 people, and the Catholic Party numbers 150,000 people. 235 Incidentally, the clergy, some of whom have joined this party, prefer to maintain a wait-and-see position, since they are afraid that a coup d'état might prove unsuccessful and that they would end up compromising themselves. An article by Blažek in issue no. 13 of the weekly publication of the CSSR Writers' Union, "Literární Listy," is among the commentaries that reveal the current mood in the Socialist Party. 236 Blažek writes that no party has ever voluntarily left the historical arena, and that all such parties must be removed by force. 237 Now the turn of the Communist Party has come, and it, too, must be removed by force. In addition to these two parties, there are a number of officially registered clubs. Among them is the Club of "Politically Active Non-Communists." It was organized quite recently but has already become a de facto mass party. Its base is in Prague, but there are branches all around the country. 238 It plays a role similar to the role played by the "Petöfi Circle" in Hungary, with the main difference that the latter consisted of only several dozen literary figures, whereas the Club of "Politically Active Non-Communists" already numbers many thousands of people. 239 It is the de facto rallying point for bourgeois parties that were disbanded in the past. This club might become the spearhead of an organized coup d'état. Members of the club are taking advantage of the new "press freedom" to publish a variety of fraudulent documents in the newspapers. These items even include spurious "letters of Stalin," which contain orders for the physical annihilation of revolutionaries. 240 They are also disseminating rumors about our efforts to arrange the murder of Masaryk and other such things. 241 An organization known as "Clean Hands" has been set up in Prague. 242 (It consists of people who took no part in the repressions.) They say about these "Clean Hands" that they will very skillfully be able to suppress all Communists and all pro-Soviet Czechs and Slovaks. Representatives of this organization say among themselves: "Democratization will be completed when only two Communists are left in the CSSR and they end up killing each other." Club "231" is named for the article in the CSSR Criminal Code under which many innocent people were convicted in the past. Initially, this club was not very large, and its chief missions were to seek the rehabilitation of those who had been unjustly convicted, to provide them with material sustenance and employment, to press for their readmission into the party, and so forth. More recently, however, this club has taken on an entirely different

cast. For one thing, many new members who were never arrested in Czechoslovakia have now joined. This increase in membership has owed a good deal to criminals, whom the leaders of the club have reclassified as “victims of Novotný’s regime.” At present, the club is harboring dark criminal elements who support trouble-makers and are prepared for any actions that will undermine the existing order. The activity of anti-Soviet, anti-socialist elements is leading above all to the persecution of pro-Soviet citizens and to demands for the ouster of all officials who held any sort of post in the CSSR party or state apparatus over the past 20 years. The same thing, says Krno, happened in Hungary, where they began by focusing just on Rákosi and then shifted their attacks to the entire party and government apparatus. Krno stated that he expects decisive changes in connection with the KSC CC plenum, which “must resolve the fate of our country.” 243 With regard to the future of the CSSR, he is gloomy. Novotný, says Krno, committed a huge number of mistakes, which his enemies have never failed to exploit. He carried out the same policy of unjustified repressions that Rákosi did in Hungary. The enemies of the USSR blame the Soviet Union for these repressions. But now a letter has been discovered from Stalin to the Czechoslovak leaders concerning the repressions and Soviet advisers. 244 In the letter, Stalin writes that the arrest of class enemies is a matter for the Czechoslovaks themselves to handle, and that we make no recommendations about this matter: Let them determine themselves who should be prosecuted and who should not. Thus, says Krno, the arrests of thousands of innocent people and their annihilation should be blamed not on the Soviet Union but on Novotný and his ilk. Now many judges are committing suicide. They sentenced innocent people to death on the basis of false accusations, and now the relatives of those who perished are demanding vengeance. Characterizing the situation in the KSC CC, Krno notes that a deep rift has occurred in the CC. Dubcek is displaying a lack of resolution, and only two of the members of the Politburo 245 are supporting him on all matters. The rest are speaking out against him. 246 A split also has occurred in the party as a whole. For example, in the Moravian city of Ostrava the KSC has split into two factions: the “Bolsheviks” and the rightist faction. In these circumstances, the legal and illegal activities of opposition parties—the Socialist and Catholic, which have been growing in size—have increased. Some members of the KSC CC are even openly claiming that full-fledged opposition parties should be allowed to exist. 247 They base their position on the statement by V. I. Lenin that an opposition is necessary to monitor the actions of the ruling party. But, says Krno, the danger is that in today’s circumstances, the opposition inevitably will become an active hostile force and will group all the reactionary elements around itself. This kind of situation demands more resolute measures on the part of the KSC CC, but because of the mistaken actions of today’s leaders of the Communist Party, all of this is leading to the growth of malevolent forces inside the country. The KSC has lost control of the country, and now it will be difficult to regain control. Krno distinguishes the situation in the Czech lands from that in Slovakia. He says that in Slovakia things are much better, and that no anti-Soviet sentiments have emerged there. But the following contradictions exist there: A struggle is under way for greater Slovak independence and for the federalization of the country. There are some nationalist contradictions. The main thing is that unrest has emerged among the ethnic Hungarian minority, which in Slovakia numbers 400,000 people. 248 The Hungarians are demanding autonomy. The root of the evil is entirely in the Czech lands, where class enemies from the former bourgeoisie and officials from the disbanded bourgeois parties are active. In this connection, Krno speaks favorably about the upcoming maneuvers of the Warsaw Pact countries, and especially about the arming of workers’ patrols. 249 This force, he says, will be capable of actively countering the reactionaries, but the KSC CC must display the requisite energy and firmness. And Krno is not at all certain whether this will happen. Krno spoke with particular disapproval about the situation in the CSSR Writers’ Union, where reactionary and Zionist officials have taken over the leadership. They are persecuting Communist writers, for example V. Minác, and are setting reactionary writers against them. 250 With regard to the treachery of V. Mnacko, he says that Mnacko evidently was just a provocateur. 251 During the cult of personality, he subscribed to an ultraleft position, which he maintained until the most recent writers’ congress, where the reactionary forces gained ascendancy. He then suddenly changed his position 180 degrees and fled to the West, where he received roughly

half a million dollars for his little book ridiculing Novotný. Now he has traveled back to the CSSR for a week. They restored his citizenship to him, but he is willing to return permanently only after the "complete liberalization" of the country. Krno cited an example that illustrates the mood among students. At the First of May demonstration the columns of students gave vent to many anti-Soviet slogans, including "Don't interfere with American efforts to defend civilization in Vietnam!" American students who are studying in Prague were dismayed by these statements. They exclaimed: "You should be ashamed! We, as Americans, have spoken out on this matter against our own government under Johnson, and now you're defending these murderers!" Reported for informational purposes. □□□□

P. SHELEST 6 June 1968 No. 1/48229 TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Miloš Krno originally was trained as a lawyer and diplomat, and was actively involved in Slovak politics in the late 1940s and 1950s; but he had simultaneously begun a separate career as a writer. By the late 1960s he had written many works - novels, poems, and collections of stories - that were widely popular in Slovakia, and he had become a prominent figure in the Slovak literary and cultural community. Outside Slovakia, however, most of his work was relatively unknown. His writings as of 1968 included *A kto ma čaká?* (Bratislava: Smena, 1968); *Kym dohorela cigareta* (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1968); *Sialene predstavenie* (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1966); *Tažká hodina* (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1965); *Výstrel sa vracia* (Bratislava: Smena, 1965); *Jastrabia pol'ana* (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1963); *Živitelka* (Bratislava: Slovenské Vyd. Politickej Literatúry, 1960); *V burke: Poezia* (Bratislava: Obroda, 1949); and his account of the Slovak National Uprising, *Viadkut: Poviedky z povstania* (Bratislava: Pravda, 1946). He wrote numerous other books in the 1970s and 1980s, including two volumes of memoirs.²³⁰ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Krno's stint at the Czechoslovak embassy in Moscow actually came in 1950-51, when he was only 28 years old.²³¹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Shelest is referring here to Krno's *Vrátim sa živý* (Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1961). Jan Nálepka (1912-1943) was a schoolteacher who became a captain in the Slovak and Soviet partisans during World War II. Under the nom de guerre Repkin, Nálepka joined the Czechoslovak partisans in mid-1942 and immediately established close contact with the Soviet Army. In May 1943, he formally enlisted in the Soviet partisans at the behest of the Soviet commander, Major-General A. N. Saburov. Under Saburov's direct command, Nálepka took charge of a Czechoslovak unit responsible for sabotage and reconnaissance in occupied Ukraine and Belorussia. In the fall of 1943, Nálepka's unit helped drive German troops out of the Ukrainian town of Ovruch and helped capture the main bridge just outside the town. On 16 November 1943, Nálepka was killed by German machine-gun fire as his unit battled for control of the local railway station. Soon thereafter, Soviet and Slovak Communist leaders sought to memorialize Nálepka as an exemplar of socialist courage and "a symbol of the fraternal bonds between Slovak and Soviet fighters in the struggle for the freedom and independence of their countries." He was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and was the subject of numerous artistic and literary works, including Krno's novel.²³² TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Soviet leaders were well aware of these arguments and tried - in vain - to refute them. See, for example, "Spravka o zhizhennom urovne naseleniya Chekhoslovakii," LI. 7-21.²³³ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: What Krno has in mind here is a "creeping" coup d'état by "anti-socialist and counterrevolutionary" elements, not a violent military takeover.²³⁴ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference to armed patrols harkens back to the units that were set up to facilitate and consolidate the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. The specific division to which Krno refers was set up in March-April 1968 under the auspices of the KSC People's Militia.²³⁵ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: These figures are much too high, at least with respect to active members (which in both cases numbered well under 100,000).²³⁶ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Vladimír Blažek was a prominent advocate of radical liberalization. The article in question is "Soukromý politický deník," *Literární listy* (Prague), No. 13 (31 May 1968), p. 2.²³⁷ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This statement, which picks up on Marx's famous dictum that no ruling class has ever given up power without a struggle, is taken out of context by Krno and Shelest. Blažek was a proponent of open, multiparty elections. Although he was doubtful that the KSC would ever accept free elections, he was clearly seeking peaceful change.²³⁸

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This is not entirely accurate. The branches of KAN were located predominantly in urban areas of the Czech lands. Although the organization hoped to expand its presence in Slovakia, little progress toward that goal had been achieved before the Soviet invasion.²³⁹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Petöfi Circle was set up in March 1956 by the Stalinist leader in Hungary, Mátyás Rákosi, who intended it to be a debating forum for the youth league of the Hungarian Workers' Party (MDF). Rákosi believed that an outlet of this sort would help defuse growing social tension. To his dismay, the club quickly became a leading organ of the anti-Rákosi opposition. On 30 June 1956, Rákosi induced the MDF Central Leadership to adopt a resolution banning the Petöfi Circle and denouncing "anti-party elements" and the "anti-party views" of "a certain group that has formed around Imre Nagy." This resolution came too late, however, either to end the Petöfi Circle or to forestall the ouster of Rákosi in mid-July 1956. (Rákosi was forced to flee to the Soviet Union, where he lived the remaining fifteen years of his life.) The Petöfi Circle continued to function over the next few months, as social turmoil in Hungary culminated in a full-fledged revolution on 23 October 1956.²⁴⁰ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: As early as mid-March 1968, some allusions to Stalin's complicity in the Czechoslovak terror of the 1950s began appearing in the Czechoslovak press. The most comprehensive analysis was presented in the three-part series by Karel Kaplan, "Zamyšlení nad politickými procesy," *Nová mysl* (Prague), Vol. XXII, No. 6 (June 1968), pp. 765-794; Vol. XXII, No. 7 (July 1968), pp. 906-940; and Vol. XXII, No. 8 (August 1968), pp. 1054-1078. Further installments of Kaplan's research were due to be published in the same journal, but those plans were cancelled after the Soviet invasion.²⁴¹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Jan Masaryk, the son of Tomáš Masaryk, served as foreign minister in the final non-Communist government under Beneš and, for a very brief while, in the first government established by the KSC. Masaryk died under mysterious circumstances in March 1948. His defenestration was officially portrayed as a suicide, but there were strong suspicions in Czechoslovakia - both then and afterward - that Soviet secret police "advisers" killed him and subsequently covered it up. (Those suspicions have been largely confirmed by declassified materials, though conclusive evidence remains sealed in the former KGB archives.) On 3 April 1968 the Czechoslovak government announced that it was opening a new investigation into Masaryk's death. One of the founders and leaders of KAN, Ivan Sviták, was instrumental in bringing about this official inquiry. Not surprisingly, the investigation sparked bitter reactions in Moscow. On 7 May, Soviet leaders issued a statement via the TASS news agency that allegations of Soviet involvement were being concocted by "enemies of socialist Czechoslovakia" who were seeking to "stir up anti-Soviet sentiments among politically unstable people." At the five-power meeting in Moscow the following day, Brezhnev expressed hope that the TASS statement would undercut "provocative insinuations by reactionary circles . . . that Masaryk was murdered by Soviet agents." Cited from "Zapis' besedy v TsK KPSS s rukovoditelyami bratskikh partii Bolgarii, Vengrii, Germanii, Pol'shi," L. 156. In a top-secret report prepared after the invasion, the Soviet KGB denounced KAN (and especially the "reactionary philosopher Sviták") for having "instigated the [KSC's] provocative campaign 'to uncover all the circumstances' of Jan Masaryk's suicide." See "O deyatel'nosti kontrrevolyutsionnogo podpol'ya v Chekhoslovakii," 13 October 1968 (Top Secret), prepared by A. Sakharovskii, chief of the KGB's 1st Main Directorate, transmitted by Soviet KGB chairman Yurii Andropov to the CPSU Politburo, in RGANI, F. 4, Op. 21, D. 32, L. 109.

²⁴² TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This "organization" consisted of a small number of people who took part in a mass symposium in late May 1968 on "the cult of personality in Czechoslovakia," a forum co-sponsored by the KSC Institute of History and the Gottwald Museum. The "Clean Hands" group argued that all KSC officials in the 1950s bore responsibility for the mass repressions, and that all "dirty" politicians should be forced to retire and placed under arrest. See "Informatsiya o diskussii 'Kul't lichnosti v Chekhoslovakii,'" Cable No. 15815 (Secret), from R. Lozhnikov, second secretary at the Soviet embassy in Prague, to M. Suslov, P. Demichev, and K. Rusakov, 6 May 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 25, Ll. 134-142. Aside from their contributions to this symposium, the members of the group played little role in the Prague Spring.²⁴³ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Krno is referring here to the plenum that was held a week earlier, at the end of May.²⁴⁴ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This letter from Stalin, written in 1951, was cited by Bilak in his speech at the May 1968 plenum

of the KSC Central Committee. The speech was published in *Rudé právo* on 5 June, the day before Shelest spoke with Krno. See "Z diskuse na plenu ÚV KSC ve dnech 29 května-1 června 1968: Odpovědnost vůči dnešku," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 5 June 1968, p. 2. Bilak used the letter to buttress his contention that responsibility for the violent repression in Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s lay with KSC officials, not with Stalin. Bilak's position, however, was at best misleading. Although Czechoslovak leaders (e.g., Gottwald and Novotný) did bear responsibility for the show trials and other repression, the whole process was instigated and guided by Soviet state security "advisers" in the CSSR Public Security Ministry, Justice Ministry, and Interior Ministry, who were acting at Stalin's behest. For an authoritative study of the role of these "advisers," see Kaplan, *Sovětskí poradci v Československu, 1949-1956*, esp. pp. 8-47. In 1951, Stalin personally ordered the removal and – four months later – the arrest of Rudolf Slánský, the KSC General Secretary, whose show trial and execution in 1952 were the most spectacular in a longer series of repressive incidents. Crucial evidence about these events was released from the Russian Presidential Archive in the late 1990s for four large volumes of collected documents, published as T. V. Volokitina et al., eds., *Sovětskii faktor v Vostochnoi Evrope, 1944-1953: Dokumenty*, 2 vols. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999 and 2002); and T. V. Volokitina et al., eds., *Vostochnoi evrope v dokumentakh rossiiskikh arkhivov: 1944-1953*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Sibir'skii Khronograf, 1997 and 1999).²⁴⁵ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This should be Presidium, not Politburo.²⁴⁶ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Krno's assessment here is wide of the mark. The extent of disagreement within the KSC Presidium varied from issue to issue, but it was rare that Dubcek encountered strong opposition. Indeed, he managed to preserve greater harmony on many issues than one might have expected in the face of such great turbulence at home and pressure from abroad.²⁴⁷ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This statement is misleading. Although some KSC officials occasionally had hinted at the possibility of genuine "opposition parties," Dubcek had consistently rejected the idea. His view was endorsed by the KSC Presidium as a whole. Moreover, it is questionable whether any groups outside the KSC could have marshaled the resources and support to become "full-fledged" parties. On this point, see Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution*, pp. 546-555.²⁴⁸ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This number is much too low. Even the official statistics put the number of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia at 560,000. See *Československý statistický úřad, Statistická ročenka Československé Socialistické Republiky, 1968* (Prague: CSÚ, 1968), p. 312. Unofficial estimates put the figure at around 600,000 to 700,000, or possibly even higher.²⁴⁹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The final arrangements for the Warsaw Pact's "Šumava" military exercises were set during a visit to Czechoslovakia on 17-22 May by a high-ranking Soviet military delegation led by the defense minister, Marshal Andrei Grechko. See "Zpráva o pobytu delegace ozbrojených sil SSSR v CSSR," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 23 May 1968, p. 1. This delegation was following up on the talks held a few days earlier by the Konev-Moskalenko delegation (see above), which had been in Czechoslovakia from 8 to 14 May, and on a visit in late April by Marshal Ivan Yakubovskii, the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact armed forces, who met at length with the CSSR national defense minister, General Martin Dzúr. Krno's mention of "the arming of workers' patrols" refers to the upcoming meeting of the KSC People's Militia (Lidová milice), the paramilitary units that had helped to impose and enforce Communist rule in Czechoslovakia. The meeting, held on 19 June, was supposed to demonstrate the willingness of the People's Militia to uphold Communist principles in the face of an "anti-socialist onslaught." (For further information about this meeting, see my annotations in Document No. 22 below.)²⁵⁰ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This refers to Vladimír Minác, a Slovak writer (1922-1996) who had been among the signatories of a letter protesting the highly critical speeches that were delivered at the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union in June 1967. The motives of those who signed the letter were varied. Old-line Communists signed it because they rejected all demands for reform. Other signatories, however, particularly a number of Slovak writers, endorsed the letter because they believed that the Congress was being diverted onto issues that were predominantly of interest to Czechs. Evidently, Minác fell into this category. He maintained a wary stance – endorsing certain reforms, while disapproving of others – once the Prague Spring was under way. Although he was not among the most diehard opponents of liberalization, his

signature of the protest letter in June 1967 and his cautious approach thereafter caused tensions with other writers (especially Czech writers) in 1968 who actively supported the reform movement.²⁵¹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Shelest gives the wrong first initial of Ladislav Mnacko, a Slovak writer whose novels, short stories, essays, and commentaries were celebrated for their anti-Stalinist themes. In April 1956, during the Second Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, Mnacko was at the forefront of those demanding far-reaching political and social reforms. He also gained prominence for his condemnation of the KSC's periodic reliance on anti-Semitism, dating back to the show trials of Slánský and other leading figures in the early 1950s. In the summer of 1967 Mnacko strongly criticized Czechoslovakia's opposition to Israel during the Six-Day Mideast War. In a further gesture of protest against Czechoslovak policy, he traveled to Israel in August 1967. The KSC authorities promptly denounced Mnacko as a traitor and stripped him of his citizenship, forcing him to live in exile. His case became one of the main pretexts for Novotný and his chief aide, the ideology secretary Jirí Hendrych, to shut down Literární noviny, the predecessor of Literární listy. Mnacko was not permitted to return to Czechoslovakia for even a brief visit until mid-1968. Following the Soviet invasion he had to leave the country again, and at that point he settled in West Germany and Austria. After the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was ousted in late 1989, he moved back to Bratislava and died there in 1994.