



**June 17, 1968**

**Memorandum from P. Shelest to CPSU CC**

**Citation:**

"Memorandum from P. Shelest to CPSU CC", June 17, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 30, Ll. 15-19, original in Russian. Translated for CWIHP by Mark Kramer. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/117293>

**Summary:**

First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party Shelest reports on the visit of a delegation of workers from Czechoslovakia to Ukraine. There was much discussion of the ongoing Prague Spring, including criticism of the Soviet Union from some delegation members.

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

A delegation of workers from the ČSSR was in the city of Uzhhorod and in Kharkiv Oblast from 25 to 29 May. They were visiting our country to exchange tokens of peace and friendship in commemoration of the 23rd anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia from fascist occupiers. The delegation, headed by the KSČ CC Presidium member and acting chairman of the Slovak National Council, Cde. František Barbírek, consisted of 22 representatives of different organizations and departments in Czechoslovakia. There was only one construction worker in the delegation and not a single worker from an agricultural cooperative.

During their stay in Kharkiv Oblast and Uzhhorod, the delegation held discussions with officials from party and government organs, visited the museum of Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship in the village of Sokolovo, and stopped at a collective farm, a university, a tractor factory, and a school, where they had meetings and conversations with workers and saw the sights in Kharkiv and Uzhhorod.

During these meetings and conversations, the guests displayed great interest in the development of the economy and culture of Kharkiv, both the city and the oblast. They raised many questions, particularly about the transition of Kharkiv enterprises to a new economic system, about the average salaries of workers, about pregnancy leaves for female workers, about apartment rent and the price of one square meter of living space in cooperative buildings, about sports in educational institutions and enterprises, about efforts to hold discussions on political themes among university students, about the entry of Communist youth members into the party, and about other matters.

In official speeches as well as private conversations, the head of the delegation, Cde. F. Barbírek, and certain other delegation members repeatedly spoke about the friendship between the Soviet and Czechoslovak peoples and about the gratitude that the Czechoslovak people felt to the Soviet Union for liberating them from the fascist yoke. They assured the Soviet people that the ČSSR always would be a loyal ally of the USSR. Referring to the difficulties that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia is currently experiencing, many members of the delegation expressed anxiety about them, but declared that the KSČ is making every effort to overcome them and to strengthen friendship with the Soviet Union on the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles and unshakable internationalism. They expressed certainty that the May plenum of the KSČ CC would facilitate the expeditious restoration of order in the country.[1]

Cde. F. Barbírek also said that "Rudé právo" and a number of other press organs are no longer under the control of the KSČ CC, that anarchy has engulfed the country, and that the state security organs are under the leadership of a "bad man, Josef Pavel, who is complicating the situation, but his instructions, it would seem, are now being ignored, and he will soon be removed from his post." [2] The so-called "non-party clubs" and other parties that are actively working against the KSČ are gaining strength in the country. On this matter, Cde. F. Barbírek always emphasized that the KSČ is overcoming these difficulties and that the ties between the KSČ and CPSU and between the ČSSR and USSR will become stronger.

Other members of the delegation also expressed certainty that the KSČ will be able to overcome the difficulties and lead the country along the path of socialist development. Representatives of Slovakia in the delegation repeatedly noted that the situation in the Slovak regions of the country is better than in the Czech lands, and that the Slovak Communist Party is in control of the situation. Speaking about this in particular were the secretary of the KSS Košice municipal committee, Cde. Severin Martinka, the secretary, Cde. F. Barbírek, Cde. Kamil Makúch, and others.

A member of the delegation and editorial official at the journal of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, "Svět Sovětů," Ivanna Gotlibová, who in the past evidently was an editorial employee at "Rudé právo," took the initiative in arranging

conversations with Soviet officials, to whom she expressed approval of the changes under way in the ČSSR and spoke idealistically about Tomáš Masaryk. "Masaryk," she declared, "was a great man who got along well with everyone and had a rapport with the common man. He was for Lenin, but condemned the methods of Stalin. During Masaryk's time, a total of only 3-4 people were killed in demonstrations, whereas in Gottwald's time a vastly larger number of innocent people perished." Referring to a recent article in the newspaper "Sovetskaya Rossiya," she said that "the Soviet press features baseless criticism of Masaryk, which evokes dissatisfaction among the whole population of the ČSSR.[3] For this reason, all the journalists at our publication have come out in defense of Masaryk." In other conversations, I. Gotlibová gave vent to open malice against the USSR. In particular, she said: "I would like to see what is happening in our country take place in the USSR as well. Your leaders should be closer to the people, as ours are. I don't see Ukraine; its language, culture, and everyday life are stifled. This is especially evident in the educational institutions. Only this year did I actually hear the anthem of the UkrSSR.[4] I'm not opposed to the USSR or to socialism, but I'm very much opposed to Stalinist bureaucratism. Our ideal is Solzhenitsyn and his book 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.'"

The remarks by I. Gotlibová were rebuffed every time. Members of the ČSSR delegation joined us in condemning her behavior. When she attempted to offer a toast at an official reception in honor of the delegation, several of the Czechoslovak comrades, including a worker, Ludvig Kožuch, prevented her from speaking, saying that at this sort of festive occasion it would be unworthy to have her offer a toast on behalf of the delegation.

Some members of the delegation of Slovak descent expressed dissatisfaction with the nationality policy carried out earlier in the ČSSR.

In lunchtime toasts at the university in the Zmiiv district during a reception in honor of the delegation, Cde. F. Barbírek explained the reasons for the current situation in the ČSSR when he mentioned numerous mistakes of the former KSČ leadership, which, in his view, had produced dissatisfaction in the country, particularly in Slovakia. These mistakes reached their height when the current president of the ČSSR, Ludvík Svoboda, was removed from his posts without any reason and was forced to work as a bookkeeper in an agricultural cooperative. The mistakes also culminated in the imprisonment, without any justification, of many former commanders of the partisan detachments that served during the Slovak national uprising. Countless appeals by Slovaks to A. Novotný requesting that he give Slovakia the rights of a republic with a capital in Bratislava went unheeded.[5]

The secretary of the municipal committee of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship in Bratislava, Cde. Rudolf Vlášek, said: "In the past, the Czechs did not regard us, the Slovaks, as human beings: A teacher or cook in Slovakia who did the same work as someone in the Czech lands and Moravia would receive much less pay. The disparity could be as much as 300 koruny. Whenever a Slovak traveled to Prague, he would have to hide his nationality, since they would give a Slovak no more than a single-room apartment for his entire family, whereas they'd give a Czech at least 2-3 rooms for the same size family." Cde. R. Vlášek expressed certainty that this situation will be changed and indeed is already changing. Great credit for this improvement is due to A. Dubček, who was characterized as "a strong, determined man who, having only the facts at hand, moved against the state of affairs that existed under Novotný."

The secretary of the Vsetín district committee of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, Cde. Ilič Kouřada, said that journalists and some editors of "Rudé právo" are behaving badly. On the editorial board of the newspaper, they have created an opposition and are speaking out against the editor-in-chief.[6] He reported that Communists have been driven from the leadership in a number of trade unions and that the people who have taken over were convicted in the past for various reasons,

including for abuses.

In response to a question about what A. Novotný is doing now, Cde. Kamil Makúch said that "he's been having regular discussions with Cde. Chervonenko.[7] As a result of these discussions, information reaching the USSR is not always reliable, despite the very accurate reports provided to the Soviet Union by the USSR consul in Bratislava, Cde. Kuznetsov." [8]

In discussions with our officials in Kharkiv, Cde. F. Barbírek spoke in favor of a comprehensive strengthening of ties between Slovakia and Ukraine and an exchange of work experience between the UkrSSR and a future Slovak Republic.[9]

Reported for informational purposes.

P. SHELEST  
SECRETARY OF THE UKRAINIAN CP

17 June 1968

No. 1/54

[1]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The KSČ Central Committee plenum ran from 29 May (the day that this visiting delegation returned to Czechoslovakia) to 1 June 1968.

[2]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: These comments by Barbírek about the loss of control over the press were echoed, almost word for word, in subsequent reports by the Soviet KGB on the "counterrevolutionary underground in Czechoslovakia." See, in particular, "O deyatel'nosti kontrrevolyutsionnogo podpol'ya v Chekhoslovakii" (cited in my annotation to Document 19), Ll. 1-34.

[3]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The article to which Gotlibová is referring is M. Shiryamov, "Ch'i interesy zashchishchal Masarik?" Sovetskaya Rossiya (Moscow), 14 May 1968, p. 2.

[4]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: All the union-republics of the USSR (except for the Russian Soviet Federation of Socialist Republics) had their own national anthems from January 1950 on. The Ukrainian anthem was "Zhyvy Ukraina" (Live on, O Ukraine), composed by Andrii Lebedynets with lyrics by Mykola Bazhan and Petro Tychyra. (A revised version of the lyrics was adopted in March 1978.) In 1992, the newly independent state of Ukraine shifted its national anthem to "Shche ne vmerla Ukraina" (Ukraine Has Not Yet Died), based on music composed in 1863 by Mykhailo Verbyts'kyi and lyrics adapted from an 1862 poem by Pavlo Chubyns'kyi.

[5]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Changes in the status of Bratislava were the first measures taken in 1968 to rectify the Czech-Slovak relationship. In late February 1968, laws and constitutional amendments were adopted to make Bratislava the "capital city of Slovakia" and to elevate the status of Bratislava's municipal national committee to a status equal to that of the Prague municipal committee - that is, a status roughly equivalent to that of each of the Czech and Slovak regional committees.

[6]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The editor-in-chief of Rudé právo was Oldřich Švestka, a member of the KSČ CC Presidium, who later became one of the signatories of the secret letter urging Soviet military intervention. For his views at the time of this visit, as expressed in a secret conversation with his counterparts at the CPSU daily Pravda, see "Zapis' besedy so chlenom Prezidiuma TsK Kommunisticheskoi partii Chekhoslovakii, glavnyim redaktorom gazety 'Rudé právo' tov. Oldrzhikom Shvestkoi," by A. I. Lukovets, member of the editorial board at Pravda, transmitted to the CPSU Politburo by Mikhail Zimyanin, editor-in-chief of Pravda, 20 May 1968 (Top Secret), in

RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 26, Ll. 33-40.

[7]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Stepan Chervonenko was the Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia, who took an active part in trying to discredit the Prague Spring. Among Chervonenko's numerous contacts was Novotný even after the latter had been removed as president.

[8]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This view of Igor Kuznetsov's reports is generally correct. Cables from the Soviet consulate in Bratislava were sometimes distorted, but usually far less so than those emanating from the Soviet embassy in Prague. See, for example, "Informatsiya k voprosu o polozhenii v rukovodstve KPCh," Cable No. 110 (Secret), to A. A. Gromyko and K. V. Rusakov, 26 December 1967, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 10-13; "Informatsiya k voprosu o polozhenii v rukovodstve KPCh," Cable No. 1 (Secret), to A. A. Gromyko, 2 January 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 7-9; and "Zapis' besedy s chlenom TsK KPS tov. Ya. Mrazikom," Cable No. 21 (Secret), to A. A. Gromyko, 14 February 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 301, Ll. 71-74.

[9]TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The federalization of Czechoslovakia, including separate Communist Parties and republic governments for Slovakia and the Czech lands, was due to take effect in the fall of 1968. Barbírek obviously had these plans in mind when he referred to a "future Slovak Republic." (He decidedly was not proposing an independent Slovakia.)