

DOCUMENT No. 100: Statement by the CPCz CC Presidium Condemning the Warsaw Pact Invasion, August 21, 1968

Source: ÚSD, Archiv UV KSČ, F. 02/1; published in *Práce*, second edition, August 21, 1968, p. 1.

Shortly after word arrived in Prague that tens of thousands of foreign troops were entering Czechoslovakia, the CPCz CC Presidium voted 7 to 4 to adopt a statement calling "on all citizens...to remain calm" and condemning the invasion as a violation of "all principles governing relations between socialist states." At Dubček's direction, Čestmír Číšař and Zdeněk Mlynář prepared a draft of the statement on the spot; it was put to a vote with a few modest changes.

Contrary to Soviet expectations, the vote demonstrated that the "healthy forces" on the CPCz Presidium did not have a majority in support of the invasion. Vasil Bilák, Drahomír Kolder, Oldřich Švestka, and Emil Rigo voted against the resolution. But two members of the CPCz Presidium who the pro-Moscow faction had assumed would back the invasion, Jan Piller and František Barbírek, voted to condemn it. Both Piller and Barbírek would have supported a no-confidence motion against Dubček if one had been offered, but they were unwilling to go on record as condoning the military occupation of their country. The presidium's adoption of the statement marked the first in a series of crucial events that undermined the plot devised by the "healthy forces."

The text was conveyed to the central radio station for immediate broadcast and to Rudé právo for publication in the August 21 edition. The radio transmission was briefly interrupted when one of the pro-Moscow collaborators, the chairman of the Central Board for Communications, Karel Hoffmann, sought to replace it with the broadcast of a statement favoring the invasion. Publication of the resolution in Rudé právo also was temporarily disrupted when the editor-in-chief, Švestka, ordered the staff to publish a pro-invasion announcement instead. However, employees from the radio station and newspaper alerted Josef Smrkovský and he promptly intervened by phone from the Central Committee building and countermanded Hoffmann's and Švestka's orders, invoking his own authority as chairman of the National Assembly. The radio employees then promptly resumed transmission of the presidium's statement. At Rudé právo, where employees had halted publication of the newspaper's first edition for August 21 after Švestka had given his orders, a special second edition was issued that prominently featured the Presidium's resolution.

The Presidium's declaration inspired other leading party and state organs in Czechoslovakia, including the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly, the 14th Party Congress, dozens of regional and municipal party committees, trade union collectives, and numerous organizations affiliated with the ČSSR Academy of Sciences, to convene over the next two days and issue statements of their own condemning the invasion. Amidst the surge of non-violent civilian resistance in Czechoslovakia and the successful convocation of the 14th Party Congress, plans to set up a "Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government" quickly came unstuck, and the "healthy forces" were unable to follow through with any of their promises.

To All the People of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

On Tuesday, 20 August 1968, at approximately 11 P.M., the armies of the USSR, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, the Hungarian People's Republic, and the Bulgarian People's Republic crossed the state borders of the ČSSR. This occurred without the knowledge of the president of the Republic, the chairman of the National Assembly, the prime minister, and the CPCz CC first secretary, and without the knowledge of these organs as a whole.

The border crossing occurred while the CPCz CC Presidium was meeting to make preparations for the 14th CPCz Congress. The CPCz CC Presidium calls on all citizens of the republic to

remain calm and to refrain from putting up any resistance against the advancing troops, since it would now be impossible to defend our state borders.¹²¹

Accordingly, units of the Czechoslovak army and the People's Militia have received no orders to defend the republic. The CPCz CC Presidium believes the border crossing not only contravenes all principles governing relations between socialist states, but also violates the fundamental provisions of international law.¹²²

All leading officials of the state, the CPCz, and the National Front are remaining in the posts to which they were elected as representatives of the people and of the members of their organizations, in accordance with the laws and other valid regulations in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The constitutional representatives have convened an immediate session of the National Assembly and the Government of the Republic. The Presidium of the CPCz Central Committee is convening a CPCz CC plenum to discuss the situation that has arisen.¹²³

The CPCz CC Presidium

¹²¹ The clause at the end of this sentence ("since it would now be impossible to defend our state borders") was included in Císař's and Mlynář's initial draft of the statement, but it was supposed to have been deleted in the final version. Dubček and his colleagues were concerned that any direct reference to armed resistance, even a negative one, might provoke an untoward reaction among the public. For some reason, however, the clause was reinserted during radio broadcasts after 4:30 A.M., and it also appeared in the text published in *Práce* and *Rudé právo* on August 21 [and then reprinted in *Sedm pražských dnů, 21.–27. srpen 1968: Dokumentace* (Prague: CSAV, September 1968), p. 6. The book is available in an abridged English translation as Robert Littell, ed., *The Czech Black Book* (New York: Praeger, 1969)]. Subsequently, all published versions omitted the clause. Confusion may have arisen when Hoffmann and Švestka tried to prevent the broadcast and publication of the statement; following Smrkovský's intervention, the broadcasters and journalists went back to the draft of the statement, unaware that the clause should have been excised.

¹²² This sentence proved to be the most controversial part of the statement and, for a brief while, was the subject of heated debate. Even a few of the leading reformers initially were concerned that the charge of a "violation of the fundamental provisions of international law" might be too strong. In the end, however, all seven of those who supported the resolution were willing to go along with the phrase.

¹²³ The Presidium proclamation on the invasion set off a series of other resolutions and anti-invasion activities (see *Sedm pražských dnů*).