

Events in Czechoslovakia and Switzerland

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EVENTS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND SWITZERLAND

In the last six years of editing the "Swiss Observer", there has been no event which has produced such vast quantities of news sheets as the tragic happenings in Czechoslovakia. The piles of yellow papers which have reached the Editor from Switzerland positively swamped her desk, and a book could be filled with accounts of Swiss reaction to the Soviet occupation of a small country.

With the exception of the Swiss Communist Party (founded 1967) every individual, every organisation, every body of men and women, raised their voices in protest. The "Rassemblement Jurassien" took the opportunity to compare Russian intervention with Bernese "domination" in the Jura, a statement much objected to in the Jura itself. Demonstrations in sympathy with Czechoslovakia took place all over Switzerland and were attended by thousands of people. Resolutions were made and telegrams and messages of protest sent to the Soviet Embassy in Berne. Anti-Russian demonstrations took place outside the headquarters of the Soviet UNO delegation in Geneva, the Soviet Bank in Zurich and the Embassy in Berne. The Swiss Foreign Minister expressed his Government's censure of the Soviet action when the Russian *Chargé d'Affaires* went to the "Federal Palace".

Declarations were issued by the dozen: 233 Zurich University and ETH lecturers and professors sent a resolution to the Embassies of the Eastern Block States. All political Parties, including the "Partei der Arbeit", protested. The Churches expressed their distress, and special intercession services were held. Naturally, the young people were most upset and organised demonstrations and marches, silent and otherwise. Whole colleges, airport personnel, scientists, trade unions and sports organisations opposed the action by Russia and the Warsaw Pact countries, and various conferences in Eastern countries were cancelled. The Federal Gymnastic Society asked for the exclusion of Eastern countries from the Olympic Games, Swiss delegates to meetings and conferences in Russia and her satellites cancelled participation and ostentatiously refused invitations — thus no Swiss lecturers will be at the Surgeon's Congress of the German Democratic Republic, and no "Collegium Musicum" Orchestra from Zurich will give concerts in Budapest. No football match Switzerland-Poland will take place, and the Swiss publishers have refused the five prizes for best books, which should have been awarded to them at the Leipzig Book Fair. A number of international conferences in Switzerland were also cancelled, such as the European Writers' Congress. Russian films were taken off, in spite of contracts, and a number of Czechoslovakia pictures shown. Forty musicians of world repute, led by the Czech conductor Rafael Kubelik who lives in Zurich, made a declaration of protest, which has found a ready echo in many parts of the world. Berne retail traders have asked their shops not to supply goods to members of Eastern Europe States and U.S.S.R. Embassies.

Communal and Cantonal Governments and Parliaments have voiced their disgust, have offered donations to the Red Cross and declared their readiness to accept refugees. Several M.P.'s asked for the recall of Parliament, the Foreign Affairs Commissions met, and the Government was kept closely informed of events, but it was decided that Parliament would deal with the matter in

their Autumn Session as there was no immediate danger developing. As an aside: Quite a few housewives made a run on food stores!

Migros put 16 tons of baby food at the disposal of the Swiss Red Cross for use in Czechoslovakia. And by 10th September nearly 4,000 refugees were taken care of by Swiss organisations, national and local. Permanent Czech nationals residing in Switzerland number about 460. All Czech tourists in Switzerland were given help, such as free petrol and food parcels. They were invited to travel free of charge to the special demonstration on the Ruetli Meadow, arranged by the Swiss Radio. Talking of Central Switzerland, at the "Tellspiele" at Altdorf, there was an impressive protest and a collection was made. Money was also collected at many of the public demonstrations, and none showed better results than those made by the students. The Zurich students in particular organised an excellent service of help. A delegation immediately left for Vienna to help in the refugee problem, and in Zurich they look for accommodation for Czech students and are organising a collection in aid of scholarships. The Geneva students were in contact by telex with their Czech colleagues in Prague and other towns. German language courses free of charge have been arranged for Czechs, and the medical agency will arrange jobs for Czech doctors. There is an information office for Czech students in Berne and other towns.

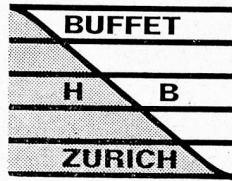
A Czech flag was hoisted at Ennetbuergen at the foot of the Buergenstock, and the demand for flags was immediate. The woman responsible for getting the flag, organised a flag campaign, but she could not cope, and the Municipal President of Lucerne came to her rescue by taking on the sponsorship of the campaign which has become country-wide. All over Switzerland, these little blue and white flags — "solidarity for 3 francs" — are to be seen on lapels, hats, handbags, etc. The money goes to the refugee help to Czechs in Switzerland.

The Swiss Red Cross has put its services at the disposal of Czechoslovakia, and the Czech counterpart has cabled its gratitude.

The Czech Embassy in Berne expressed solidarity with Dubcek, and the UNO delegation in Geneva supported it. The Czech Foreign Minister Hajek arrived in Switzerland at the end of August and left again on 5th September. No news about his visit was available.

The following story which apparently circulated at UNO is said to have annoyed the Russians: "What are the Soviet soldiers doing in Czechoslovakia?" Answer: "Still looking for the people who invited them there." The Editor's little niece (8) asked her mother "Mummy, did the Russian soldiers also have to show their passports at the Czech frontier?" Out of the mouth of children . . .

(Compiled from news received mainly by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)



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