

PRISONHOUSE OF NATIONS



THE THIRD WORLD WAR

This Czechoslovak affair is peculiarly frustrating. On the one hand, it is so brutally outrageous. On the other, there seems to be nothing meaningful to do about it.

Direct military counteraction is excluded. About this there should be no confusion. It is not a question of appeasement v. firmness; it would make no difference if the shrillest imaginable hawks were running the American and NATO governments; nor does it have anything to do with Vietnam. Military counteraction is excluded by the strategic realities. NATO does not have the military means to mount a conventional military offensive into eastern Europe. Nuclear operations are effectively deterred by the Soviet Union's strategic nuclear force. Q. E. D.

"You cannot step twice into the same river," wrote Heraclitus, meaning that time's current is irreversible. The strategic realities of 1956 were quite different from today's. When Hungarian students and workers were fighting for freedom—and the students and workers of much of the rest of eastern Europe ready to join them—the Soviet Union had no intercontinental missiles and a feeble long-range air force. We were then in a strategic position to lay down an ultimatum that would have kept Soviet troops out of Hungary. The Kremlin knew this. That is why the Soviet leaders waited a week before ordering their troops in. They had to make sure the U. S. Government was *not* going to act. If . . . but there's no use crying over history's might-have-beens.

On the Moral Front

Excluding direct military moves does not rule out all forms of military and paramilitary action. If civil war, guerrilla operations or some sort of underground resistance movement started up in Czechoslovakia, perhaps spreading

elsewhere in eastern Europe, the overall strategic stalemate would not necessarily prohibit unofficial aid. That, after all, is a routine feature of our time—especially in the reverse direction. But such developments are unlikely, if for no other reason, because the Czechs remember that nothing official or unofficial, direct or indirect, was done to aid the Hungarians.

What about nonmilitary support—economic, diplomatic, "moral"? It is surely in order—some even is being attempted—but experience does not suggest much optimism about what it can accomplish. Denunciations may relieve the feelings of indignant Westerners, but they roll unnoticed off Bolshevik hides. It should be added that most Bolsheviks, particularly Russian Bolsheviks, undoubtedly judge this Czech operation to be justified preventive therapy—as from their point of view it probably is.

Boycotts are almost impossible to organize and seldom achieve much anyway. Besides, it is not clear what we would even aim to achieve in this case. The Czech operation is being publicized as a Warsaw Pact enterprise involving Polish, East German, Hungarian and Bulgarian as well as Soviet troops. However, all photographs and specific reports are of Russian soldiers only. It is likely that there are only token units from the four satellite armies, included as politico-psychological window dressing. Unquestionably most people in the four satellite countries are opposed to what is being done to Czechoslovakia by Moscow's command, but Moscow is trying to exploit the Czech "danger" (of, for one thing, opening a breach to "West German revanchism") as a means of drawing the satellites back more closely around her. Thus, an undifferentiated boycott—or any other undifferentiated counteraction—against all five of "the invading powers" might further Moscow's purpose. Countermeasures ought properly to be focused against the Soviet Union; the Warsaw

Pact "joint action" should be exposed as the fraud it really is.

Back to School

Perhaps the most productive response would be educational, and in that endeavor diplomatic and moral gestures would acquire a significant role. This brutal assault, while still fresh before the minds of most of the world, can be made the occasion for re-teaching the central lesson of our epoch: that Communism is Communism; and that a communized Russia is only a more voracious "prisonhouse of nations" than the Czarist Russia that was thus christened by its victim-nations.

Lectured about in the abstract, the truths about Communist imperialism and despotism are not convincing to the nations of the Third World whose actual experiences have been of an imperialism imposed by Western powers. But in eastern Europe right now there is openly displayed the reality of a crushing imperialism and a ruthless despotism. Because it is once more Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev-Kosygin are revealed as the heirs and imitators of Stalin and Hitler. There is thus a chance to present the lesson more persuasively right now, before the reality is once more obscured by the disguised capitulation that will doubtless be discreetly drawn over Czechoslovakia's ravaged hopes. Even the Arab nations of the Middle East, currently within the range of Russia's strategic probing, might listen right now, especially if the teacher emphasized the seriousness of his point by a few symbolic acts—canceling the Moscow-New York air run, for example, suspending cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union, indefinitely postponing the disarmament talks on the obvious ground that no agreement with the Kremlin can be trusted, perhaps recalling the ambassador from Moscow.

Unfortunately, many of our own spokesmen are among those who most need educating. □

Copyright of National Review is the property of National Review Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.