

Module 05: 1968 — A Generation in Revolt?

Evidence 15: Letter to Breznev From Czech Communists, August 1968

A

Introduction

The following document is a "Letter of Invitation" written to Leonid Breznev, leader of the Soviet Union, by the anti-reformist faction of the Czech communist leadership in August of 1968. The letter asks for Soviet intervention to stop the liberalization process supported by Dubček, Svoboda, and the reformers.

Question to Consider

- Compare this document with the critique offered in "The Two Thousand Words." Why do these accounts differ starkly?

Document

Esteemed Leonid Il'ich,

We, conscious of the full responsibility for our decision, appeal to you with the following statement.

The basically correct post-January democratic process, the correction of mistakes and shortcomings of the past, as well as the overall political management of society, have gradually eluded the control of the party's Central Committee. The press, radio, and television, which are effectively in the hands of right-wing forces, have influenced popular opinion to such an extent that elements hostile to the party have begun to take part in the political life of our country, without any opposition from the public. These elements are fomenting a wave of nationalism and chauvinism, and are provoking an anti-communist and anti-Soviet psychosis.

Our collective—the party leadership—has made a number of mistakes. We have not properly defended or put into effect the Marxist—Leninist norms of party work and above all the principles of democratic centralism. The party leadership is no longer able to defend itself successfully against attacks on socialism, and it is unable to organize either ideological or political

resistance against the right-wing forces. The very existence of socialism in our country is under threat.

At present, all political instruments and the instruments of state power are paralyzed to a considerable degree. The right-wing forces have created conditions suitable for a counterrevolutionary coup.

In such trying circumstances we are appealing to you, Soviet communists, the leading representatives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with a request for you to lend support and assistance with all the means at your disposal. Only with your assistance can the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic be extricated from the imminent danger of counterrevolution.

We realize that for both the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet government, this ultimate step to preserve socialism in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic will not be easy. Therefore, we will struggle with all our power and all our means. But if our strength and capabilities are depleted or fail to bring positive results, then our statement should be regarded as an urgent request and plea for your intervention and all-round assistance.

In connection with the complex and dangerous course of the situation in our country, we request that you treat our statement with the utmost secrecy, and for that reason we are writing directly to you, personally, in Russian.

Alois Indra
Drahomir Kolder
Antonin Kapek
Oldrich Svestka
Vasil Bil'ak

Source:

Jaromír Navrátil et al, eds., *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, translated by Mark Kramer, Joy Moss, and Ruth Tosek (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 324-325.
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