

LBJ's Czech Assurances Backfired

By Jack Anderson

The facts have been swept under a secrecy label, but President Johnson gave the Kremlin advance assurance that the U.S. would not interfere with any Soviet action against Czechoslovakia.

The President's purpose, ironically, was to forestall a Soviet move into Czechoslovakia by making clear that the U.S. had no military or political designs on the country.

The question came up when the liberal Dubcek government sounded out the U.S. about economic aid. Cautious word was sent back that the U.S. would consider providing financial help, but that this would not imply political or military support.

To allay Soviet suspicions over our dealings with Czechoslovakia, President Johnson relayed to the Kremlin the gist of what the U.S. had told the Dubcek government. In light of the subsequent Soviet invasion, this may have encouraged the Russians to believe they could move into Czechoslovakia without risk.

The invasion, incidentally, caught American military intelligence completely by surprise—despite an elaborate network of electronic listening devices which are supposed to monitor Soviet military moves.

The Pentagon was aware, of course, that Russia had several divisions poised on the

Czech border. The Russian military maneuvers had been kept under close surveillance.

But an estimated 330,000 troops, complete with tanks and planes, managed to slip into Czechoslovakia without immediate detection by the massive electronic monitoring equipment. The first word of the invasion came from an informant inside the Czech government and reached the White House scarcely two hours before the official Soviet notice.

The Pentagon was also shocked over the use of satellite troops in the invasion. It had been assumed that the Russians considered satellite soldiers too unreliable to use for anything except logistical support. Yet Poles, Hungarians, Bulgarians and East Germans participated in an invasion of a sister satellite with no apparent hesitation.

The whole Soviet operation has caused some agonizing reappraisals inside the Pentagon.

Campaign Standards

This column has found much to criticize in the conduct of Congress. It is only fair, therefore, to report changes for the better.

In the past, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee has accepted campaign cash under the table from special interests seeking to influence legislation.

Bagmen for the oil companies, for instance, would slip money to the committee with instructions that it be passed out to Senators who had agreed to vote for the oil depletion allowance. The records of contributions were deliberately vague.

These practices were abruptly abandoned after Maine's ruggedly righteous Sen. Ed Muskie took over the chairmanship. He talked it over with Democratic Senators up for reelection, who agreed to take the high road in their campaigns.

He asked Washington attorney Berl Bernhard, who has a strong sense of ethics, to help keep the Democratic incumbents on the right side of the law. Then Muskie laid down stern ethical standards.

He insisted that every contribution must be identified and that every transaction must be made by check. He made certain even that the interest on the \$650,000 which the committee had in the bank was properly recorded. He asked Bernhard whether the interest was taxable.

Back came a memo from the attorney assuring him: "Since it is the intention of the committee to use all of its funds for political campaigns and related purposes, rendering the contribution non-taxable, income in the form of interest from these gifts, if applied for

campaign purposes, can be considered non-taxable."

Muskie's Ethics

Muskie also sought advice on how to handle contributors who insisted that their money be earmarked for their favorite Senators.

"Each contributor," suggested Bernhard, "should be asked to accept the concept that his contribution is received with the understanding that the committee recognizes the donor's preference, but is under no obligation to disburse the funds as requested."

This became the rule, and it was soon put to the test. The AFL-CIO submitted, along with a generous contribution, a list of eight Senators who should get the money. Muskie amiably refused to give any guarantee.

Another time, the Senators seeking re-election decided to spend a quiet weekend on Maryland's Eastern Shore mapping strategy. Someone offered to get a corporation to fly them to the Shore in a private plane. Muskie flatly rejected the idea, and they all paid their own expenses.

He also decreed that contrary to past practice, each incumbent will get an equal share of the campaign kitty.

It was Muskie's quiet reputation for integrity, as much as anything else, that made him Vice President Humphrey's choice for a running mate.

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