

**May 12, 1968**

**Yu. Ilnytskyi Reports on Items from the  
Czechoslovak Media**

**Citation:**

"Yu. Ilnytskyi Reports on Items from the Czechoslovak Media", May 12, 1968, Wilson Center Digital Archive, TsDAHOU, F. 1, Op. 25, Spr. 28, Ll. 81-85.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112167>

**Summary:**

On Certain Items Featured in Czechoslovak Television Broadcasts and in the Newspaper 'Rudé právo'.

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

12 May 1968

CPSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE

At the instruction of the UkrCP CC Secretary Cde. P. E. Shelest, I am sending you a report from the UkrCP Transcarpathian Oblast committee "On Certain Items Featured in Czechoslovak Television Broadcasts and in the Newspaper 'Rudé právo'."

Attachment: as indicated, 5 pages.

DEP. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT  
UkrCP CC A. ODNOROMANENKO

---

---

---

CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST  
PARTY OF UKRAINE

Certain Items Featured in Czechoslovak Television Broadcasts and in the Newspaper "Rudé právo"

1. On 6 May the CSSR minister of internal affairs published a directive ending the jamming of radio stations of foreign countries that transmit radio broadcasts for Czechoslovakia. According to the television, the society viewed this decision very favorably.
2. A huge number of tourists from capitalist countries, especially from West Germany and Austria, are visiting Czechoslovakia every day. Some 50,000-55,000 tourists are arriving from the FRG and Austria every day. In coverage on Czechoslovak television at the end of April from an entry-exit border point, they reported that officials from the CSSR border guard organs are faithfully greeting West German tourists without making any attempt to check their belongings and documents. [1] To cross the border, all a tourist has to do is stick his head out the window of a bus and show a paper to the border guard, who then smiles happily at him and wishes him a good time in Prague. The television correspondent emphasized the great "efficiency" of the border services and their hospitality to West German tourists.

Thus, in a very direct way, Czechoslovakia is being permeated every day with spies, anti-socialist and anti-Soviet literature, religious objects of all sorts, and other such things.
3. In some reports from the border, they broadcast pictures showing the border guards removing barbed wire from installations along the border with West Germany and Austria. [2] No doubt, the presence of such installations on the border is now superfluous and unaesthetic.
4. At the 1st of May demonstration in Prague, Czechoslovak television prominently displayed one of the posters held by the column of demonstrators: "We demand an opposition party." [3] A bit earlier, the television showed a group of public speakers who openly stated that they must do away with the dictatorship of the Communist party, create an opposition to the Communist party, and establish a new polity using the model of the English and American two-party system. [4]

5. Television reports from the regional party conference in České Budejovice highlighted a presentation by one of the speakers, who affirmed the necessity of convening an extraordinary congress as soon as possible, where they would have to elect a completely new leadership and form a new party to replace the compromised KSC. [5]

6. At the 1st of May demonstration, one of the television announcers spoke very agitatedly about recent events in the country. "We see demonstrators holding up posters saying 'We demand an opposition party'," he said, "but this is not as bad as some other things that have been happening recently. Hostile elements have been taunting and throwing stones through the windows of former prosecutors, judges, and officials from the internal affairs and state security organs. . . . If you look at this realistically, the current victims are honorable people who struggled against criminals, sadists, and other hostile elements. And this is despite the fact that only one out of a hundred officials, perhaps, committed violations of the law." [6]

This same announcer spoke about the plight of economic management officials, indicating that honest directors who sacrificed everything for the success of their enterprises are now being driven from their posts under a variety of pretexts.

7. Elements hostile to socialism have penetrated the press organs, radio, and television. With censorship now lifted under the slogan of "broad information for the public," they are highlighting unsavory features and deficiencies in various spheres of social life and prison life as well as grave shortcomings in the military barracks. They have even seen fit to show tactical-technical data about Soviet tank production and its weak points. During the broadcast the viewers were informed that more information will be shown about other military technology in the future. (The broadcast was on 4 May 1968.)

8. The former Uniate clergy has been sharply stepping up its propaganda activity in Eastern Slovakia. The congress that assembled in Kosice devised an action program demanding the recognition and soonest possible restoration of the Uniate Church, "inasmuch as the Orthodox faith was forcibly set up as a replacement." [7] The proceedings of the congress were broadcast on television, and reports about it were published in "Rudé právo."

9. Jaromír Hettes, [8] a secretary of the KSC's Eastern Slovakia regional committee, was asked about party cadres in an interview with a television correspondent at the end of April. Hettes indicated that these cadres can be divided into three groups, beginning with those who lived and struggled during the first Czechoslovak Republic. They were prepared only to seize power, but were unable to manage the national economy. For that reason, a second group of party cadres came in as replacements, and they have remained in power up to now. Initially, they were progressive in their handling of the national economy, but now they have become conservatives.

New cadres are needed to ensure that the economy can develop properly in the future. "In our view, to resolve this matter," said Hettes, "it's necessary to rectify the mistakes of the past whereby the top posts in the state and economic apparatus automatically went to KSC members. We must now bring in more non-Communists without needing to worry that the chairman of a regional or village council will declare war if he does not happen to be a member of the KSC."

10. Systematic propaganda has been featured in "Rudé právo" and on radio and television about a new model of socialist democracy. The propaganda emphasizes that in this respect they have set out on an uncharted path that undoubtedly will earn broad support in the Western world. Incidentally, "Rudé právo" regularly features a compilation of reactions from around the world to the events in Czechoslovakia. Someone or other in the CSSR is especially happy about seeing praise in the

bourgeois press.

11. On 5 May "Rudé právo" featured an article on "Marx and the Communist Party," which reached the conclusion that Marx was the last Communist philosopher of the XIX century (and possibly of the XX). [9] It also spoke about the different components of the "Communist movement": "The latest path of Lenin was (and to this day remains) the single complete application of Marxism and the single consistent development of Marxist doctrine. But it has gone in only one direction. Marx permitted far more directions than that. [10] We are at the beginning of a search, which must proceed. There is no other way."

12. On 24 April, "Rudé právo" published an article under the headline "Here, Too, We Need Improvements," which deals with the work of the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship. [11] Specifically, it says:

"The period of the cult of personality left many traces of formalism and official rigidity (or at least semi-official rigidity) on the movement that arose spontaneously and out of pure love in the face of the Second World War. In the past, certain political figures, who have left us with so many bad things to clear away, often made a monopoly of their friendship with the USSR, and with their verbosity and phraseology they more often harmed things than helped. . . .

"In addition, this period witnessed an unreasonable transfer of the Soviet experience, which meant that along with positive features, we imported things unsuitable for our country, not to mention outdated and egregiously unscientific concepts, such as the creation of a Lysenko school. . . .

"The routes were often stereotyped, most were group offerings, whereas individual tourism is insignificant. . . ."

A bit later the article refers to the presence of Czech students on the virgin lands, where they learned about life without adornments and agitation. They lived and worked with real people and did not exchange pat phrases, but were open, measured, and candid with one another. Our students established close ties with their young Soviet friends, who themselves today are seeking new paths to follow, do not like the phrases muttered by agitators, and are more critical than the previous generation was. [12]

13. A presentation on television by the writer Lustig [13]

At the end of April, the television gave broadcast time to the writer Lustig. In his presentation, he spoke with open sympathy in favor of the Israeli aggressors, declaring that "such a small country as Israel, in the midst of the Arab world, was unable to wait until the midnight hour struck." [14]

He called on the Czechoslovak government not to supply weapons to the Middle East, and condemned the supply of arms to Egypt by the Soviet Union.

14. On 3 May, "Rudé právo" published an article entitled "1st of May Referendum," which characterized the demonstrations in Prague and other locales (and also the session of the people's assembly) as a vote of confidence and trust in the party and government. [15] The article strongly emphasizes that the demonstrations were spontaneous, that no recording machines were evident there, and that they were not carrying standard typeset posters prepared by appropriate departments in the propaganda establishment and by the party apparat.

Further on, the newspaper says that all those who have eyes and ears can hear and

see what the majority of the all those, both in the CSSR and abroad, who are likening the current events in the CSSR to the Budapest events of 1956, ample grounds to rethink their position.

SECRETARY OF THE TRANSCARPATHIAN OBLAST COMMITTEE  
COMMUNIST PARTY OF UKRAINE

Yu. IL'NYTS'KYI

9 May 1968

[1] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In response to Soviet complaints, Smrkovský had pledged in the spring of 1968 to introduce new border controls, but, for various reasons, the government took no immediate action along these lines.

[2] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Czechoslovak border guards had begun dismantling the barbed-wire and electrified fences along the borders with West Germany and Austria in late March and early April; see "Les militaires enlèvent des barbelés à la frontière germano-tchèque," *Le Monde* (Paris), 5 April 1968, p. 5.

[3] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: In the document, this phrase is rendered in a rough Ukrainian transliteration ("Zhadame opozichnu stranu") of the Czech slogan "Zádáme opozicnou stranu."

[4] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The May Day celebrations in Czechoslovakia in 1968 were one of the highlights of the Prague Spring. In contrast to the regimented and officially-orchestrated activities of previous years, the celebrations in 1968 featured vast and exuberant crowds who turned out spontaneously to voice enthusiastic approval of Dubcek and the ongoing reforms. Marchers in the official parade - as well as many spectators - held banners calling for a multiparty system, free elections, the "restoration" of democracy (as in Masaryk's time), and even a reassessment of Czechoslovakia's ties with the Soviet Union. The excitement surrounding the May Day events was heightened still further by the celebration of the Majáles, the Czechoslovak student festival traditionally held in university towns on 1 May. Even under Novotný, the Majáles tended to be boisterous and irreverent (akin to Mardi Gras), often to the displeasure of the Communist authorities. During the limited "thaw" in Czechoslovakia in 1956, students used the Majáles in both Prague and Bratislava to call for nationwide political reforms, expanding on demands made by several delegates at the Second Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union in April 1956. Soon thereafter, the "thaw" came to an end, and Novotny banned the Majáles for the next nine years. The revived celebrations in 1965, accompanied by flamboyant and off-color posters, again provoked official anger, especially when the American "beat" poet Allen Ginsberg, who was visiting Czechoslovakia, was elected "King of the Majáles" in Prague. (Ginsberg was promptly expelled from the country.) In 1966, the Majáles proved equally controversial, and at least a dozen students in Prague were arrested. Much the same happened in 1967. The student festivities in 1968 thus continued a long-standing pattern of unorthodox celebrations, with the added fervor generated by the Prague Spring. In large, carnival-like rallies around the country, Czechoslovak students (and other celebrants) called for sweeping political reforms and voiced support for the changes initiated by Dubcek. The students in Prague also held a demonstration in front of the Polish embassy to express solidarity with Polish students (whose rallies in Warsaw in March were brutally suppressed) and to protest the anti-Semitic campaign under way in Poland. (An even larger rally of Czechoslovak students was organized for the same purpose two days later, provoking a vehement official complaint from the Polish government on 6 May.) For an account of the Majáles activities and other May Day celebrations in 1968, see Frantisek

Janáček and Jan Moravec, "Mezník i rozcestí reformního hnutí (duben-kveten)," in Jirí Padevět, ed., *Ceskoslovensko roku 1968*, 2 vols. (Prague: Parta, 1993), Vol. 1 (Obrodný proces), pp. 90-92.

[5] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: By this point, as reported in *Rudé právo* on 27 April 1968, regional party conferences in Prague, Brno, and Plzen as well as České Budejovice had called for an extraordinary KSC congress to be convened in 1968 rather than 1970.

[6] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Behind the scenes, numerous Czechoslovak officials and diplomats were expressing similar concerns to Soviet leaders. See, for example, "Zapis' besedy s gosudarstvennym sekretarem ministerstva kul'tury i informatsii ChSSR t. B. Khneupkom," Cable No. 115 (Top Secret), from V. K. Zhuravlev of the Soviet embassy in Czechoslovakia to K. V. Rusakov and A. A. Gromyko, 1 February 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 71-76; "Zapis' besedy s zamestitelem zaveduyushchego ideologicheskim otdelom TsK KPCh tov. Ya. Shimekom," Cable No. 232 (Top Secret) from I. A. Cherkasov, 20 February 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 94-96; "Zapis' besed s zam. zav. mezhdunarodnogo otdela TsK KPCh tov. M. Millerom v fevrale 1968 goda," Cable No. 211 (Top Secret) from I. I. Udaltsov, minister-counselor at Soviet embassy in Czechoslovakia, to M. Suslov, K. Rusakov, and A. Gromyko, 5 March 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 97-101; "Zapis' besedy so starshim referentom mezhdunarodnogo otdela TsK KPCh t. F. Seminyom, 4 marta 1968 goda," Cable No. 208 (Top Secret), from I. I. Udaltsov, minister-counselor at Soviet embassy in Czechoslovakia, to M. Suslov and K. Rusakov, 5 March 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 102-103; "Zapis' besedy s sekretarem TsK SChSD t. Bendoi V., 1 marta 1968 goda," Cable No. 201 (Secret), from R. A. Lozhnikov, 2nd secretary at the Soviet embassy in Czechoslovakia, 4 March 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 106-107; "Zapis' besedy s zaveduyushchim otdelom molodezhi TsK KPCh t. Ya. Svobodoi i glavnym redaktorom zhurnala 'Zhivot strany' ('Partiinaya zhizn') t. I. Valentoii, 4 marta 1968 goda," Cable No. 241 (Secret) from M. N. Kuznetsov, first secretary at the Soviet embassy in Czechoslovakia, to M. Suslov and K. Rusakov, 12 March 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 110-115; and "Zapis' besedy s chlenom Prezidiuma TsK KPCh, sekretarem TsK KP Slovakii tov. Savol'chikom, 28 fevralya 1968 goda," Cable No. 238 (Secret) from M. N. Kuznetsov, first secretary at the Soviet embassy in Czechoslovakia, to K. Rusakov, 14 March 1968, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 299, Ll. 116-118.

[7] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The Uniates, or Catholics of the Old Eastern (or Byzantine) Rite as they were more formally known, had been forced to merge with the Russian Orthodox Church in March 1946. Most of the Uniates' property and funds were then confiscated by the Orthodox Church. After a further clampdown in 1948, all former Uniate parishes were forcibly closed, and many clergy and ordinary worshipers were persecuted, imprisoned, or, in some cases, murdered. From then on, no Uniate masses were legally permitted anywhere in the Soviet Union. Yet somehow, even under Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev, scattered groups of Uniates were able to keep their faith alive through underground services, especially in western Ukraine (around L'viv as well as in the Transcarpathian region). Although adherents of the faith were severely punished when discovered, the Soviet authorities never wholly succeeded in eliminating the underground Uniate communities in Ukraine. For declassified materials on the destruction of the Uniate Church in western Ukraine, see the documents in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial-no-Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI), F. 17, Op. 125, Dd. 313-315. In Czechoslovakia, the fate of Uniates was, until 1968, similar to the fate of Uniates in the Soviet Union. The Uniate diocese in Eastern Slovakia (centered around Presov) was forcibly disbanded in April 1950 by the new Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, and a large number of Uniate clergy and worshipers were then persecuted and imprisoned. Over the next 18 years, Uniate rituals were strictly forbidden in Czechoslovakia. During the Prague Spring, however, underground Uniate clergy in Eastern Slovakia sought to have their church legally revived. An appeal to this effect was first drafted in April 1968, and by June the government had endorsed the appeal, giving permission for more than 170 Uniate

priests to officiate services. Although tensions soon emerged between the revived Uniate Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church (mainly because the latter had seized most of the Uniates' property after 1950), the revitalization of the Uniate faith in Czechoslovakia was a momentous development in 1968. For a useful overview, see Silvia Ruzicková, "Postavenie cirkví a náboženských spoločností na Slovensku v rokoch 1968-1970," in Komisia vlády SR pro analýzu historických udalostí z rokov 1967-1970 and Politologický kabinet SAV, Slovenská spoločnosť v krízových rokoch, 1967-1970: Zborník štúdií, 3 vols. (Bratislava: Komisia vlády SR, 1992), Vol. II, pp. 185-233, esp. 211-229.

[8] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The document incorrectly transliterates Hettes's given name as Jarolim rather than Jaromír.

[9] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The article in question is M. Janda and A. Rocek, "Marx a Komunistická strana," Rudé právo (Prague), 5 May 1968, p. 7.

[10] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: These two sentences were underlined by typewriter in the original.

[11] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference is to Emil Sip, "I zde treba zlepsovat," Rudé právo (Prague), 24 April 1968, p. 2. All ellipses in the excerpts quoted here were in the original document.

[12] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This passage is underlined (by typewriter) in the original. For evidence about the restive mood among students in the Soviet Union, especially in Ukraine, see "Studenchestva i sobytiya v Chekhoslovakii," report transmitted by KGB chairman Yu. V. Andropov to the CPSU Secretariat, 5 November 1968 (Top Secret), in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 60, D. 48, Ll. 120-153. See also the comments by Brezhnev, Aleksandr Shelepin, and Mikhail Solomentsev in "Rabochaya zapis' zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS ot 21 marta 1968 goda," 21 March 1968 (Top Secret), in APRF, F. 3, Op. 45, D. 99, Ll. 147-158.

[13] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The writer in question is Arnost Lustig (b. 1926), a survivor of Auschwitz, who consistently denounced the Czechoslovak government's decision in June 1967 to break ties with Israel, a decision that he claimed was motivated purely by anti-Semitism. Lustig also was one of three prominent writers (Pavel Kohout and Jan Procházka were the others) who signed a letter on 3 May 1968 to the Polish authorities condemning the anti-Semitic campaign under way in Poland. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Lustig was forced into exile and has lived in the United States since 1973 (though in recent years he has spent four months a year in the Czech Republic). For an illuminating interview with him by Pavlina Kostková, see "A Small Stone in a Big Mosaic," Central Europe Review, Vol. 3, No. 28 (22 October 2001), pp. 1 ff.

[14] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Lustig is referring here to the Six-Day Mideast War in June 1967. In late May 1967, Egyptian President Gamel Abdel Nasser sent troops into the Sinai Peninsula, expelled United Nations peacekeeping forces from the area, proclaimed a "readiness for war" with Israel, and imposed a blockade on the Straits of Tiran, preventing Israeli ships from entering the Gulf of Aqaba. Shelling and terrorist attacks against Israel, which had been occurring on a daily basis even before Egypt occupied the Sinai, intensified along the Syrian and Jordanian borders, as the Egyptian, Syrian, and other Arab armies mobilized for a coordinated, all-out offensive that would "pave the Arab roads with the skulls of Jews." Faced with imminent attack, the Israeli army preempted the Arab offensive by launching a series of lightning strikes that proved devastatingly effective. Within an hour, more than half of the Egyptian air force's 410 combat planes had been destroyed; and soon thereafter the Egyptian and Jordanian armies were in full-scale retreat. For a concise, insightful overview of Israel's military operations, see Michael Howard and Robert E. Hunter,

Israel and the Arab World: The Crisis of 1967, Adelphi Paper No. 41 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1967). An excellent reassessment of the events leading up to and following the Six-Day War, as well as the conflict itself, is provided in Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), which draws extensively on newly declassified materials and memoirs from numerous countries. Among other things, Oren's book reveals that Egypt's move into the Sinai in May 1967 was spurred in part by disinformation from Soviet officials, who claimed that Israel had deployed nearly a dozen brigades along the border with Syria in preparation for an attack. In reality, as Soviet officials were well aware, no such deployments by Israel had occurred.

[15] TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reference is to Emil Sip, "Prvomájové referendum," *Rudé právo* (Prague), 3 May 1968, p. 2.