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RUSSIA'S ACT OF AGGRESSION

Russia's barbarous invasion of Czechoslovakia will have heavy consequences for Europe and the world; but the first thought must be for the Czechs and Slovaks themselves. They are a good-natured, modest, hard-working people, who wished only to live more freely. Tanks, guns, troops, and the whole apparatus of security police have now answered their hopes. Many of them will remember the time, thirty years ago, when German, Polish, and Hungarian columns rolled in similar fashion into their border areas; and then a little later when the German army lumbered on into Prague. Many more will recall the events of twenty years ago, when marching columns in the streets supported the communist coup. Now for the third time a brief summer of freedom—this last is the briefest of all—seems to be ending in calamity.

Only three weeks ago, amid the uncertainties after the Cierna talks with the Russian leaders, crowds ran to the Old Town Square in Prague, calling "Tell us the truth"—the traditional Czech cry in days of national danger. Today they see the truth too clearly. The Kremlin and its client regimes in eastern Europe fear liberty and will not allow it so far as their power can reach.

Timing of the move

Seldom has a policy been carried out with such a blend of brutality and trickery. What is to be thought now about all the comradely talks, smiles, handshakes, and blown-up communiqués at Cierna and Bratislava? A strong case can be made for saying that the Russians had made up their minds some weeks ago and were simply playing with the Czechoslovak leaders. After all, the Bratislava talks were proclaimed to have ended with warm agreement. Both sides agreed to forget all the harsh and ultimative terms of the letter which Mr. Brezhnev and other east European leaders had sent to Prague from Warsaw, coming very near to demanding a change of regime. Both sides agreed to

Secondly, as rulers of the sprawling Russian lands, they are convinced that tightly centralized political control is necessary.

They suspect, in particular, that many of the non-Russian peoples within the Soviet Union would soon take advantage of any loosening. And what they cannot afford, as they think, in the Soviet Union, they are not prepared to concede to others in the socialist camp. Thirdly, as they showed in Hungary twelve years ago and as they show again, they are quite simply determined to maintain the power of their empire. So far as they can they will tolerate no threat, no encroachment. They let power have the last word.

Pressures from below

What this means for the future of eastern Europe—and of Russia itself—is appalling. One may say that the oppression will fail in the end, and that as peoples become more and more educated the regimes will inevitably be subject to gradual improvement. Maybe so; but the immediate point is that the Russian, Polish, and east German leaders are out to stop the loosening-up progress as hard as they can, and to reverse it if need be. As the pressures from below will certainly grow the danger is that changes will eventually come not by agreed reform but by violent explosion. The invasion of Czechoslovakia immeasurably increases the likelihood of that.

But, it may be said, Hungary was suppressed with terrible bloodshed twelve years ago and has survived to be given a relatively mild regime. Why cannot this happen to Czechoslovakia? The first part of the answer is that the price which Hungary had to pay, in terms of repression and defeat and humiliation, was much too heavy to be balanced against any supposed benefits later. The second part is that the Czechs and Slovaks were not asking for liberty doled out in dribbles from above. They were

STOPPING THE SUPPLY OF ARMS

From Mr. Stan Newens, Labour M.P. for Epping

Sir,—The reports which have come in from Nigeria over the course of the last few days that a final Federal assault on the Biafran heartland may be under way, and the suggestion by a number of British spokesmen that the success of this may be the best possible means of bringing the war to a close and enabling the work of relief to proceed, is tragic news.

During the course of the last year the Movement for Colonial Freedom, of which I am chairman, and the British Committee for Peace in Nigeria, of which I am a member, have on the basis of strict neutrality between the two sides pursued every possible avenue to bring pressure to bear for a peaceful settlement of this dispute. At a time when the talks at Addis Ababa are still under way, and while children are dying in thousands, it is callous nonsense to suggest that a military onslaught, with all its incumbent destruction and slaughter, will improve the situation.

Even if a quick military victory can be achieved, the resultant suffering and bitterness will only add to the enormous difficulties of arriving at a peace settlement, which in any circumstances would still have to be achieved.

The present willingness to continue hostilities only demonstrates once again that the British Government should at a much earlier stage have ceased the supply of arms to the Federal side, and have sought to prevent arms from being supplied to either side by international action. Late as it is, I still think that this should be done.

Yours faithfully,

STAN NEWENS.

House of Commons, Aug. 19.

Ibo solidarity

From Mr. Adeleke Adedeji

Sir,—I hope you will allow me to point out the grossly incorrect impression which Mr. M. Martin (August 10) struggled to make about the Nigerian conflict when he implied that we have all fallen victims of Biafran propaganda. His views that "it is neither in the interest nor within the capacity of this country (i.e., Britain) to interfere in the internal quarrels of other countries" but that this rule in the case of Nigeria implies that Britain "should continue to sell goods, including arms if necessary", appear to me a curious combination of illogicality and emotional confusion.

I am a Nigerian, but I find it hard, almost impossible, to understand the British Government's policy of supplying arms to Nigeria on the one hand and giving her relief aids on the other. If, by suggesting that French support of Biafra is aimed at weakening British influence in Nigeria, Mr. Martin was referring to the British economic interest there, he was probably providing an explanation for the British Government's policy. But if the failure of the Federation experiments in the West Indies, Aden, and Central Africa (Rhodesia and Nyasaland) has not weakened British "in-

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From Mr. M.P. for

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From Miss

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