

Prague, November 24, 1989

Speech by Premier Ladislav Adamec at an extraordinary session of the CPCz CC, stating his preference for a political solution to the crisis (excerpts)

[...] Making decisions is not simple. Events are developing rapidly and aren't the same everywhere. I therefore regard it as my duty to express my opinion of the situation and its resolution. I am aware we don't have much choice. The pressure of circumstances is rising day by day and possibly hour by hour. We have to deal with it. I am considering the alternatives along with everybody else. There are basically two ways to go - both have their advantages and drawbacks, merits and risks. None of them are guaranteed to fully succeed. With these thoughts, following on from what Comrade Jakeš has said, I would like to contribute to finding the internationally and internally optimum political variant. To explain the first alternative, let us assume that mass demonstrations and the spreading strike movements constitute a direct attack on the socialist establishment, and that therefore there is no other way but to immediately halt all protest actions. On the basis of this evaluation, we may decide that a general strike must be prevented even at the cost of extensive use of extraordinary means, including force. This operation could be complemented by a large number of protest letters from Party collectives in industrial and agricultural factories and other workplaces. One cannot passively watch the law being violated. To allow anarchy would be the direct opposite of democracy, whereas taking extraordinary measures could, if only temporarily, return calm to the streets. But experience with administrative measures has shown a significant risk. After a certain period the situation could explode again, bringing on another crisis, with still more unpredictable results.

For all these reasons, I would clearly prefer the second alternative: a political solution. We must count on making certain acceptable concessions. I believe that we have not nearly exhausted these possibilities. I also rely on the fact that most of our people, including young people, have no reason to be against socialism. They are unsatisfied with many things, even stirred up by all kinds of disinformation, but are able and willing to repay trust with trust. To drive the young generation into the arms of the enemies of socialism would be an unforgivable mistake. This must be prevented under any circumstances. I also advocate political methods because the recent intervention of the forces of order has led to the radicalization of youth, allowed the unification of various groups behind its condemnation, and has not contributed to the authority of either the Party or the state. Next time we have to avoid things like this. It would also be a mistake to underestimate the international risks of a broad application of force. We mustn't labor under the illusion that various democratization, environmental, and other movements end at our borders. Also, signed international treaties dealing with human rights cannot be taken lightly. When selecting methods of managing internal political problems, the international support of the socialist countries can no longer be counted on. From the capitalist states, one must take into account the results of a political and economic boycott. This warning should not be understood as a call for concessions at any price, without regard to the loss of socialist values.

To look truth in the eye means to realize that the loss of political trust as a result of mistakes in leadership must be paid for. And there have been many in the last twenty years, and not small ones. I am convinced, however, that we need not pay too high a price, if we can manage to mobilize the Party. No one else has such a numerous membership, such an experienced cadre of functionaries, and close connections with each collective. [...] Today it has come down to the very status of the Party in society. If our meeting helps to energize all its members, it will fulfil its historic mission. If not, we shall pay dearly, and only very slowly repair the damage. I consider it especially important and sensitive to take a position on the basic demands, especially those most often voiced. They are extremely varied, correct and incorrect, feasible either now or only later. This must be clear. Those that we are unable to answer immediately, at least let us say when we will address them. Under no circumstances should there arise the impression that we are avoiding something, using delaying tactics, and somehow maneuvering. Let us choose our course so as not to give impetus to further waves of still-more-radical demands. I consider it crucial to announce the calling of another meeting of the Central Committee within a fortnight to evaluate political questions, especially the program of accelerated restructuring and expanded dialogue. We would gain time, mobilize the Party, and improve its level of information on the chosen strategy. The Party needs a short-term action program, a plan for the unification of the greatest possible number of Communists towards a concrete goal in the upcoming weeks. It would then even be possible to organize a broad public discussion centered on the positions and proposal of the CC CPCz. We could also, for example, quickly submit proposals on the constitution for public discussion, publicize proposed laws on the association and assembly for citizen comment. This would provide a certain framework and solid content to a thus far less than constructive exchange of views. We could take the wind out of the sails of the daily proclamations, various calls, and petitions. I am convinced that only an active approach can put our side on the initiative, and with this we shall also gain the majority of our citizens in favor of Party policy. This is the best reply to the demands of Party organizations for more assistance from the CPCz Central Committee. [...]

Source: Stenographic minutes of the Extraordinary Session of the CC CPCz, November 24, 1989, pp. 21-3, State Central Archive, Prague, CC CPCz record group, W-0154/89.

Translated from the Czech by Todd Hammond.

(From *The Democratic revolution in Czechoslovakia: Its Precondition, Course, and Immediate Repercussions, 1987-89, An International Conference, 14-16 October 1999, Prague, Briefing Book*)