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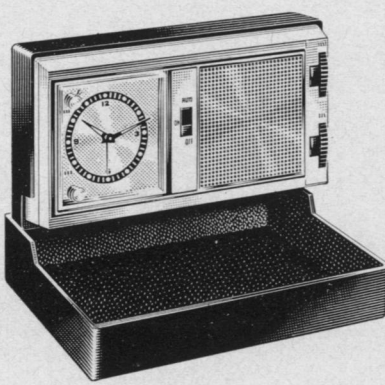
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CZECHPOINT

Slamming windows

As Russian armor growled into Prague, scientists on both sides of the Elbe feared that windows it had taken years to open would slam shut.

By last week though the threat of explosion was receding, no one in Washington could see through the cloudy events in Eastern Europe clearly enough to predict their effects on what had been regarded as a growing detente between the East and the West. But it seemed the repression of Czech liberalism could lead to the resumption of the distrust evident through years of cold war, a war that many had believed thawed.

The atmosphere, carefully tended, of cooperation, acceptance and mutual trust that had been growing, particularly among scientists, was polluted. The days when a visit to California was a status symbol for Russian physicists, and a tour of Novosibirsk a feather for Americans, seemed likely to give way to an older attitude, when American scientists, for example, amused themselves at international meetings by ferreting out the secret police in the Russian delegation by tripping them on technical questions.

Or to the attitude shown by the Russian delegation, invited to a conference, which replied tardily, and cryptographically, by cabling the formula for the Schwarzschild radius—which gives the size of a gravitationally collapsing body below which nothing can get out.

Immediately in danger, State Department observers felt, was the new-minted accord under which high energy physicists might be exchanged between the United States and Russia for longer periods than has been the case. But resentment of the Russian clout was visible in many ways and places, from Britain's canceling of the appearance of the Red Army Chorus to off-the-cuff statements by the contenders at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

The mauling of the Czechs could well delay the start of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. talks on cooling the missile race, and cast doubt on West Germany's willingness to sign the atomic weapons non-proliferation pact.

In the United States, there are signs that even if central Europe cools off, the memory will linger. The result is not likely to be pressure for more spending on military research, but pressure for expanded development of an anti-ballistic missile net is certain.

The fear, as Czech leaders acceded to Soviet deliberalization demands last week, was not that things could never be the same again between the East and West; it was that they very well might.

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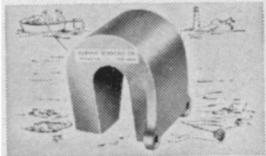


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