The Shape of Things

EVENTS IN PRAGUE PROVIDED A THEATRICAL background for Stalin’s urgent invitation to the Finnish President to open negotiations for a friendship pact. Actually, these events have become routine: the countries of the Soviet sphere have been linked together by a crisis of similar agreements among themselves and between each and Russia. Finland is the only state outside the network, and its inclusion was inevitable. Whether or not Stalin’s letter is a first move toward Communist control inside Finland will be revealed in the coming months. So far, Moscow has exercised considerable restraint in its dealings with Helsinki—surprising restraint considering Finland’s role in the war and its historical relationship to Russia. But the Czech crisis proves that polite dealings do not rule out Communist domination, and Finland’s party is strong and closely tied to Moscow. In any case, the pact will certainly be concluded, and President Paasikivi, who has a record of successful negotiations with Moscow, displays little concern about the result, arguing, no doubt, that by the terms of the armistice Finland was integrated in the Russian defense system about as tightly as it could be.

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IF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN Affairs really expected its hearings to shed light on the Marshall Plan, it must have been bewildered by the last few witnesses. Committee members heard Henry Wallace denounce the European Recovery Program as the creature of “big bankers, monopolists, and militarists.” Then came Representative Frederick C. Smith, of Ohio, who solemnly advised them that the program was “outright communism.” A third witness told them that while the plan might be directed against communism, its effect would be the opposite, because the outlay called for by the Administration could only result in “a depression in the United States more serious and far-reaching than anything we have ever experienced.” This view was advanced by Ernest T. Weir, chairman of the National Steel Corporation and one of the “monopolists” who, if Wallace is correct, should be promoting the program with the passion of a zealot. But Weir went farther. “Western Europe will not go communist,” the committee was assured by the steel magnate, whose name was anathema to organized labor in the early days of the New Deal and whose politics have always been right of right. Like Wallace, Weir says the Administration is engaging in “a tremendous propaganda campaign” to frighten the country with the threat of communism. The difference is that while Wallace believes it, Weir, who as an old Liberty League is a veteran hand at fostering red scares, has other fish to fry. The Marshall Plan, if successful, will in the long run make Western Europe less dependent on American industry than it is today. Weir, like Hoover, would keep Europe hanging on our good-will, a poor relation interminably scraping for crumbs. The prosperity he seeks is the prosperity of monopoly; the depression he professes to fear will in fact be unavoidable if Europe is left too crippled to make its own steel and too poor to buy Mr. Weir’s.

GLEN TAYLOR COULD NOT HAVE PICKED A more unfortunate week to make his plunge into the third party. Having praised President Truman’s “excellent domestic program” less than two months ago, the Senator made his decision on the basis of “our present get-tough-with-Russia foreign policy,” which he said was a device to achieve our own “aggressive” purposes, the Russians themselves having “good intentions.” Consequently, he was reduced to explaining that recent events in Czechoslovakia, which he deplores, would not have occurred “if our foreign policy were not so aggressive.” This is the age-old excuse for every international adventure ever perpetrated and could as plausibly be used to justify the Truman Doctrine, which Taylor so properly opposes. In spite of this inauspicious beginning, it is believed in some quarters that the Senator, who knows the vital importance of a good Congress, will prevent the Wallace party from committing a most serious blunder. This is the threatened introduction of independent Congressional candidates in races where progressive Democrats are already slated to run. Taylor expects “to feel good inside” because he is free of the compromised Democratic Party, and he sympathizes with those “Republican liberals who have to swallow and rationalize a program laid down for them by Mr. Pew, Colonel McCormick, Senator Taft, and the National Association of Manufac-
LANDLORDS HAVE MANY FRIENDS IN THE Eightieth Congress, but not enough who are willing to risk their political necks by abolishing rent control out of hand. Reluctantly, the G. O. P. high command has come to the conclusion that restriction of rents must continue for at least another year. Because the decision was put off as long as possible, a bill simply extending for one month the 1947 act, which expired February 29, had to be rushed through both houses last week. In supporting this measure, Jesse P. Wolcott, chairman of the House Banking Committee, said it gave Congress an opportunity to study the effects of the recent commodity slump before taking final action. Presumably, he thinks that if a real recession is coming, landlords will be discouraged from raising rents. But that would happen only if unemployment forced large numbers of workers to vacate their present homes, leading to even more “doubling up” than at present. This kind of depression doesn’t seem to be imminent, and if it is, Congress had better think of a better way to check it than the restoration of a free market in housing. To do the Senate justice, it has made more progress on the rent question than the House. Last week, it passed a bill continuing control for fourteen months.

THE ONLY SAFE WAY TO PUT A TERM TO rent control is to build enough houses at reasonable rents and so reduce the terrific pressure on the market. In a message to Congress, the President has again asked for early legislation designed to encourage intensive housing construction. He pointed out that of the million dwelling units added to the supply last year only 15 per cent were built for rental. The rest were offered for sale, usually at prices far beyond the reach of those most in need of homes. Two and a half million married couples, Mr. Truman said, were being forced to live with other families; five million homes now occupied were below minimum standards of health and decency. Such figures, coupled with a record birth rate, indicate that there is nothing extravagant in his assertion that we need one million new houses annually for ten years. His proposals for immediate action include a large increase in federal funds for home-mortgage loans and financial assistance to local housing authorities to permit the erection of 100,000 units a year for the next ten years.
Meanwhile, Republican Senator McCarthy of Wisconsin has introduced a bill which seeks to provide 1,500,000 houses a year for ten years by the wholesale subsidizing of private investors. Builders of low-rental homes would be guaranteed 3 1/2 to 5 per cent profit on their outlay together with income-tax exemption on the earnings of such projects. In some way not quite clear, the bill also seeks to induce local authorities to offer builders of low-rental houses additional benefits, such as relief from real-estate taxes, land, and cash. Possibly such a program, which appears to do away with any risk whatever to the investor, would produce results. But for the same cost, we believe, the government could provide more and better houses through existing public housing authorities.

Congress and Science

If a National Science Foundation is to be established this year, its supporters had better get busy. Although the White House, interested Senate and House Republicans, and representative scientists have apparently at last agreed on a bill to create a Science Foundation, its passage at this session of Congress is by no means certain. The Republican leadership on Capitol Hill has no liking for it. This being a Presidential year, moreover, Congress will wind up serious law-making by the end of May—and the bill has not yet been introduced.

Last summer, President Truman vetoed the Science Foundation measure handed him by Congress on the ground that the administrative set-up provided was unworkable and unconstitutional. The bill specified that the director was to be appointed, not by the President, but by a nine-man executive committee named by the foundation's twenty-four-man governing board. Subsequently, Republican Senator Smith of New Jersey, sponsor of the bill, and Chairman Wolverton of the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee met twice with Budget Director James E. Webb and Dr. John R. Steelman, representing the White House, and with Dr. Harlow Shapley, spokesman for the Inter-Society Committee of scientific groups. As a result of these meetings, Smith and Wolverton agreed to change the bill so that the director would be appointed by the President.

After the first conference with Steelman, Smith was sharply reprimanded by the Senate Republican leadership for dealing with the White House on his own and was told he could not commit the party to support of a bill. The second meeting, therefore, served only to tell Senate Republicans what the President wanted. This they are not disposed to grant: they have no desire to give Truman twenty-five desirable appointments—twenty-four members of the board and the director—in a campaign year. Unless effective pressure is brought to bear, they will simply wait until a Republican may be in the White House. Nor is Congress in any hurry to create a foundation which will do no military research. Smith's original bill proposed a military division, but this has been eliminated on the ground that the military is already taken care of.

It is all too true that military research is amply provided for. The army, navy, and air force have such huge funds at their disposal that they are steadily winning control of American science. They now pay for 40 per cent of all research and development activities in the United States and for more than 50 per cent of the research carried on in universities. Every day, more university laboratories, unable to obtain money elsewhere, sign up with the military. Long-term contracts are replacing short-term commitments, and the percentage of secret contracts is increasing. The best way to counter this ominous trend, which means the gradual militarization of science, is to set up a National Science Foundation. The revised Smith bill should be passed at once.

How to Save Partition

Last week at Lake Success, the State Department initiated a move designed (1) to destroy the Palestine partition resolution of November 29; (2) to smash the unity between the United States and the Soviet Union on the Palestine question; (3) to provoke a Soviet veto in the Security Council; (4) to start a series of acts leading to a stalemate and the ultimate commitment of the whole problem to the Trusteeship Council, on which the Soviet Union is not represented. That the pledged word of the United States would be dishonored by these tactics, and President Truman's election chances ruined, apparently seemed to the State Department a small price to pay for bringing Palestine and the Middle East within the scope of the Truman Doctrine.

This is the real meaning of the declaration of Ambassador Austin in the Security Council on February 24 and of the subsequent American resolution.

It is no accident that within a few days of these initial moves Secretary Marshall announced that new military appropriations for Greece and Turkey must be vetoed; that, on February 27 in Beirut, a spokesman for a War Department investigating commission stated that the partition of Palestine would endanger American security and interests in the Middle East; that in the same week the Arab League declared no oil pipe lines would be permitted through the Arab states as long as partition stood. These announcements must be understood for what they are—maneuvers carefully planned to justify a reversal of the American position.

Any doubts concerning this intention were rapidly re-