

JULY 18, 1968 THURSDAY
(DALLAS TOWNSEND)

PRAGUE

Defiance at Prague! Czech Communist Party Leader Alexander Dubcek - taking to nationwide radio and television. Warning, in effect - that Czechoslovakia will fight, if necessary; to prevent any direct Soviet intervention - that might imperil the new Czech reform movement.

Dubcek telling his countrymen: "We are determined - to continue pursuing the policy which we have adopted." "What we need most now" - he added - "is the backing of the Czech people." And that - we are told - he already has.

Earlier, the Soviet Union made public a note - formulated this week at a Warsaw Pact meeting. Warning the Czechs: "We will not permit imperialism to split the socialist camp - there must be no change in the balance of power." The Czech answer - a flat statement saying: "We have taken the necessary measures - to insure the safety of our state border."

STATE FOLLOW PRAGUE

In this country - a guarded response today to the new Czech crisis.

Some officials believing that armed intervention by Russia - if it happened - would threaten the slow but steady progress of recent months - toward improving Soviet-American relations.

However, the State Department - adopting an official "hands off" policy. In Austin, Texas - en route to Honolulu - Secretary Rusk adding that Czechoslovakia "should be free to develop its own internal arrangements." But "we have not" - said he - "we have not involved ourselves in this matter."

PACIFIC FOLLOW STATE

The Secretary of State later joining President Johnson aboard Air Force One - on the flight to Hawaii. South Vietnamese President Thieu and U.S. Defense Secretary Clark Clifford - also heading for that Hawaii meeting from the opposite direction. While behind them - big U.S. B-Fifty-Two today were blasting North Vietnamese missile batteries - just above the D.M.Z.

SENATE

Back in Washington - another day - another grilling - perhaps the worst yet - for Associate Justice Abe Fortas. His face at times flushed - at times dismayed - under the stinging interrogation of Republican Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. This - with regard to a number of recent controversial court rulings.

Whatever his inner feelings though - the President's nominee for Chief Justice refusing to be drawn into open combat. Asserting that under the Constitution - he could not be held accountable for court decisions - by Congress or anyone else.

WALTER REED

Just about everyone likes Ike - we all know that. But whom does Ike like? To the surprise of practically no one - it turns out, it's Richard Nixon. The former President today officially endorsing his former Number Two - as "the best man" for the Republican nomination for President.

This in a brief news conference at Walter Reed Army Hospital - where Ike is recovering from his latest heart attack. The seventy-seven-year-old general calling his ex-running mate - "a man of great reading - of great intelligence - of great decisiveness;" a man "of great experience - and still quite a young man;" whose election "would serve the best interests of the United States" - in these "exceptional" times. Said General Eisenhower.

RAY

After weeks of legal delay - James Earl Ray is finally coming home. Britain today dropping its own charges - against the alleged slayer of Dr. Martin Luther King. With British Home Secretary James Callaghan then quickly signing a court order - officially extraditing Ray to the United States.

Government sources adding that the accused will be turned over to U.S. agents - as soon as "the U.S. government advises it has transportation waiting." Which could mean a trans-Atlantic flight - perhaps before the night is over.

JUSTICE

Americans are dying from gunfire in this country - at a rate of better than one every half-hour. This the salient figure - in a twenty-three-page compilation made public today by the U.S. Justice Department. Further setting the annual loss - at twenty thousand lives through misuse of firearms; including homicides and suicides - as well as accidents.

At the head of the list - the so-called "weak gun - law states." Arizona, Nevada, Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana - where firearms are the instrument of death in up to seventy percent of all murders. Reverse side - the so-called "strong gun-law states." Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island - where the rate falls as low as twenty-four per cent.

Copies of the compilation also sent to the House Judiciary Committee - in another bid to spur the passage of pending stronger gun control laws.

COMMERCE

For the Gross National Product - sum total of all the nation's goods and services - a near-record Twenty Billion dollar jump during the second quarter of this year; according to figures announced today - by the Commerce Department.

This an increase of more than two per cent over the previous quarter - with more than half the climb said to be directly attributable to inflation. However, a top ~~top~~ government economist - predicting this will be the last inflationary period "for some time."

Reason: That new tax surcharge - that began cutting into paychecks all around the country this week. As you've probably noticed, Warren.

MANILA

From Manila - another compelling chapter - in the sartorial adventures of G. Mennen Williams.

The new U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines - world-famous for his polka-dot bow ties - now incurring the wrath of the Manila press for "going native," so to speak. Williams wearing, whenever possible - the light, airy barong tagalog; a loose-fitting embroidered shirt - normally favored by Filipino men. With local columnists calling this an obvious "affectation" unworthy of his office.

At least, one Williams defender though. A columnist in The Philippines Herald writing: "If he likes the barong - if he feels more comfortable in it than wearing a coat and tie - as who wouldn't in this summer heat - then why shouldn't he wear it."

And here in sweltering New York. The Barong tagalog sounds like a grand idea. Good night.