

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



(R - Kansas)

2213 Dirksen Building, Washington, D.C. 20510

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 1979

CONTACT: BOB WAITE
202-224-8953

ARREST OF CHARTER 77 MEMBERS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN

WASHINGTON--"The attention of the entire world is focused on the historic meeting in Vienna between the leaders of the two most powerful nations on earth," Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan) said thi

"On the eve of sealing an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union designed to help promote the cause of world peace, it is unfortunate that a member nation of the communist bloc, Czechoslovakia, should choose to violate the provisions of an earlier agreement between East and West, the Helsinki Final Act on human rights," Dole said.

"I am referring to a recent incident involving members of the Charter 77 movement. As you will recall, Charter 77 is the Helsinki monitoring group in Czechoslovakia. On May 29, 10 members of the movement were arrested in Prague. Among them were Valac Havel, playwright, a former charter spokesman, the philosopher Jiri Nemeč, Physicist Valav Benda and seven other persons, including three women. The arrests were made following the publication of a new Charter 77 document comparing economic conditions in Czechoslovakia with conditions in Western Europe," said Dole, a member of the Helsinki Commission.

"Conflicting reports make unclear how many of those arrested are still being held. The figure ranges from seven to nine and possibly all 10. All, however, are facing the charge of 'undermining the state', which carries a penalty of three to 10 years of imprisonment, or of 'undermining the republic', which carries a penalty of one to 10 years of imprisonment," Dole said.

"In addition, one of the three official charter spokesmen of the movement still at liberty, Zdena Tominova who telephoned the news to Palach Press in London, was attacked by men wearing masks as she was entering her house. She had to be hospitalized in Prague, suffering brain concussions," Dole said.

"Accustomed as we are to freely expressing opinions, voicing criticism when it is deemed constructive, and offering praise when it is thought appropriate, we are brutally reminded, once again, in the words of the German historian Hannah Arendt, writing in the Origins of Totalitarianism, that people living under such a system, as exists in Czechoslovakia, are 'deprived not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion'."

"The dehumanized world dreamed up more than 50 years ago by an illustrious son of Czechoslovakia, Franz Kafka, in which citizens are taunted by faceless bureaucrats on obscure charges for crimes they did not commit, has become a nightmarish reality of every day living for the freedom loving Czech people," Dole added.

"In lodging my strong protest against this blatant violation of human rights, I should like to acclaim the indomitable courage of the members of Charter 77 as they symbolize the fight against tyranny of the Czech people, who has never abandoned their struggle for freedom in spite of harassment and terror spreading tactics of a regime bent on destroying the spirit of independence," Dole concluded.