

ITEM No.9399/54

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October 30
II/2096

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

<u>DESCRIPTION OF COUNTRY</u>	/3800/
Capital	/3801/
<u>FOREIGN RELATIONS</u>	/1500/
Foreign Visitors	/1501/
<u>MORALE AND GENERAL MOOD</u>	/2000/
Whisper Propaganda	/2002/
Public Opinion	/2003/
<u>STANDARD OF LIVING</u>	/3200/
Prices	/3204/

A FEW WESTERN IMPRESSIONS OF PRAGUE.

SOURCE STOCKHOLM : Confidential source.

DATE OF OBSERVATION : September 30 to October 2 1954.

CORR. COMMENT : Nothing especially noteworthy in a report like this, but there may be a point or two of either passing or confirming interest.

EVAL. COMMENT : This very good report may well serve our Programming as information on living conditions in present-day PRAHA. The cited hotels are known here and the prices are confirmed by previous reports as well as by official CSR sources. The reported shop window displays showing the "amount of harvest" and a huge map of the CSR are most probably situated on Jana Opletala street and Jindřišská street /according to the sketch made by source, which may be inspected at the CS Evaluation Desk./ This method of Communist propaganda is known here.

The match Czechoslovakia-Sweden took place on Friday and Saturday /October 1 and 2 1954/ and on Army Day on Sunday October 3 1954.

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When the athletes arrived at the PRAGUE airport there was no luggage check whatsoever; merely the question of cameras. All athletes were asked whether they had cameras and the fact was noted. There was also a strict currency control; how much and what kinds of money brought in and what left when they left.

Source found it most difficult to exchange dollars in the CSR. Storekeepers, hotel porters and private citizens seemed unwilling to take dollars. Source did not try to exchange dollars at a bank.

The athletes surrendered their passports when they registered at their hotels /the "Alcron" and the "Esplanade"/ and did not get them back until they left.

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The "Esplanade," where source stayed, was a good, modern, comfortable hotel. The athletes slept two to a room and all rooms had a bath. No soap was provided, either at the hotel or the stadium locker rooms. The only complaint source had about the "Esplanade" was the lack of heat. It was quite cold in the rooms and many of the athletes slept in their woolen training clothes.

They ate all their meals in the "Esplanade" restaurant, where the food was described as "good." There was a lot of chicken on the menu. Breakfasts consisted of tea or coffee, bread, butter, marmalade and one egg per person.

The "Esplanade" lobby and bar were usually quite full /it was a weekend,/ usually with couples drinking and dancing. All of them seemed well-dressed and source said they were mostly Czechs and not hotel guests or other foreigners. Source saw few if any unescorted women in the bar or lobby. There was a television set in the lobby which attracted only a fair amount of attention. Source saw only part of one program, which consisted of a travelogue-type show on China; it featured Chinese singers and dancers. Source noted that the hotel staff all spoke good German; he did not know about their fluency in any other language. He noted no hotel guests

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which might have been in PRAGUE especially for the Army Day program, which was scheduled for October 3 1954.

General Impression of PRAHA.

Source's general impression of PRAGUE as a city was that it was drab and colorless. Window displays lacked imagination and there were few neon lights at night. He did not think that PRAGUE was any dirtier or cleaner than any other city its size. He thought the people appeared "plainly and poorly dressed;" most overcoats were mud-brown in color and of the military type. The women, either on the streets or in a night-club or restaurant, were neither very elegant, "nor pretty."

Source said that his group of foreign athletes was stared at wherever they went. Their clothes, were especially admired. Whenever they asked a by-passer for direction, they were cordially and helpfully given assistance.

Source felt that the Army Day announcements, proclamations and bill-boards must have been kept to a minimum because he was hardly aware of them.

Riding on a streetcar, he was not even aware that there was any kind of placard advertisements, either propaganda-wise or for the sale of various products. As he remembers it, streetcars are red and white.

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Source did notice two displays that attracted his attention. The first was the entire window of a store /street name not known; see attached sketch for approximate whereabouts - Ed/ in which a huge display showed the amount of harvest -- grain, corn, oats, etc.-- which had been gathered in various sections of the country. Source said that there were a series of box-like affairs, some of them half-full, others three-quarters, etc., indicating the percentage of the crop so far harvested.

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A second display consisted of a huge map of the CSR on a large billboard, with lights placed over its surface. As these lights were lit up it indicated the fact that that area had fulfilled its norm in bringing in the harvest. Source said that he saw no one looking at either display at any time.

The few prices source noted are as follows :

A kilo of coffee in a national store cost 210-170 Kčs, depending on quality. A taxi from the hotel "Esplanade" to the airport cost 40 Kčs. A bottle of French cognac /which tasted terrible!/ cost 200 Kčs. A small doll in a CSR national costume cost 50 Kčs. An ornamented cigar box of the souvenir type /made in Bulgaria/ cost 34 Kčs. A streetcar fare was 0.60 Kčs.

Source tried to buy a roll of 16 mm color film for his movie camera but could not find any anywhere in the city.

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Source went into a PRAGUE antique shop but found it unlike any antique shop in Sweden or other Western countries. This one was extremely orderly /"un-antique-shop-like,"/ with every item carefully displayed and a definite price on it. "No chance to bargain with the proprietor," said source. He saw one set of nice candlesticks on which the Latin letters "I.H.S." were engraved. Source was thus sure that the sticks had come from a church. Everything he saw in the shop struck source as being extremely expensive.

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Source did not talk to too many Czechs, and few of them came up to start a conversation. The one exception was one evening in a night club when a man at the next table who was a bit tipsy kept leaning over to source and whispering: "Tell everyone in the West how bad things are here. Tell them we have no freedom. No choice to do anything. Our elections are a farce. We can only vote for the CP candidates. Tell

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the West all these things. But tell them, too, that few of us are really Communists. Do not forget that."

Once during this long conversation "a man" in the club wandered over near the tipsy man's table. The man immediately stopped talking and waited until the other one had gone away. Then he began to plead with source again.

Incidentally, source said he saw almost no signs of drunkenness during his three days in PRAGUE.

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