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1. The 1977 Harvest

Czech Minister of Agriculture and Nutrition Josef Nagr summed up the situation in this year's harvest when he said over Radio Prague (13 August 1977) that "the bringing in of this year's most promising crops is being effected under quite exceptionally difficult circumstances." Owing to the different geography and climatic conditions in Slovakia, most of the harvest there was completed before the period of excessive rainfall. The farther westward one went, the worse the harvesting conditions became. On average 50 to 60 per cent of the grain has become waterlogged; in the Plzen region and in western Bohemia the figure was as high as 70 per cent and in some places fields were flooded by rivers bursting their banks. This caused the completion of harvesting to be delayed by about 10 days since the damaged crops could be cut only from one side by combines operating at reduced speed, so that output was reduced by a half.

Harvesting was resumed during every dry interval, but grain humidity was as high as 28 per cent and grains were crushed while passing through the drying plants. Several hundred harvest combines, over and above the number originally agreed upon, were sent from Slovakia to help with the harvest in the Czech Lands. The order of the day has been to deploy combines where they are needed most, regardless of ownership. Brigade workers from factories, offices, and schools, and members of the army -- including Soviet soldiers -- and of the police have been called in to help. Owing to the adverse conditions mechanical breakdowns have been frequent, and spare parts are in short supply; consequently, more than 400 harvesting machines were unserviceable at the beginning of August (Zemedelske Noviny, 10 August 1977). Moreover, it was necessary to attach double sets of wheels to enable the machines to operate in the swamped fields, and not enough tires were available for this purpose. Shortages of heating oil and tractor drivers have also been reported.

Nonstop work was introduced at the drying plants and state procurement storage units, and brigade members were allocated most of the night shifts (Zemedelske Noviny, 15 August 1977). In this connection an unpleasant accident was reported from the Salka collective farm in Slovakia: at 0300 hours one morning a 16-year-old brigade member, apparently a student, fell asleep on a pile of grain and when the driver of a truck, unaware of this, unloaded his cargo on top of the boy the latter was buried under 150 quintals of grain and suffocated (Zemedelske Noviny, 4 August 1977).

The hope that it would be possible to purchase grain from the USSR to fill any gap was proved unrealistic some time ago, since that country is itself short of grain. At the same time, Czechoslovakia's hard currency reserves are too small to allow it to buy anything other than essential raw materials and technology from the West. The grain problem has therefore been a subject of discussion in Czechoslovakia for a number of years and exceptional importance has been attached to its production in recent times. Cereals are often described as the decisive sector in crop production, the main pillar of agriculture, and the pivot of Czechoslovakia's efforts to increase self-sufficiency in food production. The development of the crop is watched closely from sowing to harvest. In late October and early November extensive yellowing of the leaves of the winter wheat, particularly of the Soviet Mironovskaya strain, gave rise to concern among the agricultural community, since something similar had occurred in 1970. It was ascertained that the crops had in fact been damaged by various blights or perhaps by the residues of the herbicide Zeazin as well as by adverse climatic conditions (Zemedelske Noviny, 8 December 1976).

According to the directives for socioeconomic development in the sixth five-year plan (1976-1980), which were issued in April 1976, Czechoslovakia is to become self-sufficient in cereal production during the period, and progress is to be made toward over-all self-sufficiency in food production. Some 53,000,000-55,000,000 tons of cereals are to be produced, including an annual average of 800,000-1,000,000 tons of maize. Cereal production in the Czech Lands is envisaged at 34,000,000-35,000,000 tons and that in Slovakia at between 19,000,000 and 20,000,000 tons (Zemedelske Noviny, 4 May 1976). In comparison with the fifth five-year plan this represents an increase of 13-16 per cent. Per hectare yields are to rise by 13 per cent to a level of 41-42 quintals by 1980 (Rude Pravo, 21 April 1976). In the fifth five-year plan 46,800,000 tons of cereals were produced, about 5,000,000 tons above plan and 30 per cent up on 1970 (Zemedelske Noviny, 17 June 1976).

For the current year the state plan set a production target of at least 10,000,000 tons, including 870,000 tons of maize, with an average yield of 36 quintals per hectare (Beseda, 1 April 1977). Preliminary estimates made on 20 June 1977 indicated that grain production would exceed the target by about 250,000 tons; the average yield for the whole of the CSSR was estimated at 37.7 quintals per hectare, 38.2 in Slovakia and 37.5 in the Czech Lands. CPCS CC

Secretary Jan Baryl was more cautious in his estimate: "This year," he said, "it has been possible to grow a good harvest which promises that the planned level of a cereal harvest of 10,000,000 tons will be achieved" (Zemedelske Noviny, 8 August 1977). On the other hand, Miroslav Toman, the director of agricultural production at the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Nutrition, stated that apart from the peak year of 1974, in which 10,368,000 tons of cereals were brought in, this year's harvest will be the largest on record. He said that, not counting maize, the total will be more than 9,500,000 tons -- 900,000 up on last year (Ceteka, 11 August 1977).

Under more favorable conditions the result of this year's harvest would undoubtedly have been outstanding, but it should be noted that the calculations made on the basis of samples taken before the operation is complete do not take into account the losses, which are certain to be enormous this year and about which detailed and accurate reports are rare. Experts estimate that they amount to several hundred thousand tons each year (Radio Prague, 5 June 1976), and perhaps the most accurate assessment came from the weekly Beseda (9 January 1976): "Losses in the cereals harvest alone amount officially to 1-2 per cent and unofficially to 7-8 per cent."

Radio Prague (19 August 1977) described the difficult conditions under which the harvest had to be brought in this year: up to a third of the weight of the grain consists of water, and about 1,000,000 tons of grain have had to be redried, 40 per cent of it once, 32 per cent twice, and 28 per cent thrice or more often. The fact that the state grain procurement plan was fulfilled in the Czech Lands and in the CSSR as a whole to 100.3 per cent by August 19 and that in Slovakia this had happened by August 8 does not lessen the seriousness of the situation, for the quantity of grain purchased by the state represents not quite one third of the harvest.

The recent indifferent weather has thwarted hopes of a quick completion of the harvest work, and new rainfall and floods, chiefly in northern Bohemia and northern Moravia, but also in other areas including the Prague region, have caused setbacks. A cloudburst and hailstorm on 27 August 1977 destroyed hundreds of hectares of grain in southern Bohemia. Work has fallen up to 14 days behind schedule despite the help of as many as 40,000 brigade workers at week ends. In the Czechoslovak information media indications have begun to appear that considerable losses have been incurred. For instance, Zemedelske Noviny (22 August 1977) stated that "for every day of delay we pay a steadily increasing toll in loss of grain, and the situation is at its worst where the grain is overripe."

Owing to the need to redry the grain the capacities of the drying plants have been overloaded, particularly in areas where they were most needed. Mobile drying plants have therefore been moved from places where the harvest had already been completed to others where work was still in progress. Even this measure proved insufficient, and whole trainloads of grain were transported to places where fixed drying plants were available; obviously, this must have led to substantial losses unless transportation was exceptionally swift and efficient. Moreover, large quantities of grain awaiting drying have had to be

stored in temporary facilities and, as Czechoslovak Television (31 August 1977) reported, "the danger of major deterioration exists" when it is subsequently removed for treatment and storage. In the week beginning August 22 there were "nearly half a million tons of wet grain" in the Czech Lands. It was possible to dry some of it when harvesting slowed down owing to adverse weather, but after the weather improved the wet grain piled up again (Zemědělske Noviny, 27 August 1977).

The weather also interfered with the normally good co-operation among agricultural enterprises in areas with different crops. Beets and potatoes ripened at about the same time as the grain, and farms specializing in other crops could not lend their harvesting combines to the grain farms. When they were ordered to do so by the agricultural boards, friction resulted -- as can be inferred from a remark that "this year neither pounding fists nor shouting is any use." Up to about the middle of August instructions were given to harvest waterlogged grain first, but the Czech Ministry of Agriculture and Nutrition then decided to "give priority to the harvesting of cereals to be used as seeds, that is, to the best, relatively unflattened crops, where losses in quantity and quality are at their smallest" (Czechoslovak Television, 24 August 1977).

At the beginning of September more than 200,000 ha. remained to be harvested in the Czech Lands, and this was scheduled to be gathered in by September 10, when a state-wide harvest festival is to be held (in Slovakia it took place on August 27).

2. Tatra Smichov -- A Factory with a Tradition

The CKD Tatra Smichov national enterprise celebrates its 125th anniversary this year. Generally known by its original name, Vagonka Tatra Ringhoffer, it is located in the Prague district of Smichov; it makes and supplies engines and chassis for streetcars (Technický Tydeník No. 33, 16 August 1977).

The story of the development and production of streetcars in Czechoslovakia is closely connected with that of Vagonka Tatra Smichov. Since 1875, when this form of transport was introduced in Prague, the factory has built all the capital's streetcars, and since 1948 it has been the only producer of complete Czechoslovak prime movers and trailers. In this connection it should be noted that since the very beginning of streetcar transport Czechoslovakia has used exclusively vehicles of domestic manufacture.

The factory built its first streetcars under a contract with the Prague Transport Corporation, using a Belgian design as its model. These vehicles, at first horse-drawn and later propelled by steam, inaugurated the Prague streetcar system (initially known as the "konka," or horsie) on 25 September 1875. Production shifted to electrically propelled cars toward the end of the century. At first a voltage of 500 was used, later raised to the current 600, and the early motors had an output of 20-30 kw which enabled the small 7.5-ton streetcars then in use to reach a maximum speed of 30 kph; in 1905 more powerful motors were introduced which made it possible to increase the capacity of the cars and to raise their speed to 40 kph.

Between 1910 and 1930 the practices used in other European states were gradually adopted in Czechoslovak cities. After 1930 the streetcar network began to reach saturation point, and the system of turning-point terminals became an obstacle to other road traffic. The transport enterprises therefore changed over to a system of turn-around terminals on off-street sites, which made it possible to produce unidirectional tractor cars with a single driver's cabin and doors on only one side. Automatically operated entry and exit doors were introduced, and the speed limit was raised. Streetcars equipped with hydraulic servo-brakes and holding 82 passengers have been manufactured by the factory since World War II. They were used in Prague until 1966 and were then transferred to cities such as Ostrava and Olomouc.

The T-1, in serial production between 1952 and 1960, represented a new generation of electric streetcars. Prime movers of this type had four driving axles, with 177-kw motors giving a maximum speed of 65 kph, and had a maximum capacity of 136. In addition to being exported to the USSR, this model was used in Prague, Brno, Bratislava, and Ostrava, although these cities' transport systems still had to rely mainly on the types produced during the first Czechoslovak republic. In Prague the T-1 and its successors had replaced all earlier models by 1966.

In 1960 Vagonka Smichov went over to the serial production of other modernized types, the T-2, T-3, and K-2, which still represent the standard production program of the enterprise. The main improvement introduced by these new types is the broadening of car width up to 2.5 m. Increased capacity (162 passengers) has been allied to greater stability, and design has kept pace with technical development. Since 1965 electronic controls have been introduced into driving and regulatory circuits, and special equipment designed to reduce the consumption of energy substantially and to increase power output is to be built into the T-3s by 1980; it has been developed at CKD's electrotechnical plant (Praha '75 No. 9, September 1975).

Production at Vagonka Tatra Smichov has leapt ahead over the last 25 years: in 1952 output was 40 cars per year; in 1975 the figure was 984 (Statisticka Rocenka CSSR, 1976, p. 270). This nearly 25-fold increase of production can be largely attributed to a steadily mounting interest in these streetcars in the Comecon states. This substantial growth involved planned specialization of individual production stages accompanied by organizational changes that led to the works being incorporated into the CKD branch enterprise in 1963 (Prace, 16 February 1963).

Some 90 per cent of Vagonka Tatra Smichov's output of electric streetcars goes for export (Radio Prague, 10 January 1972). The largest customer is the USSR to which, up to 1972, 4,000 electric streetcars had been supplied (Mlada Fronta, 6 May 1972); 560 new cars are delivered each year. During the sixth five-year plan period (1976-1980), Czechoslovakia has contracted to supply the Soviet Union with a total of 3,000 streetcars (Zahranicni Obchod No. 1, January 1977).

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In the past few years the development section of CKD Tatra Smichov has been preparing for the implementation of a production program for new types of electric streetcars. After the unification of construction groups and parts has been achieved, this program is expected to offer variable solutions to the problems of domestic and foreign transport enterprises. The main features of the program are unified undercarriage construction, sectional construction of new frames for various track gauges, new layouts for doors, and opening and closing mechanisms for individual cars and whole trains. Many technical improvements in the electrical system will lead to reduced power consumption. Experiments are under way on adapting streetcars so that they can have two different speed ranges, one for city traffic and the other for suburban subway traffic. A prototype of a new prime mover with a top speed of 80 kph and a 320-kw motor is reported to have been successfully developed (Technicky Tydenik No. 33, 16 August 1977).

3. The Shah of Iran in Czechoslovakia

Although hailed by Gustav Husak as "another milestone" in his country's relations with Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's just concluded visit to Czechoslovakia seems to have been largely of a ceremonial character. Coming from Poland, he and his wife spent five days in the CSSR, from August 26 to 30, at the invitation of "President Gustav Husak," as the Czechoslovak media were careful to note (Radio Prague, 25 August 1977). Husak's more important office, that of party secretary-general, was studiously avoided out of diplomatic courtesy and political considerations, as no communist party has legally been allowed to exist in Iran since 1949. This circumstance has never bothered the communist rulers of Czechoslovakia, and it is even less allowed to interfere now, when the country is searching for new sources of raw materials, especially oil and gas, and Iran is able and willing to supply them at a price. During their entire visit, the imperial couple were handled with kid gloves. As tokens of esteem, the Shah received the Order of the White Lion with Chain, Czechoslovakia's highest decoration for foreigners, while Prague's Charles University conferred on both the Shah and his wife honorary doctors' degrees in jurisprudence and philosophy, respectively.

In his dinner toast on the first day of the Shah's visit, August 26, Husak said there were "no open, controversial, or unresolved problems" between Iran and Czechoslovakia. Instead, he went on, there is a "broad identity of interests" in mutual relations, and "identical or very close stands on many basic questions in current world developments." The first round of conferences earlier that day, Husak asserted, was held in the spirit of "friendship and mutual understanding" (Ceteka, August 26).

Apparently no problems cropped up during the meeting on the last day of the emperor's stay, August 30, either, for the joint communiqué described it as having been marked by "cordiality and a constructive spirit." The two sides expressed satisfaction with their bilateral relations, while declaring that they hold "identical or close stands on major international issues" (Ceteka, August 30).

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Czechoslovak-Iranian relations, both political and economic, go back to the 1920s. The first Czechoslovak firms to concern themselves in Iran were the Plzen Skoda Works, which built a number of sugar refineries, grain silos, a tobacco factory, textile mills, and an ammunition factory; and the Brno Zbrojovka which assisted in providing equipment for defense. On the political plane, official relations were established in 1927.

The intensification of Czechoslovak-Iranian relations in the early 1960s coincided with the inception of the Shah's far-reaching political and economic reforms designed to lead the country out of backwardness and to modernize its economy. The outward sign of this improvement was the exchange of high-powered delegations, and its tangible results were the treaties and agreements signed on these occasions. Former Czechoslovak President Ludvik Svoboda was in Iran in November 1969 and in October 1971; Federal Assembly chairman Alois Indra followed in April 1976; and the most recent visitor was federal Premier Lubomir Strougal in November 1976. The Shah was in Czechoslovakia in May 1967; an Iranian parliamentary delegation came in September 1972, and Iranian Premier Amir Abas Hoveyda in September-October 1975.

To date, economic relations have been conducted on the basis of a three-year trade and payment agreement concluded in May 1974. Trade turnover in 1976 reached the value of 131,400,000 US dollars, eight times the amount registered in 1959. For the 1977-1978 trade year, a turnover to the tune of 175,000,000 US dollars is expected. Czechoslovakia will import crude oil, cotton, nonferrous ores and concentrates, and dried fruits, as well as some engineering and consumer goods. Exports to Iran will consist of factory equipment, chemicals, cut timber, and rolled materials (Svet Hospodarstvi, 25 August 1977). In 1975, Iran was 25th among Czechoslovakia's trading partners (Zahranicni Obchod No. 8, August 1976).

Of significance is a 10-year agreement on economic, industrial, scientific, and technical co-operation signed on 1 December 1976 and, above all, a 20-year contract for the delivery of natural gas, which was signed on 12 November 1976. This is the biggest contract Czechoslovakia has ever concluded with a nonsocialist country. It is to guarantee Czechoslovakia the import of 2,500 million dollars worth of natural gas between the years 1981 and 2001. The industrial value of the expected annual deliveries of 3,500 million cubic meters of gas is equivalent to nearly 3,000,000 tons of crude oil, or about 6,000,000 tons of good quality coal (Radio Prague, 12 November 1976). In the 1980s, Iranian gas is to cover about one third of Czechoslovakia's import needs of that fuel, with the rest coming from the USSR (Czechoslovak Television, 12 November 1976; Radio Hvezda, 8 April 1977). The "Iranian Pipeline" is to be partly operational by the end of 1980, and should reach full capacity by 1983 (for further details, see Czechoslovak Situation Report/46, Radio Free Europe Research, 17 November 1976, Item 2).

The following is the background to the Czechoslovak-Iranian oil deal. In 1969, Czechoslovakia agreed to grant Iran a 12-year credit for the delivery of industrial plants and equipment valued at 200,000,000 US dollars. The credit was to be repaid by Iranian oil, starting with annual deliveries of 1,500,000 tons, to be gradually in-

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creased to 6,000,000 tons a year. The credit was calculated to assure Czechoslovakia delivery of some 20,000,000 tons of oil over the 10-year period following the contract. Transport was to be provided by Soviet-built tankers to Bakar, Yugoslavia, and then through the Adria pipeline via Hungary to Czechoslovakia. Due to various obstacles of a monetary and material nature, above all the US dollar crisis and delays in the construction of the Adria pipeline, the target date for the signing of the appropriate contracts could not be met. Nor can any practical effect be expected before 1979, when the Adria pipeline is now expected to become operational (Tanjug, 10 December 1974).

Cultural relations between Czechoslovakia and Iran are based on a treaty signed in 1967. Especially successful in this field have been scholars from Prague's Oriental Institute who, according to the Shah, have made the institute "one of the world's most active centers" for the study of the Iranian culture and civilization (Radio Hvezda, 26 August 1977). Other highlights have been a performance in Czech of Bedrich Smetana's The Bartered Bride in Tehran last June, as well as Czechoslovak participation in international film festivals in the Iranian capital. In turn, Iranian artists regularly participate in Czechoslovak exhibitions and there have also been exchanges in the framework of scientific co-operation (Ceteka, 19 August 1977).

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