

Czechoslovakia (2)

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Vera Rich considers the position of scientists in the Slovak Republic

SOME Western analyses of the Soviet and East European interest in detente stress their need for modern technology. Insufficient modernisation of industrial production in these countries is said to be due to the difficulties in implementing new technologies. The problem may not be a simple mechanical one, though; it may also be related to the relegation of science to the status of a mere tool whose direction has been predetermined by the needs of society.

One of the main tenets of science policy throughout the Comecon block is the tightening of links between research and industry. The place of science in the economy is assessed primarily for its practical and immediate benefits. In the case of a relatively newly-developed area such as Slovakia, which for many years was the 'backward' partner of the Czechoslovak federal state, this can mean that scientists bear responsibility for deficits due largely to planning errors and past neglect.

Slovak research scientists have recently been blamed for deficiencies in the local metallurgical and engineering industries. This involves some 40% of all research workers in Slovakia, or more than 15,000 persons. According to the November 1976 meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, "the slow introduction of new ideas in production and the contribution of research institutes so far are not satisfactory." There is a high turnover of leading technical and managerial personnel, weaknesses in planning and leadership, and a general failure to use modern equipment to the best of its ability.

Federal planning aims to "balance the sociopolitical and economic standards of the Czech and Slovak republics" and the development of Slovak industry is a major theoretical issue. The need for such a development is reflected in the targets for the present Five Year Plan: overall Czech industrial production is to be increased by 32.3%, and Slovak production by over 44%. This means that output from Czech industrial enterprises must rise by 48.5%, and from Slovak enterprises by 70%. The targets are a 50% rise in Slovak exports with engineering exports in particular rising by 100%. It is difficult to imagine that all these figures will be met, particularly

as Slovakia's main 'export' products—steel and aluminium—are not in fact exported in ingot form, but go to Bohemia to be manufactured into finished articles, which are then credited to the Czech Republic.

The slow growth of Slovak industry is partly historical in origin—when the Czechoslovak Republic was set up by the Treaty of Versailles, the Czech lands, which had been under Austrian rule, already had flourishing industries, while Slovakia, which had formed part of the kingdom of Hungary, was largely agricultural. The policy of the First Republic was to maintain this *status quo*—thereby causing considerable Slovak resentment against the federal government. During the late 1940s the industrialisation of Slovakia was a major issue. Students uncertain of which subject to pursue were urged into technology, in particular metallurgy.

One of the first actions of the new communist government was to start planning the vast East Slovak Iron Works at Košice. This was primarily a political decision: the only resources the area could offer were limestone for fluxing and a large labour force. Iron ore had to be brought from the Ukraine and coke from Czech Silesia. One of the charges brought against Slansky, the former Party Secretary, during his trial in 1952 was that this was an "impossible" scheme, and construction at the plant was halted for three years. In 1968, when open discussion became possible under the Dubček regime, it was revealed that steel produced at Košice was costing 8–10 times that produced in Japan, although Japan was shipping iron ore from Australia and Brazil and coke from Australia. Since 1968, the Husak government has invested sums in Slovak industry which are out of all proportion in comparison with the population of the republic, causing some resentment from the Czechs. The Slovaks, however, stress the need for even more investment. In September, 1975, Miloslav Hruskovic, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party, noted that "serious problems persist in the capital investment plan", and that scientific and clinical development has not been "reflected in investment construction as much as it should have been" (no details were given).

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Camera Press

Gustav Husak, Communist party head

Improvements

Certainly investment has produced considerable improvements. During the 1971–75 period industrial production in West Slovakia (mainly chemical and engineering) is said to have risen by 54.6%, while in East Slovakia the "volume" of production increased by 66.2%. There was considerable investment in the chemical works at Bratislava, and the notorious Košice ironworks now has the second highest output of all Czechoslovak metallurgical plants, and the lowest manufacturing costs (no details given). And although the Federal reports indicate a general lack of enthusiasm and expertise in the use of computers, particularly for information and planning work, the development of a scientific and technical information system in Slovakia was, according to the Slovak Minister of Development and Technology, J. J. Busa, going forward well. The new arrangement, by which Cuba will supply the Comecon countries with nickel will undoubtedly benefit the nickel-works at Sered, which until now has had to use ore from Albania.

Nevertheless, according to Hruskovic, what is needed is a greater intensification of production, together with a more economic use of raw materials, commodities and energy and an improvement in quality and technical standards. The Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party proposes a stick-and-carrot policy for scientists and technologists: those who "have the courage to take risks on the challenging part of technological progress" will receive "moral rewards" and sharply-differentiated "material incentives" unhampered by "unwarranted egalitarianism, because this slows down progress". Those, however, who cannot "cope with the tasks of the present", should be transferred to other posts "tactfully, and before it is too late". □