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Smoke from a Czech factory pours into the air.

Friends of the Czech earth go underground

MOSCOW radio urged recently that environmental protection is an important field of international co-operation and detente, intimating, with quotes from Mr Brezhnev, that it is the West which is displaying "inconsistency and sluggishness" in this regard. Yet the first issue of a new Czech *samizdat* magazine, *Spektrum*, republished in London this week, includes a translation from *L'Express* (April 1977) of an extensive interview on ecological problems. If Czechoslovakia is following the Moscow line, why should such an article be *samizdat*?

At first glance there appears to be open discussion of problems of ecology and pollution in the Czech and Slovak press. Thus in April 1976, there was a whole spate of articles in the general and technical press on problems of atmospheric pollution, which in some cases actually presented concrete figures. *Zivotne Prostredie*, for example, gave the direct cost of air pollution as 4,400 million Kcs per year, and indirect damage (*ie*, damage solely attributable to corrosion) as an additional 2,000 to 2,500 million Kcs—figures which relate only to material damage, and take no account of health hazards.

Similarly, in 1977, the media devoted much attention to water pollution in Slovakia. According to Radio Bratislava (June 1977), in spite of numerous party and government decisions "outlining the way towards improvement", little had been done to construct the necessary recycling plants. A single issue of the weekly *Nove Slovo* (June 2, 1977) contained several articles on the problem, including a long interview with the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister Julius Hanus. He stressed that to deal with the 1,400 km of polluted water-courses in Slovakia, 500 new purification stations must be built, and that existing legisla-

tion on the use of recycling plants should be implemented more efficiently.

Discussion of environmental problems in the official Czech and Slovak media is thus nothing new. Why then did the 'publishers' of *Spektrum* find it necessary to circulate a western article on the subject.

Looking more closely at the contributions from the official media, it appears that such extensive discussions take place in conjunction with major party and governmental events. Thus the water-pollution "debate" was a preliminary to a special discussion of the problem by the Slovak National Council (and, as we have seen, included a trend-setting interview with Deputy Prime Minister Hanus).

Similarly, the publicity given to air pollution in April 1976 followed a speech by the party leader, Gustav Husak, at the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, in which he urged that it was necessary "to make more determined efforts to reduce the harmful influences on the environment that ensue from the expansion of industry and transportation and the industrialisation of agriculture", noting that "it is our solemn duty to preserve the basic values of the environment, the wealth of nature, and the beauty of our country for future generations".

However, in spite of Mr Husak's stress on "environmental values", ecological planning, in Czechoslovakia as throughout the Comecon bloc, is closely linked to the basic concept of 'scientific and technical progress'. Industrialisation is a necessary good, a dogma incorporated in all planning without further discussion.

Any temporary deviations from this ideal seem purely pragmatic or political in origin. Thus in 1968, Czechoslovakia, which since the late 1940s had been exporting all her uranium ore to the Soviet Union, suddenly began to

stress the need to accelerate development of nuclear power. After the fall of Dubcek, however, this concept had to be abandoned for some years (with, incidentally, a resulting expansion in the mining of lignite—the chief cause of air pollution in Czechoslovakia). Now, Czechoslovakia plays an important role in the integrated Comecon plans for nuclear power; one major contribution by the Czech team being a detailed survey of the ecology of aquatic life in a radioactively-polluted water-course.

Against this background, the *samizdat* appearance of the interview from *L'Express* becomes meaningful. For the subject of the interview is Edward Goldsmith, a supporter of "green earth" type radical ecological programmes. His approach is not one of "doomwatch" statistics, although he does deal with various specific hazards, such as DDT.

Rather he is concerned with the philosophical and ethical problems underlying the concepts of ecology and conservation, strongly condemning 'materialism', whether of socialist or capitalist provenance.

It is not surprising that the Czech dissidents wish to discuss pollution; even the official literature admits the magnitude of the problem. In circulating the Goldsmith article they seem to be seeking a broader basis for discussion than that permitted by current Party doctrine.

Vera Rich

Erratum

In last week's issue, page 305, 'The secret is to have no secrets', the first sentence should read, "Earlier this month, Anatolii Shcharanskii received a sentence of three years' imprisonment, plus ten years in a labour camp . . ."