

THE ČSAV COMMITTEE FOR AIDING GREAT WORKS OF SOCIALISM

After 1953, when criticism of Stalinist productivism began in earnest, if only implicitly, the Czechoslovak discourse on great works underwent a fundamental change; its focus shifted from industrialization to the transformation of nature and from mobilizing the masses to scientific planning. Shutting down construction work on “New Ostrava,” the HUKO combine, and KOVOHUTA essentially narrowed the focus of the discourse to hydraulic engineering works, the defining elements of the original Soviet concept of works of Communism. When in 1952 Koshelev described how the countries of the socialist camp were implementing “a program to build the foundations of socialism and were following the Soviet Union’s example in transforming nature and forcing its spontaneous forces to serve the interests of the workers,” he left out Czechoslovakia, even though he spoke about projects from all the other countries, including East Germany and China. At

that time Czechoslovakia truly lacked any “nationwide” water management projects that could be compared with the Danube–Black Sea Canal (Romania), hydropower stations in the Balkans (Bulgaria, Albania, Romania), irrigation and drainage systems (Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania), and projects for improving navigability (Poland). He mentions a “work of the youth” in East Germany, the Sosa Dam of Peace,¹⁰⁸ even though the Nosice Reservoir of Youth existed on the Váh. This project began in 1949 with the help of volunteers from the Central Youth Union in Bratislava.¹⁰⁹ Work on fulfilling Soviet visions of transformation could only begin once the planning apparatus was consolidated; such work was undertaken by the SPO, particularly in collaboration with the Technical Section of the freshly established ČSAV.

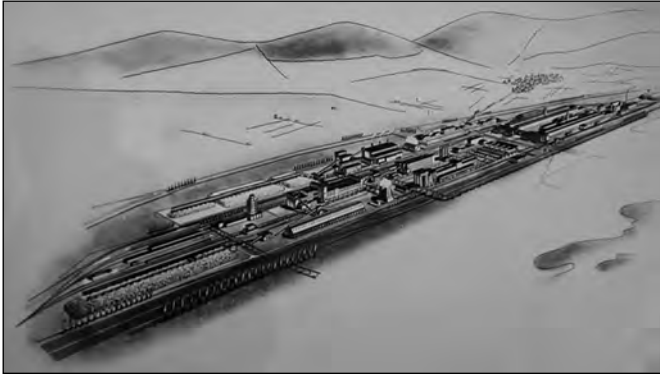
The Committee for Aiding Great Works of Socialism aimed for “scientifically founded planning and water use” and for the harmonization of short-term energy goals and the long-term objectives of transforming nature. The committee’s mission statement of sorts, which was based on the idea that water is the foundation of all planning, is contained in a publication by Ladislav Votruba, a member of the committee and an expert on dam construction. This publication was based on a lecture that was expanded and published on the initiative of the Czechoslovak Society for Disseminating Political and Scientific Knowledge, which was established to promote new socialist sciences in keeping with the Marxist maxim of “science for the people.”¹¹⁰

Votruba, writing under the influence of Soviet ideas, lists the “great hydraulic works of socialism” that were either planned or being constructed and describes the

108 KOŠELEV, 1953, pp. 170–81.

109 ĎURIŠOVÁ, 2006.

110 RANDÁK, 2012; OLŠÁKOVÁ, 2014.



The KOVOHUTA project (Source: Schválení investičního úkolu a úvodního projektu hliníkárnny Kovohuty Hron, materiál pro schůzi vlády 8.7.54, Courtesy of Jiří Janáč)

critical contribution they make to building socialism. This publication was also one of the last explicit applications of the Stalinist notion of great works, even though the implementation and impacts of this project would be dealt with by the ČSAV Committee for Water Management until the mid-1970s (the building program's planned date of completion was 1965). The development and application of new technology (turbines, concrete) and scientific methods (for hydraulic and energy calculations) combined with new construction technology (which enabled working in winter) and methods (prefabricated buildings) were supposed to lead to the transformation of nature and society. The greatness of these "hydraulic engineering works of socialism" lay not only in their physical size (which was unprecedented in Czechoslovakia) but also in their

“comprehensive nature,” the result of the broadly conceived planning process.¹¹¹

However, it seems as if the hydrocrats attempted to use the potential of the discourse on great works of Communism to reach their own objectives—that is, the goals of the hydraulic mission, the features of which, given the political situation, differed significantly from the traditional Czechoslovak concept. In 1949–54 the systematic nature of the SWP had to yield to the accelerated building of the technological foundations (the energy system) of socialism, that is, the rapid construction of hydropower stations.

In the mid-1950s the ČSAV Committee for Aiding Great Works of Socialism, which was established in 1952 and began working the following year, became the Committee of the Presidium of the ČSAV for Water Management, from which after 1968 the independent Committee of the Presidium of the ČSAV for Environmental Issues (1972–77) was created. This continuity illustrates the change in ideas about the relationship between man and nature and demonstrates that Stalinist formulas adopted wholesale from the USSR no longer worked in the 1960s and that therefore a fundamental transformation in the approach to nature had occurred.

111 VOTRUBA, 1954. He also classified as great hydraulic-engineering works of socialism “the Vltava cascades of socialism” (Slapy, Orlík, Lipno), projects on the Váh (reservoirs and hydroelectric power stations: Kostolná, Horná Streda, Nové Město, Krpelany, Mikšová, Hričová, Povážská Bystrica, Nosice; the Trenčín–Piešťany canal; and the Orava Reservoir), a planned “great reservoir on the Danube,” and the hydropower reservoirs Dobšíná, Vír, and Křižanovice and water-supply reservoirs Klíčava, Křimov and Fláje, Kružberk, and Žermanice.

HYDROCRACY AND HYDROCRATS¹¹²

In the modernization process a great deal of attention was focused on the control and efficient use of water resources. Since the mid-nineteenth century an elite group of water management experts at the state level had been forming, one that is known as the water management bureaucracy, or the hydrocracy. It created a specific ethos based on the technocratic ideas of rational and scientific water management as a vehicle of civilization and basic prerequisite for modernization. The primary goal of hydrocrats was to fully control the surface waters of each country (stream regulation, flood prevention, navigation, supplying water for industry and agriculture); nonetheless, some aspects of technocratic ideology also led toward the depoliticizing of water management. Experts following long-term plans were to reign supreme over water management. A typical feature of the hydrocrats was that they viewed their activities as part of the civilizing mission that benefitted all of society. The fulfillment of this mission, however, ran into political obstacles that stemmed from the very essence of liberal capitalism. The protection of water resources was also a topic of key interest since the emergence of the hydrocracy. The concept of the hydrocracy as an analytical tool for studying the modern, transnational history of the relationship between water and society was formed by development-studies scholars François Molle and Peter P. Mollinga.

112 MOLLE – MOLLINGA, 2009.