

LEAGUE OF NATIONS
COMMITTEE ON INTELLECTUAL CO-OPERATION

ENQUIRY
INTO THE
CONDITIONS OF INTELLECTUAL WORK

Second Series

INTELLECTUAL LIFE

in the

VARIOUS COUNTRIES

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

TECHNICAL SCIENCES

by

O. de HALECKI

Professor at the University of Warsaw,

Secretary to the Committee,

in collaboration with the Czechoslovak Committee on Intellectual Co-operation.

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NOTE

The object of the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation in publishing this series of pamphlets is to call attention to the problems of organisation and intellectual assistance to which each subject gives rise. The Committee does not propose to treat these subjects exhaustively, but desires rather to bring them to the notice of the public and to provide an opportunity for further suggestions.

TECHNICAL SCIENCES

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This report is based chiefly upon information and material supplied by Dr. Z. Bažant, Professor of Structural Mechanics and Stereotomy at the Czech Polytechnic School at Prague, Secretary-General of the Masaryk Labour Academy, member of the Czech Academy of Science, and by Dr. A. Klir, Professor of Hydraulic Engineering at the Czech Polytechnic School at Prague, President of the Masaryk Labour Academy and of the Society of Czechoslovak Engineers and Architects. The detailed replies given by the two Polytechnic Schools at Prague, the Masaryk Academy and the "Česká Matice Technická", have also been utilised.

I. — GENERAL SITUATION

Technical sciences play an important part in the intellectual life of Czechoslovakia; great progress is being made in this field, and institutes have recently been established or reorganised to encourage the development of these sciences.

Under Austrian rule, Czech technical literature was handicapped by the fact that all engineers and professors in the State service were obliged to publish the results of their researches in the two German official reviews, the "Allgemeine Bauzeitung" and the "Monatschrift für den öffentlichen Baudienst". The technical reviews in Czech, however, though less voluminous, maintained an equally high level, thanks to the co-operation of civil engineers and architects. Text-books were few, but the situation was distinctly improving.

The War practically interrupted all this development. One review, the "Technicky Obzor" (Technical Review), which dealt with civil engineering, continued to appear, but in a much smaller compass. Relations with Western Europe and America—the countries which offered the greatest stimulus and the most encouraging examples to the technical sciences—were entirely cut off.

Since the War and the establishment of the Czechoslovak State, there has been constant progress—slow, but unquestionable. Special reviews for the principal technical sciences have been founded and, with the aid of institutions which will presently be described, a series of Czech text-books has been published to meet the most urgent needs. The reviews devote about half, and the text-books one-third, of their space to original work, the rest being filled with extracts from foreign publications and with popular articles.

The grants allowed to the Polytechnic High Schools at Prague and Brno (Brünn) for the purchase of books and instruments were reduced during the War but have now been raised considerably, thus enabling a larger number of publications to be issued. Moreover, the Government makes grants to technical workers for theoretic and practical training abroad and for preparation for higher education. Parliament readily votes the necessary funds for establishing new technical laboratories and supporting the technical workers' organisations.

There has been an undoubted increase of public interest in the purely technical sciences, which was not very keen before or during the War. Evidence of this improvement may be found in the formation of engineering societies which, on payment of an annual subscription, supply their members with special weekly or monthly reviews. The 3,300 members of the Czechoslovak Society of Engineers and Architects pay an annual subscription of 100 Kr. and may choose any one of the three reviews published by the Society; the subscribers to these

reviews include a considerable number of non-members, but even so the total receipts scarcely cover the cost of publication. A further proof of growing public interest is the increased membership of the publishing society known as "Česká Matice Technická". In 1913, it had 86 foundation members; by 1922, this number had increased to 121, and the number of active members, of whom there were under 1000 before the War and until 1916, was doubled in 1918-19 and amounted to 4,751 in 1922; at present there is a membership of over 5,000. During recent years the society has shown such great activity that its funds are now exhausted, although since 1921 it has been in receipt of an annual Government grant of 120,000 Kr.

The financial difficulties with which all Czechoslovak scientific publications, especially periodicals, have to contend, are due to the industrial crisis, the high cost of living and, above all, the rise in the cost of printing, which is ten times in excess of pre-war prices. However, none of the reviews has been discontinued and the situation has slightly improved since the beginning of 1923. The larger technical institutions and associations have considerably increased the fees they pay for scientific work; but these fees are still insufficient to meet the high cost of living. Without the help of these institutes, it would be extremely difficult to publish any work on pure technical science; publications of that kind very seldom find a private publisher and yield little or no profit.

Foundations have therefore been established and competitions organised to encourage the recruitment of specialists. Two such foundations have been established by the engineers themselves—one in 1920, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the opening of the first railway in Bohemia, and the other in honour of Professor A. V. Velflík, the first President of the Masaryk Academy; the time-limit for the first competitions organised by these two Foundations has not yet expired. Other competitions for the best solution of a technical problem, and essay competitions covering the whole field of technical science, have been announced by the Masaryk Academy (since 1922) and by the Institute of National Economy. The laboratories of the technical high schools also attract a good number of younger specialists.

It is thus becoming comparatively easy to obtain recruits, but very few devote themselves entirely to scientific work, as it does not afford them a living. Only those technical workers who obtain employment in the private laboratories of the great factories at Prague, Plzen, Kladno, Mor. Ostrava, etc., are more fortunate in this respect, but the results of the research work undertaken in these laboratories are very rarely published.

Conditions might improve if there were a larger number of posts concerned mainly with scientific work, as, for example, professorships at the technical high schools and scientific appointments at the research institutes. In time, purely scientific experiments carried out in technical laboratories will be better appreciated, and their results will contribute to the adaptation of science to human needs. At present most of these institutes, like the technical experts, are suffering from a shortage of instruments and materials, especially of those which were requisitioned during the War (platinum, microscopes, etc.). These are gradually being replaced with the help of Government grants, which, however, are not always large enough to cover the immediate purchase of all the necessary instruments or publications, particularly those which have to be obtained from abroad.

II. — THE TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOLS

In 1806 a German polytechnic institute (later termed a high school) was established at Prague on the pattern of the Polytechnic School at Paris. Teaching was given in both German and Czech from 1863 till 1868, when the institute was divided into two separate schools. In 1850, a second German polytechnic school was opened at Brno (Brünn), followed in 1899 by a Czech polytechnic school. In addition to these, a school of mining was established at Příbram in 1849, and converted into a high school in 1894.

Since the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, technical instruction has been reorganised and extended. In 1920, the polytechnic schools with their special departments and faculties were reconstituted; the German School of Agriculture at Tetschen-Liebwerd, which was established in 1850 and converted into an academy in 1900, was recognised as a higher institution and became the agricultural department of the German Polytechnic High School at Prague. The German professors at the high school of Mining at Píbram, now an exclusively Czech school, were also transferred to the German Polytechnic School at Prague, where they now give preparatory courses of lectures in their special subjects. Finally, the Czechoslovak State, in the first year of its existence, established a high school of agriculture at Brno (Brünn); this was divided into two faculties (agriculture and forestry), and for the year 1921-22 numbered 60 professors and lecturers, 498 students, and 22 scientific institutes.

The two polytechnic schools at Prague are undoubtedly the most important of these institutions. Their joint library establishes a bond between them, though each has its own private library. A central technical library will be opened later. Both institutions are divided into special branches on much the same plan. The Czech school comprises the following departments :

1. *a.* Bridges and highways;
1. *b.* Rural engineering;
2. Architecture;
3. Industrial mechanics and electricity;
4. Chemistry;
5. Agriculture and forestry;
6. Special studies;
7. Commerce.

The departments of the German school are almost the same : the preparatory school of mining is attached to the mechanical and electro-technical department; as we have already stated, the agricultural department (12 professorships) is at Tetschen-Liebwerd, and the general department of the German school corresponds roughly to the special studies and commercial department in the Czech school. The German school proposes to transform its preparatory school of mining into a special department and to create a forestry department and a commercial high school at Prague, as well as forestry and veterinary departments at Tetschen-Liebwerd. The Czech and German schools at Brno are organised on similar lines, but, as there is a separate school of agriculture in that town, the subject is not taught in the polytechnic schools. Each school has its own library. Numerous institutions and valuable collections are attached to the various Chairs in all four polytechnic schools.

The difficulties confronting these schools under present conditions are much the same as those experienced by the universities. They complain chiefly of lack of accommodation. This is felt most acutely at Prague (1), where the premises of the polytechnic schools are—like the university buildings—scattered throughout the town, and where the housing shortage is so acute as to prevent the appointment of additional professors. The professors also give courses and popular lectures (two courses and fifteen lectures for the session 1921-1922 at the Czech school, and holiday courses in the provinces organised by the German school and its agricultural department); like their university colleagues, they are members of the Czech and German professor's associations. Similarly, the students at the technical schools take advantage of establishments which provide board and lodging for university students on easy terms; they have special funds at their disposal and have created a number of scientific associations. Subscriptions have been trebled since the year 1921-22.

The financial means at the disposal of the polytechnic schools are considerable, but not large enough for the purchase of all the necessary foreign books. The budget of the Czech

(1) The extension of the premises of the school at Tetschen-Liebwerd, planned before the War, has now become indispensable.

school at Prague, which in 1913-14 and in 1918-19 was less than a million and a-half crowns, has increased so rapidly that it amounted to 9,825,768 crowns in 1922 and to 18,602,151 (about 3,000,000 Swiss francs) in 1923. The budget of the German school in the same town, which before the war was 772,412 crowns, rose to 4,747,347 crowns in 1922. This sum, however, includes the budget of the agricultural school at Tetschen-Liebwerd (450,000 crowns), which was a separate item before the War, when it amounted to 111,408 crowns.

At the Czech polytechnic school at Prague, the number of professors, assistants and readers has been doubled since the War (54, 83 and 11 in 1913; 100, 194 and 17 in 1922). Before the War, in 1913-14, there were 2,898 students. There was naturally a decided decrease during the War; numbers fell to 882 in 1916-17, but rose 4,749 during 1918-19, and in 1921-22 attained a maximum of 6,860; for the year 1922-23, 6,100 students were entered on the rolls. The number of doctor's degrees obtained each year has remained stationary (about 20). At the German polytechnic school in the same town, the increase in the number of professors and assistants was less appreciable: 36 and 50 in 1913, 44 and 69 in 1922. On the other hand, the number of students (903 in 1913, 2,194 in 1922) and of State examinations passed has risen considerably (1). The German polytechnic school at Brno (Brünn) is almost as large as the one at Prague (2,163 students and 63 professors and lecturers in 1922); there are several hundred fewer students at the Czech school in that town, but practically an equal number of professors.

In all the technical schools, a certain number of foreign languages are taught; at Prague, for instance, ten languages are taught at the Czech school, and five, including Ido, at the German school. Professors are very rarely exchanged. At present there are only a few Russian professors, who give free lectures in Russian at the Czech Polytechnic School at Prague.

The polytechnic schools in Czechoslovakia, like the universities, admit foreign students if their previous education is recognised as equivalent to that which is required of nationals, and if there are vacancies. Since 1921, the Ministry has reserved the right to admit Hungarians, Poles, Russians and Ukrainians to the German technical schools. The equivalent value of technical education acquired abroad is recognised on conditions of reciprocity. There were comparatively few foreign students at the Czech school in Prague both before and after the War (210 in 1913-14; 301 in 1918-19), but in 1921-22 their number rose to 2,178; in 1922-23 there were 2,107, practically a third of the total number of students. More than half these foreigners are Russians (1,113 in 1921-22). There are 436 Jugo-Slavs, 279 Ukrainians, 158 Bulgars and 117 Roumanians. Before the War there were very few foreign students at the German school (19 in 1913): in 1922 there were 307, 78 of whom passed their examinations. The majority were Roumanians, Poles and Austrians.

III. — ASSOCIATIONS AND INSTITUTES FOR THE PROMOTION OF TECHNICAL SCIENCES

The Czech Academy of Science and Art has from time to time published reports and articles on technical sciences. Of late years however, the need for a special academy to organise technical work in Czechoslovakia has been felt. Since the establishment of Czechoslovakia as an independent State, the scheme has taken shape, and the law of January 29th, 1920, officially established the new institution called the "Masaryk Labour Academy". This institution, which marks a new departure, is progressing favourably, in spite of its economic difficulties, and proposes methodically to develop the capacities of the population and to exploit the natural resources of the country for the general good. To this end it encourages every form of research work in the field of technical science, in so far as it has a bearing upon practical life. It also affords facilities for the training of qualified workers and the education of the masses in this branch of

(1) At Tetschen-Liebwerd there were 30 professors and assistants and 74 students in 1913-14, and 29 professors and 193 students in 1922-23.

knowledge; it organises competitions, awards prizes, publishes scientific works and co-operates with all other organisations with similar aims.

The academy is composed of six Departments (natural and medical sciences, agriculture and forestry, public works, mechanical and electro-technical construction, industrial chemistry, political and social economy) combined under a central Executive Committee. The control of the Academy is in the hands of a Scientific Council, the members of which are elected permanently and are divided into six sections corresponding to the six Departments of the Academy; each Department elects a certain number of experts for a period of six years. In 1923, there were 30 members of the Council and 201 members of Departments. The Academy is collecting a library, which at present contains 4,430 volumes and 124 periodicals. It has established a number of institutes and committees (committees for hydro-technical experiments and mining; institutes for town-planning, testing materials, physico-technics, industrial economy; a committee for industrial standardisation, etc.). In 1922 it affiliated the Association for the Investigation and Testing of Materials and Technical Constructions, to which it grants subsidies. A few chemical laboratories, dealing principally with the analysis of combustible materials and silicates, also receive grants from the Masaryk Academy, which publishes the results of their work. The publications of the Academy already fill 14 volumes, and six further volumes are in the press. In 1922, it awarded 11 scholarships. The Academy proposes in the future to offer prizes to the authors of first-rate works, to undertake further scientific publications, to organise special exhibitions and to found a new hydrological institute at Prague.

The greatest obstacle to the development of the Academy is the lack of suitable accommodation. It is also hindered by the unfavourable conditions of publishing and the low fees paid for scientific work as compared with wages for manual labour. Nevertheless, its existence is financially secure; President Masaryk gave a million crowns for its foundation, and it has, since 1922, been in receipt of an annual grant of a million crowns from the Government. It is also supported in part by public bodies and private undertakings, as well as by the Association of Friends of the Masaryk Academy, founded in 1920, which publishes a periodical dealing with labour problems.

The chief of the associations which concern themselves with technical sciences independently of the Academy is the Society of Czechoslovak Engineers and Architects, to which reference has already been made. This, too, receives a small State grant and publishes three reviews dealing respectively with public works, the construction of machinery, and architecture. The Czechoslovak Chemical Society, which publishes a periodical dealing with pure and applied chemistry, the Czechoslovak Electro-Technical Society, and the Society of Mining Engineers, with their special reviews, should also be mentioned. A weekly official bulletin which the Ministry for Public Works, in collaboration with other Ministries, has been publishing since 1919 contains articles on public works of special interest, and a section is devoted to original scientific work. The pupils' societies of the Czech Polytechnic School at Prague from time to time publish scientific works, chiefly consisting of lectures given at that school; in 1920 a central publishing committee was formed which, aided by the students' associations, issues lithographed texts of the lectures. The Donat Foundation at the Brno Polytechnic School, which is private, but receives State grants, serves the same purpose.

In conclusion, a few details should be given concerning the "Česká Matic Technická", a co-operative organisation founded in 1895 by Czech engineers for the issue and popularisation of technical publications; its rapid development has been described above. In spite of financial difficulties, this society continued until 1922 to publish about five volumes on scientific works annually. In all it has published 114 volumes. In 1922, it also published 19 volumes of *The World and Labour*, an important popular series; six new scientific books are to appear in 1923. The proceeds of the sale of these publications are so large (170,786 crowns in 1920; 301,153 in 1921; 227,579 in 1922) that, with members' subscriptions, which have increased from 9,280 crowns in 1913 to 92,665 crowns in 1922, they practically enable the association to balance its budget.

Research work in technical science is carried on in the laboratories of the technical high schools, amongst which the Technical and Engineering Research Institute should be mentioned;

this institute was founded in 1921 at the Technical School in Prague with a view to the experimental investigation of wood, iron and reinforced concrete materials and structures. There is also at Prague an institute for research work on beet sugar. The Hydrotechnical Research Institute at Brno is already open for work, and another institute is being established at Prague, as well as a State institute for research work on coal. The various institutes for agricultural research publish the results of their work in a special review. Almost all these institutes, as well as the Geological and Hydrological Institute at Prague, receive State grants. There is also a technical museum, founded by private association. The establishment, in addition, of institutes for electricity, aeronautics, town-planning and municipal hygiene would be most useful.

IV. — INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hitherto, chiefly for linguistic reasons, foreign countries have received scant information regarding Czech activities in the field of technical science or, indeed, of science in general. The Academy of Sciences alone was in the habit of including in its bulletins summaries of its publications in a widely known language. The Masaryk Academy generally adds a summary in French or English to any work it publishes. A "Review of Czechoslovak Scientific Publications" has recently been founded; it will contain short reports in French on all branches of Czech scientific work. The first volume (1918-1920) is to appear shortly.

Czechoslovak scholars also find difficulty in obtaining information concerning foreign publications. The only remedy would be a regular exchange of the principal reviews, but these are not easily procurable in consequence of the depreciation of the crown. In particular, the institutes of more recent foundation, such as the Research Institute at the Prague Polytechnic School, possess very few foreign periodicals.

An exchange of information concerning scientific organisations which exist in the various countries, unknown to each other, should also be encouraged. The International Committee on Intellectual Co-operation would render great services to science by collecting the addresses of such organisations with information as to their aims, and by communicating this information to the National Committees which co-operate with it. In this way it would promote direct international relations between intellectual workers; hitherto these relations have only been established at congresses or by the exchange of professors.

Before the War, German influence preponderated in the technical sciences in Czechoslovakia, and information concerning scientific work in other countries was obtained through the medium of Germany. Since 1918, direct relations with scientists in western countries have been established, and Czechoslovak industry is devoting its attention to the organisation of labour in American establishments, based upon the scientific study of "minimum movements" (Taylor-Gilbreth); the Masaryk Academy has appointed special committees for this work.

For the most part, relations with foreign countries have been maintained privately by individuals. The Czech Polytechnic High School at Prague, however, takes part in the work of the International Union for Pure and Applied Chemistry, the International Institute of Refrigeration at Paris, and the Permanent International Association of Navigation Congresses at Brussels. The Agricultural School at Tetschen-Liebwerd collaborates with the International Institute of Agriculture at Rome. Recently established scientific institutions, such as the Masaryk Academy, have only just begun to organise their international relationships. The Academy is already a member of the International Garden Cities Federation, the Association of Navigation Congresses, and the International Association of Road Congresses in Paris. It is assisting in the formation of a Labour Academy in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

International relations might well be extended and organised more systematically. To do so is one of the aims of intellectual workers in Czechoslovakia.

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