Feature

CZECH URANIUM AND STALIN'S BOMB

Z.A.B. Zeman *uncovers a fateful link between Czechoslovakia's brief monopoly of uranium in Europe and the country's subordination to the USSR*

The great uranium rush started in 1943 and lasted for about seven years. Unlike the gold rushes of the past, uranium did not promise untold riches to individuals but instead unlimited power to the state: the atom bomb was the 'absolute weapon'. As long as physicists and deposit geologists assumed that uranium was a scarce raw material, therefore, the great powers were desperate to secure it.

Jáchymov

By the end of 1943, General Groves, the administrative head of the Manhattan Project, the US atomic enterprise, had under his control two of the three known sources of the metal, in the Belgian Congo and Canada. Only Jáchymov in former Czechoslovakia remained outside the reach of the western Allies. It was under German control during the Second World War and in August 1945, as soon as Stalin decided, following the explosion of the American bomb over Hiroshima, that the Soviet Union should match the American achievement, the Red Army occupied the Jáchymov mines.

The existence of uranium deposits on both sides of the border between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet occupation zone in Germany not only vitally affected the timing and course of the armaments race between America and the USSR but also had a far-reaching impact on the politics of central Europe. In August 1945, nobody yet knew that Saxony had, in the Erzgebirge mountains, the richest deposits of uranium in Europe: in a way, Jáchymov served as a decoy for it had a long-established reputation as a supplier of uranium. The Curies had used Jáchymov pitchblende for their experiments from the end of the nineteenth century and after their discovery of radium, a medical fashion for radiation developed. The building of the Radium Palace Hotel was completed in Jáchymov shortly before the First World War, and the local waters were used for the healing of diseases mainly of the motorial system; the popularity of radiation was such that, between the two wars, visitors could buy 'radium soap' and even 'radium beer'. On 2 August 1939, Albert Einstein wrote to President Roosevelt, warning him that the discovery of nuclear fission would lead to the construction of an extremely powerful bomb. Einstein hinted that 'Germany has actually stopped the sale of uranium from the Czechoslovakian mines which she has taken over. That she should have taken such an early action might perhaps be understood on the ground that the son of the German Under-secretary of State, von Weizsacker, is attached to the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut in Berlin, where some of the American work on uranium is now being repeated.'[1]

After the experimental explosion of the American atomic weapon in New Mexico and then its strategic use over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the summer 1945, there was no doubt in the Foreign Office in London about the impression the atomic explosions made in Moscow. The Russians feared that their victory in the Second World War would be annulled, a British diplomat reported from Moscow. In a memorandum of 11 September 1945 prepared for Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, grave fears for the future were expressed. The British and the Americans, as well as Marshal Stalin, were aware of the possibility of a rift among the Big Three as a result of the development of the atomic weapon.[2]

The 'absolute weapon' in the hands of the Americans forced Stalin to review his policies, at home and abroad. He was perfectly informed by his intelligence services about both the British (code-name Tube Alloys) and the American nuclear projects. He knew of the Maud report on the feasibility of the atomic bomb a few months after it was submitted to Churchill in July 1941. His suspicious nature was incensed by the knowledge that neither Churchill nor Roosevelt would trust him with information on the development of the atomic weapon. Before the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945, Stalin spent several long nights talking freely and informally to Churchill. The talk never strayed in the direction of nuclear research and development, though Stalin shared with Churchill an interest in the application of science and technology to warfare. He allocated scarce resources to the Soviet atomic project in 1943; in summer 1945, as soon as the experimental bomb was exploded in New Mexico, the project passed under the supervision of Lavrenty Beria and the security services.

After heavy losses inflicted on it by the war, Stalin continued to drive Soviet society hard, forcing it to make a great leap in technology. Billions of roubles were invested in the atomic project: thousands of tons of uranium had to be produced, and laboratories and factories built. It marked the beginning of the development of the Soviet military-industrial complex and of the arms race with America.[3] The Soviet atomic project was extremely short of uranium, and so Czechoslovakia, and later the whole of the Erzgebirge mountain range on the border between Saxony and Bohemia, found their place in Stalin's reassessment of Soviet policies.

The Potsdam Conference
David King Collection

The Secret Treaty

Less than three months after fears were expressed in the Foreign Office in London that Czechoslovakia would conclude a uranium treaty with the Soviet Union, such a treaty was indeed concluded on 23 November 1945. It was negotiated at the highest level on the Czechoslovak side, while the commercial attaché in Prague, together with a low-level delegation, took care of the Soviet end of the treaty. It resembled, in its main points, the Tripartite Belgian-British-American treaty of September 1944, which may have been used as a model for the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty, as Stalin and Beria were well informed about every aspect of the Manhattan Project. Like the Tripartite Treaty, it was a long-term agreement, and the Soviet Union was to be the sole buyer of Czechoslovak uranium; its price was to be 'reasonable' and contain 'production costs with the addition of normal percentage of profit'.

While the secret uranium treaty was being negotiated Zdenek Fierlinger, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister who was always anxious to please Stalin, used the authority of President Benes to gain support for the treaty among his colleagues. They discussed the Soviet draft treaty for the first time on 7 October. The day before, the Soviet trade attaché in Prague, Bakulin, had turned to Fierlinger with pressing enquiries: would the Soviets be able to play the leading rôle in the extraction of uranium, the making of the plan, etc; would Soviet specialists and workers be invited to Jáchymov in case of need; and would the Soviet Union be certain of getting all the mined ore. Bakulin wanted his country to have overall control of the project. Beneš objected merely to the request that the Soviet Union should get all the Czechoslovak production. Fierlinger, on the other hand, confined himself to assuring Beneš that the Russians would regard deliveries of uranium as a 'matter of trust and cooperation between allies'.

Lest this assurance was not enough for the president, Fierlinger added that Moscow could be helpful on the issue of correcting the border in favour of Czechoslovakia. Fierlinger knew Beneš well and having witnessed Beneš's tireless efforts to secure the maximum amount of territory for the new state at the end of the First World War, he knew that Beneš would rise to the territorial bait. In the end, the border was not redrawn. On the contrary, once the deposits in former Czechoslovak territory, now in the Soviet zone of occupation, proved to be richer, the Soviets vigorously developed mining works there at Johanngeorgenstadt, as if to prove Soviet preference for mining uranium where the Red Army was master.

The Russians made no secret of the fact that they needed Czech uranium for military purposes. At a meeting on 26 September Colonel S P Alexandrov, a geologist in the employment of Beria's security service, told the Czechoslovaks that 'it was not the Soviet Union who declared the atomic bomb to be the weapon of the future'.[4] At later meetings of the praesidium of the government (which consisted of the prime minister and his deputies, who represented their respective political parties), questions of the use of uranium for military purposes and the international implications of the sale of the ore to the Soviet Union, were left open.

At a meeting of the praesidium on 17 November, shortly before the treaty was signed, Fierlinger reported that negotiations about the 'very urgent matter of the extraction of uranium ore in Jáchymov' had been conducted since August, and that the Soviets were 'examining especially the possibilities of economic (*hospodárské*, that is peaceful) exploitation of atomic energy'. One of the deputy prime ministers, Šrámek, an elderly Catholic cleric and leader of the christian-democrat (*lidová*) party, expressed lively interest

Churchill, Truman and Stalin at the Potsdam Conference.
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in the subject, though he probably confused uranium with radium. He had been in charge of the ministry of health before the war, and he told his colleagues that doctors then assured him that the use of radium for healing was no more than a crudely empirical method. He insisted that the Czechs should get an adequate price for the ore. When the matter of Soviet technical assistance was discussed, Duriš, the communist minister of agriculture, was convinced that it would be very generous; Šrámek, on the other hand, feared that it might go too far. Jaroslav Stránsky, the national socialist deputy prime minister, assumed that uranium business with the Soviet Union could be profitable, though the treaty should be made so that 'we should keep control over the enterprise'.[5]

While the treaty was being negotiated, and in the first months of the operation of the Jáchymov National Enterprise (*Národni Podnik Jáchymov*, NPJ) in 1946, it was clear that Soviet interests crossed Czechoslovak political intentions at several critical points. While the government was nationalizing industry and financial institutions (thereby not only bringing enterprises under state control but also removing them from their, in many cases, German owners and bringing them under exclusively Czech management), the Soviets offered to establish an international joint-stock company for the exploitation of the uranium ore. Members of the government, however, explained to Bakulin that the plan for the company was unacceptable to them, thus raising the question for the Russians of how best to secure control over the uranium industry. It was resolved in the fourth paragraph of the secret treaty, which provided for the establishment of a 'permanent Czechoslovak-Soviet commission', where each government had two representatives. The sixth paragraph of the treaty in addition set aside the post of the technical director and several experts for the Soviet side.

Secondly, at a time when the Germans were being expelled from Czechoslovakia, the Russians feared that the mining operations would be impaired by the severe labour shortage which gripped the country. They started sending German prisoners of war to Jáchymov soon after the treaty was signed; out of the total of 7966 employees in 1948, nearly a half, that is 3563 men, were German prisoners-of-war. In addition, many of the special grants of Czechoslovak citizenship made in the district at the time went to Germans who were willing to work in the uranium industry.

Nevertheless, it was the local council, representing some 3000 Czechs in the district, which was empowered to take over the administration of Jáchymov and arrange for a speedy transfer of the Germans. In the elections on 28 May 1946, the communists received 1122 votes, the social democrats 473, the national socialists 593 and the people's (christian-democrat) party 159. Although the security commission of the national council did its best to please zealous communists on the district council, it often failed. The management of NPJ was at the centre of local politics partly because of the strategic importance of the industry and very good wages, but mainly because of the political diversity among the members of the management. The first director of NPJ was Ing Hegner, a member of the people's party; his deputy, Ing Cmelák, was a newly recruited communist party member, whom his comrades did not quite trust; the second deputy was Ing Zalud, a social democrat. The communists cited the party's weak hold on the management to explain the low efficiency of the Jáchymov mines.

There was a minor but telling incident, caused by the postmaster at Jáchymov, a member of the people's party, the only non-socialist political organisation in the country. In a letter to his party headquarters of 4 February 1946, he took exception to the officially published news that there were no more Red Army units stationed at Jáchymov. The postmaster

knew of some kind of a treaty with the Soviets, though he was not quite certain whether Fierlinger signed it with or without the knowledge of the rest of the government. In a second letter dated 13 February, the postmaster reported that two Soviet officers, accompanied by Ing Kolar, the general director of Czechoslovak mines and Ing Rada, a member of the Czechoslovak-Soviet uranium commission, had visited Jáchymov, and that in the next few days 100 German prisoners-of-war and 40 members of the Czech militia would arrive. Militia representatives treated the '... manager of the enterprise in such a manner that he cannot stay here. They behave arrogantly ... The militia is exclusively communist; it may happen that I and other members of the peoples' party will have to leave, or they will arrest us all!' The poor postmaster did not know that his letters were being passed on to the communists and ended up in the personal archive of Klement Gottwald, the second prime minister of post-war Czechoslovakia and, after the resignation of Beneš in 1948, its president.

The UN, Masaryk and Uranium

At the height of the uranium rush, events in Jáchymov came to the attention of the international community. International control of nuclear energy moved to the centre of the diplomatic agenda early in 1946, when the Americans still tended to believe that they held nuclear weapons and their production in 'sacred trust'. Truman thought that the control of nuclear energy – and of the sources of uranium in particular – would become the main responsibility of the new international organization, the United Nations, whose first plenary meeting took place in London, in January 1946. Jan Masaryk, the Czechoslovak foreign minister, led a delegation to London consisting of members of all the political parties. He asked them for ideas as to what he should say; when he tried to incorporate their suggestions into his speech, he told his secretary that it was one of the hardest jobs that he had ever undertaken.[6] The way the speech was drafted, and especially the hasty, ill-considered manner in which the Soviet-Czechoslovak uranium treaty was concluded, soon took their toll.

In the key part of his address on 17 January 1946 in the Central Hall in Westminster, Masaryk declared that control of all instruments of war, be they physical, chemical, biological or sociological, should make the conduct of wars impossible. Within the framework of the United Nations, science should be protected against misuse and the armaments industry, including the latest inventions, should come under the control of the UN. 'I speak with a certain knowledge of the subject, because our uranium mines in Jáchymov were the first which served mankind with supplies of radium for medical purposes, before new mines were discovered. And I can here, in utmost humility but with deep conviction, express a hope, which I know you all share, that not a single part of uranium produced in Czechoslovakia [will be used] for mass destruction ... (Applause) We in Czechoslovakia want our uranium to be used entirely differently – to build, protect and to make our lives safer and more efficient. For this purpose we want to dedicate our uranium mines. We beg you to help us.'[7] Masaryk's statement to the UN meeting was underlined by a Reuter's news item on his proposal for international inspection of uranium mines. Fierlinger and Gottwald, as well as the non-communist deputy prime ministers, Stranský and Šrámek, were upset by Masaryk's speech. Immediately after the meeting of the presidium on 18 January, Fierlinger telegraphed to London: 'Please report on all this at once and in detail. We fear very unpleasant political consequences, because it is inadmissible that we be dragged into similar discussions in which we have to behave with the utmost reserve, if only because of our contractual obligations to USSR, which have to remain secret.' [8]

The secretary handed the cable over to Masaryk, who read it and announced to his colleagues that he would have to leave. It was apparent, on the short car journey to his flat, that Masaryk was overwrought. He drafted an angered reply to Prague. He objected that the Soviet delegation in particular 'ostentatiously applauded' his statement that Czechoslovak uranium would be used for peaceful purposes only and that later they came to discuss with him the question of the secretaryship general of the UN. (Jan Masaryk was one of the men who were considered for the job, which in the end went to Trygve Lie, his Norwegian colleague from wartime exile in London.) Masaryk wrote that his speech did not prejudice in any regard 'our treaty with the Soviets, which of course has to remain secret'. He offered his resignation as leader of the delegation and as minister.

In his first reply to Prague, Masaryk wrote that 'I did not draft the particular passage about uranium'. Professor Jan Belehrádek, a medical chemist, was the only scientist on the delegation. He represented the social democrat party, and he gave Masaryk a draft containing six points, including the one on the misuse of science for military purposes. Masaryk used most of Belehrádek's ideas in his speech; in a letter dated 21 January, Belehrádek explained to Fierlinger that 'It was hinted to us here on several occasions that we are in fact subject, against our conviction, to the Soviet Union and that we have given up, against our better judgement, our international political freedom. I am of the opinion therefore that Masaryk's speech, even though it may ostensibly have appeared to be directed against the great powers, should strengthen the impression that we have managed to retain a large part of the independence of a small nation.' Belehrádek added that it became clear in London that small nations will have the right and the duty to take part in discussion of international policy, 'even when the great powers, whose might will not be diminished, take offence.'[9]

Belehrádek was a scientist and not a politician. He knew nothing of the secret treaty with the Soviets, nor was he aware of the political implications of the uranium rush. He was pleased about the role of smaller states in the formulation of rules which would prevent the misuse of science. Masaryk, on the other hand, knew of the treaty, but he did not fully understand its political implications.[10] He was not in the business of organizing smaller states against the great powers in the UN, nor was he interested in the making of rules - as the Americans were – for the international inspection of uranium mines. He was taken aback by the sharp reaction from Prague and he tried to rid himself of some of the responsibility for the speech to the UN – and for the Reuter report. 'I sent a message to Reuter to say that I was very angry. A Reuter's representative turned up and very humbly asked for my forgiveness for creating trouble. He admitted that from a chance remark that Jáchymov was under our, and not Russian, control, he constructed a misleading telegram. He asked me whether I wanted a public correction, and I refused it, so that the matter would rest there. I hope that this definitely resolves the whole problem.'[11] Czechoslovak diplomacy thus wasted a chance of taking a stand on the proposal of international control of the sources of uranium.

The View from the West

Before the UN meeting in London, the American, British, French and Swedish governments became interested in the Jáchymov district, and various adventurers and professional and amateur spies started making their appearance. The British consul in Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad), 0. Bamborough, reported to the embassy in Prague that he visited Jáchymov on 4 January 1946, where the 'mines are in Russian hands and the alleged number of the garrison is about forty men'. He added that after his return he met M. Dejean, the French ambassador, who was about to leave Karlovy Vary for Jáchymov.[12] The report was forwarded to London on 6 February, with the comment that the day after the Consul's visit to Jáchymov the Czechoslovak news agency announced that, after the departure of the Red Army, the Czechoslovak authorities took full control over the Jáchymov mines; and mining operations were renewed for the sake of the extraction of radium for medical purposes. The report also announced the arrival in Prague in the next few days of Mr Higgs, a director of Continental Mines, who would find out more about the matter. In London on 11 February, a young diplomat drafted a top secret memorandum on his conversation with Robert Luc, a friend of his employed at the French embassy in London, who informed him that Stalin had recently asked Fierlinger that the whole output of the Jáchymov mines should be handed over to the Soviet Union.

Slánský
David King Collection

The British Embassy continued to pay attention to events in Jáchymov. In the middle of March, Sir Charles Hambro, who had been the head of SOE (Special Operations Executive) during the war and at the end of the war had supervised the transportation of uranium from Germany to America, came to Prague on a business trip for the family bank and was asked to look into the matter of Jáchymov mines. He took the most direct approach, and asked the Czech authorities whether it was possible to export Jáchymov uranium. He discovered that the Czechs were not interested in exporting it, because the volume of the ore would place too heavy a burden on the overstretched transport system. They decided that they would process the ore locally, Hambro was told, for the sake of radium. Hambro believed it to be an excuse, and asked whether the Russians showed any interest in Czech uranium. He was told that they were interested, but that the ore was not being exported anywhere. [13]

For the Americans, control of the sources of uranium remained one of the key demands in the negotiations on nuclear energy in the UN; although the US were by no means short of uranium, they never lost interest in sources in other countries. As early as the end of January, American newspapers, alongside a reference to Masaryk's recent speech in London, published the news that the Russians controlled the only uranium mines in Europe.[14] A year later, Washington knew of the Czechoslovak-Soviet uranium treaty and about the details of the security measures as well as mining technology in the Jáchymov district.[15] In the course of the years 1946 and 1947, sufficient information reached London and Washington that mining operations in Jáchymov and its neighbourhood were growing fast and that all the uranium produced was exported, under the auspices of the Czechoslovak government, to the Soviet Union.

The Treaty and Czech Politics

Czechoslovak politicians, on the other hand, remained ignorant of the extent of the nuclear problem, for the western capitals as well as for Moscow. They knew nothing of the dearth of uranium which choked the Soviet nuclear project, nor were they able to assess the implications of the US proposals for the international control of atomic energy, and especially of the sources of uranium. President Beneš, as we have seen, had raised only half-hearted objections and discussion of the uranium problem by the government was at best superficial.[16]

The Czechoslovak-Soviet agreement on the 'increase of the production of ores and concentrates in Czechoslovakia, containing radium and other radioactive elements' made not a single reference to uranium, which was in fact its main subject; only its supplementary protocol stated that the treaty was 'strictly confidential'. Yet the treaty became the neuralgic point of Czechoslovak politics and diplomacy. In a personal letter to Beneš from Moscow on 20 February 1946, Jirí Horák, the Czechoslovak ambassador, complained that he was so badly informed from Prague that '... we were short

of any information concerning the agreement about the mining of uranium in Jáchymov, though I intervened in that matter with V M Molotov.' In the case of Jan Masaryk's speech in London, Horák thought that 'The hasty approach to the Soviet Ambassador to Prague definitely harmed the reputation of the government as far as the local authorities were concerned, who are impressed by calm dignity rather than by too much anxiety, which may be regarded as evidence of weakness.'[17]

A solitary article in the weekly *Obzory* in summer 1946,[18] entitled 'Atomic Energy and Jáchymov', sufficed to create panic in government circles. Its author, Jan Kolár, wrote that 'It was not with a feeling of satisfaction or gratification, but with a matter-of-fact feeling that we read several months ago the proclamation by minister Jan Masaryk that Jáchymov ore will never be used to make anything like an atomic bomb ...' and he added '...we can only wonder in this connection that the Jáchymov mines still employ Germans in considerable numbers, so that security requires a strong presence not only of our army, but of the Red Army as well. It would be better, as soon as possible, to place only Czech miners in the Jáchymov mines since it is necessary to solve the problem of the world-famous Jáchymov spa whose proximity to uranium mines of military importance requires the cancellation of visits of foreign guests, as happened this year to several hundred overseas visitors.' The author of the article was interrogated and excerpts from the article made the rounds of government offices. 'According to the opinion of the general staff of the ministry of national defence, the article announced the presence of Soviet workers in Jáchymov and could cause unpleasant [one word illegible] of the western press.'[19]

Clement Gottwald
David King Collection

It was difficult to remain dignified in a situation where the interests of the Soviet Union clashed with the policy of the communist party of Czechoslovakia. In a comprehensive report to Gottwald[20] Svatopluk Rada, deputy minister of industry and one of the two Czech members of the permanent commission, complained that at Jáchymov, 'The [communist] party simply did not exist. Party secretaries and functionaries changed frequently and one of the party secretaries went as far as shooting himself during an interrogation, when his contacts with the West were proved. I want to show how far the employment of spy cells in the National Enterprise reached, and still reaches.'

On 20 September 1947, a comrade Svoboda of the district secretariat of the communist party in Karlovy Vary reported to the general secretary of the party, Rudolf Slánský, that 'On 18 this month I had a consultation with leading comrades in the Jáchymov mines. It was stated that only 60% of the plan for extraction for the last month was fulfilled.' Svoboda did not explain the reasons for the failure solely in terms of insufficient initiative by comrades in leading positions. The initiatives they did take were opposed by Ing Hegner, the general manager, a member of the people's party, together with some workers of the technical management of the mines. The party's regional organisation in Karlovy Vary, as well as the district organisation at Jáchymov, including of course the NPJ, became targets of the effort, by Rudolf Slánský, the general secretary of the party, to strengthen party organisation and its ability to control events. Slánský's interest in Jáchymov became fatal for him.

After February 1948, when Hegner was fired on the initiative of the communist-dominated action committee, Slánský's interest in Jáchymov continued. He tried to purge the party after the influx of new members; at the beginning of 1949, a party commission dispatched from Prague informed Slánský that 'the Jáchymov mines are a problem for the whole district. A secretariat was established for the mining region and its secretary is comrade Dušek, who reports directly to the regional committee. The district has no right to interfere in anything concerning the mines. Problems which comrades bring to the district cannot be solved at the district level – and so they remain unsolved.'[21] Dušek also made a reference to 'Turkish economy', that is an extremely messy way of conducting the affairs of NPJ. At the end of the year, Slánský asked Rada for regular reports on the situation in the mines and on the fulfilment of the plan. It was a fatal request, for both men. It was one of the factors which led to Slánský's arrest in 1951 and death sentence in the great show trial of top party officials in 1952. It was the main reason for Rada's decision to take his own life. Four days after Slánský's arrest, on 28 November 1951, Rada, possibly after a request by telephone, let Gottwald know which reports Slánský had received. On 16 April 1952, a few days before he was to be arrested, Svatopluk Rada committed suicide.

Soon after the communist take-over of power in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, long before the arrest of Slánský, the acute shortage of labour led the communist government to consider the employment of prisoners in the uranium industry. In the language of contemporary documents, it was referred to as 'unfree' or 'serf' (*nesvobodná* or *nevolná*) labour. Its use was first considered in January 1949, by members of the Soviet-Czechoslovak joint commission and of the ministry of justice. At a meeting on 16 February, it was agreed that 5000 prisoners would be needed in 1949, a figure which was later raised to 5500. The first group of 209 prisoners reached Jáchymov in March.

At a meeting on 8 June, Alexej Cepicka, the minister of justice, said 'we must concentrate all our attention on Jáchymov. Comrade Miroslav Kloss [the minister's deputy who was responsible for prison administration] will report daily on the steps taken. I declare the action to be secret; it will have a code name.'[22] In October, the ministry of interior showed concern about placing the 'most terrible criminals', that is, political prisoners, so close to the country's most sensitive western border. It was agreed in consequence that the proportion of political prisoners should not exceed one-third of the prison population in the camps. In January 1950 of 3980 prisoners employed in Jáchymov, 41.6% were political prisoners; most of the 'class enemies' arrested after 1948 spent at least a part of their sentence working in the uranium industry.

Conclusion

Stalin and the Soviet party leaders were by no means great admirers of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia, and they tended to suspect Czech and Slovak comrades for inadequate revolutionary fervour. It is nevertheless true that, from the point of view of Moscow, Czech communists were more reliable than the other political parties in Czechoslovakia before 1948, whose leaders might agree to trade Czechoslovak uranium on the international market, and whose members passed on news about the mining of uranium to western intelligence agencies without a qualm. The Russians also knew that the situation in the Jáchymov National Enterprise was less than satisfactory. At the beginning of 1947, with the agreement of the Czechoslovak government, 107 Soviet experts came to Jáchymov. Rada wrote of them in his report for Gottwald[23] that they had the 'advantage of being narrowly specialized and, secondly, they are far more politically reliable than a great many of our experts.' Though the Czechs and the Russians had a common task in increasing the output of uranium as fast as possible, they were accustomed to entirely different working habits. The administration of the National Enterprise was unable to manage the rapid growth of the mines. When the Soviets tried to help their Czech colleagues, two administrative systems came into being, each trying to manage the business. In 1948, this resulted in the management's inability to agree on the accounts for the year and especially on figures disentangling production from investment expenses. Rada was of the opinion that, during the first two or three years of the existence of NPJ, the Czechs 'wasted the trust of their Soviet comrades'.

For a brief but critical moment after the Second World War, Jáchymov's position as the sole important producer of the precious resource of uranium within easy reach of Soviet power drew Stalin's attention to Czechoslovakia and helped him decide to bind the country – and its Communist party – more closely to the Soviet Union. Russian experts and accompanying security officers had in Jáchymov sufficient opportunity to view close-up not only the management of the National Enterprise, but Czech society as a whole in the years 1946 and 1947. The variety of political parties which made themselves felt in the management of the mines, as well as their divisions over the conduct of Czechoslovak foreign policy, did not quite suit Stalin's purposes.

References

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2. *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (London, 1985), series 1, vol II, document 193.
3. Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (Harvard UP 1996), 44.
4. State Central Archive, papers of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. (SÚA, UVKSC), fond 100/24, sv 82, a j 1031.
5. Idem
6. Lumír Soukup, Chvíle s Janem Masarykem, Prague 1994, 76 et seq.
7. Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague (AMZV), kabinet GS, k 77.
8. Lumír Soukup's archive, incoming cable no 34/Pr/28; Soukup, op cit, 77.
9. Soukup's archive, Belehrádek's letter to Fierlinger, 21 January 1946.
10. Nor is it certain that Masaryk knew of the action of his own ministry, at the time of the signing of the secret treaty with the Soviets, with regard to the recovery of a small amount of uranium ore from Austria. On 26 November 1945, the Czechoslovak ministry of foreign affairs asked the British authorities for the return of 9.223 kilograms of "uran ore" which was allegedly taken from Jáchymov to Treibach on 26 February 1945. Since the note from Prague gave such an exact weight, the British assumed that it could not refer to unprocessed raw material. This furnished another proof that the Czechs, as well as their Russian allies, were not interested in radium for medical purposes, but in uranium concentrate for the making of a nuclear weapon. A British expert explained to the diplomats that nine kilos of the concentrate would contain only about one miligram of radium. (PRO, FO 371/57098 contains the British reply of 16 May 1946 to the Czechoslovak request and Acabrit to War Office, Top Secret Cipher Telegram, 18 March 1946).
11. idem, Masaryk's own draft, as it was received by the Czechoslovak embassy in London.
12. F0371/57094, Bamborough's report to the British Embassy in Prague, 4 January 1946.
13. F0371/57098, J.No18908, a note by D E H Peirson, 27 March 1949.
14. Overseas News Agency, Carlsbad Jan. 26, (delayed).
15. US National Archives, Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, report for the State Department from 3 February 1947.
16. Documents of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, where the key papers on the trade in uranium may be found, contain a single reference to a short expert analysis of the Jáchymov uranium source, by Ing V. Hromádka of the Skoda works in Pilsen SÚA, fond 100/24, sv 82 a j 1031, pp 45 and 46. When the author consulted the archive, the two pages were missing.
17. Archive of the Institute of T G Masaryk (AUTGM), f EB-kor 76.
18. no 30, p 470.
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20. SÚA, UVKSC, 100/24, 82, 1031; 5 December 1949.
21. SÚA, UVKSC, 100/1, 107, 697.
22. Kaplan and Pacl, Tajny prostor Jáchymov, Prague 1993, 35.
23. SÚA, UVKSC, f 100/24, 82, 1031, report for the president of the republic of 22 November 1949.

Professor Zeman, after a distinguished academic career, including posts at the University of Lancaster, Amnesty International, and Oxford, has returned to live and research in Prague where he was born in 1928. His numerous and varied books on central European history include *The Break-up of the Habsburg Empire 1914-1918* (1961), *Heckling Hitler: Caricatures of the Third Reich* (1984), and *The Making and Breaking of Communist Europe* (1991).