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## **“Thanks to the Soviet Union”: Testimony of Czechoslovak Architecture from 1948–1989**

### **Abstract**

The article focuses on the radical shift in Czechoslovak culture after World War II, characterized by an ostentatious approval of the Soviet Union, which was reflected in all areas of public life. Interesting testimony of the Sovietization of Czechoslovak culture from 1948 to 1989 is provided by architecture. Initially, it is characterized by historicism, argumentatively supported by the doctrine of socialist realism, and from the late 1950s, a moderated modern style, serving the same representative function (metro, hotels, monuments).

### **Keywords**

Czechoslovakia, architecture, urbanism, Bolshevism, socialist realism, modernism.

### **1918–1945: Czechoslovakia between East and West**

*From his jealously guarded solitude of a lone wolf, Vladimír Holan sends to the Czech reader this poetically expressive and passionate thanksgiving*

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to the Soviet Union: as proof that he is, if not in body, at least in heart and poetic sensibility, right in the midst of our hustle and bustle, general events, and enthusiasm. This is how prominent critic, notable Romanist, and professor at Charles University Václav Černý (1905–1987) began his commentary on Vladimír Holan's poetic composition *Děk Sovětskému svazu* [Thanks to the Soviet Union], published in print in the summer of 1945 immediately after the end of World War II. Černý was not concerned with the poetic qualities of the composition, its literary values, but rather highlighted the poet's value shift: *For this moment, the Scornful in the crowds – meaning Holan – believed: those one hundred and fifty verses are a fervently trembling thanksgiving to the Soviet army for its salvific arrival.* (all quotes according to Černý, 1945, pp. 25–27) In other words, the poet – a loner, hitherto avoiding literary and social bustle, stepped out of his tusculum, from the closed world of subtle artistic and intellectual problems, to celebrate the liberators with pathetic nobility.

The value shift of the eminent Czech poet is here a striking – and welcome – symbol of the value shift of the entire Czech society, or its intellectual and artistic elites. Symbolically speaking, the West is henceforth replaced by the East. Regarding Vladimír Holan, Václav Černý, as a connoisseur of Romance literatures, hastily reminded of the roots of the poet's poetry:

The expression of sympathies, which this composition is, is of a quite distinct nature and, I would say, unidirectional: eastward, Russia. And who can blame the poet? And who will not praise him for it? While it comes from the mouth of a poet who is – whether we like it or not – a typical Westerner: trained on French models, infused with the essence of Western culture (Černý, 1945, p. 25).

These are not criticisms, because “his song to Russia would not be what it is; I mean as successful as it is, were it not for the West” (Černý, 1945, p. 26). These words are not only a reminder of the artistic sources of Holan's poetry but also a confirmation of the repeatedly mentioned fact that Czech culture, from its medieval beginnings, is a culture of the European West. Figuratively speaking, the alternation of West to East, therefore – let us emphasize for now – does not concern the

very essence of artistic culture and its firm rooting in the Western tradition, but only the external, cultural-political orientation of Czechoslovakia and its society in the situation after the end of World War II. Thus, with the passage of time, the period of the so-called Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945–1948) appears: a time when it was possible to loudly agree with socialism, as contemporary programmatic texts by Václav Černý, indeed, provide sufficient proof, and even communism, but at the same time continue to follow cultural events in contemporary France, England, Spain, the USA, or the Scandinavian countries and find in them reliable sources of artistic inspiration and creative stimuli; to see in them the springs that have nourished Czech national culture at least since the mid-19th century, when its modern foundations were being formed. Nevertheless, this post-war value shift on the West-East axis is not only extraordinary and, from the perspective of looking into the not-so-distant past, surprising, but above all, in light of the events that will come in the years 1948–1949, ominously fateful.

But first, let's shift our focus from 1945 to the events that took place twenty to twenty-five years earlier, in the final years of World War I. Reports coming from Russia during 1917–1918 depicted a fateful drama, the course of which was not entirely clear, and its phases and stages were reconstructed by journalists and reporters from fragments of random testimonies and not always reliable news. Nonetheless, it was evident that economically backward Russia was in indescribable chaos, deepened by bloody clashes of various power groups and competing factions, among which the Russian communists, the so-called Bolsheviks, were gaining decisive influence. German and British papers quoted Professor Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), later the first president of independent Czechoslovakia and a summoned expert on Russian issues, who attempted to shed light on the events. Masaryk's pessimistic view of the Russian situation, however, was still a mild assessment (see Masaryk, 1917). “From the wild mix of reports,” reported the Prague *Národní listy* in January 1918, “the only certainty that emerges is that the proponents of the violent Bolshevik government indeed fulfilled their threat: when they realized that the decisive majority of the elected members of the constituent assembly stood sharply against Lenin and his entire

government, they dispersed it and caused bloodshed” (Masaryk, 1918, p. 1). The experience with the Russian events of 1917–1918, mediated by Czech and foreign newspapers, provoked fear of future developments, resonating throughout Central Europe except for the radical left, which found inspiration in Soviet Russia. It also managed to establish communist states in Bavaria, Hungary, southern Slovakia with part of Subcarpathian Rus in 1919, at the cost of executions, murders, and general chaos accompanying their rise and fall. “How far must we look”, asks Jan Bartoš (1893–1946) in the essay *Russia and Europe*, “to recognize the nature of the shadows emerging here, and to understand the distant strange voices speaking here?” (Bartoš, 1919) Bartoš’s literary inclination towards expressionism seemed to find in the Russian events a counterpart to the excited scenes dominating contemporary expressionist theater and simultaneously a justification for a pronounced artistic stance as a reflection of a restless, chaotic era. The prevailing opinions of the Czech intelligentsia were both more straightforward and more radically rejecting of the events in Soviet Russia, evoking fear, resistance, and horror across various layers of society, across the entire left-right political spectrum.

“Russia, in relation to its enormous size and population, was culturally almost entirely sterile. Europe gave almost nothing to it, and it owed everything to Western cultures. Even today’s Russian Bolshevism is just an unthoughtful orthodox copy of the German idea, it is a reflection of the aggressiveness of the German spirit” (Dušek, 1926, p. 249). Thus wrote the distinctive Czech sociologist Jan Dušek (1897–1934) in his *Sociology*, which, although not positively evaluated by contemporary sociologists, his cited assessment of Russia captured the majority opinion of the Czech intellectual elite about the eastern empire. Dušek’s view of contemporary Russia was not isolated; what was troubling about his approach was the directness with which he linked natural conditions to societal life, its manifestations, and ambitions. *Bolshevism*, writes Dušek elsewhere in his book,

is a faithful manifestation of the Russian character, a faithful reflection of Russian life, the Russian plain. Destructive vengefulness, leprous uncontrollable hatred has seized the widest layers of the Russian people,

it is characteristic of the lowland man. Likewise, that Bolshevnik messianism, that naive conceit, that Bolshevism is the most suitable means for the salvation of all humanity, excellently characterizes the psychology of the lowland man (Dušek, 1926, p. 252).

While linking the mentality of a certain populace and the geomorphology of the territory it inhabits might be judged as contentious or simplistic, the very negative portrayal of Bolshevism accurately documents the resistance to it in interwar Czechoslovakia.

In this regard, it is necessary to recall that one of the political and cultural symbols of the Czechoslovak Republic were *the Czechoslovak legions*. This was the term for volunteers grouped in France, Italy, and especially in Russia; in Eastern Europe, they initially fought against the Austro-Hungarian and German armies, later in the Russian Civil War alongside the White Army against the Red Army in an effort to restore Tsarist Russia. The fight against Russian Bolsheviks thus became an integral part of the founding myth of Czechoslovakia. And at the same time, the fear of the spread of the Bolshevik revolution, or Bolshevism outside Russia, united clericals and socialists, representatives of the political right and moderate left, tradesmen, teachers, soldiers, writers, and labor leaders. This is evidenced by contemporary newspapers and informed journalism, and the seriousness of the situation is directly proportional to the need of contemporary intellectuals to grapple with events through independently published essays and reflections.

Among the contemporary commentators on events, let us at least recall Rudolf Vrba (1860–1939), a Catholic clergyman and publicist, who had a long-standing interest in Russia. Shortly after the end of World War I, Vrba wrote:

The Bolsheviks destroyed everything that had life. Now everything is in ruins. The Russian nation is indeed cured of Bolshevism, but at the same time completely destroyed. [...] The Russian government is in the hands of criminals and madmen [...] Ivan the Terrible was an innocent boy compared to Trotsky and Lenin. How many millions of people were murdered by the Soviet government will be discovered only when Russia is freed from this government (Vrba, 1924, p. 196).

Significantly, these words are read in a publication issued in the year of Lenin's death, long before the tragic events that were yet to come, whether we think of the famine in the early thirties or the victims of political purges, the physical elimination of Russian intellectual elites, and – in a better case – the emigration of Russian artists and scientists, which already numbered between nine hundred thousand and two million people at the time of the publication of Vrba's book.

The establishment of Stalin's unlimited power in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s and the simultaneous rise of Adolf Hitler to power in Germany (1933) forced Central European states – political representatives, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens – to henceforth choose *between Scylla and Charybdis* – between two totalitarianisms: German and Soviet. A middle position between these extremes, despite efforts for objectivity, was unthinkable, as any inclination towards one pole provoked sharp criticism from the opposite side and vice versa. For example, the Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance treaty of 1935, part of the defensive pact against the rising threat of war from Nazi Germany, was sharply condemned by clerical journalism in the Czech lands. "Many papers even write about a new White Mountain", *Lidové noviny* (1936, p. 1) commented in July 1936, "as the only just punishment for Czechoslovakia opening the gates of Bolshevism in Central Europe by concluding a military treaty with Soviet Russia". In the same year, the agrarian *Venkov* (1936, p. 1) published a speech by Milan Rastislav Štefánik to the Russian legions from early 1919, in which he stated:

You must remain invincible enemies of Bolshevism. Bolshevism is the negation of democracy. (...) Bolshevism buys souls for benefits and forms parties of bandits and sectarians, democracy involves everyone in benefits rightfully. Bolshevism is decay, poverty, hunger. (...) Bolshevism is an enemy of humanity and must be fought against.

Among the influential contemporary discussions on communism, or Bolshevism, it is necessary to recall texts published in the review *Přítomnost*, edited by the prominent journalist and proponent of democratic journalism in interwar Czechoslovakia, Ferdinand Peroutka (1895–1978), representing valuable responses both to the

political events in Europe, including the Soviet Union, and to the ambivalent attitudes of communist parties towards the practices of Russian Bolsheviks.

At the end of the 1930s, it was evident that verbal attacks against the Soviet Union, Bolsheviks, and Bolshevism as such, conducted in contemporary journalism, had become an integral part of Nazi propaganda, merely masking Germany's imperial interests. In Peroutka's *Přítomnost*, we read, for example, this passage: “When Hitler said last year that he reserves the right to defend against Bolshevism everywhere where he feels threatened by it, he certainly did not exclude us (i.e., Czechoslovakia) and certainly thought that he alone – at the right moment, would define what and where Bolshevism is. He just still needed that right moment...” (Peroutka, 1937, p. 436) When German propaganda during World War II portrayed the Soviet Union as the realm of evil and the war as a justified fight against Bolshevism, undoubtedly many who would have agreed with the anti-communist rhetoric before the war now at least became more attentive (see Kuklík, 2000).

The unequivocally negative connotations of terms such as *communism*, *Bolshevism*, *the Red Army*, or *the Soviet Union* lost their intensity during the war years, and the extremely negative evaluation of the Soviet Union was replaced, especially with the approach of the Eastern Front in the spring of 1945, by an extreme opposite: increasingly loud approval of the Soviet Union. After May 1945, this approval of foreign Soviet policy was associated with gratitude for liberation from Nazi Germany, although it did not mean an increase in sympathies for communism as a distinct ideology. Criticism of post-war Bolshevism, or communism, was suppressed by justified fears, because those who opposed it in the pre-war period were now placed dangerously close to German Nazis and collaborators with the Nazi regime. Indeed, many were labeled collaborators after the war, and a number of them were indeed tried and convicted. One example among many: when the exile government signed the Czechoslovak-Soviet alliance treaty in Moscow in December 1943, the *Czech League against Bolshevism* was established in January 1945 in Prague by order of the Protectorate authorities; it was formed by collaborators with the Nazi regime, but

prominent representatives of Czech intelligence were also forced to join. Some refused outright, others at least avoided membership, but even those who showed clear distance from the league found themselves among the ranks of collaborators after the end of World War II. This was the case with the distinguished historian and Charles University professor Josef Šusta (1874-1945), who responded to accusations of collaboration with suicide (see Ressler, 1947, pp. 152-155).

The value shift in the perception of the Soviet Union, which took place in the mid-1940s, was recalled in his memoirs, for example, by Czechoslovak politician Rudolf Bechyně (1881-1948): “Public opinion has overcome the fear of Bolshevism and sees in the Soviet Union an irreplaceable ally in the fight and perhaps even in peace”, he wrote succinctly, clearly, and of course somewhat simplistically. The naivety of the writer’s assessment of the Soviet Union and the motives of local communists – like the naivety of many in that excited time – is evidenced by the fact that on the same page of the cited memoirs, he writes about the “shameful Nazi lie of the massacre in the Katyn Forest”. (Bechyně, 1948, p. 138.) In any case, Bechyně’s testimony is just one of many, documenting the value shift from radical rejection of everything that arose in the Russian East to a one-sidedly enthusiastic, and therefore completely uncritical, approval of the Soviet present and, above all, the future of liberated Czechoslovakia in connection with the Soviet Union.

### **1945-1948: The Third Republic**

During the years of the Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945-1948), the image of the Soviet Union in contemporary journalism was influenced by the pro-Soviet direction established by the post-war Czechoslovak government, which was supported by all political parties within the strongly reduced political spectrum determined by the system of controlled democracy, i.e., with the dominance of the Communist Party. Yet, even in this short period, there were voices that relativized the uncritical evaluation of everything that came from the Soviet side, as recalled by novelist and journalist Edvard Valenta (1901-1978) in a statement: “[the viewer] leaves the cinema disappointed that a particular Soviet film was unsuccessful, but is infuriated

to discover that an official voice calls this film excellent and labels critics of the opposite opinion as fools...” (Valenta, 1946, p. 1) Despite the Sovietization, the Western orientation remained decisive for the culture of the Third Republic, although officially, there was talk of the inspirational nature of the culture of Slavic nations led by the Soviet Union (see Stary, 1946, p. 4). This Western orientation is sufficiently evidenced by contemporary architecture and its theoretical and journalistic reflection. Its protagonists, although they identified with the Communist Party or at least with the ideas of socialism, remained the successors of the interwar avant-garde, which has its roots in Western Europe, particularly in France. Radical leftist architect Karel Janů (1910–1995) presented the future of Czechoslovak architecture in his book *Socialist Building* (1946) in a way that, while following the Soviet model, we would adopt the typification of construction production, but the resulting artistic expression would resemble the Western European architecture of Purism and Functionalism of the 1920s and 1930s. The thorough organization of society’s life based on a unified economic plan – including construction – indeed recalled Soviet practice developed in the 1920s and 1930s, but it must be understood primarily as a search for an effective tool to overcome the consequences of World War II, even at the cost of reducing the needs of the inhabitants to the essentials. The reconstruction of infrastructure, ensuring affordable housing and basic food supplies, was much more important for the Czechoslovak Republic and its political representation in the post-war years than supporting the individual needs and interests of citizens, but a similar reduction in political and public life themes was a necessity for all European countries, including Western democracies.

The term *socialism* was ubiquitous in the post-war years; the question remains, what was meant by it. For architect Karel Storch, for example, it was associated with the need to revive cooperatives. Architect Storch, together with architects František Jech and Hanuš Majer, developed a project for the Prague housing estate *Solidarita* (realized 1947–1949), inspired by Scandinavian cooperative construction. In the magazine *Architecture of the ČSR*, he presented the issue of healthy and affordable housing through examples from Norway, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland, the USA, and the New West.

Alongside them, there were also sporadic examples from the Soviet Union (see Storch, 1947). For the readers of the magazine, this overview of different approaches was certainly important and intriguing, as was the report on post-war architecture in Great Britain, prepared by prominent interwar architect Jaromír Krejcar (1895–1950), who remained in London after the communist coup in 1948 (see Krejcar, 1947). Architects Ivan Šula (1903–1977), who in the 1930s published *Floor Plans and Constructions of American Houses*, and Jarmila Lisková (\*1902), who was already interested in the issue of social housing in the 1930s, turned their attention to the public greenery of the British capital (Šula-Lisková, 1947). A generation-younger architect Lubor Lacina (1920–1998) focused on contemporary Swiss architecture (see Lacina, 1947). Landscape planning, to which urban planner Vladimír Zákřejs (1880–1948) was dedicated to before World War II, significantly influenced urban practice after the war, although none of the grand plans were implemented. Among the spectrum of raised topics, the Soviet Union and its architecture certainly had a place, but it cannot be said that it was unequivocally accepted. Prominent post-war Czechoslovak architect Jiří Štursa (1910–1995), who publicly expressed his leftist views since the 1930s, wrote about Soviet architecture (Štursa, 1947, p. 174): “The process of construction raises new questions, which – I am convinced – will bring Soviet architecture into closer contact with the views of foreign architects. For many reasons, a leading role in this respect may be reserved for architecture and architects from Czechoslovakia”, which can be understood as latent criticism of Soviet architecture and simultaneously as an offer to cooperate with Czechoslovak architects who could effectively respond to the problems of Soviet construction. It is one of the paradoxes that among the photographs of architectural realizations from the Soviet Union, accompanying the “Soviet” issue of the magazine *Architektura čSR* [Architecture of the Czechoslovakia], we find the famous Rannahotell in the Estonian resort of Pärnu, designed by the protagonist of Estonian Functionalism, Olev Siinmaa (1881–1948), who received education in Germany and with his concept of the hotel complex followed Scandinavian Modernism. When it came to reporting on developments in the Soviet Union, a factual tone prevailed, as characterizes the texts of architect Karel Hannauer

(1906–1966), a representative of pre-war Functionalism, who wrote about Soviet book production in *Architektura čsr* [Architecture of the Czechoslovakia]. However, anyone interested in architecture in the post-war years was much better informed about British or French architecture, which were presented in Prague at separate exhibitions. In the summer of 1947, there was an exhibition *British Cities of Tomorrow*, showing interesting British realizations in photographs, plans, and models. The exhibition, opened by the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Sir Lancelot Keny, was accompanied by a collection of specialist and popular science literature.

In post-war Czechoslovakia, Soviet art was primarily recalled with reference to the prominent figures of the Soviet avant-garde. For example, when architect Jiří Voženílek (1909–1986) contemplated how the concept of the linear city could be developed in post-war Czechoslovak conditions, he connected to Miljutin’s Socgorod:

Thus, during the construction of the industrial base of the Soviet Union during the first five-year plan [1929–1933], the idea of the linear city was born, incisively formulated by N. A. Miljutin in the publication Socgorod as the result of many planning attempts and studies. Miljutin’s initiative plan put the relationship between work and living on a new basis without reminiscences of the traditional market-place – dwelling – workplace relation from the time of artisanal production, and we can rightly consider it the starting point of socialist settlement policy.

It should be emphasized that Nikolai Alexandrovich Miljutin (1889–1942) was one of the protagonists of the Soviet avant-garde, who lost his prominent position with the onset of Stalinization of Soviet culture in the 1930s, and his theoretical work *Socgorod* was already published in Czech translation in 1931. Voženílek thus only connected to the interest in radical transformation of the urban structure, developed by avant-garde architects in the interwar years, among which the industrial cities designed in various regions and countries for the Bata shoe company held a significant position.

The example of Jiří Voženílek demonstrates that for both architecture and urbanism, the collective term for the radical left in the culture of the interwar period was the avant-garde. It consisted

of connecting Czech and Slovak creators with Western countries and the protagonists of their artistic culture. Although the inter-war avant-garde in Czechoslovakia followed developments in the Soviet Union, the attempt to adopt Soviet *socialist realism* was far from as certain as the interpretation of the term that prevailed after 1948: in the mid-1930s, representatives of the leftist avant-garde and the communist intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia (Bedřich Václavek, Ladislav Novomeský, Karel Teige, Vítězslav Nezval, etc.) understood socialist realism broadly as a term encompassing various expressions of modern culture, including avant-garde and surrealism, and even after World War II, artists and theorists were willing to discuss the meaning of socialist realism, as evidenced by the case of the theorizing painter Otakar Mrkvička (1898–1957). Mrkvička considered Marc Chagall the “most Russian” painter, appreciated the simple folk nature of Henri Rousseau’s works, and at the same time regarded socialist realism as *a mere wish*, which, according to him, was not fulfilled by the visual culture of the Stalinist epoch, which he condemned by exclaiming (Mrkvička, 1947, p. 5): “Is it possible to reach [comprehensibility] so lazily through the most banal convention?”

### **1948–1956: Sovietization of Architecture in Czechoslovakia**

The Third Republic ended in February 1948 with the communists taking over political power in Czechoslovakia, guided by the political representation of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the political elite in Czechoslovakia quickly and ostentatiously shifted from a democratic form of socialism to Stalinism. A feature of the post-February development was radical Sovietization, manifested by harsh persecution of any, even suspected, opposition. Economic life was subject to Moscow’s leadership and supervision by Soviet advisors. Russian became a compulsory foreign language taught in primary and secondary schools, and workers were taught the Russian language in evening courses. Already in a collage of texts written by state administration representatives, university teachers, writers, and working collectives, published by the Brno communist newspaper *Rovnost* on November 7, 1945, i.e., on the anniversary of the Great October Revolution in Russia, there were formulations that anticipated the future boundless,

uncritical admiration for the Land of the Soviets, as the Soviet Union was commonly referred to. Architect Bohuslav Fuchs, undoubtedly the most prominent figure of modern architecture in Moravia and Silesia in the interwar period, contributed a text that emphasized the idea that also interested him, namely, generous urban planning encompassing a broader area than a single urban unit. Compared to other writers, his enthusiasm was somewhat subdued; he merely factually stated the interest of Czechoslovak architects in developments in the Soviet Union and in the construction of residential complexes and economic complexes there (see Fuchs, 1945, p. 5). This was nothing new, as Karel Teige (1900–1951), a writer, journalist, and the most prominent theorist of the Czech avant-garde, had been urging attention to Soviet architecture since the late 1920s (see Teige, 1928, pp. 100–122). At that time, Teige had in mind exclusively avant-garde, constructivist architecture, represented, for example, by the works of Moisei Yakovlevich Ginzburg (1892–1946), both buildings and theoretical books and the magazine “Sovremennaja arkhitektura”, the first volume of which was published in 1926. He provided the Czech reader with an overview of architectural and urban planning work that had to be forgotten after 1948 because the Stalinization of public life changed the visual code of architecture from constructivism to neoclassicism. With this new doctrine, Czechoslovak architects had to ‘identify’ themselves, whether they wanted to or not.

The formal example firstly entered the Czech environment inconspicuously in the form of praise of the successes of Soviet science and culture. For instance, during the visit of Nikolai Vasilievich Tsitsin (1898–1980) to Prague in June 1945, it was recalled that Tsitsin was the director of the permanent agricultural exhibition in Moscow, later known as the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy, about which the contemporary press wrote, “The architecture and decoration of the exhibition are the pinnacle of Soviet architectural and artistic skill.” (Cicin, 1945, p. 3) However, this was a mandatory appreciation of Soviet cultural specifics, which were not quite suitable for the Central European situation with its profoundly different cultural tradition.

The external, organizational aspect of the development of architecture and urbanism in Czechoslovakia was quickly completed in the

first years after February 1948: the subordination of the development of architecture and urbanism to the interests of the Communist Party, and the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists, had already integrated architects as creative artists in 1948. Simultaneously, *Stavoprojekt* was established as a unified design organization, with branches in the regions (the number of employees of this organization was around 1200). The form of architecture was given by a series of examples from Soviet urban construction beginning in the 1930s, with models provided by the exhibition Architecture of the Nations of the USSR, which took place in Prague in the spring of 1949. However, the acceptance of Stalinist architecture in Czechoslovakia was not straightforward. There were several reasons for this.

The North Bohemian mutation of the newspaper *Mladá fronta* brought news of a criticism of the work of architect Ivan Zholtovsky (1867–1959) made by the chairman of the architecture committee of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, architect G. A. Simonov. Simonov reproached Zholtovsky for “blindly adopting historical forms without considering whether these forms are capable of expressing the new lifestyle of Soviet cities today” (Simonov, 1948, p. 5). Czechoslovak architects surely found welcome support in such critical reactions for their own negative evaluation of Soviet architecture of recent decades, even though they never openly formulated them. The architects did not want to split from their own artistic convictions and ideas, especially when they had been internationally recognized for their creative results to date. Architect Colin Penn began his contemplation of the further development of urban planning in Great Britain with the statement: “It is a great pleasure for me to express myself to the architects and planners of Czechoslovakia, who enjoyed such a significant position in the international professional world before the war...” (Penn, 1947, p. 85) And in the same year that Penn published his text, the Czechoslovak exposition at the International Exhibition of Urbanism and Housing in Paris received the Grand Prix (see *Úspěchy...*, 1947). Czechoslovak architects were also pleased that the post-war development would finally fulfill their long-held desire, expressed by Julius Wein in the words: “Advancing industrialization [of construction] will eliminate from construction and interior design forms that are accidental,

playful, unique, with an individual expression, corresponding to handcrafted production”, meaning the exact opposite of what was now, from the spring of 1949, demanded of Czechoslovak architects: to multiply the schemas of Stalinist architecture.

This change was brought about by the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in May 1949, where one of the main communist ideologues, Václav Kopecký, spoke about socialist realism as the doctrine to which all artistic creation in Czechoslovakia was subordinated. Kopecký then declared: “Socialist realism will create art that will overshadow all the great art of past times” (Kopecký, 1949, p. 386). This meant a 180-degree turn: a turn towards historicism, originating in Russian imperial architecture and urbanism from the era of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, or alternatively to Italian Renaissance and French Baroque, which provided influential models for Russian architecture of the 17th-18th centuries. Arbitrator of this change was Jiří Kroha, an outstanding Czech architect and urbanist, who enriched the architecture of the 1920s and 1930s with a series of original works. From a sworn avant-gardist, he became a supporter of Stalinist architecture.

The interest that our architects showed in functionalist architecture in the Soviet Union in the first years of construction of the Soviet Union cooled almost overnight when it was abolished and the path to socialist realism was embarked upon in Soviet architectural work.” The key point was that “in the Soviet Union there was a sharp rejection of avant-garde architectural work, which directly or indirectly wanted or had to impose on the Soviet people various parts and forms of the lifestyle of capitalist nations (Kroha, 1949, pp. 66–67).

A mandatory part of contemporary rhetoric was devotion to Soviet leadership: “The work of the genius teacher of all workers, Comrade J. V. Stalin”, wrote architect Václav Hlinský in 1951 (Hlinský, 1953, p. 64), “is an inexhaustible well of lessons and advice for our work. It is like a compass that will lead us the right way to our goal”. Devotion to the Soviet Union and its representatives, and enthusiasm for everything Soviet, was associated with so-called self-criticism, where creative workers themselves publicly confessed that they had been mistaken

and the Soviet Union had opened their eyes. Jiří Kroha, rightly considered a major figure in Czechoslovak avant-garde, is just such a case. Where self-criticism was not enough, radical, devastating criticism served the purpose, culminating in 1950 in a sharp critique of Karel Teige by the ideologue Ladislav Štoll (1902–1981). Štoll was followed by Antonín Černý, Jan Hlavsa, and Jiří Klen, who stated in their report (Černý–Hlavsa–Klen, 1950, p. 520):

Karel Teige caused considerable damage to our architecture. He led a number of architects [...] down the wrong path. An example of their harmful influence can be the career of architect Jaromír Krejcar, who ended up as an enemy of the Soviet Union and after February 1948 crossed over to the camp of criminal emigration.

Add that Karel Teige ended his life by suicide on October 1, 1951...

The ideal of Stalinist architecture presented to Czechoslovak architects in the magazine *Architektura čSR* was the skyscraper on Smolensk Square from 1948–1953 by Vladimir G. Gelfreich and Mikhail A. Minkus, which now houses the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation [fig. 1]. V. Kusakov, Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Architecture at the Council of Ministers of the USSR, stated about this type of high-rise building that

the construction of these buildings will be carried out based on entirely new principles, previously unknown to world architecture in urban construction,” where they “will be freestanding buildings, bathed in streams of light from all sides, their architecture joyfully and boldly soaring upwards (Kusakov, 1949, p. 75).

Without specific examples, we would conclude from the description that the writer had in mind Le Corbusier’s *Plan Voisin* with 18 skyscrapers proposed to create a new center of Paris. The floor plans of Corbusier’s buildings had the shape of a Greek cross; Soviet skyscrapers differed in a more complex floor plan, but it was also symmetrically composed. And most importantly, they had one substantial difference: the mass took on a ziggurat-like character, i.e., the mass set on the base mass was slightly narrower, and this

was continued upwards. The result, therefore, did not differ from American skyscrapers, which had numerous elements of historicizing morphology in the first third of the 20th century. It is striking how the Soviet Union, with Stalinist skyscrapers, followed the American example; it sought to create a counterpart to American architecture, or the position represented by the completion of the New York City Hall, known as the Manhattan Municipal Building from 1909–1914 [fig. 2]. This “Manhattanization” of Soviet cities aimed to create a visually attractive symbol of political reality, and if it spread to the territory of Soviet satellites – Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and other people’s democratic, or socialist countries, it would visually express political subordination to Moscow. It would fulfill a similar function to that of Greek architectural forms deep in the Asian continent during the time of Alexander the Great (4th century BC), where they declared the Hellenization of the territory. Similarly, urban-architectural forms of ancient Rome symbolically expressed for Central Europe or the British Isles the belonging of the territory to the Roman Empire.

The construction of each skyscraper is, however, specifically demanding in terms of organization and finance. The only instance of the described type of building realized in Czechoslovakia was thus the Hotel Internacional in Prague-Dejvice (1952–1956, see Stroč, 1957, pp. 465–475), the work of designers led by architect František Jeřábek [fig. 3]. The ziggurat-like composition of the central part was complemented by equally-voluminous horizontally-conceived masses on the sides. Where Soviet buildings abounded in stone elements, the Prague building had to limit itself to sgraffito. The interiors stood out for their cultivated design of doors and stair railings, complemented by artworks. Much more than the expression of a single realized building, contemporary journalistic reactions turned to the Soviet Union: the anthology *Construction of Socialist Moscow* (Prague 1952) featured a photograph of one of the tower-like skyscrapers on its cover, to which contemporary commentators reacted in an attempt to capture their symbolism. For instance, Zdeněk Lakomý (1914–1995), a contemporary promoter of socialist realism architecture and theory, wrote (Lakomý, 1951, p. 313):

Soviet architects demonstrate the highest creative mastery, using the most advanced construction techniques in the world, in high-rise buildings in Moscow, where the unity of grandiose solutions for urban complexes, urban plans, and artistic design of individual buildings and their groups create magnificent symphonies expressing the greatness and beauty of socialist ideas.

This socialist utopia, however, had no chance of success in Czechoslovak reality. All the more so, socialist realism was enforced in residential complexes, and it was best suited for regions with proposed development of heavy industry – in Slovakia, it was the city of Nová Dubnica, whose construction began in 1951 according to a project by Jiří Kroha, intended to provide accommodation for workers from the armory in nearby Dubnica nad Váhom; in northwestern Bohemia, residential complexes in Horní Slavkov and Ostrov nad Ohří; in central Bohemia in Příbram; in Moravia, residential complexes in Brno, Přerov, or Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, and especially in the Ostrava region. In 1951, a proclamation was issued calling on *Visual Artists to Fight for the Construction of New Ostrava* (*Vývarní umělci do boje za vybudování Nové Ostravy*), anticipating design work led by Vladimír Meduna: the new socialist city of Poruba, proposed for 150,000 inhabitants, was to rise along a long boulevard, dominated by a huge statue of Josef Vissarionovich Stalin. The composition of the districts was dictated by lessons from Soviet urbanism, which was aided by the publication of a Czech translation of a work by historian of architecture Andrei Vladimirovich Bunin (1905–1977) and Maria Grigoryevna Kruglova, published in 1940. The rich concentrated material from the history of European and American architecture was to serve as a lesson for architects and urban planners, who were not formulating one task but transforming the entire settlement structure according to a unified artistic plan. In the year of the publication's release, pivotal events occurred: the death of Josef Vissarionovich Stalin (and in Czechoslovakia the death of President Klement Gottwald) in March 1953 marked significant political changes, symbolized by the new Soviet leader Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev.

Devotion to the Soviet Union continued in the years 1954–1956, i.e., until the xx. Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet

Union critically evaluated the Stalinist era and condemned it as the so-called cult of personality. Some architects strongly agreed with Soviet and reported on this in their study trips, as was the case with prominent art historian Jaromír Neumann (1924–2001), who visited the Soviet Union as part of a delegation of the Union of Czechoslovak Visual Artists. The reporter appreciated the *strong impression* of the entire trip, repeatedly speaking of *audacity*, especially *grandiose unprecedented buildings*, meaning Stalinist skyscrapers, expressed *joyful feelings*, the buildings are according to him *breathtaking, beautiful, impressive*, but also *magnificent, joyful, encouraging*, and as for the metro, it is downright *admirable* (see Neumann, 1954, pp. 46–58). In 1957, the magazine *Architektura čSR* dedicated a separate issue to Soviet architecture [fig. 4]. D. G. Khodzhayev wrote the introductory text for this issue, in which he wrote about the avant-garde of the 1920s that “the 1920s brought as a positive aspect the freshness and audacity of ideas, creative flight, and the denial of all old dogmas”, while condemning Stalinist-era historicism, noting that “imitation [of antiquity, Renaissance, and Russian Empire] in contemporary times is anachronism”, and highlighted the Soviet pavilion prepared for the EXPO exhibition in 1958 in Brussels as interesting (see Chodžajev, 1957, pp. 513–516). The pavilion received the form of a large glass prism with smooth, fully glazed surfaces, with a staircase in front and a slightly convex-shaped roof, thus standing in direct contrast to the works of socialist realism of the Stalinist era. The EXPO exhibition in Brussels, attended by 52 countries, including the USA and the Soviet Union, and visited by 42 million people, was a triumph for Czechoslovakia: following the functionalist-constructivist architecture of the interwar period and applying new technical and construction procedures in the realization of the building and in the artistic component of the interiors, it was declared the best of the entire exhibition.

### **1969–1989: Architecture of the Normalization Period**

The decade between the Brussels EXPO (1968) and the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces (1968) is considered one of the happiest for the development of artistic culture and public life in Czechoslovakia. Although the slogan “*With the Soviet Union for eternity*”

and never otherwise” did not lose its significance during this time and was repeatedly reminded, the one-sided inclination of Czechoslovak society towards the East was balanced by a lively interest in developments in the West. The so-called normalization (from 1969) meant a renewed turn to the East. Normalization refers to a series of repressive measures that affected the Communist Party itself, the police, and the army; this also reflected in the dissolution of many interest and political associations, organizations, newspapers, and magazines, and generally affected public life in Czechoslovakia. If in the early fifties the Soviet Union was admired for its *gigantic constructions of communism*, as contemporary journalism wrote, now contemporary journalism more often reminded it as the arbiter of world peace. And from this stems the increased attention to the role of the Red Army in the liberation of Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1945. Symbolically speaking, Holan’s titular “Thanks to the Soviet Union” now acquired a new, current significance.

A spectacular expression of this gratitude to the Red Army and the then political leadership of the Soviet Union, now without the reminder of Josef Stalin, took the form of the *Ostrava Operation Memorial in Hrabyně* [fig. 5], a village west of Ostrava (see Spáčil-Kupka, 1981, pp. 441–442). The Ostrava Operation took place between March 10 and May 5, 1945, and was the largest battle on Czech territory at the end of World War II. The foundation stone for the memorial was laid on April 29, 1970, in the presence of Marshal Andrei Ivanovich Yeremenko. Built between 1976–1980 and opened on the 35th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia (1980), the memorial included the colossal sculpture *Brotherhood in Combat* (1974–1982) by Miloš Axman, a sculptor who had proven himself as the creator of monuments to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in Vyškov (1972) and Brno (1970). The national significance of the memorial was confirmed by the government of the Czech Socialist Republic when it declared it a national cultural monument in April 1989. It is notable that the object has no specific local or temporal coloring. The use of exposed concrete and the energetic shape of two massive forms in the shape of elongated, unevenly long wedges can be linked to inspiration from Western European brutalism. Its location in the open landscape is provocative and forms a counterpoint to the parish

church in Hrabyně, which had been experienced as a significant pilgrimage site since the 19th century and thus a symbol of Czech national emancipation. The memorial completely overshadowed this dominant, just as the Czechoslovak-Soviet friendship, which was authoritatively promoted, overshadowed regional cultural specifics.

In Prague, after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968, it would not have been possible to contemplate a similar monumental work in the heightened atmosphere. Here, more conciliatory and unobtrusive forms of Soviet Union commemoration were promoted. One such example was certainly *the Moskevská (now Anděl) metro station*, built between 1980–1985 with the assistance of Soviet architects and engineers. In the concave-shaped vestibule lined with dark red marble, bronze reliefs depicting a branch of blooming lilac were placed between the inscriptions Moscow and Prague. The design of northern vestibule was dominated by a Florentine mosaic in the theme of Moscow, stylizing prominent landmarks of the Soviet capital with a focus on the famous monumental sculptural composition *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* from *the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy in Moscow*. Only this, but only in contemporary photographs, takes us back to the time when the Soviet Union was a land where tomorrow meant yesterday for Czechoslovak elites and a large part of society<sup>1</sup>.

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1 A country where tomorrow already means yesterday. This is a paraphrase of the title of a book of reportages from the Soviet Union by the communist journalist Julius Fučík (1903–1942) entitled *In the Country Where Tomorrow Already Means Yesterday* (*V zemi, kde zítra znamená již včera*). The first edition was published in 1932, with subsequent editions in 1947, 1948, 1950, 1951, 1955, and several others.

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