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DEFICIENCIES IN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DISRUPT RAILROAD TRANSPORT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA



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DEFICIENCIES IN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DISRUPT
RAILROAD TRANSPORT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Analysis of current Czechoslovak press reports shows that the difficulties that plagued the Czechoslovak railroad system during the latter weeks of 1961 have carried over to the first half of 1962. It is probable, therefore, that deficiencies in railroad transport will be a significant factor in the underfulfillment of economic plans in 1962.

A primary deficiency is an absence of adequate reserves of railroad rolling stock in Czechoslovakia, so that unforeseen delays in loading and unloading of rail cars or any variations in demand for cars resulting from above-plan or below-plan economic production creates bottlenecks throughout the railroad system. For example, a surplus of freight cars may exist in a coal producing region where production is below plan while a critical shortage arises in another region where production is above plan. Other deficiencies include inadequate maintenance of track and rolling stock by railroad personnel and factors external to railroad management such as severe weather conditions during the first quarter of 1962.

Late in 1961 a serious freight car shortage developed, in large part because of an increase in the turnaround time of freight cars. Turnaround time increased during the last quarter of 1961 from an average of 3.99 days in 1960 to 4.24 days in 1961, an increase of 6 hours. Turnaround time increased by 3 additional hours in the first quarter of 1962. During December 1961, moreover, there was a daily backlog of about 5,000 freight cars in the yards and terminals waiting to be unloaded while another 3,000 cars per day were waiting to be loaded. These 8,000 cars, all of which were being held overtime, represented more than 24 percent of the total daily loadings (carloadings averaged about 33,250 cars daily during the last quarter of 1961), or more than 5 percent of the approximately 140,000 freight cars in service during this period. The situation became so serious in December that the government ordered the organization of emergency gangs to load and unload

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cars around the clock and on Sundays and holidays. In spite of these steps the backlog of freight cars waiting to be unloaded rose to a daily average of 5,500 by 1 January 1962. Freight traffic, in terms of metric tons (mt) carried, fell below the performance in the first quarter of 1961 by almost 1 million mt and below plan by 4 million mt. By the end of the second quarter of 1962, the railroads had fallen behind planned goals for freight traffic by 7 million mt.

It is difficult to determine just where the blame lies for these deficiencies. Press reports indicate that poor planning and management by users of railroad transport appear to be major contributing factors to the increase in turnaround time. Shippers and receivers preferred to pay demurrage charges for freight cars rather than employ additional labor or pay overtime wages to load and unload within the prescribed time limits. Singled out as the worst violators in delaying freight cars were the Ministry of Metallurgy and Mines, the Ministry of Construction, and the Ministry of Chemical Industries, the very ministries which were complaining that a shortage of freight cars was the reason for their failure to fulfill production plans.

Another cause for disruption in the Czechoslovak railroad system is the failure of Czechoslovak planning and policy, like that in all the European Satellites, to provide for an adequate reserve of rolling stock. Moreover, the regime attempts to maintain too delicate a balance between freight car supply and actual requirements, so that when the utilization plan falters, the entire system is thrown off balance for lack of reserve capacity. It is unusual, however, for an extreme shortage to develop during the first half of a year.

Improper planning in traffic management by shippers and receivers as well as inadequate storage facilities at transshipment points also are major factors in disruption of the railroad system. A classic example of this combination of factors occurred in June 1962 in the Danube port of Komarno. At that time about 67,000 mt of ore were unloaded from river barges and stored in Komarno. About 8,000 mt were on barges waiting to be unloaded, and 40,000 additional mt were en route by barge. The regular storage space was exhausted, and ore was being piled along

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the railroad track, thus making the movement of trains difficult. The various metallurgical plants throughout the country were unable to accept increased shipments, so that whole trains loaded with ore were standing in Komarno and could not be dispatched. At the same time (18 June 1962), 180 cars loaded with coal for transshipment by barge were standing in the Komarno yards but could not be unloaded, because the barges were loaded with ore, which, in turn, could not be unloaded because of inadequate storage facilities. Meanwhile, in the coal mining region of Ostrava, some mines were forced to restrict production because their storage bins were full and there were no coal cars available for loading.

Extremely cold weather, resulting in frozen switches, frozen water lines on locomotives, broken rails, and numerous accidents, contributed to railroad deficiencies during the winter months. Bad weather in conjunction with a lackadaisical attitude on the part of railroad maintenance personnel caused a large number of cars -- about 8,000 per day in May and June 1962 -- to be undergoing or awaiting repair.

Underfulfillment of rail freight haulage plans in the first half of 1962 means that the entire planned increase for this year in comparison with 1961 -- 14 million mt (119 million mt in all) -- must be carried in the last half of 1962. This quantity is an increase of more than 13 percent compared with the same period in 1961. At the rate of freight car utilization that was attained during the first half of 1962 (turnaround time 4.37 days, average load per car 17.2 mt), about 166,000 freight cars will be required in operation to fulfill rail transportation plans this year. This requirement is about 17 percent above the estimate of 142,000 freight cars owned by Czechoslovakia that will be available by the end of the year. Moreover, in spite of the growing shortage of freight cars, Czechoslovakia has continued to be an exporter of cars in substantial quantity -- production in 1961 was about 5,000 freight cars, but it is estimated that only 3,700 cars were added to the domestic inventory. Consequently, unless additional cars are built quickly, purchased, or rented from abroad or unless there is drastic improvement in the utilization of freight cars, the Czechoslovak railroad system probably will fail to fulfill the original planned goal for 1962 by several million mt.

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