

Engineering Legend



Hynek Strítěský (ed.): Fenomén ČKD. Příspěvek k dějinám pražského strojírenského koncernu Českomoravská-Kolben-Daněk. Příspěvek k dějinám pražského strojírenského koncernu [Phenomenon ČKD: Entry on the History of the Engineering Concern Českomoravská-Kolben-Daněk]. Mladá Fronta, Národní technické muzeum, Prague 2014. 326 p. (Práce z dějin techniky a přírodních věd, vol. 37).

A voluminous, on a glossy paper printed collective monograph under a management of Mgr. Hynek Strítěský deals with a significant phenomenon of Czechoslovak and Czech economic history — the syndicate Českomoravská-Kolben-Daněk, one of the largest Czechoslovak companies that essentially influenced engineering industry both at home and abroad. The work presents a whole range of new pieces of knowledge based upon an archive research. One must appreciate a set up of the erudite authors team that is not limited merely to the National Technical Museum (NTM) in Prague but there are representatives of other technical institutions to be found (Military History Institute in Prague, State District Archive in Beroun, Centre for Art Studies, ČKD GROUP, Inc.), including the Slovak Historical Institute of Slovak Academy of Sciences.

The monograph consists of 5 differently structured chapters. At the end of the publication the sources and literature are to be found together with English abstracts and the list of authors. The text is attached with quality illustrations (partly in colour), a great number of charts and other graphic schema.

The first chapter “The Company’s Founders” consists of 4 entries. The entry “The First Czech-Moravian Machinery Factory in Prague-Libeň and Sugar Industry in 1871-1880” (Hynek Strítěský, p. 15-36) deals with the very beginning of the company as a machinery factory with a significance for a sugar industry in Prague suburbs. Another entry, “Engine from the Breitfeld & Daněk Company” (Jiří Topinka, p. 37-42) is focused upon a start of the production of gas engines for ironworks in Králův Dvůr in Central Bohemia. The part “Vincenc Daněk and his Family” (Miloš Hořejš, s. 43-52) depicts a family of the founder of the company Vincenc Daněk. The final section “Three Generations of the Kolben Family” (M. Hořejš, p. 53-72) concludes the first chapter with a depiction of life stories of another representative of the company in the electrotechnic field, i.e. the Kolben family.

The second chapter “From Steam to Electricity: Different Aspects of ČKD Production” contains five sub-chapters. The first of them, “The Establishment of the Locomotive Works of the First Czech-Moravian Machinery Factory in Prague-Libeň” (Karel Zeithammer, p. 75-95) deals with the circumstances of implementation of a new assortment of the machine-works, i.e. the production of steam engines at the beginning of the 20th century. This chapter is as for contents directly succeeded with the subchapter “The ČKD Company’s Locomotives in the National Technical Museum’s Collections” (Tomáš Kučera, p. 96-125) where the author describes engines produced in the ČKD that are owned by the national Technical Museum. Another subchapter “Steam Rollers from the ČKD Company” (Jan Palas, p. 126-135) presents



another upgrade of an assortment of the ČKD before the WWI, being it a production of road steam rollers. The semi-final chapter “The Project and Implementation of New Metallurgical Operations at the ČKD Company in 1928–1930” (Jaroslav Jelínek, p. 136–179) deals with the theme of implementation of new metallurgical plants (steel foundry in Prague Vysočany) of the syndicate ČKD at the end of 1920s. This section is concluded with the entry “The Electro-Praga Company — a ČKD’s Subsidiary: Service Company for Sale and Production of Home Electrical Appliances (Lucie Střechová, p. 180–189) focused upon one of subsidiary companies oriented to a production of domestic electronic appliances, such as quick cookers, fridges, electric stoves etc.

The chapter “The ČKD Company and Armament Industry” mentions a significant part of the production — armament production. The first entry “Hawker Hurricane Fighter and the ČKD Company: Some Comments Regarding the Possibilities of Equipping the Czechoslovak Air Forces with Modern British Fighters in 1938” (Michal Plavec, p. 195–205) explains a not very well known event of the autumn 1938 when the ČKD made an effort to purchase the British fighter Hawker Hurricane Mk. I, the purchase of which was prevented only due to foreign affairs political circumstances. The following entry “Armoured Praga Cars” (Ivo Pejčoch, p. 206–217) depicts a production of panzers up to 1950s. The entry “The “E Plant” of the Czech-Moravian Engineering Works in the Context of the 1944–1945” (Martin Příbil, p. 218–242), dealing with a construction of underground factories of the ČKD at the time of the so-called Second Czechoslovak Republic and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, brings forth numerous, so far unknown facts.

The penultimate chapter “The ČKD Company in Other Contexts” consists of three sub-chapters. The first one is “Down to the Very Bottom: „A Director’s Crisis at the ČKD Company in 1934–1935” (Jaroslav Jelínek, p. 245–265) depicting cumulating of ČKD problems in the half of 1930s caused by the industrial crisis, a competition with the Škoda concern in Pilsen and last but not the least changes in the top management of the ČKD connected with various conceptions of the general manager Ing. Klement Růžička and his deputy, Ing. Jakub Karásek. The penultimate sub-chapter “The ČKD Company and Slovakia” (Miroslav Sabol — Ludovít Hallon, Slovenská akademie věd, Bratislava, p. 266–278) is dedicated to an operation of the ČKD in Slovakia in the field of engineering, power engineering and hydroenergetics not only in the interwar period, but also after 1945. The whole chapter is concluded with a sub-chapter “A Contribution to the Sociology of Art in the 1950s” (Marek Krejčí, p. 279–287) presenting a culturally-enlightening activity in the ČKD (visiting cultural centres, concerts and exhibitions in the ČKD, the environment of the ČKD as an inspiration for fiction or individual art activities of employees).

The monograph is concluded with the last chapter “The ČKD Company Nowadays” with the only entry by Jan Musil, the chairman of the board of directors and director general of the ČKD GROUP, Inc., “The Presence and Future of the ČKD GROUP” (p. 291–206). A brief company strategy after 1989 is outlined in here with an emphasis upon power engineering and heating industry, gas, oil and infrastructure.

Since it is not a “classic” monograph concerning the history of the company ČKD, it enables due to its structure an insight into a development of the company from its

beginning in the final third of the 19th century to present. It can be recommended to all those interested in the “business history” in a professional way. It is also important to note that the preceding monograph was published more than 50 years ago (J. Petráň — V. Fuchs, 90 let práce a bojů, stručný přehled dějin ČKD Sokolovo, národního podniku ČKD, Prague 1961).

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