

Samizdat, Five Year Plan

Ostensibly it's about a trifle. There will be no state upheaval for such fiddle-faddle. And there will be the joke: Do you why there isn't enough toilet paper? Because they plan for the head and never for the other end of the body. Or: the planners demonstrated the brilliant foresight, that where there slowly won't be food, toilet paper won't be necessary. In the sundry-goods stores, drug-stores, and obviously in the paper-goods stores there appeared signs reading "There is no toilet paper."

It's not only that there isn't any, but that there won't be the necessary amount for a long time. [. . .] The total demand for toilet paper in the CSSR is roughly 35,000 tons. According to the plan, in the Czech lands 4,750 tons are to be produced and in Slovakia 32,750 tons. That should have richly sufficed, but at the end of last year Slovak production fell short by 500 tons. Thus, because before Christmas no one dared reduce deliveries for small shops, non-retail appropriations were cut (health facilities, spas, restaurants, offices, institutes and other concerns). It all began here.

Shoppers went to the stores and quickly the paper disappeared from the shelves. That incited a panic, from which demand rose 10 to 15 percent, a phenomenon we also already know from the sale of other goods. People started to build reserves; each member of the family had the job of finding at least one roll. Soon even napkins and paper tissues disappeared, and toilet paper in work places and public concerns was stolen, because whoever didn't steal received a hit—and one that truly stung. In the midst of it all a report arrived, saying that the Harmanecká paper mill in Slovakia burned down. In truth, about 80 to 100 tons of raw materials for the production of rolls burned, but that's hardly the reason for the general shortage.

The reality is that 14 years ago Slovak enterprises gained control over the monopolization of the production of toilet paper, arguing that production lacked good prospects in obsolete Czech operations. For this reason, production in the Czech lands is going down from year to year: 4790 tons in 1986; 4782 tons in 1987; 4750 tons in this year's previously-mentioned plan. And it's supposed to continually be cut, so long as the present situation doesn't demand a decision to transfer toilet-paper production to the new Moravian factory in Paskova or to south-Bohemian Loučovice, but all that's far off. . . .

The present shortage of toilet paper is being fixed by making available foreign-currency means from Ligna to the tune of 20 million crowns for purchases in Austria. . . . The shortage in the non-retail sector is being mitigated through deliveries from China (about 1000 tons), but one roll arrives with a tax of 10 Crowns for overseas shipping, and a ten-percent lower tax for land transport. The paper is quality and, naturally, a pack of four will cost 40 crowns. Exactly since October 1 this much toilet paper was promised per month to pensioners, since the Chinese toilet paper is going to the non-retail sector with the proper state appropriation. This won't fully cover non-retail needs. 2000 tons will be lacking and still there will be buying in retail stores and stealing in public concerns. Always round and round.

As in a drop of water, here [in toilet paper] economic ignorance and decrepitude are reflected. There's no point to use as an excuse the Slovak monopoly, to dramatize such already tense relations, to use as an excuse federalization and the defectiveness of inter-ministerial agreements, which devour so much paper. The recorded limit on supply should above all be tied to the incompetence of the decision-makers. It's just that who would remain in the center [of government]? Even such a ostensible trifle, like how there can be a supply (or rather shortage) of toilet paper shows the depth and intricacy of the problems, in which the restructuring of the economy is bogged down and marking time. What weightier tasks do we not deal with every day like we do with "bog-paper".

It's known that our annual consumption of paper is 80 kilograms per resident. At the same time in Western European countries it is 200 and in the USA it is 340. But when it comes to the production of iron, we outran all of these advanced states long ago. Thus this solution is offered: the use of a wire brush for a certain function.

Source:

"Why There's No Toilet Paper [Proč není toaletní papír]," trans. Cathleen M. Giustino, *Lidové noviny*, June 1988, no. 6, 8.