

Prace, Health

[Excerpts] . . . The situation of our state of health is nothing to boast about. [. . .] In the world table of cardiovascular diseases listed as the cause of death, we, for example, occupy second to sixth place. Cardiovascular diseases have long been the number one cause of death in our country. . . .

Statistical tables show that, as recently as the mid-sixties, our population's state of health was fully comparable with that of the most advanced industrial countries. We have, however, lost this standing. The decline in the infant mortality rate is slow (from 19.2 per thousand in 1970 to 12.3 per thousand in 1985, compared with less than 10 per thousand in advanced countries).

The average longevity of both men and women is stagnating. Middle-aged men, in particular, are dying more and more often. The stronger sex has an average life expectancy of 67.3 years in our country, while the fair sex has an average life expectancy of 73.9 years. This is between 4 and 7 years less than the average life expectancy in other industrially advanced countries.

(In this connection it is not uninteresting to take a look at the increments in average life expectancy between 1960 and 1985: Average life expectancy in the CSSR increased by 0.1 to 70.5 years; in the FRG by 5.3 to 75.0 years; in France by 4.8 to 75.9 years; in the United States by 4.4 and 74.7 years; and in Hungary by 2.3 to 69.7 years. The fact is that [of all these countries] the CSSR has experienced the lowest increase in average longevity. We have managed to drop to 25th place among the 28 European countries studied. We have been overtaken by some 20 developing countries and rank approximately 50th in the world "league" table.)

The illness rate of women has increased. One in three pregnancies can be designated as high-risk pregnancies.

The sickness rate and work disability on account of diseases of the digestive, motor, and nervous systems is growing.

Finally, there is an unfavorable trend in cardiovascular and oncological diseases. One in two Czechoslovaks dies of cardiovascular diseases and one in four of malignant tumors. . . .

There are several causes for this unsatisfactory state of health—the steadily deteriorating state of the environment, the very often unsuitable working environment, the poor composition and often also poor quality of food, lack of movement, which applies virtually to all age groups, and, last but not least, our own inadequate care of our health.

To this we must add the not exactly world-class endowment of our health care system and our hospitals with top technology: problems with pharmaceuticals and medical supplies; the great amount of

paperwork that distracts physicians from their work; the feminization of health care with all the consequences that this involves; and the lower percentage of gross national income spent on health care compared to industrially advanced countries. . . .

Every year, 28 billion cigarettes are consumed in our country. Each person drinks an average of 140.1 liters of beer, 15.5 liters of wine, and 8.2 liters of spirits and distillates. We are also big eaters. Our energy consumption has climbed to 12,900 kilojoules, which far exceeds the recommended intake. . . . Moreover, fats account for much too large a percentage of our diet. . . .

Those who have read the above lines may ask: What things can I influence, and what is beyond my power? Some experts contend that we can influence virtually everything. [passage omitted] True, some things, such as improving the environment, will take time. . . . However, even now we must honestly strive for such an improvement. It is also necessary that the new laws provide for greater responsibility of individuals, as well as production organizations, for the health of employees. One cannot put employees' health at risk ad infinitum in the pursuit of momentary economic advantages. . . . It is in the working people's interest that they work in an environment that does not endanger their health, that they avoid last-minute rush work, and that they do not have to spend Saturdays and Sundays making up for arrears caused by bad labor organization.

In connection with the required change of diet, it is necessary that shops provide enough good-quality food and that they offer the correct food from the standpoint of healthy nutrition. . . .

People in the housing estates and in city centers must be provided with more opportunities to engage in sports and to spend their free time actively and outdoors. In short, it is necessary not to content oneself with the proclamation of slogans but rather to start creating conditions for a healthy way of life. This is the only way to catch up. These are tasks which, for objective reasons, cannot be mastered by individuals but only by society in its entirety. . . .

Source: "Unsatisfactory State of Health Deplored." September 7, 1988, *PRACE*, trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS).