

THE BIRTH OF CHIRANA IN PIEŠŤANY WAS WATCHED ALSO BY ALEXANDER DUBČEK

M. Nerád: My father looked for a production programme and he has succeeded

Only several days ago there was a unique meeting. More than 120 of the former as well as present Chirana employees met in the restaurant „Semafor“. Many of those over 80 year old men and ladies witnessed the boom of Chirana the gates of which were passed by more than ten thousand employees. They had the stamp: “Chirana Prague, plant Piešťany” in their old identity cards covered in red cloth in the middle of 1950´s.

The executive of the company Chirana Dental – Mr. Miroslav Nerád talked at the meeting about fifteen directors and 60-year long history of Chirana in Piešťany. His father Miroslav Nerád Sr. was the general manager of the giant named Concern Chirana Stará Turá. It has swallowed also the plant in Piešťany. But first things first. There is a sizeable pile of books on the table of Miroslav Nerád Jr. in his blue glassed-in office with a view of the conservatory of the family company Chirana-Dental Piešťany. It includes also articles and documents from the archives on the establishment of Chirana in Piešťany. In this connection immediately a question came to my mind.

When did the production of medical equipment in Slovakia start?

There is no point to look for references to the existence of the production of medical equipment in Slovakia after the Second World War in the archives. There existed only nationalized foreign agencies of the companies Sanita, Siemens and Philips. The situation in Czech lands was different. Here on the basis of nationalization decrees in January 1946 an organization named Závody léčebné mechaniky Praha (Medical Mechanics Works Prague) was established. Three years later – on 12 March 1949 these works were renamed to Chirana - Závody léčebné mechaniky Praha (Chirana-Medical Mechanics Works Prague). The name was changed so that their products could be better sold on foreign markets.

The chain of renaming probably didn't stop at that...

You are right because on 1 January 1953 the Czechs changed the name of the works to Chirana Praha, national enterprise. And here we come to Piešťany. The Praguers got also the Piešťany works under their authority with branches in Bratislava and Košice. At that time in Piešťany they repaired medical equipment and also manufactured products on customer orders.

Who managed Chirana in those times?

The first director was a Czech from Prague – Lichtnegger. I am sorry but at the moment I can't remember his first name. But already in 1954 the position was taken over by an ambitious Piešťany citizen Slavomír Chorvát. The Slovak central bodies have already decided to build the production of medical equipment in Slovakia. Mr. Chorvát thoroughly documented not only the production programme but also the beginning history of the production of medical equipment in Piešťany. He even wrote his memoirs. They are a document on that period, testimony of a man whom I respect highly.

More than fifty years have passed since that time. You have grown up in a family where the history of Chirana was written by acts. The largest share in it belongs to your father...

This statement is very pleasant though not entirely exact even though in the upshot you are right. I will explain why. At that time they began to produce medical tools in Považské strojárne (mechanical works) and later in Presná mechanika (Precise Mechanics) in Stará Turá. They produced syringes as well as other minor surgical tools. The production of medical equipment was at that time managed by my father Miroslav Nerád Sr. Under his direction the production of armaments was converted to the production of medical equipment and measuring devices. However not on the basis of Chirana tradition or within a decision of central bodies. It was after the war, there was no need to produce ammunition and my father simply looked for a production programme. And he was successful.

According to your words in terms of history the establishments of the works in Piešťany and in Stará Turá are not connected...

They are, but I will explain it later. We still haven't built Chirana in Piešťany. It happened like this. In Chirana Prague which included in 1954 also the Piešťany works under the director Slavomír Chorvát they began to prepare a project of a new factory for the production of medical equipment. It has been decided to build it in Piešťany on Vrbovská street. The ceremonial start of excavations took place in our town on 20 September 1958 at 10:00. It was attended also by Alexander Dubček.

In those times the building of Chirana Piešťany, similarly as today, was one of the nicest works in the town but even in the republic.

The project of the works was really generous in those times. Specialists called it the nicest plant in Slovakia. Chirana in Piešťany was built for 1400 people for one hundred million Czechoslovak korunas. The government of Czechoslovakia has determined its programme – Piešťany works were to be devoted to repairs of medical equipment, service was to cover 30 % of their business. The remaining 70% were filled in by the delimited production of medical equipment from Czech companies within the project of industrialization of Slovakia.

Almost 24 000 jobs were created within industrialization of Slovakia. So many as 245 enterprises were moved here from Czech lands. Chirana was one of them...

Yes but there were more reasons. In 1950's heavy industry was given preference in Czechoslovakia. Only the compounds of Chirana Prague where the medical equipment was being produced were a part of ČKD – Kompressory Praha (a heavy-industry enterprise). It didn't benefit the concept of the government therefore Chirana was moved to Slovakia – to Piešťany. The old inhabitants of Piešťany may remember the negative acceptance of the decision of the government. The disputes had to be solved even on the level of the Communist Party bodies. The production of dental equipment, operating tables, anaesthesia appliances, dental compressors and many other products has been moved to Slovakia.

The delimitation was mentioned during the meeting of Chirana employees also by the former production manager Otto Hrdina from Piešťany.

Really many products had been delimited but it has to be reminded that thanks to the delimitation Piešťany started to produce a universal operating table for which they became

famous. Their success is mentioned even in the town chronicle of Piešťany in 1958. The chronicler writes: "...employees of the factory were particularly proud of their nicest product, the universal operating table." In 1958 they won a gold medal for it in Brussels.

However the year 1960 was near. This year became a turning point for Chirana. Could you explain why?

Since 1 January 1960 the works in Piešťany gradually became a part of Presná mechanika (Precise Mechanics) Stará Turá. The whole delimitation production programme as well as the premises on Vrbovská street were transferred under Stará Turá. However until 1963 there still existed an independent Chirana in Piešťany on Lenin Street as the works of Chirana Prague. Since 1965 the reorganization swallowed also all Czech enterprises. A strong economic production unit has been created in Stará Turá and subsequently the Concern Chirana Stará Turá has been established. It was managed by my father.

How do you remember those times?

The whole period from 1960 up to 1990 was very successful. A concern has been created with almost 14 thousand employees. It had its own Research Institute for Medical Devices with its seat in Brno and since 1969 also its own foreign trade. Later we know it under the mark Chirana Export-Import Piešťany.

How did it look then with Chirana on Vrbovská road and other Piešťany Chiranas?

In 1990 1400 people worked in the works on Vrbovská road. About 450 people worked on Pionierska street – they were the former employees of technical administration and another about two hundred traders concluded contracts under the heading of Chirana Export-Import on Krajinská road. Chirana Piešťany profited from extensive international agreements. Thanks to it from 1960 until 1968 it became a monopoly producer of dental equipment in Slovakia. However after 1968 also Chirana Stará Turá started to produce dental equipment.

The people in Piešťany were probably not enthusiastic about it.

Certainly not but everything has its advantages and disadvantages. Their promising products – operating tables including a very perspective table marked OPR 6 went to Hungary and the anaesthetic equipment and a part of dental equipment to Chirana Stará Turá. Though Chirana Piešťany has lost its privileged position of the bearer of delimitation from Prague to Slovakia it has achieved a position among the first twenty production branches in the whole former Czechoslovak republic and was significantly involved in international co-operation.

Don't you think that the people in Piešťany have paid for Stará Turá?

Chirana in Piešťany partially lost its identity after having been included under the general management, however it never stopped to use its trademark Chirana on its products. But it had to accept organization changes and for five years (1960-1965) also the change of its name to Presná mechanika.

Another situation came after the velvet revolution

After the big privatisation Chirana Piešťany followed the decision of Czech enterprises and practically in 1991 left Chirana Stará Turá and became an independent company. However up to 1996 the Piešťany works were not able to consolidate themselves and there were justified worries about the destiny of the works. Similar situation was also with the traders on Krajnská Road as well as in Chirana OTS Piešťany.

What about further development?

In 1996 a strategic investor the company EUR-MED Stará Turá entered Chirana Piešťany. After an analysis it has singled out the plant of dental equipment and Chirana-Dental was established with the production programme based only on the production of dental units and chairs.

Now we are talking about the present days of the company. How does it look?

We have modernized the plant, we employ about 250 people who produce about 2600 components per year – units as well as chairs with the mark Diplomat. We sell as much as 90% of our products abroad. Chirana-Dental is approximately on the fifth place in Europe.

It is said that Chirana – Medical Stará Turá with which Piešťany were in one concern only ten years ago, is your biggest competitor. There appeared the problem of the use of the trademark.

Life brings also such paradoxes. It is also a paradox that the history of Chirana is reduced only to Chirana in Stará Turá though it is evident from history that Chirana Piešťany was in Slovakia ten years sooner and people in Piešťany produced dental equipment eight years sooner than the plant in Stará Turá.

By the way do you remember somebody from the older generation who had significantly put his signature under the products of Chirana Piešťany?

It is a very difficult question because there were hundreds of such people and thousands of others created big values. In this connection I talked to the doyen of the dental equipment in Chirana Piešťany Ing. Štefan Kačvar. He made a comment on his work, research as well as present disputes about the trade mark: "Nobody can deprive me of my patents in the sphere of dentistry, which were the first ones in Slovakia." My opinion is clear – the decisive fact is that there are more companies in Piešťany now with business in medical equipment which achieve European standard. These companies bring up next generations of skillful people who need not to worry about their future.