

U.S. SPECIALIST HELPS CZECHS

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of about 4,000-5,000 crowns a month (about \$133-\$166 a month.)

With some estimates indicating that 70-80 percent of Czechoslovakia's enterprises are technically bankrupt, the goals of the program are modest. "We want to have the managers learn from the MBAs. We can't expect to turn the companies around," said Best.

As to advice for the Americans,

many of whom will be setting foot in Czechoslovakia for the first time, Best advises them to recognize that "things can't be changed overnight and to go slow in handing out advice."

A common trait of American businessmen, Best has observed from his vantage point in Prague, is that they tend to be overconfident. "Czechs are more modest. I see that Americans who come over here

take Czechs as being unsophisticated, but they are sophisticated people with realistic expectations," he said.

Best has now gotten himself up to speed in Czech. A background in Russian has helped him, but his Russian skills are a double-edged sword. Czechs say he speaks Czech with a Russian accent, and they become cautious. "Then they see my clothes and know I'm not a Russian," he added.

U.S. specialist helps Czechs do business 'the Western way

(Editor's note: Jeff Lilley, 27, was a reporter at The News-Sun for a year in 1986-1987. He recently received his master's degree in Soviet Studies from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. This summer he traveled to Poland and Czechoslovakia. Fluent in Russian, he plans to relocate to Moscow soon.)

By **JEFF LILLEY**
(Fourth in a series)

A business school graduate and management consultant by training, Erik Best has taken on the job of bringing American business know-how to Czechoslovakia.

Best is in the vanguard of American specialists who have arrived in Czechoslovakia to help this former Soviet bloc country make the transition to a democratic, market economic system. As project manager for the Center for Democracy and Free Enterprise, Best has set up a program that will place American MBA graduates in Czech and Slovak enterprises.

Apart from the Soviet Union and probably Albania, no other European country had so much state ownership and so little private enterprise. However, after the revolution of 1989, under the leadership of its democratically elected government, Czechoslovakia embarked on a pro-



Erik Best is an American pioneer in Czechoslovakia, bringing American business skills to this formerly communist country.

gram to privatize its economy. The program will require many enterprises to come up with a privatization plan by next year. One way for the companies to privatize will be to find a foreign partner or buyer.

Thus, Czech enterprises want to get in contact with western businessmen and gain a knowledge of the western way of doing business. The Center for Democracy and Free Enterprise's MBA Enterprise Corps proposes to do just that by sending Americans trained in accounting, finance and marketing to work as in-house consultants for a year or more in Czech enterprises.

Following his arrival in February, the 27-year-old Best jumped into the project. He started intensively studying Czech for several hours a morning. With the help of a translator, he identified companies that would benefit from the advice of an American consultant. After visits around the country, he settled on 30 enterprises, including an art gallery, brewery and computer distributor.

The program requires that management of enterprises speak English. In addition, the enterprises provide housing and pay the Americans a Czech salary

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