

Marietta Smolkova Receiving A State Award



In this picture I was photographed in 1968 as I was accepting an Award for Excellent Work, for which I was nominated by the company where I worked at the time. In 1948 I started working as a secretary for the Strojimport company, located in Prague on Wenceslaus Square, which did business internationally. I worked there until I retired in 1977. I started as a secretary in the machine tool department, gradually I worked my way up to departmental manager, then I became a vice-director in the woodworking machinery department and later for some time we had no director, so I managed a group of about 70 people. But I never counted on being named director, as I had never been a member of the Communist Party. They never directly pushed me into joining the Party, but of course offered me membership. Nevertheless, in the meantime the Slansky trials took place, which were so markedly anti-Semitic that I refused to join. At work everyone knew that I was Jewish, I never tried to hide it in any way. I'd say that they quite respected the fact that I had

survived the Holocaust. I'd be lying if I said that I was badly off there. In my political profile it stated that I was the daughter of a businessman, a porcelain manufacturer. It was put in a very oblique manner, they could have come right out and written that I come from a bourgeois family and that I'm the daughter of an industrialist, as it was put back then. I even got a state award, For Excellent Work, for which the company had nominated me. It began with the fact that we were tasked with importing some set of machines for making hardware. It was a purchase that involved a great deal of money. The general directorship had an offer for these machines from one Austrian company, which had good connections here and had lots of contacts, so received a lot of opportunities. But from their offer there was no way of telling who manufactured the machines, the only thing that they told me was that they were from the United States. This was in 1964, when the political atmosphere in Czechoslovakia was beginning to loosen up a bit. People began to receive permission to travel abroad. I told my husband to try requesting an exit permit, because his brother Arnost was in America, whom he hadn't seen in a long time. He said that he wouldn't go without me, but I knew that they wouldn't give both of us a permit, for fear that we'd then stay. My husband got an exit permit, and so did I, after my colleague at the time, Vladimir Boruvka, vouched for me. So I was in America, and knew that those machines for the hardware industry were supposed to be from there. I had a copy of the Austrian company's offer. In New York in the phone book I found some association of machine tool manufacturers, who couldn't help me, but who gave me this large catalog, so I could try to find among the appropriate manufacturers someone who would be appropriate to the size of the order. I actually succeeded in doing so, and I then asked that company for an offer, which in the end was 45% lower than the one from the Austrian company. In that same year I then flew to America one more time for a few days, with the general director and his two assistants, so we could negotiate the technical details of the deal directly in the factory in Chicago. The company then nominated me for an award, which I received in 1968.