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## **The Emergence of the “Outskirts of Budapest” as a New Administrative District through Food Supply, 1917–1919**

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a suburban ring began to form at a very brisk pace around Budapest, the modern, metropolitan capital of the Kingdom of Hungary. Largely spontaneous economic and social processes attracted the attention of contemporaries, and the question was whether they should try to control or influence them in some way through official means and planning. At the time, the most obvious solution, following foreign examples, was the annexation of the suburban zones to the capital, i.e. the establishing of “Greater Budapest” by administrative unification. However, the merger required the clarification of a host of fundamental and significant issues with profound financial ramifications which would have demanded some agreement and cooperation between the capital, the surrounding municipalities, and the national government. That did not come to pass before the outbreak of the First World War.

What changes did World War I bring about in the area? How did the extent of the state’s influence and responsibility—primarily the organization of public (food) supply in the hinterland—affect the specific situation of the outskirts of Budapest and what developments started as a result? How did the revolutionary, successive radical political upheavals of the post-war transition period impact these ongoing processes, and to what extent was rupture or continuity prevalent in the examined issue? In the end, what did the political “rearrangement”—the new right-wing regime established in the wake of the 1919 counter-revolution—engender in the relationship between Budapest and its surroundings?

Answering those questions is the focus of the present study. First, I will briefly present an overview about the specific situation of the outskirts of Budapest before the World War I, covering the plans to establish a closer relationship with the capital and the limited steps that had actually been taken. After that, I will discuss the issue of public food supply during the war, then, specifically, the supply problems and conflicts in the outskirts of Budapest, touching on the various public and social organizations, the centralization at the end of the war and the organization of the region into an administrative unit. I will subsequently consider the developments of the post-war transition period, primarily in terms of change and continuity. Finally, the last part is an overview of the 1920s: how the situation of the outskirts of Budapest changed compared to the previous eras, how its characteristics had been taken into account—though the establishing of Greater Budapest did not take place in the interwar period either.

### *The Outskirts of Budapest up to the First World War*

The outskirts of Budapest, also known as the “neighbouring villages,” appeared as a new, special area and group of settlements in the thinking of contemporary experts and politicians around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries following the modernization of Budapest and the explosive development of its suburbs. In 1873, at the time of the unification and establishment of the capital, real suburbs had not existed yet, except in the case of two villages north of Pest, Újpest, and Rákospalota, where a total of 10,000 people lived. Compared to this, four settlements with tens of thousands of inhabitants could have been found in the area by 1910: Újpest (fifty-five thousand) and Rákospalota (twenty-five thousand) north of Pest, Erzsébetfalva (thirty-one thousand) and Kispest (thirty thousand) south of Pest; and even on the

other (that is, right) bank of the Danube, south of Buda, the population of the neighbouring villages increased significantly, if not explosively. The population growth especially accelerated between 1890 and 1910, and after 1900 it continued clearly at the expense of the central districts of Budapest. More and more people moved to the new suburbs, which offered cheaper living conditions, and public suburban transport. The opportunity to commute was utilized by various social classes in the largest peripheral communities. However, more than half of the population had already worked in the secondary (manufacturing) sector and industrial workers had become a dominant social group in these areas.<sup>1</sup> As the costs of industrial relocation were lower in the suburbs than in the capital, significant industrial areas were created in the outskirts after which the industrial workers worked not only in Budapest but also in their place of residence or in other surrounding villages.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the outskirts of Budapest became the first metropolitan zone to emerge within Hungary by the beginning of the twentieth century. Experts, politicians, and ordinary people as well, were increasingly preoccupied with ideas about its establishment, development, and future. At the same time, it was still only an idea with blurry boundaries, and it was not clear which local settlements belonged to it and which did not. That would only develop in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The area outside the capital itself belonged administratively to the Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County (Pest County for short) and to various districts (*járás*, the smaller administrative unit) within which there was a mixture of places adjacent to and further from the capital, and which were, accordingly, a mix of industrial and agricultural places. The settlements, including those with tens of thousands of inhabitants, were still villages in an administrative sense, so they had very little autonomy, and their lives were largely governed and influenced by the district chief magistrate (*járási főszolgabíró*), appointed by the county. Residents therefore had to handle much of their own official affairs (taxation, industrial licences, etc.) not locally and not in the capital, but in the more inaccessible district centres. In addition, the traditional district administration, which was mostly tailored to the needs of agricultural areas, proved less and less suitable for dealing with the specific, urban, and industrial problems of the settlements surrounding Budapest.<sup>3</sup> The Administrative Committee of Pest County stated in its 1908 report to the government that “[i]n the outskirts of Budapest, there are villages with the same degree of intellectuality as the inhabitants of the capital, and thus with greater demands. They have a population of 15,000–20,000 and developed industry, the administration of which is within the narrow framework of Act XXII of 1886, it is the same for all municipalities without exception, cannot be correctly executed.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In then-contemporary Hungarian statistics, the category of people working in industrial jobs included not only industrial workers, but also self-employed craftsmen, as well as officials working in factories, vice officials performing various tasks, servants, etc. However, manual labourers were also included in other categories (such as transport and commerce) as well. At the same time, the proportion of people working in industrial jobs is a good indication for areas with a higher percentage of (industrial) workers.

<sup>2</sup> For the development of the Budapest agglomeration, see: Gusztáv THIRING, *Budapest félszázados fejlődése, 1873–1923 [A Half-century of Development in Budapest, 1873–1923]*. Budapest 1925 (*Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Közleményei*, 53. [Statistical Publications of the Capital City of Budapest, 53]), 21–26. Pál BELUSZKY, *Az elővárosok útja Nagy-Budapesthez [The Path of the Suburbs to Greater Budapest]*, in: Szilva Andrea HOLLÓ / András SIPOS (Eds.), *Az ötven éves Nagy-Budapest—előzmények és megvalósulás [The 50-Year Old Greater Budapest—Antecedents and Realization]* Budapest 2002 (*Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából, XXX [Studies from the Past of Budapest, XXX]*), 121–152.

<sup>3</sup> See the example of Újpest: András SIPOS (Ed.), *Dokumentumok Újpest történetéhez 1840–1949 [Documents on the History of Újpest 1840–1949]*. Budapest 2001, 34–44.

<sup>4</sup> *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja* [the gazette of Pest County] VII (1909), H. 7 (18 Febr), 63.

At the time, the administrative unification was the most obvious solution for the problems of the agglomeration. The big city usually annexed its peripheral settlements as happened in Austria (Greater Vienna, 1890) or in large German cities around the turn of the century. The idea of Greater Budapest appeared as early as in the 1890s among officials of Pest County, the capital and the central government, and the proposals would have annexed primarily the villages of Újpest, Rákospalota, Kispest and Erzsébetfalva to Budapest. However, the local government of the capital took a dim view on the issue, mainly for financial reasons, and even the new leadership, installed in 1900s, could not change it. In 1908, Mayor István Bárczy (1906–1918), who launched a comprehensive reform program, worked in vain on a serious analysis and proposal for the establishment of Greater Budapest which would have included seven to twelve “neighbouring villages.” Bárczy failed to convince the members of the Representative Body of Budapest to support the plan, and the (financial) backing of the central government wasn’t secured either. Ultimately the proposal was not implemented.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Újpest, the most populous and developed settlement in the area, chose a different path and gained the urban rank (municipality with regular council) with greater autonomy and administrative powers in 1907. An important difference here, compared to the villages, was that such municipalities were no longer under the control of the district chief magistrates, but directly under the counties, and accordingly had the right to set their own rules, and had more autonomy in their own affairs and in the election of their own representatives and leaders. Prefectures heading the villages were small (consisting around ten people), with few officials, because the majority of the cases were handled by the office of the district chief magistrate. In comparison, the cities already had much more complex administrations and a separate council heading them. The elected mayors stood on a par with the district chief magistrates within the county organization. The significant difference between the two types of settlements is also shown by the number of local elected representatives: in the villages, the assemblies could consist of a maximum of forty members, while in the cities they could consist of two hundred people.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of the other villages, the main administrative change took place shortly before World War I. In 1911, the Kispest District was established, the first district of Pest County in which only settlements of other existing districts near the capital were incorporated, including Kispest, Erzsébetfalva, and Csepel. The latter had grown to more than 9,000 inhabitants in 1910, and the proportion of people working in industrial jobs became exceptionally high, at 75%. This occurred after Manfréd Weiss’s large-scale munition factory settled there, employing 5,000 people as early as 1913 and 30,000 in the second half of the war.<sup>7</sup> But 60% of the population of the whole Kispest District also worked in industry, which in terms of employment (57,000 people) was the largest after Budapest in comparison with other districts and all Hungarian cities as well. The district, with the smallest area and only six villages, was also comparable to the largest cities outside the capital in terms of total population (nearly 100,000) and had a very

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<sup>5</sup> András SIPOS, *Várospolitika és városigazgatás Budapesten 1890–1914* [Urban Policy and City Administration in Budapest 1890–1914]. Budapest 1996, 202–204. Ella KALMÁR, A „statisztikai” Nagy-Budapest [The “Statistical” Greater Budapest], in: HOLLÓ / SIPOS (Eds.), *Az ötven éves Nagy-Budapest*, 289–336, 290. Lajos BENE, *Nagy-Budapest tervének kialakulása* [The Development of the Plan for Greater Budapest], *Városi Szemle* XXXI (1945), 81–98, 81–83.

<sup>6</sup> Act XXII of 1886 on the Municipalities (Villages).

<sup>7</sup> BELUSZKY, *Az elővárosok útja*, 130–133. - However, the number of inhabitants in Csepel remained lower than that, because the employees of the factory also included a large number of residents from the capital and other nearby villages. Ultimately the number of Csepel residents doubled (to 18,000) by 1917.

high population density,<sup>8</sup> while the size and quality of its administration differed considerably. However, through the reorganization, a peripheral village became a district centre.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that the administrative separation of the capital and its outskirts basically remained intact, a merger had begun in two areas following growing economic and social convergence. One of them was an important official issue; unification gradually began when the authority and jurisdiction of the Budapest State Police was extended to Újpest and Rákospalota in 1890, then to Kispest, Erzsébetfalva, and Pestszentlőrinc in 1912, and to Csepel in 1917. The move was justified by the reason that there was supposedly no other effective solution for the improvement of public safety in both the capital and the given villages, and the law-enforcement administration of the “rapidly developing” peripheral settlements required completely different regulations than in other villages or municipalities.<sup>10</sup> The other area was related to the labor movement. The territorial organization of the Social Democratic Party was also transformed in 1912. The party organizations in the districts in and around the capital were placed under joint control.<sup>11</sup>

The history of the formation of the Outskirts of Budapest, the relationship between the capital and its suburban zone is well researched, but the period of the First World War is still a kind of unknown field, which is often skipped in summaries and histories or resolved simply by stating that the “annexation” took a back seat during the war. On the other hand, I will argue in the following sections that in the second half of the war the unification of Budapest and its surroundings expanded into another area, food supply which had become an important public service.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Project GISta Hungarorum (OTKA K 111766), the data of the 1910 Census, under [https://www.gistory.hu/docs/10\\_/10\\_MO\\_JARAS%203\\_1910%20NEM%20FAJLAGOS.xlsx](https://www.gistory.hu/docs/10_/10_MO_JARAS%203_1910%20NEM%20FAJLAGOS.xlsx), 11.05.2020. Az 1910. évi népszámlálás [The Census of 1910], Vol. 6: Végeredmények összefoglalása [Summary of the Final Results]. Budapest 1920 (Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények, Új Sorozat, 64 [Hungarian Statistical Publications, New Series, 64]), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Pest County had been pushing for the establishment of the Kispest district for years, but since it involved the creation of new administrative posts paid for by the state, it required government approval, which materialised slowly. At the same time the Administrative Committee of Pest County also supported the elevation of the larger villages around the capital to the urban status, which required a government decision in its previously cited 1908 report referring to the example of Újpest. The committee argued that although there were plans to annex those municipalities to the capital, its realization was in doubt, and moreover, that becoming a city would make it easier to join later. *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja* VII (1909), H. 7 (18 Febr), 63.

<sup>10</sup> For details see: Roland PERÉNYI, Urban Places, Criminal Spaces. Police and Crime in Fin de Siècle Budapest, *Hungarian Historical Review* 1 (2012), H. 1–2, 134–165, 150–160. For Csepel: József PERÉNYI, Csepel. Budapest 1934 (Magyar városok monográfiája [The Monograph of Hungarian Towns]), 45.—The extensions, as I will refer to it later, played an important part during the WWI. The unification of public safety resumed at the end of 1919, involving a significant number of villages.

<sup>11</sup> In the report prepared for the party congress, 9 and 16 local organizations, were reported in the surrounding settlements for 1912 and 1913 respectively. See: A magyarországi szocialisztikus munkásmozgalmak az 1912. évben [The Socialistic Workers’ Movement in Hungary in 1912]. Budapest 1913, 134–138. A magyarországi szocialisztikus munkásmozgalmak az 1913. évben. Budapest 1914, 152–155. Károly VÖRÖS (Ed.), Budapest története [The History of Budapest], Vol. IV: A márciusi forradalomtól az őszirozsás forradalomig [From the March Revolution to the Aster Revolution]. Budapest 1978, 666.

<sup>12</sup> For the history of western capitals in the Great War, see: Jay WINTER / Jean-Louis ROBERT (Eds.), *Capital Cities at War*. Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919. Cambridge 1997. For the cities of the Habsburg Empire: Maureen HEALY, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire. Total War and Everyday Life in World War I*. Cambridge 2004. Rudolf KUČERA, *Rationed Life. Science, Everyday Life, and Working-class Politics in the Bohemian Lands, 1914–1918*. New York, Oxford 2016.

## *Food supply in Hungary during the First World War*

During the war, food supply became a key issue in the relationship between state and society. Similar processes occurred in all belligerent countries. Agricultural production fell almost everywhere, while demand and consumption remained at or above the pre-war level. The food supply for the army, but also for certain social groups, primarily industrial workers and civil servants, became a priority for war governments. Food supply had been transformed, the place of market mechanisms had increasingly been taken over by state involvement and regulation, so food distribution had become a public task.<sup>13</sup>

In Hungary, the public rationing system and its institutions gradually evolved during the war. In the first years of the war, price controls were instituted to prevent ballooning food prices with little success. An important step was taken in the summer of 1915: the government established a central grain bank—the War Crop Corporation—which carried out the purchase, transportation, and distribution of the annual grain harvest “with the exclusion of profiteering.”<sup>14</sup> The new institution had a monopoly; it took over the goods from the producers at a fixed price, and the harvested grain was delivered to non-producers in need who were registered by the local administrations. The distribution was not standardized, but in Budapest food rationing already had to be introduced in 1915, first for flour.<sup>15</sup> Restrictions on grains and flour were then extended to a number of other goods, resulting in the formation of new institutions and centers for their acquisition and distribution.

However, the emerging system encountered many practical problems and conflicts. Producers did not want to sell their whole production at a fixed price because they could get much higher prices on the black market due to the shortage economy. (The black market extended not only to Hungarian territories, but also to other parts of the empire. It was often reported by the Hungarian authorities and the press that producers and traders smuggled food into Austria.) The status of the farmers was strengthened by the fact that most county administrations were dominated by the traditional agrarian elites, and the governance of the agricultural villages was entwined with the local farmers, thus hindering strict supervision by the authorities. On the other hand, several public entities and social actors were able to organize their own food supply such as cities (especially Budapest), large companies, and cooperatives which could have an impact on the central government. This resulted in a lack of central monitoring and control over the entire process of food supply.<sup>16</sup> Those without provision could supplement the limited and often stagnant supply with food purchased on the black market. Those who did not have the money to do so could try to be added to the distribution lists of several different organizations and thus receive multiple benefits.

All these problems and conflicts and the permanent shortage in the food supply led to demands by factory owners and workers for the urgent introduction of the “food dictatorship” in the autumn of 1916, meaning that a government commissioner should put food supply in order with

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<sup>13</sup> Zsombor BÓDY, *Élelmiszer-ellátás piac és kötött gazdálkodás között a háború és az összeomlás idején* [Food Supply in Market and Restricted Economies during War and Collapse], in: Zsombor BÓDY (Ed.), *Háborúból békébe: a magyar társadalom 1918 után* [From War to Peace: Hungarian Society after 1918]. Budapest 2018, 151–194, 151–154.

<sup>14</sup> 2072/1915 (16 June) M. E. decree, *Magyarországi rendeletek tára* [Collection of Decrees in Hungary] 49 (1915), 717–725.

<sup>15</sup> Fővárosi Közlöny [*Capital Gazette*] XXVI (1915), H. 25 (7 May), 881–882.

<sup>16</sup> BÓDY, *Élelmiszer-ellátás*, 155–157.

full power and strict penalties.<sup>17</sup> At the end of October, the government satisfied the demand partially and established the National Office of Public Food Supply with its own authority. The president of the new institution, acknowledging the “scandalous nature” of the situation, initiated more rigorous requisitions which were aided by the military and the gendarmerie.<sup>18</sup> However, tougher actions could only reduce food shortages and could not eliminate the black market entirely. On the other hand, the new office strove for unified central management, so it tried to organize the food supply with as few organizations as possible. Only the War Crop Corporation and its agents were authorized to acquire goods, cities and companies were prohibited to do so. In distribution, local administrations, large companies, cooperatives and purchasing groups had to submit their requests to the new institution, which decided on the allocation of the available goods.<sup>19</sup>

### *Food supply in the Outskirts of Budapest during the First World War*

During the war, food shortages and the distribution of the scarce resources were the most serious problems in the urban areas of Hungary, but the situation in Budapest was not as dire as in Vienna or Berlin. Due to the special circumstances and development of the Hungarian capital, the supply of sufficient and relatively cheap food had already been a problem in the decades before the war, so the local authorities built a reliable network of public utilities for food distribution and the proper administration to operate it.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the situation in the working-class settlements around the capital became much more critical during the war due to inadequate or initially non-existing supply systems. I have already pointed out the explosive growth of the population in these settlements during the previous twenty years. Moreover, the development of the military factories in the capital and its surroundings during the war (for example the Manfréd Weiss factory in Csepel) resulted in the growing number of industrial workers. According to the census in May of 1917, which was carried out precisely with public supply in mind, for example, the population of the Kispest district increased almost one and a half times (to nearly 140,000 people; Kispest and Erzsébetfalva, with 30,000 inhabitants each seven years prior, respectively became villages of 48,000 and 42,000 by then). However, the village and district administrations did not grow

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<sup>17</sup> „Élelmezési diktatúra” [“Food dictatorship”]..., *Magyar Gyáripar [Hungarian Industry]* VI (1916), H. 18 (15 Sept), 2. Élelmezési diktatúrát! *Népszava* [the social democratic daily paper] 23.09.1916, 1–2.

<sup>18</sup> 3560/1916 (26 Oct) and 3973/1916 (27 Nov) M. E. decrees, *Magyarországi rendeletek tára* 50 (1916), 1515–1518, 1587–1588. A lakosság élelmezéséről [On Supplying the Population], *Népszava*, 27.10.1916, 1. Harmadszor is rekvirálnak [Requisition for the Third Time], *Ibid*, 18.01.1917.—The restrictions and requisitions were supported wholeheartedly by such urban and consumer-oriented newspapers as the social democratic *Népszava* and it gushed over the downfall of farmers hiding their crops. There were cases where requisitors found hidden goods even in churches. See: A sarkadi szent sír titka [The Secret of the Sarkad Sepulcher], *Népszava*, 06.01.1917, 8. Ahol az oltár mögé rejtik a gabonát [Where the Grain is Hidden behind the Altar], *Ibid*, 09.01.1917, 9.

<sup>19</sup> BÓDY, Élelmiszer-ellátás, 158–159.

<sup>20</sup> For details see: Laura UMBRAI, Mit evett Budapest? A főváros élelmezéspolitikájának kialakulása és működése az első világháború éveiben [What Was Eaten in Budapest? The Formation and Operation of the Capital's Food Supply Policy during the First World War], in: Gábor EGRY / Eszter KABA (Eds.), 1916—A fordulat éve? Tanulmányok a Nagy Háborúról [1916—Turning Point? Studies about the Great War]. Budapest 2017, 267–301.

accordingly, on the contrary, they struggled with a lack of material and human resources due to the war.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, unlike in Budapest, a number of serious street protests and violent hunger riots took place in the area, for example in the summer of 1915 in Csepel, in the autumn of 1916 in Újpest, and in the summer of 1917 in Erzsébetfalva. According to various reports, the course of those events was similar: due to the lack of specific foods (flour, potatoes, sugar), the crowd, consisting of mostly shopping women, gathered in front of the town halls and broke their windows with stone, then in some cases the people marched to the residences of local leaders and damaged them as well. The dissatisfaction of the residents was probably fueled by the fact that they expected to receive at least the same level of supply as in Budapest, and they compared their own worse-off situation to it.<sup>22</sup> The local problems were given special attention due to their closeness to the capital and because of the major military industrial companies operating in the area, so the relative satisfaction and tranquility of the workers and inhabitants in the surrounding settlements was also a military priority of the utmost importance. There were protests and even strikes in those military factories in increasing number and intensity as the war progressed.<sup>23</sup> In July 1916, a strike at the Manfréd Weiss munition factory of Csepel, the causes of which included food supply problems, was dealt with not only by the Hungarian political leadership, but also by the Ministry of Defense of the Habsburg Empire. The protest, which was ultimately resolved through negotiations, got a symbolic sequel a few months later in October when the Hungarian Prime Minister, István Tisza, himself received a labor delegation from Csepel (social democrat and trade unionist workers) and promised to remedy their situation, including the food supply problems.<sup>24</sup> (The social democratic daily, in addition to reporting the meeting and appreciating the promises, noted that workers could not present their complaints and demands in the main forum of political publicity, the Parliament, because of the system limited suffrage maintained by Tisza.)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> It shows the volume of the task that 480,000 flour ticket coupons had to be distributed and their use checked in the village of Erzsébetfalva. A kispesti járás főszolgabírójának közigazgatási iratai. Általános közellátási ügyek [Administrative documents of the District Chief Magistrate of Kispeszt. General public supply affairs], 1916–1917. Budapest Főváros Levéltára (BFL) [Budapest City Archives] IV. 401.b. Vol. carton 121. Cases 3603, 3648 and 6355/1917.

<sup>22</sup> Csepel (9 June 1915): Ferenc MUCSI / János KENDE / Tibor ERÉNYI / Edit S. VINCZE (Eds.), *A magyar munkásmozgalom történetének válogatott dokumentumai* [Selected Documents from the History of the Hungarian Labour Movement], Vol. 4/B: 1914–1918. Budapest 1969, 107–108. Újpest (Oct 1916): Éhes asszonyok tüntetése Újpesten [Demonstration of Hungry Women in Újpest], *Népszava*, 08.10.1916, 11. Az élelmiszerhiány a főváros környékén. Újpesten megostromoltak egy fűszeresboltot [Food Shortages around the Capital. A Grocery Was Stormed in Újpest], *Ibid.*, 15.10.1916, 10.—For Erzsébetfalva see below.

<sup>23</sup> A significant number of female workers played important roles both in the industrial production and in the labour movement. In 1913, there were only 6,500 women (6%) among members of the social democratic trade unions, and by the end of 1917, nearly 50,000 (23%). Szakszervezeti mozgalom Magyarországon 1911–1913 [Trade union movement in Hungary]. Budapest [1914], 30. 215,222 szervezett munkás [215,222 trade unionist workers], *Népszava*, 04.05.1918, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ferenc MUCSI / János KENDE / Tibor ERÉNYI / Edit S. VINCZE (Eds.), *A magyar munkásmozgalom*, 195–202.—According to Tisza's official correspondence after the meeting he asked his ministers to take action in order to rectify the problems, to improve the food supply, and to alleviate the permanent congestion of the tram service to Csepel as well. As he put it, “it is vitally important that the workers feel the helping hand of a sympathetic government caring about their problems and taking their interests into account”. Gróf Tisza István összes munkái [The Complete Works by Count István Tisza], Vol. V. Budapest 1933, 378–381. See: Zsombor BÓDY, *Az ipari munka társadalma. Szociális kihívások, liberális és korporatív válaszok Magyarországon a 19. század végétől a második világháborúig* [Industrial Society. Social Challenges, Liberal and Corporate Responses in Hungary from the End of the nineteenth century to the Second World War]. Budapest 2010, 105.

<sup>25</sup> Tisza István fölfedező úton [István Tisza on an Exploratory Journey]. *Népszava*, 15.10.1916, 1–2.

However, the settlements in the outskirts struggled with the new task of providing food for the population. In any case, they had to register the local people who were in need and keep a record of them, and monitor the distribution of goods not freely traded. The latter could be dealt with in cooperation with local merchants or cooperatives, but also by setting up their own network of stores. With these stores, they could handle the purchase and sale of other freely traded commodities as well. However, navigating the often confusing regulatory and commercial activities gave rise to conflicts in several places, and in the second half of the war, open complaints and accusations were made in the press. The biggest scandal erupted in the new municipalities of Újpest. The previously mentioned local demonstrations in October 1916 were reported in the capital's newspapers, so it was an obvious symbolic step that the first official trip of the head of the new institution, the National Office of Public Food Supply (NOPFS), went to the market in Újpest to get acquainted with the people's problems and complaints "in a practical manner."<sup>26</sup> The visit alone did not solve public food supply problems, but in November a milk adulteration scheme came to light at the official plant, and the culpable urban employees were duly convicted.<sup>27</sup> In the spring of 1918, an investigation was initiated by NOPFS because of the maladministration of the public food supply, and probably due to corruption and fraud.<sup>28</sup> Finally the mayor and some local officials were suspended from their posts by the high prefect (*főispán*, also known as Lord Lieutenant) of Pest County, the highest local authority over the municipality.<sup>29</sup>

But it was not only the settlements that played a role in providing supply for their residents, primarily industrial workers. As the war progressed, the voluntary and social democratic General Consumer Cooperative (GCC) assumed a more and more important role in this regard, building a wide range of commercial and distribution activities in both freely and non-freely traded goods. The GCC, founded in 1904, had a considerable retail network with 30 branches and more than 25,000 members in and around Budapest at the beginning of the war. The cooperative sought to provide cheap products for members. Basic commodities such as fat, flour, or bread were available below the market price because of the profits gained by selling other products. The success of the GCC could also have been attributed to the government's recognition which sometimes even supported the opposition party's organization during the war since its activities helped to maintain the satisfaction of the workers. The recognition was further shown by the fact that the head of the cooperative, Mór Erdélyi who was originally a print worker, received a position in the management of the War Crop Corporation and other national distribution centers. The GCC also succeeded in ensuring for its members special, more favorable terms in the public supply system. In some cases, as in Csepel, there was simply no alternative to the GCC. Only a network of retail stores established by the cooperative was able to provide local and efficient supply for the military industrial workers living in the area, as

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<sup>26</sup> Az élelmezési hivatal vezetője az újpesti piacon [Head of the Food Supply Office in the Újpest Market], *Népszava*, 31.10.1916, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Az újpesti hamis tej [Adulterated Milk in Újpest], *Budapesti Hírlap*, 07.02.1917, 11. Az újpesti tejhamisítás [Milk Adulteration in Újpest], *Ibid*, 14.02.1917, 10.

<sup>28</sup> The investigating ministerial commissioner compiled a 99-page report in which he not only validated the complaints, but also judged the entire public service and even general administration of the city to be in bad shape. See: Újpest vegyes iratok. Újpest város közlélmzési helyzetének vizsgálata [Mixed documents of Újpest. Investigation of the food supply situation in Újpest], 1917–1918. BFL V. 675.h. Vol. carton 3.—At the same time, it is worth noting that a number of cases suggest that systemic issues were at the root of supply and administrative problems in the outskirts of Budapest.

<sup>29</sup> Újpest közlélmzési botránja [The Újpest Food Supply Scandal], *Népszava*, 09.03.1918, 6. Ottó LÉDERER (Ed.), A 100 éves Újpest története [The History of the 100-Year Old Újpest]. Újpest–Rákospalotai Lexikon. Újpest 1936, 26–27.



Prime Minister István Tisza was forced to admit at the end of 1916.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, a key feature often associated with the rationing system, the long queues, was less characteristic of the GCC branch stores, and in the food supply business hampered by abuses and profiteering, the cooperative operated, in their own words, with “puritanical honesty.”<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising that the number of members of the cooperative had grown to 60,000 by the summer of 1917, which, together with the dependent family members, could mean a crowd of 300,000 people.<sup>32</sup>

It was also important for the owners and managers of large companies to provide their workers with sufficient and predictable food to ensure continuity of production. At the same time, solving the problem became a kind of local power issue, because the employers did not relish the thought of strengthening the labor cooperatives and organizations in general. Therefore, companies also set up their own consumer cooperatives through their own advocacy organizations. At the end of 1916, the conflict was resolved with a compromise. Some of the industrial workers were provided by GCC and others by the cooperative of the companies. In addition, an organization, the Industrial Workers’ Food Supply Committee, was established within the framework of NOPFS to monitor the balance between the different cooperatives and the food supply for workers. An important novelty was that the scope of the committee was extended to all employees in Budapest *and* its outskirts.<sup>33</sup>

It is worth checking out how the system looked like in practice, that is, in a specific settlement. Here I will present the example of the village of Erzsébetfalva. In the settlement with a population of 30,000 in 1910, which grew further in the war years—by 1917 to 42,000—the food situation became a permanent and thorny issue during the assemblies of the local representative body from 1915 onward. In the first period, the food supply was provided by private traders, but in the wake of some abuses and growing dissatisfaction, the distribution of flour was taken over by the village itself in the summer of 1916. However, the activities of the official stores drew heavy criticism in one of the local newspapers, which wrote about back-door influence, official arbitrariness, and rude service.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> BÓDY, *Az ipari munka*, 103–104, 107–108.—In a letter to his Minister of the Interior, Tisza argued that “the fact that this cooperative strengthens its position and that of the socialist workers controlling it, should not deter us, in these dire times, from using it as a singularly efficient tool”. He thought this would be offset by the fact that factory workers would receive the food regardless of their cooperative membership, so they would know they were getting help from the factory. Gróf Tisza István összes munkái, Vol. VI. Budapest 1937, 95–96. (Cited by: BÓDY, *Az ipari munka*, 104.)

<sup>31</sup> “The whole food market is teeming with abuses. Only the modern cooperatives stand here in isolation and use puritanical honesty to protect the interests of consumers. Not just with slogans, but in a real manner.” *Az Általános Fogyasztási Szövetkezet évi jelentése* [The Annual Report of the General Consumer Cooperative], *Népszava*, 17.11.1917, 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* The growth continued in the last year of the war as well. By the summer of 1918 there were already 85,000 members served by 61 branches. Gyula SOÓS, *Hús esztendő. Az Általános Fogyasztási Szövetkezet főnnállásának húszéves története* [Twenty Years. The 20-Year History of the General Consumer Cooperative]. Budapest 1924, 80. —The success of the GCC is also demonstrated indirectly by the fact that, following the trade union model, civil servants also became more and more serious in their attempts of creating similar cooperatives.

<sup>33</sup> BÓDY, *Az ipari munka*, 108.

<sup>34</sup> István Jr. BAGDY, *Pestszenterzsébet város története* [The History of Pestszenterzsébet], in: *Pestszenterzsébet, Kispeszt és környéke. Budapest 1936*, 9–110, 73–76. Gézáné SALLAY, *Pesterzsébet története (1867–1944)* [The History of Pesterzsébet], in: *Pesterzsébet, Soroksár. Budapest XX. kerületének múltja és jelene. Budapest 1972*, 125–180, 152. *Erzsébetfalva képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvei, 3/1918 (30 Jan)* [Minutes of the Representative Body Assemblies of Erzsébetfalva], BFL V. 371.a, Vol. carton 1. *Ami actualis, Erzsébetfalva és környéke* [a local newspaper], 23.08.1917, 1. *Közélelmezésünkről* [Our Food Supply], *Ibid.*, 04.10.1917, 1.

In 1917, initiated by local complaints, several formal investigations were launched into supply matters in Erzsébetfalva. In March 1917, a group of women from Erzsébetfalva approached the head of NOPFS to say that they and their “starving children” could not receive the food they deserved; they complained to the local leaders in vain and were rudely rejected. The letter requesting the intervention of NOPFS was signed by fifty women. According to the summary of the District Chief Magistrate of Kispest, who was instructed to investigate, “the complaints were essentially justified,” and the supply was indeed significantly worse than in the capital. People therefore blamed the local authorities, while the chief magistrate considered it more of a systemic problem that should be resolved by NOPFS. In June 1917, a local factory under military command forwarded the female workers’ complaint to the Hungarian Ministry of Defense. The complaint was basically about milk distribution problems (fraud, circumvention of the maximum price, long queues, favoritism), but according to an accompanying letter from the factory board, food could hardly be obtained in the village and a remedy was requested. At the end of July 1917, the women of Erzsébetfalva personally went to NOPFS in the capital with, among other things, the complaint that it had not been possible to get flour in the village for weeks, which was essentially confirmed by the District Chief Magistrate of Kispest.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, an open demonstration took place in Erzsébetfalva in early August. According to press reports, a desperate crowd of four thousand people, mostly women and young people, threw stones at the village hall and then at the houses of the local leaders. The police eventually restored order, but did not treat the protest as a police issue, but a social affair, and essentially acknowledged that the protesters, who demanded flour, were right. The village, however, was still unable to obtain flour, so the chief of the Budapest State Police put himself in charge of the case and asked for the assistance of the General Consumer Cooperative (GCC). Finally, the solution was that the labor cooperative took over the food supply and distribution for the entire population of two large working-class villages, Erzsébetfalva and Csepel.<sup>36</sup> The agreement initially covered only the flour distribution, but then gradually extended to more and more commodities. According to press reports, not only was the service better and faster in the cooperative’s stores, but the food supply also improved because the cooperative was able to provide some supplies from its stocks even when central allocations had not arrived on time.<sup>37</sup>

The demonstration proved to be successful, to which several factors contributed. First of all, the event took place after the fall of Prime Minister István Tisza in May 1917, when a new government came to power promising internal reforms. This resulted in the scale of censorship being reduced, so the demonstration could be reported in detail by both local and national papers, which led to the quick and meaningful resolution of the problem. Secondly, after the government change, the old police chief of the capital resigned and his successor immediately tried to prove that—in his own words—he “would work for the people suffering the most during

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<sup>35</sup> A kispesti járás főszolgabírájának közigazgatási iratai. Általános közellátási ügyek, 1916–1917. BFL IV. 401.b. Vol. carton 121. Cases 6347, 9410 and 10952/1917.

<sup>36</sup> Tüntetésről [About the Demonstration], *Erzsébetfalva és környéke*, 09.08.1917, 1. Zavargás Erzsébetfalván a liszt miatt [Flour Riot in Erzsébetfalva], *Világ*, 07.08.1917, 13. Forrongás Erzsébetfalván [Public Uproar in Erzsébetfalva], *Szövetkezeti Értesítő* [the newspaper of GCC], 11.08.1917, 2. Erzsébetfalva képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvei, 59–60/1918 (8 Aug) and 61/1918 (10 Oct), BFL V. 371.a, Vol. carton 1.

<sup>37</sup> Nincs már zavar Erzsébetfalván [No More Hardships in Erzsébetfalva], *Budapesti Hírlap*, 26.09.1917, 8. Közélelmezésünkről, *Erzsébetfalva és környéke*, 04.10.1917, 1. Erzsébetfalva képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvei, 78/1917 (19 Dec), BFL V. 371.a, Vol. carton 1. –The success of the GCC in public food supply also contributed to the strengthening of the social democratic movement in the second half of the war, and not only nationally, but locally as well in the outskirts of Budapest.

the war.”<sup>38</sup> Since the authority of the Budapest State Police then extended to Erzsébetfalva as well, the new police chief could play an active role in defusing the situation and solving the food supply problem. Finally, it is also important to mention that in the summer of 1917 the Social Democrats became essentially the external supporters of the new government,<sup>39</sup> although still as a non-parliamentary party.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, it was not so surprising that an official person asked a social democratic organization to fulfill a public function. Following the intervention of the police chief, the local leadership and administration no longer had the opportunity to refuse assistance, which was then approved by the traditional county leadership as well.

When, finally, peace was restored in Erzsébetfalva and in the wider district, and the complaints about public service ceased in the autumn of 1917, the situation became suspicious to the Pest County administration. According to the report of the vice prefect of the county, the number of people who got public food supply from different sources, from the villages, the cooperatives, and the military factories was more than one and a half times higher than the whole population of the district, so a large part of them received multiple benefits.<sup>41</sup> Complicating the situation, the supply system may have been different for different commodities, i.e., factories only supplied certain products to their workers who thus needed to be supplied by the settlements for other goods. The vice prefect therefore had to warn the villages that they could not simply exclude factory workers from supply on the grounds that they would be taken care of by their employers.<sup>42</sup> The solution was the unification of the administration, so the villages had to register all of their people in need. In Csepel, for example, the number of people to be provided with food was nearly 25,000, of which only 3,500 were directly supplied by the village, while the labor cooperatives and the Csepel Munition Factory took care of the rest in equal measure.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A főkapitány—a nép szenvedéseiről [The Police Chief—on the Sufferings of the People], *Népszava*, 12.07.1917, 9. Several of his first directives in the capital concerned public services, so he tried to reduce queues, imposed new rules on the distribution of goods, and acted against the rude behaviour of vendors. He also took part in a large-scale operation when, in the autumn of 1917, the food supply office and the capital acquired vegetables from farmers near Budapest by requisitions and immediately distributed them directly to the residents using police escort. A főkapitány meg akarja szüntetni az élelmiszerekért való ácsorgást [The Police Chief Wants To Cease the Queues] *Ibid.*, 04.07.1917, 6. A főkapitány a sértegető kofák ellen [The Police Chief Against Rude Vendors], *Ibid.*, 15.07.1917, 11. Rekvirált paradicsom a főváros piacain [Requisitioned Tomatoes in the Markets of the Capital], *Az Est*, 05.09.1917, 2.

<sup>39</sup> However, the situation lasted only for a short time, because the new prime minister following István Tisza resigned at the end of August and the Bolshevik takeover in Russia in autumn led to restoration in Hungarian internal politics.

<sup>40</sup> Some socialist candidates participated in parliamentary elections before 1914, but in most constituencies they had no chance because of the limited suffrage. There was no Social Democrat MP during the war. At the same time, Social Democrats had already been elected into some local representative bodies, primarily in the settlements around Budapest. A magyarországi szocialisztikus munkásmozgalmak az 1913. évben, 143–145., 155.

<sup>41</sup> Az alispán jelentése a 1917/3. évnegyedről [Report of the Vice Prefect from the 3rd Quarter of 1917], 911/1917 (8 Oct), Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Pest Megyei Levéltára (PML) [Pest County Archives of the Hungarian National Archives], IV. 403a-b. Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun vármegye Törvényhatósági Bizottsága közgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve [Minutes of the Representative Body Assemblies of Pest County], Vol. 137. Also see: Megszűnik a többszörös ellátás [Multiple Benefits Will Be Eliminated], *Fővárosi Hírlap*, 21.08.1918, 2–3.

<sup>42</sup> Gyári munkások élelmezése [Food Supply for Factory Workers], *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja XV* (1917), H. 37 (13 Sept), 384–385.

<sup>43</sup> The administrative costs were paid by the villages themselves and could only be covered partially and for a certain time by sales profits and commissions, which resulted in serious deficits in the following years. Csepel képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvei, 93/1918 (20 Aug) [Minutes of the Representative Body Assemblies of Csepel], BFL V. 705.a, Vol. 3.

By the end of 1917, and the beginning of 1918, the centralization of food supply organization and control became a central issue both in the country and in the Outskirts of Budapest. The central officials responsible for the public food supply was dissatisfied with the activities of the local administrations, both in support of the requisitions and in the distribution of the collected food, so they set up local commissioners within NOPFS who supervised the tasks related to the food supply locally.<sup>44</sup> The situation in Budapest and its surroundings became a separate issue when the twelve government commissioners were set up in the whole country. At first, the administration of the capital did not think that a new government commissioner was needed in Budapest, moreover, according to press reports, a former military officer was planned to be appointed to the position, which the capital firmly rejected.<sup>45</sup> Finally, a compromise was made, and in March of 1918 a state secretary of NOPFS, Ferenc Nagy, was appointed as the local government commissioner, who had been dealing with the issue before. In fact, from the second half of 1917, he led the works of forming the Outskirts of Budapest as an “independent and unified food supply area and establishing the same rationing system as in Budapest.”<sup>46</sup>

With that measure in place, the special status of the area and its close affiliation with the capital were officially recognized, and the rest of Pest County was transferred to another governmental commission. In the new public supply administration unit, two separate administrative areas were merged: Budapest itself, two municipalities, and twenty-six villages (with a combined 350,000 residents)<sup>47</sup> from Pest County—the latter area extended beyond the boundaries of what was considered the industrial-urban suburbs of that age. In April 1918, a separate body was organized under the government commissioner, the Public Supply Committee of the Outskirts of Budapest.<sup>48</sup> Under the direction of the organization, the integrated public food supply of the capital was introduced in the summer of 1918, which, according to official assessments, brought about a considerable improvement in supply and relative satisfaction to the people who lived in the Outskirts of Budapest compared to the previous years.<sup>49</sup>

Overall, this was not only a bureaucratic and administrative process, but also a very political one. A good example is that in the summer of 1917 the Vice Prefect of Pest County ordered the establishment of so-called municipal food committees “to facilitate the task of the authorities, to monitor them and reassure the public.” In order to fulfil the latter function, it was emphasized that all classes of society (including workers) should be represented in the committees, which was a new practice compared to the usual composition of the representative bodies in

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<sup>44</sup> BÓDY, *Élelmiszer-ellátás*, 159.

<sup>45</sup> Az élelmezésügyi kormánybiztosok [Government Commissioners for Food Supply], *Budapesti Hírlap*, 19.02.1918, 6–7. Budapest élelmezésügyi kormánybiztosa [Government Commissioner for Food Supply in Budapest], *Ibid*, 20.02.1918, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Közélelmezési kormánybiztos kinevezése Budapest környékére [Appointment of a Government Commissioner for Food Supply in the Outskirts of Budapest], *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja* XVI (1918), H. 13 (28 Mar), 121.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*. Az alispán jelentése a 1918/1. évnegyedről [Report of the Vice Prefect from the 1st Quarter of 1918], 300/1918 (8 Apr), PML IV. 403a-b, Vol. 140.

<sup>48</sup> Minutes of the First Committee Meeting, 26.04.1918, PML VI. 601. Budapesti Környék Közellátási Bizottságának iratai [Documents of the Public Supply Committee of the Outskirts of Budapest], Vol. carton 1.

<sup>49</sup> A fővárosi környék élelmezése. Budapesthez csatoltak 28 községet [Food Supply in the Outskirts of Budapest. 28 villages were annexed by Budapest], *Népszava*, 16.08.1918, 3. Az alispán jelentése a 1918/3. évnegyedről [Report of the Vice Prefect from the 3rd Quarter of 1918], 1135/1918 (14 Oct), PML IV. 403a-b, Vol. 143. Rákospalota képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvei, 46/1918 (2 Oct) [Minutes of the Representative Body Assemblies of Rákospalota], BFL V. 572.a, Vol. 13. Erzsébetfalva képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvei, 1/1919 (26 Feb), BFL V. 371.a, Vol. carton 1.

contemporary Hungary. However, a new decree by the Vice Prefect a year later also showed that in some places the new committees were not satisfied with the monitoring and supporting role assigned to them, and demanded and exercised powers of authority and action.<sup>50</sup> In some ways, therefore, they foreshadowed the change, in the revolution following World War I, when partially new governing bodies took over the administration of public affairs both nationally and locally. In the field of public supply, therefore, the opinions, complaints, and needs of the residents had to be taken into account more and more, and at the same time the role of the street and the control of the streets became more and more important. That was the case not only in the vicinity of the capital, but in Budapest as well, which was in a better supply situation, where in 1917–18 large labor processions and demonstrations represented pre-revolutionary situations in some respects. Budapest and its outskirts together formed the center of the country, and whoever ruled that could also control the whole public life in the country, as it turned out during the revolution and regime changes after the war.

It was not a coincidence in that atmosphere, parallel with the creation of the new administrative unit and organization that the implementation of the Greater Budapest concept was again on the agenda at a representative body assembly of Pest County. In April 1918, János Kégl, a county representative—who would later, after the Aster Revolution 1918, become the county's high prefect and government commissioner—submitted a proposal to annex the settlements around Budapest to the capital. According to his reasoning, the residents of the area essentially belong to the capital, so they should be taken back by Budapest. The administration of the villages by the county had not worked, but it could not have been expected to adapt to the special needs there. The extension of the separate administration had already started previously with the extension of the authority of the Budapest State Police, then in the field of public supply, and according to the representative, that could be continued in other administrative areas, such as public health, transport, housing, etc. as well. All in all, he thought that while there was no need for an artificially enlarged city like “*groß Wien*,” there was one for a naturally developing Greater Budapest. He referred to the unification reform plan by the Mayor of Budapest in 1908, and essentially proposed the annexation of the wider circle defined there, i.e., thirteen surrounding villages and Újpest to Budapest. After two more supportive statements from representatives of the affected settlements, the Representative Body of Pest County voted in favor of the proposal and asked the government and Budapest to attach the settlements to the capital—albeit unsuccessfully.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the issue of annexation also arose at the lower level. In March 1918, the local representative body of Kispest village decided to apply for urban rank on the grounds that although the settlement would be annexed to the capital within a short time, it would be preferable to enter Budapest as a municipality.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Alispáni rendeletek [Decrees by the Vice Prefect]: 33,791/1917. and 30,745/1918. *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja* XV (1917), H. 31 (2 Aug), 332. and XVI (1918), H. 30 (25 July) 273.—The formation of the public food supply committees was ordered nationally during the autumn revolution of 1918 by the new Minister of Public Food Supply, Ferenc Nagy, who had previously been the government commissioner for food supply in Budapest and its surroundings.

<sup>51</sup> 371/1918 (8 Apr), PML IV. 403a-b, Vol. 140. —The representative body of Budapest probably did not deal with the proposition of Pest County in the last year of the war, however, at the meeting of the Finance Committee, one of the representative raised the issue condemning the initiative. According to him, the capital was in a dire situation and could not take over those villages with their “disordered conditions” without external, state support. “County gentlemen know what they want to. Get rid of a big problem at our expense. We will not deal with this issue until we have settled and built Budapest.” *Fővárosi Közlöny* XXIX (1918), H. 34 (12 July), Appendix IV, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Géza MOLNÁR (Ed.), *A 100 éves Kispest [The 100-Year Old Kispest]*. Budapest 1972, 65.

### *Rupture and continuity in the post-war transition period*

The military defeat and collapse of Austria-Hungary in the First World War resulted in a revolution in Hungary in the autumn of 1918, the main goal of which was to create a democratic republic. But the leaders of the new republic, proclaimed on November 16, were unable to cope with the serious internal and even more profound external challenges that made the new system difficult to establish. Thus, on March 21, 1919, another change of political system took place and a Republic of Councils of Hungary was formed by the unification of the Communists—led by Béla Kun—and the Social Democrats. Most politicians of the latter party participated in the operation of the new system. The Republic of Councils eventually proved unsuccessful, and suffered defeat in an armed struggle with the Czechoslovak and Romanian forces occupying a significant part of the pre-1918 territories of the Kingdom of Hungary. Finally, after the fall of the proletarian dictatorship in August 1919, a counter-revolution ensued. In the background of the internal turmoil, there was the dissolution of the former Kingdom of Hungary, which, in different ways, all Hungarian political forces were trying to prevent or at least decelerate and mitigate—all unsuccessfully. Meanwhile, there was an attempt to transform the country's political and social system, first by implementing democratic reforms that had been maturing for a long time, and then by increasingly going beyond them with rapid, radical, and violently transformative actions.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast, continuity was more prevalent in the field of public food supply. The national organization of food supply changed surprisingly little in the post-war period, during the democratic Aster Revolution, and then during the Republic of Councils. Personnel changes not unexpectedly took place at the highest levels, of which the most significant was that the former government commissioner for public food supply in the Budapest area, Ferenc Nagy, became the new Minister of Public Food Supply (and thus the head of NOPFS) in the wake of the Aster Revolution in October 1918, and was subsequently replaced by Mór Erdélyi, the head of the General Consumer Cooperative (GCC). The change showed that the Social Democrats, who became key players in the new government led by Mihály Károlyi, effectively took over the management of public food supply, especially in and around Budapest, but it was also evident that the task was given to a well-prepared person with practical experiences. Erdélyi also provided continuity during the era of the Republic of Councils as the People's Commissar for Public (Food) Supply in the Governing Council. The organization of central management of food and other commodities classified as public necessities had already been established during the war, so radical changes in the field were no longer necessary or feasible. Due to Erdélyi's role and more broadly, because of the Social Democrats' ascension to power, the GCC gained a more important function in the public food supply than before, which contributed to the standardization of food distribution. The process was completed and became fully centralized under the Republic of Councils when, according to a government decree, all shops and stores in and around the capital had to be taken over and operated by the labor cooperative. However, the decree was probably not realized fully in practical terms, because Erdélyi, a moderate Social Democrat, did not necessarily agree with the radical move, supporting the proper functioning of established organizations throughout the whole field of public supply.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For a summary of the political events and changes in 1918–1919, see: Ignác ROMSICS, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*. Budapest 1999, 95–108.

<sup>54</sup> For the issue of food supply during the Republic and the Republic of Councils in general, see: BÓDY, *Élelmiszer-ellátás*, 170–173. About the role of the GCC: BÓDY, *Az ipari munka*, 116. SOÓS, *Hús esztendő*, 80–86. By the end of the Republic of Councils, the membership of the GCC had grown to 163,000.—On the role of the Social Democrats, including Mór Erdélyi, during the Republic of Councils, see Lajos VARGA,

The general situation of public food supply became considerably worse in Hungary after the collapse for several reasons. In the short term, the revolutionary mood in late October and early November was a serious problem because of the ensuing riots and the widespread plundering of existing public and private food warehouses in some places. In the outskirts of Budapest, however, that was less typical. The old administrative and new, revolutionary bodies soon restored order and thus took care of the public food supply.<sup>55</sup> However, two other problems associated with the country being isolated had made it impossible to provide adequate food supply in the long run. With the disintegration of the Kingdom and the cessation of control by the government in Budapest over vast territories, the transport of goods from several important food-producing areas stopped, and could not be restarted under the new conditions. The constant shortage of coal also hindered the transport of the remaining stocks to Budapest and its surroundings. The issues started to improve slowly only after the fall of the Republic of Councils, when international entities only then contributed to the betterment of the public supply situation in Hungary.<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, during the difficult circumstances, the supply of the Budapest area, albeit at a low level, was ensured by the new administrative system established at the end of the war. In the new political climate following the war and the revolution, the provision for (industrial) workers living and working in and around the capital became even more important since they formed the main social base of support for the governing Social Democrats. That was already the case during the period of the democratic republic, and more so during the proletarian dictatorship.

The new organization established at the end of the war, the Public Supply Committee of the Outskirts of Budapest (PSCOB), continued to operate, and in several steps its territorial authority was extended to an ever-increasing area. According to the assessment of the chief executive officer of the committee, in January 1919, after six months of operation, “the supply of the area has been carried out to the full satisfaction of the population,” as evidenced by the fact that the villages left out of the area constantly applied to come under the authority of the committee. So, the committee proposed the inclusion of an additional twenty-six settlements, which in principle were mostly inhabited by workers and civil servants. Only a quarter of the population was composed of self-sufficient people working in agriculture.<sup>57</sup> However, the main goal was probably to include all places where a significant number of workers lived within the area under the committee’s control, as it had been decided previously that the committee should be responsible for the provision of food for persons and their families who lived out of the area, but worked there.<sup>58</sup>

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Kényszerpályáról tévútra. Szociáldemokraták a Tanácsköztársaságban [From Forced Path to the Wrong Track. Social Democrats in the Republic of Councils]. Budapest 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Budapest környékén teljes a rend. A közellátás is biztosítva van [All in Order in the Outskirts of Budapest. Food Supply is Provided], *Az Est*, 06.11.1918, 2.

<sup>56</sup> BÓDY, Élelmiszer-ellátás, 170–174.—Important to note that the Romanian army, which played a major role in the fall of the Republic of Councils, conquered more and more territories, and in August 1919 it occupied most of the new territory of Hungary, which was later established by the Trianon Peace Treaty.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 25.01.1919, PML VI. 601, Vol. carton 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja XVI* (1918), H. 44 (31 Oct), 454–455.—

According to the 1910 and 1920 census data more than half of the population worked in agriculture in some annexed villages, although in 1919 some of them may have been classified as needing public supply. Occupational statistics of the villages to be annexed had been compiled in preparation for the Commission's decision, but unfortunately those have not survived in the archives, just a reference to them.

The Minister for Public Food Supply, accepting the proposal of the committee, decided in February 1919 to annex the new villages in three steps (effective from April 1, July 1, and September 1).<sup>59</sup> The process and the operation of the committee were not affected by the regime change in March. Though they were transferred directly to the supervision of the People's Commissioner for Public (Food) Supply (Mór Erdélyi), the head and the administration of the central office remained unchanged. Similarly, the new administrative and "representative" bodies set up in the settlements had to implement the provisions of the chief executive officer of the committee in the same way as the old ones.<sup>60</sup> In addition, final steps were taken to fully unify the supply in and around the capital, so prices became equal after higher transport costs to the outskirts were covered by state subsidies.<sup>61</sup>

During the Republic of Councils, a proposal for the administrative unification of the capital and seventeen surrounding settlements, i.e. the establishment of Greater Budapest, was made at the end of April, because, according to the official opinion at the time, "economic, public security, public health and public welfare interests make it urgent."<sup>62</sup> Naturally, it was related to the issue of local public supply as well. At the end of May, public food supply was discussed at a meeting of the Steering Committee of the all-important national body, the Budapest Workers' and Soldiers' Council, and the resolutions adopted to improve the situation included the following: "In order to ensure adequate and equal supply for the workers in the area, the administrative unification of Budapest and its outskirts must be put on the agenda as a matter of urgency."<sup>63</sup>

However, the elaboration and implementation of the detailed plan for Greater Budapest did not take place during the remaining short period of the proletarian dictatorship,<sup>64</sup> which overlapped, from the point of view of public food supply, with the most critical months before the harvest. At the same time the capital and its surroundings were managed in a uniform manner during the Republic of Councils, but the administrative structure changed only to the extent that settlements with more than 25,000 inhabitants were declared municipalities which affected Erzsébetfalva, Kispest, and Rákospalota.<sup>65</sup>

After the fall of the Republic of Councils, the counter-revolution brought about another radical political change, but in the field of public food supply continuity prevailed yet again. Official public supplies remained in place until the early 1920s, and, moreover, "the most deprived and politically important groups, especially industrial workers, continued to be supplied with cheap bread by the state until 1922–1924."<sup>66</sup> Although the social base of the emerging new anti-democratic system was not industrial labor, it was the experience of the war and the subsequent

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<sup>59</sup> 191/1919 (14 Feb) KB. decree. See: Minutes of the Committee, 21.02.1919, PML VI. 601, Vol. carton 1. A budapesti környék kiterjesztése [Expansion of the Outskirts of Budapest], *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja* XVII (1919), H. 12 (20 Mar), 139.—According to press reports, the first stage of the annexation finally took place only on May 1: A Budapest környéki munkásság élelmezése [The Food Supply for the Workers in the Outskirts of Budapest], *Népszava*, 23.03.1919, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 28.08.1919, PML VI. 601, Vol. carton 1. 3/1919 (27 Mar) Ké. N. degree, *Budapesti Közlöny*, 01.04.1919, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 28.08.1919, PML VI. 601, Vol. carton 1.

<sup>62</sup> Nagy-Budapest megteremtése [The Establishment of Greater Budapest], *Népszava*, 27.04.1919, 9. See: Miklós HORVÁTH (Ed.), *Budapest története* [The History of Budapest], Vol. V: A forradalmak korától a felszabadulásig [From the Era of Revolutions to the Liberation]. Budapest 1980, 62.

<sup>63</sup> A közélelmezés ügye [The Issue of Public Food Supply], *Népszava*, 30.05.1919, 3–4, 4.

<sup>64</sup> HORVÁTH (Ed.), *Budapest története*, Vol. V, 79.

<sup>65</sup> Erzsébetfalva took a new name, Leninváros (Lenintown). On the other hand, in the case of Rákospalota, the urban declaration was delayed in practice. *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>66</sup> BÓDY, *Élelmiszer-ellátás*, 194.



revolutionary period which prompted right-wing political leaders to fear the working class and sought not only to restrict and discipline but pacify it as well. Thus, the public supply unity of Budapest and its outskirts was preserved for years, which was also shown by the continuous operation of PSCOB until 1924. The territorial authority of the committee remained intact, the extension during the Republic of Councils was not revoked; only the further enlargement planned for September 1, 1919—the annexation of six more settlements—was suspended, citing the miserable food supply situation.<sup>67</sup> The privileged and monolithic status of the GCC not unexpectedly ceased, but the cooperative itself could not be simply excised from the system or its control could not be wrestled totally from the grip of the Social Democrats, even though such a political demand was raised by the far right.<sup>68</sup> In Erzsébetfalva, for example, almost the whole population became a member of the GCC during the Republic of Councils, so all the officially distributed goods should have been delivered to them in the autumn of 1919 as well. Finally, a compromise was forged, and the cooperative received 70% of the goods, while the remaining 30% were given to the merchants in the Outskirts of Budapest, who, according to the zeitgeist, had already formed their own (business) organization.<sup>69</sup>

### *The special treatment of the Outskirts of Budapest after 1919*

For the interwar period, it had become generally accepted that the Outskirts of Budapest was a new area with specific characteristics, even if the Greater Budapest concept could not be realized for political and economic reasons until 1950.<sup>70</sup> The main political reason was that the working-class settlements in the area were seen as left-wing—rightfully in the 1920s—whose incorporation could have upset the delicate political balance in the capital and could have eroded the power of the right-wing leadership which was maintained by anti-democratic means.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the neighboring settlements still belonged to Pest County; however, there was no return to the pre-war situation either,<sup>72</sup> because the Outskirts of Budapest were treated as a separate administrative unit in many different fields.

First, the expansion of law enforcement continued. From October 1919, a unified central state police was organized for all the cities and the municipalities (the previously organized Budapest State Police also became part of it), while in the “countryside,” in the villages, the gendarmerie usually continued to operate. At the same time, according to a decree, the Minister of the Interior could extend the territorial jurisdiction of the police to certain villages or groups of villages in justifiable cases. That was exactly what happened to those around Budapest; at the end of 1919, another fifteen villages came under police supervision. Thus,

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<sup>67</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 28.08.1919, PML VI. 601, Vol. carton 1.

<sup>68</sup> Zsombor BÓDY, Gyár és földbirtok a nagy háborúban és az összeomlásban [Industry and Landed Property in the Great War and during the Collapse], *Századok* 152 (2018), H. 6, 1261–1292, 1281. Soós, Hús esztendő, 86–100.

<sup>69</sup> Erzsébetfalva képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvei, 17/1919 (1 Oct), BFL V. 371.a, Vol. carton 1.

<sup>70</sup> The borders of Budapest which were created by the annexations of 1950 have been essentially the same ever since.

<sup>71</sup> József SZEKERES, Nagy-Budapest kialakulásának előzményei [The Antecedents of the Formation of Greater Budapest], in: Gabriella Szvoboda DOMÁNSZKY (Ed.), *Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából XXV.* Budapest 1996. 269–314, 289–290.

<sup>72</sup> The counter-revolutionary regime sought to undo the revolutionary events of 1918–1919, like restoring the public administration regarding personnel and organization to prior conditions (30 Oct 1918, before the Aster Revolution), with all its problems. 3886/1919 (8 Aug) M. E. decree, *Magyarországi rendeletek tára* 53 (1919), 627–628.

together with the seven settlements already under the authority the Budapest State Police, the new law enforcement system was extended to a total of twenty-two settlements.<sup>73</sup>

Second, in official statistical data (and in expert materials based on them) the “neighboring villages” appeared as a separate group, together with the capital as “Greater Budapest,” and by the mid-1920s a consensus was reached on which settlements belonged there. The last, summary volume of the 1910 census was published in 1920, in which only twelve settlements were classified in the group. During the processing of the data of 1920 census in 1924, the heads of the central and capital statistical offices agreed that, in addition to the capital, twenty-one surrounding settlements belonged to Greater Budapest and from then on the concept remained unchanged in various statistical publications for two decades.<sup>74</sup> The settlements of the statistical and law enforcement “neighborhood” did not match completely, but there was a considerable overlap between them.

Third, during the transformation of the electoral system in 1922, which was a hugely important political issue at the time, a separate constituency, the “Outskirts of Budapest” was organized, where, like in the capital but unlike most of Pest County and the majority of the country, there was secret ballot with voting for party lists throughout the interwar period.<sup>75</sup> Twenty-one surrounding settlements were included in that constituency, which again was not completely identical to any of the previous groups, but largely overlapped with them.

Fourth, even if a complete reorganization did not occur, administrative changes took place in the early 1920s. Although the urban declarations of the Hungarian Republic of Councils were not recognized in the new regime, a few years later in 1922–1923 the three largest villages affected were finally given the urban rank: Erzsébetfalva (known as Pesterzsébet), Kispest, and Rákospalota. In the related administrative reorganization (1922–1924), in place of the dissolved Kispest District, a so-called Central District was established uniting more surrounding villages than before. Hence fifteen villages and, including Újpest, four municipalities received “special” administrative control around the capital.<sup>76</sup>

Fifth, separation was also implemented in other administrative organizations. “The territorial divisions of courts, bar associations, school inspectorates, finance directorates, district office of social insurance, etc. are established in such a way that the Outskirts of Budapest forms a separate territorial unit isolated from the rest of the county, although the area of the divisions does not always completely coincide in the different administrative branches.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> 5047/1919 (1 Oct) M. E. Decree on the Nationalization of Law Enforcement, *Magyarországi rendeletek tára* 53 (1919), 752–767. The extension to the surrounding villages: *Budapesti Közlöny*, 25.12.1919, 2.

<sup>74</sup> KALMÁR, A „statisztikai” Nagy-Budapest, 290–293. The first publication containing the description of Greater Budapest: THIRING, Budapest félszázados fejlődése, 24–25.

<sup>75</sup> 3100/1922 (31 Mar) M. E. decree, *Belügyi Közlöny* XXVII (1922), H. 17. (9 Apr), 749–750.—In 1922, the list of the Social Democratic Party won 57% of the votes in the Outskirts of Budapest Constituency. However, four-fifths of the parliamentary seats could be obtained in the open balloting constituencies. See Károly IGNÁCZ, Multi-party Parliament in an Anti-Democratic Regime. Election System and Practice in Interwar Hungary. *Střed / Centre* 10 (2018), H. 2, 9–36.

<sup>76</sup> Those settlements were organized into the central district which had a direct tram connection to the capital, and thus their population was bound to the capital or had similar occupations (industrial worker, clerk). According to the vice prefect’s justification, this grouping enables district officials to acquire the necessary expertise and thus best meet the needs of the public. *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja* XX (1922), H. 23 (1 June), 269.

<sup>77</sup> István EGYED, Nagy-Budapest [Greater Budapest], *Magyar Szemle* XXVI (1936), H. 4, 341–348, 344.

## *Summary*

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the political leadership of the capital and the country was unable or unwilling to react to the rapid development of the Outskirts of Budapest for a long time, and the administrative organization did not keep pace with the economic and social processes and the suburbanization. The gradual strengthening of forces pushing for change in the field would probably have led to some breakthrough sooner or later, but the First World War accelerated and altered the process. It showed that, in addition to Budapest, the morale of the area was then an issue of national importance, and its inhabitants considered the opportunities in the capital, like the supply conditions, as a model for themselves.

Thus, in the issue of public food supply of the home front, which became more and more important, a strong centralization took place at the end of the war, and a new administrative unit, the Outskirts of Budapest, in the broadest sense, was defined in which they sought to provide the same level of supply as in the capital. In the new system, not only the old administrative entities and the newly created authorities, but also a social organization, a consumer cooperative affiliated with the social democratic trade unions, gradually became more significant. It had a major role representing one of the dominant groups of people living in the area, and the government even recognized (industrial) workers as a force to be reckoned with.

The reorganization at the end of the war proved to be successful. Despite very serious food problems in the immediate postwar years, the food supply of the capital and its the surrounding areas remained intact, albeit at a low level, and famine did not occur. In that context, despite the successive radical political upheavals of 1918–1919, continuity was more prevalent in the field of public food supply, because the much-maligned yet operational centralized distribution system ultimately was not or could not have been significantly transformed and reorganized by any political leadership. At the same time, the issue of supply, especially the feeding of Budapest and its outskirts, became a central political issue that determined then-contemporaneous social conflicts to a large degree.

During the Republic of Councils of 1919, the uniform treatment of the capital and its surroundings as a working-class area was implemented not only in the field of public food supply, but also in other regulations. There was no debate in the political leadership about the need for unification—i.e. the establishment of Greater Budapest—so a general plan was made for achieving that end, but did not take effect during the few months of the regime's existence.

The right-wing counter-revolution in 1919 was an obvious attempt to restore the political conditions before 1914. However, the changes that took place in many areas during the war and the revolutionary period could not have been simply ignored. There was also no point disregarding the fact that a significant suburban zone had been created around Budapest which required special treatment in many respects similar to the capital. And even if Greater Budapest itself could not have been established for political and economic reasons, the unique treatment was realized in many areas from law enforcement through politics to various public and professional administrations in the interwar period.