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Bohemia's Eastern Border in Transition, 1918–1919

Introduction

The passage of supranational empires to national democracies at the end of the First World War has recently been the subject of a plethora of publications.² Even if these historiographies are still in the making, one can safely assert that they stress the importance of contexts, actors and representations in a situation of rapid transformations brought about by the sudden, quite unplanned break-up of empires, in this case the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus, regional, non-central territories take on a new status. How they and their inhabitants were involved in the building of the subsequent Central European states may shed new light on this process.

The proclamation of the First Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October 1918³ created a

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2 For an introduction, see Georgios Giannakopoulos: *An Age of Ages. Nation, Empires and their Discontents*, In: *Contemporary European History* 29 (2020) 2, pp. 232–242.

3 See Antonín Klimek: *Velké dějiny zemí Koruny české* [The big history of Czech crown lands]. Vol. XIII, Prague, Litomyšl, Paseka 2000, p. 9; Ines Koeltzsch, Ota Konrád: *From 'Islands of Democracy' to 'Transnational Border Spaces': State of the Art and Perspectives of the Historiography on the First Czechoslovak Republic since 1989*. In: *Bohemia* 56 (2016) 2, pp. 285–327; Zdeněk Kárník: *České země v éře První republiky. Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)* [The First Republic in the Czech Lands. Birth, Development and Heyday]. Prague 2017 [2000]; Volume 3 of *Český časopis historický* [Czech Historical Journal] (2018), especially Jiří Pešek: *Vznik, charakter a konec první Československé republiky (Několik úvah k aktuálním diskusím)* [Birth, Character and End of the First Czechoslovak Republic (Some Reflections on Current Debates)], pp. 659–692; Lukáš Fasora, Miroslava Květová, Richard Lein, Ondřej Matějka (eds.): *Demokratická monarchie, nedemokratická republika? Kontinuity a zlomy mezi monarchií a republikou ve střední Evropě* [A Democratic Monarchy and a Non-democratic Republic? Continuities and Ruptures between Monarchy and Republic in Central Europe]. Prague, Masarykův ústav a Archiv

country *ex nihilo*. Territorial control proved to be a major challenge for the new state.⁴ While the integration of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia was partly violent,⁵ the western (Czech) lands saw less trouble. Nevertheless, the immediate post-war period was marked by tensions. The Republic was highly criticized in a variety of ways, by citizens hostile to its liberal features, by others nostalgic for the Empire, and by the secessionists in the German-speaking border districts in November and December 1918. Nevertheless, the situation was pacified within a few months. Numerous arguments have been put forward in order to explain this, ranging from military occupation of the border to acceptance of a regime guaranteeing national affirmation, “the democratic idea”, “social legislation” and “cultural progress.”⁶ Beyond general explanations, the few existing studies on sub-regional situations show that reactions in the young Republic were far from homogenous.⁷

In order to discover more about the dynamics of local experiences, we will adopt a dual perspective on the changes between the end of the Great War and the second part of the year 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles and the first social measures of the Republic entered into force. The first perspective focuses on the re-organization of the state administration in Bohemia: if the transition between empire and nation state went comparatively smoothly, it was largely because this administration stayed in place after the war. But this perspective, reinforced by files from the National Archive in Prague,⁸ is hardly able to show local dynamics often decisive for arrangements or –

AV ČR, “Publikace Stálé konference českých a rakouských historiků”, 2020. Because this article was originally written for the summer of 2018, it only marginally takes into account publications that occurred afterwards.

- 4 Peter Haslinger: *Nation und Territorium im tschechischen politischen Diskurs 1880–1938*. Munich 2010, especially pp. 197–207.
- 5 For example, Etienne Boisserie: *Asserting Czechoslovak Authority in Slovakia. Context and Obstacles in the Immediate Aftermath of the Great War*, In: Christoph Cornelissen, Marco Mondini (eds.): *The Mediatization of War and Peace. The Role of Media in Political Communication, Narratives and Public Memory (1914–1939)*. Berlin, Boston 2021, pp. 109–124; Bohumila Ferenčuhová: *Qu’a signifíé la naissance de la Tchécóslovaquie pour les Slovaques? Historiens et opinion publique [What Meant the birth of Czechoslovakia to the Slovaks? Historians and Slovakian Public Opinion]*, In: Antoine Marès (ed.): *Mémoires et usages de 1918 dans l’Europe médiane* ([Collective memories and their uses]), Paris 2020, pp. 195–212.
- 6 *Deset let pány ve svém domově [Ten Years Masters in Their Own Home]*. In: *Litoměřické listy [Litoměřice Newspaper]*, 20.10.1928, no. 21, front page.
- 7 Karel Řeháček: *Němci proti Československu na západě Čech (1918–1920) [Germans against Czechoslovakia in Western Bohemia]*. Plzeň 2008.
- 8 Especially *České místopředsedství (Bohemian general government), prezidium (presidium), 1911–1920* (henceforth

on the contrary – escalations leading to serious conflicts. From a second perspective, we will analyse how the base political elite experienced the changes in Eastern Bohemia (our usual field of work). Diverse sources, such as the press, chronicles, and rare published memoirs will help reconstruct the expectations and strategies of local actors from the southern episcopal, Czech-speaking city of Hradec Králové/Königgrätz to the northern German-speaking textile town of Trutnov/Trautenau.

Ensuring change of sovereignty without revolution

The proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic by the National Committee (Národní výbor) on 28 October 1918 in Prague took public opinion by surprise. While the Austro-Hungarian army was disbanding, a “State of the Czechs and Slovaks” was founded on the territory of the Czech and Slovakian provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (plus Subcarpathian Ruthenia). The future president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, had prepared the State with the Entente and could count on the support of the American president Wilson.

A century later, it is striking to note how easily the new state could form in the area formerly administrated by Austria, that is, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesian Moravia, as in the case of Bohemia within a few weeks between 28 October and Christmas 1918. The term “revolution” seems to be ill suited, even if it has sometimes been used to describe the establishment of the First Republic. Furthermore, contemporaries largely rejected it, some out of fear of Bolshevism, others out of disappointment with what they considered to be the socio-economic inadequacies of the new state, a liberal democracy that to them was insufficiently social.⁹ The concept of “transition” which, after 1989, dominated the studies on the exodus of communism from Central and Eastern Europe seems better suited than “revolution” to describe the political changes in 1918 and the years thereafter. First used to describe how the former Eastern Bloc

ČM PM), series “Převrat” [coup d’État, revolution]. The prefects’ letters and reports quoted below are all addressed to the presidium.

9 Jiří Hnilica: Dynamiques du 28 Octobre tchécoslovaque aux XX^e et XXI^e siècles. [The Dynamical Heritage of October 28, 20th-21st Centuries]. In: A. Marès: Mémoires et usages [Collective Memories and their Usages], pp. 161–74, here: p. 166.

countries adopted the market economy, this concept has since been expanded to new geographical areas¹⁰ and other areas of human activity, especially concerning administration in developing countries facing thorough transformations in their political-economic orientation.¹¹ Indeed, the ability of the administration to transform itself has proven to be one of the key factors in the change of sovereignty from Empires to the building of new states after 1918.¹²

Enthusiasm dominated as the Bohemian province learned of the proclamation of the Republic: to the prospect of the end of the war was added the birth of a long-desired state, considered a “national liberation” of the Czechs. On October 30, Max Julius von Coudenhove, governor of the Bohemian kingdom, had given way to the vice-governor Jan Kosina, a Czech. After some hesitation, the military command refrained from using the non-Czech troops stationed in the country.¹³ But if the path was clear for the National Committee, the situation spiralled out of control “in the chaos of the first days”,¹⁴ with a procession of troubles accompanying the removal of imperial insignia. These disturbances, sometimes serious, were only seldom a matter for the state administration on the local level (called the “political administration”), and most of them are not reflected in our sources. They have been finely analysed elsewhere.¹⁵ A strong

10 Cf. Paul Hare and Gerard Turley (eds.): *Handbook of the Economics and Political Economy of Transition*. Abingdon, New York 2013.

11 See Philippe Bezes (ed.) *Réformes de l'Etat et transformations démocratiques. Le poids des héritages*. [State Reforms and Democratic Transformations - the Historical Heritages]. In: *Critique internationale* 35 (2007).

12 See for example Olivier Bouquet: *Old Elites in a New Republic. The Reconversion of Ottoman Bureaucratic Families in Turkey (1909–1939)*, In: *Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31 (2011) no. 3, pp. 588–560.

13 Luboš Velek: *Češi ve víru světové války (1914–1918)* [Czechs in the Whirlwind of the World War (1914–1918)]. In: Dagmar Hájková, Pavel Horák (eds.): *Republika československá 1918–1939* [The Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1939], Prague 2018, pp. 48–71, here: pp. 67–71. Martin Klečáček: *Převzetí moci. Státní správa v počátcích Československé republiky 1918–1920 na příkladu Čech* [The Rise to Power. State Administration at the Beginning of the Czechoslovakian Republic. The Bohemian Example, 1918–1920]. In: *Český časopis Historický* 3 (2018), 697–732, here: pp. 695, pp. 698–699.

14 ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, archive box (henceforth b.) 4548, Administrator (name illegible), prefectory of Ledeč, 7.11.1918: “Nový duch úřadování [New spirit of administration].” The author remarked benignly that “Všecky tyto zjevy nikterak nepřekvapují a jsou pouhým výsledkem chaosu prvých dnů, vždyt' radostný převrat tak náhle a neočekávaně všechny vrstvy národa překvapil” [nothing of this is surprising in any way, as it is only the result of the chaos of the early days, when the revolution that happened so fortunately surprised all the parts of the nation]. All translations by the author.

15 For Ota Konrád, the level of violence in Bohemia matched those in Austria, even if it declined quite soon after the

trend emerges: the perpetrators of violence, provided they went beyond the food riot, had more or less confused views about establishing the new regime and redefining the national community. However, they did not show principled hostility to the Republic¹⁶ – on the contrary.

Since the slogan of the National Committee, addressed to public authorities, was to maintain “public tranquillity”,¹⁷ the troubles that arose had to be quickly stamped out.¹⁸ Pending the peace negotiations, the new state had to prove itself able to fulfil its missions. The National Committee, then after 14 November the first Czechoslovak government, headed by Karel Kramář, followed a strategy of appeasement, including when disturbances arose in Bohemia between nationalities or took an anti-Semitic turn.¹⁹ In the period before a new constitution was established, which did not happen until January 1920, the authorities sought to ensure the continuity of the law²⁰ and administration.²¹ Their objective was to contain opposition within the framework of the institutions, particularly that of the political administration. The latter, therefore, sought to present itself as a guarantor of profound political changes and as a purifier of negative Austrian heritage.

end of the war. (Two Post-War Paths. Popular Violence in the Bohemian Lands and in Austria in the Aftermath of World War I. In: Nationalities Paper, 46 (2018) 5, pp. 759–775).

- 16 A hostility nevertheless existed in Bohemia and Moravia, especially on the part of Catholics: see for example the protests against the destruction of the Prague Virgin Mary column on 3 November 1918 recorded in the file “Stížnosti a udání na nepřístojné chování duchovních 1918 [Complaints against improper behaviour of clergymen]”, State District Archiv Hradec Králové (henceforth SOKA HK), series *Okresní národní výbor Hradec Králové I.* [District National Committee Hradec Králové I]. On Catholicism and its political situation at the beginning of the Republic, see Jaroslav Šebek: *Za Boha, národ, pořádek* [For God, Nation, and Order]. Prague 2016, pp. 47–67.
- 17 ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548, circular signed by Jan Kosina “Nové úkoly [New tasks]” to be handed to the directories of each prefecture and to the chief of the Prague police”, 30.10.1918 (henceforth Circular “Nové úkoly”, 30.10.1918). The entire quotation reads: “Zachováním rovnováhy ve správním organismu, jakož i zabezpečením klidu a pořádku za všech okolností splnili onu část nových úkolů, která vložena jest na jejich bedra.”
- 18 Klímek: *Velké dějiny*, p. 18.
- 19 See Michal Frankl, Miloslav Szabó: *Budování státu bez antisemitismu? Násilí, diskurz loajality a vznik Československa* [Building a State without Anti-Semitism? Violence, the Discourse of Loyalty and the Creation of Czechoslovakia]. Prague 2015, pp. 34–98, especially pp. 35–38.
- 20 Paragraph 2 of the law instituting the independent state of Czechoslovakia, 28.10.1918: “all imperial laws remain in force for the time being.”
- 21 See M. Klečáček: *Převzetí moci*, and ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548: circular of 30.10.1918 to the leaders of the political administration and the chief of the Prague police signed by the newly self-appointed governor Kosima: “Die Organisation und der Wirkungsbereich [der politischen Behörden – handwritten addition] bleiben sowohl in territorialer als auch in sachlicher Hinsicht unverändert.”

As the first Czechoslovakian administrative circulars in the National Archives files assert, unpopular restrictions and control measures during the war were associated with the Austrian Empire, while the new Republic was “the triumph of national principles and, moreover, of democracy.” The political administration had to convince the citizens of its being not at the service of an “old state more and more estranged to the people’s will” and “the will of its nations”, but an offshoot of national sovereignty.²² In the “Czech or mixed districts”, the officials were asked to encourage “the [Czech] nation” to fulfil “its centuries-old dream” (of building a state)²³.

In fact, competent Czech speakers had gradually populated the Bohemian administration, which had been bilingual since the 1890s, even if they rarely reached the top of the imperial hierarchy.²⁴ In response to the cleansing demanded on the local level by the Czech National District Committees (*Okresní Národní Výbory* or ONV), often constituted by trained managers of national Czech associations, foremost the Sokol (Falcons) gymnastics society, prefects (*hejtmani*, German *Hauptmänner*) who were unpopular or too closely linked to the old regime were discharged. They constituted 10% of the total,²⁵ among them the prefect of Plzeň/Pilsen, who had had demonstrators shot at, and his colleague from Hradec Králové, Josef Smutný. As soon as 29 October 1918, the latter phoned to report that

22 All quotations from the same circular of 30.10.1918, “Die Organisation... bleib[t] unverändert”, p. 1: “Das, was der grossen Umwälzung ihr Gepräge gibt, ist – abgesehen von dem erfolgreichen Durchdringen des nationalen Gedankens – in erster Linie der Sieg der demokratischen Grundsätze [emphasis in the original] [n]ach vier Kriegsjahren, während welcher sich der alte Staat immer mehr und mehr von dem Willen und den Wünschen des Volkes entfernte [...]” John Deak and Jonathan Gumz have insisted on this dimension of an empire at war with its own population: *How to Break a State: The Habsburg Monarchy’s Internal War, 1914–1918*, In: *The American Historical Review* 122 (2017) 4, pp. 1105–1136.

23 Circular “Nové úkoly”, 30.10.1918.

24 After Richard Česaný, prefect of Chrudim (ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548, letter of the 6.11.1918). See also Martin Klečáček: *Český ministr ve Vídni: ve službách císaře, národa a politické strany* [A Czech Minister in Vienna: Working for the Emperor, the Czech People and a Political Party]. Prague 2017.

25 Martin Klečáček: *Poslušný vládce okresu. Okresní hejtman a proměny státní moci v Čechách v letech 1868–1938* [Obedient Masters of the Districts. Bohemian Prefects in Changing Times, 1868–1938]. Prague, Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2021, p. 213. See also the political administration biographies before and (despite the book’s title) after 1918 in: M. Klečáček et al.: *Slovník představitelů politické správy v Čechách v letech 1849–1918* [Heads of the Bohemian Political Administration, 1849–1918. A Biographical Dictionary]. Prague 2020.

The *Národní okresní výbor* just dropped me off because I have exposed myself too much in the interest of the Austrian state and [out of?] patriotism. I am allegedly dangerous to public peace and order. My deputy, Chief Commissioner Pacovský, would take over my duties.²⁶

The episcopal city had been shaken by strikes throughout 1918. The rural surroundings were heavily hit by grain requisitions twice as high as the year before, which were said to go to Berlin. At the beginning of October, schools were shut down for two weeks due to Spanish flu. Not rarely, the disease proved deadly among children and young people lacking proper food and heating.²⁷ The Czech Social Democrats organized a “giant” demonstration on 14 October which gave “our city a Czech appearance for the first time in the present war”, with houses decked out in Czech colours and young people wearing folk costume. A “proclamation of the Czechoslovak working people” was issued, heralding an autonomous republic.²⁸ “Forbidden to administrate” on 29 October,²⁹ the prefect retired with the assurance he could claim his pension.³⁰

Nonetheless, these measures proved insufficient in the face of the radical questioning of the administration by the ONVs, with the support of the Prague National Committee. In many districts, according to prefects’ reports, the ONVs considered that in the name of “the Czech spirit”, it was up to them to secure all local authorities.³¹ They took over two strategic activities, the distribution of foodstuffs and the direction of the gendarmerie, and organized the surveillance of the “political administration”, posting guards at the doors of the district prefectures, or even inside the buildings. They wanted to seize the administrative archives, to receive the money for the food sup-

26 “Der ‘Národní okresní výbor’ hat mich soeben für abgesetzt erklärt, weil ich mich im Interesse des österreichischen Staates und Patriotismus zu viel exponiert haben und deshalb der öffentlichen Ruhe und Ordnung gefährlich sei. Die Amtsführung würde meinem Stellvertreter, Oberkommissär Pacovský, übergehen.” ČM PM, 1-6-22-10, b. 4516, transcript of prefect Smutný’s phone call to the presidium, 29.10.1918.

27 State District Archive Hradec Králové, City Archive Hradec Králové, inventory no. 531, Pamětní kniha [Chronicle] 1918–1921, book no. 232 (henceforth Chronicle HK), pp. 101, p. 117, p. 118, p. 120.

28 Chronicle HK, pp. 122–123.

29 Chronicle HK, p. 125.

30 As M. Klečáček shows in *Poslušný vládce okresu*, pp. 213–215, the dismissal of senior officials was undertaken in a consensual manner.

31 ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548, Administrator (name unreadable), prefecture of Ledec, 7.11.1918.

plies, in short, to take the place of the administration. And worried telegraphs or telephone calls from the prefects mounted at the Bohemian government in Prague (i.e. the head of the political administration), demanding support for their own hierarchy and the end of that of the ministries for the ONVs. At Čáslav, the prefect reported with a touch of humour that the ONV had wanted to occupy his offices and isolate him in his private apartment:

I thanked these gentlemen for this suggestion [...] and refused [moreover] that they set up at the prefecture a liaison [...] who would only complicate the negotiations between the prefecture and the ONV [...]. Not to mention the secrecy of the matter: I would like to be able to handle them without fifteen people being aware.³²

What was at stake was to decide between the establishment of a fully nationalized administration under street control and the restoration of a “Weberian” administration, that is to say, a professional one only at the service of the common good, far from partisan (or national) conflicts.³³ To a large extent, Prague decided in favour of this solution, which had the advantage of not disrupting the country and relying on the ethos of the civil service, whose traditional mission was to ensure “order and calm.”³⁴ At the beginning of November, posters bloomed on the walls of the localities, showing the main points of circulars of the general government and the very first laws of the new state: the prefects – and they alone – were indeed responsible for the food supply and helped build “our dear homeland Czechoslovakia.”³⁵ ONVs were banned on 4 December.³⁶

The new state was therefore in a position to be obeyed, deriving its legitimacy from its democratic nature. However unchanged, the administration, placed under the authority of the National Committee, was no longer that of the Empire, but the emanation of popular sovereignty – which further justified state control down to the local

32 ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548, letter of the prefect Karel Vojáček, Čáslav, 25.11.1918.

33 Ph. Bezes: Construire des bureaucraties wébériennes à l'ère du New Public Management ? [Building a Weberian bureaucracy in the era of New Public Management?]. In: Critique internationale [International Review] 35 (2007), pp. 9–31, here: p. 9, pp. 11–12, p. 22.

34 Circular “Nové úkoly”, 30.10.1918.

35 ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548, posters of prefect Šprongl in Příbram (1.11.1918) and Mann in Ledec (4.11.1918).

36 “Unanimous decision of the Council of ministers, 4 December 1918”, forwarded by the presidency of the Home Ministry to the Bohemian government, 6.12.1918. ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548.

level. The Czechoslovak Republic, whose inhabitants were almost as linguistically diverse as those of the former Austria were, sought to bring together the two definitions of the term “people” as a whole, as an abstract civic community of citizens, *and* as a cultural community defined firstly by its main language and culture and therefore understood as an ethnic group. It offered the possibility for nationalisms to contribute to the construction of the new state. To put it in 1918 terms, “the affirmation of the sovereignty of the people” implied the recognition of “ideas that led the great cultured peoples, once politically reborn, to the flourishing of national forces”, after a world war that had helped ensure “the victory of the national principle.”³⁷ However, the inhabitants of the predominantly German-speaking territories seemed to refuse this offer *en bloc* between 1918 and 1919.

“The Czechs caught on more quickly.” The German secession attempt on the local level

Emperor Charles’ manifesto on 16 October 1918, which opened the door to the federalization of the Austrian part of the Empire,³⁸ launched on a provincial level intense activity building German and Czech polities on the territory in which each nationality lived. For some German-speaking representatives of Bohemia-Moravia, it looked like recognition of the efforts they had made since their election to the Austrian Imperial Assembly (the Council of the Empire – *Reichsrat*) in 1907 or to the Bohemian Diet in 1908. They wanted to ensure clear separation between the Bohemian districts on the basis of main language. During the war, they also achieved a reinforcement of the administrative status of German-speaking towns in the north. Furthermore, Wilson’s Fourteen Points, published in January 1918, provided the international basis on which it seemed the peace would be settled.

37 “Und so bekennen sich die neuen Gebilde, die auf den Trümmern der alten Ordnung entstehen, freudig zu jenen Ideen, welche den großen Kulturvölkern seit ihrer politischen Wiedergeburt eine segensreiche Entfaltung der nationalen Kräfte gebracht haben, welche heute der leidenden Menschheit den langersehnten Frieden wiederingeben – zu den Ideen, die in der Erkenntnis gipfeln, dass das Volk [sic] dessen natürliche Fähigkeiten, Begabung und Fleiß die einzige Machtquelle des Staates bilden.“ ČM PM, 1-6-28-68, b. 4548, circular of 5.11.1918.

38 See Christopher Brennan: ‘Eure Majestät fragen mich etwas spät’ (à propos de Charles Ier). In: *Austriaca*, 87 (2018), pp. 77–102.

This German-Bohemian activity was taken aback by the proclamation of a Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October. As a German politician later acknowledged, the Czechs were quicker.³⁹ On 29 October, the German-speaking representatives of Bohemia-Moravia at the Imperial Council (which still existed) proclaimed from Vienna the attachment of their constituencies to “German-Austria” (Deutschösterreich, that is to say, what remained of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and corresponds to present-day Austria). The conservative politician Rudolf Lodgman von Auen headed this attempt at regional secession.⁴⁰ Quite surprisingly, he enjoyed the support of the leader of the German-speaking Social Democrats in the Czech countries, Josef Seliger. The Social Democrats were well established in the political landscape, having won 87 of the 516 mandates in the Imperial Council elections of 1907. They hoped for a unification of the Bohemian constituencies with Germany, where the Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert became chancellor on 9 November 1918.⁴¹

For the founders of the Czechoslovakian Republic, there was no question that any inch of the Bohemian territory would be given up. Between mid-November and mid-December 1918, the newly formed Czechoslovak army, armed by the Allies, pending the final decision on the definitive state borders to be made in the forthcoming peace negotiations, occupied the secessionist districts. In this connection, our East Bohemian sources recount a serious incident which seems to have been unique in its gravity and received a great deal of attention. Nine notables or local authorities of Choustníkovo Hradiště/

39 State Regional Archive Litoměřice – henceforth SOAL – series Lodgman von Auen, b. 4, inventory no. 152: letter (copy) of deputy Josef Mayer, Eger/Cheb, to R. Lodgman von Auen, 7.01.1924. “Lieber Freund! Mit Entsetzen verfolge ich in der letzten Zeit die Verschiedenen [sic] Aufsätze, in denen sich die Führer der Umsturzeit gegenseitig die Schuld am gänzlichen Versagen unseres Volkes in den kritischen Herbsttagen 1918 vorwerfen. [...] [M]eine alte Auffassung [habe ich bestätigt], dass die Tschechen ursprünglich genau so von den Ereignissen überrascht wurden, wie wir, daß sie aber als der geschontere Teil sich rascher erfangen konnten und dann den Augenblick besser ausnützen [...]”

40 See Susanne Maurer-Horn: Die Landesregierung für Deutschböhmen und das Selbstbestimmungsrecht 1918/1919. In: *Bohemia* 38 (1997), 37–55; Hanns Haas: Im Widerstreit der Selbstbestimmungsansprüche: vom Habsburgerstaat zur Tschechoslowakei - Die Deutschen der böhmischen Länder 1918 bis 1919. In: Hans Mommsen, Dusan Kováč, Jirí Malír (eds.): *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Beziehungen zwischen Tschechen, Slowaken und Deutschen*. Essen 2001, pp. 141–220; Francesco Leoncini: *La questione dei Sudeti 1918–1938* [The Sudete Question 1918–1938]. Venezia 2005; Johann Wolfgang Brügel: *Tschechen und Deutsche*. Vol. I: 1918–1939. Munich 1967, pp. 524–525.

41 Jean-Numa Ducange: *Quel(s) droit(s) pour quel(s) peuple(s) ? Les dilemmes du socialisme autrichien. 1918–1919* [Which Right(s) for which People(s) ? The Dilemmas of Austrian Socialism. 1918–1919]. In: *Revue d'Allemagne* [German Review], 52 (2020) 2, pp. 289–302.

Gradlitz, a German-speaking locality near Dvůr Králové/Köninginhof (where the majority was Czech-speaking), were arrested on 8 December 1918 by a detachment of the Czechoslovak army after the mayor had flaunted the German colours. In Dvůr Králové, the crowd almost lynched them on the way to the prison, from where they were brought to the court in Hradec Králové.⁴² German homes in Choustníkovo Hradiště/Gradlitz were searched, and arms and food were confiscated. That same week, the imperial insignia were removed from public buildings and in the nearby village of Žireč/Schurz the soldiers were “forced”⁴³ to spit on a bust of the emperor thrown into the square.

The mix-populated district of Dvůr Králové was then beset by the hostility of the urban labouring population to the countryside, which had drastically raised food prices since the beginning of blockade by the Allies in 1916.⁴⁴ Czechs and Germans disagreed over the imperial plan to give Choustníkovo Hradiště/Gradlitz a court to reduce the influence of the nearby Czech-speaking court of Jičín. Finally, the 32 German-speaking municipalities (out of the 38 district municipalities) attempted to secede in November 1918. This accumulation of tensions can explain the degree of radicalization reached in these “revolutionary days” – revolutionary in the sense that those seen as grain hoarders were arrested, the old regime was broken with and its representatives (the mayor, two teachers and two gendarmes) were interned and mistreated by the crowd (all participating so that no one in particular could be held responsible), especially the *Gendarmeriewachtmeister* Scharf (the former direct representative of the abolished authority).⁴⁵ The trouble ended with a mandatory declaration of loyalty to

42 Offenes Schreiben an den Herrn Präsidenten der tschechoslowakischen Republik Dr. Thomas Masaryk zur Besetzung der deutschen Gemeinden des Königinhofer Bezirkes. In: Neue Trautenauer Zeitung (henceforth NTZ), 18.1.1919, front page. See also Radomír Roup: Jakschův kámen [The Jaksch Stone], In: Vlastivědné čtení o Královědvorskú [Historical Reading about the Královědvor Region], 3 (2018), pp. 26–28, here: p. 27, quoting the Schönauer Anzeiger of 29.12.1918. Unfortunately, it was impossible to compare the version printed by the newspapers with the court records, as the court in Hradec Králové referred the case to the one in Dvůr Králové, whose records are only partly accessible to research.

43 NTZ, *ibid.*

44 According to prefect Veselý of Dvůr Králové in his report of 26.8.1915: “[Ich] muss jedoch zugleich bemerken, dass die dem Landwirstestande angehörende Bevölkerung ohne Unterschied der Nationalität den wünschenswerten Sinn für das Gemeinwohl nur ins solange bekundet hat, als von Seite des Militaerärars Prämien und von Seite der Konsumenten [...] fabelhaft[e] Preise (bis 60.– K. pro q. Korn) bezahlt wurde[n].“ ČM PM, 1-6-19-14, b. 4512.

45 Cf. also villagers’ refusals to obey hunting laws in the name of liberty in January 1919, quoted by Ota Konrád in: Widersprüchlich und unvollendet. Die Demokratie der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918 bis 1938. In: Vierteljahresshefte für Zeitgeschichte 66 (2018) 2, pp. 337–349, here: p. 345.

the new regime via the public desecration of a symbol of the old regime in the village of Žireč/Schurz. The lack of support shown by the authorities (on 21 December, the Hradec Králové court freed the nine men arrested in Choustníkovo Hradiště/Gradlitz) fits in with the above-mentioned strategy of appeasement. Furthermore, some days before the 8 December incident, “several mayors of German villages” around Dvůr Králové wrote to the prefect to “assure [him] that the situation will soon clear up” (they evidently did not believe in the success of secession) and that they intended to “remain in the district and continue to supply it.”⁴⁶

This divergence of opinions is representative of the lack of uniformity, even consistency on the regional level. For his part, the German Minister Plenipotentiary in Prague stressed the difference in attractiveness of the German provinces on the other side of the border. Only “Saxony attracts”; Bavaria (then one of the poorest regions in Germany) and Prussian Silesia aroused little interest, if not none at all.⁴⁷ The troops were sent to the east of Bohemia late and briefly, whereas they had been sent to its west as early as November 1918.⁴⁸

In order to obtain an idea of public opinion in Trutnov/Trautenau, let us open the two periodicals of the time. They had been published for several decades. One, entitled *Neue Trautenauer Zeitung* from 1918 to 1919, had become nationalistic and anti-Semitic in the late 19th century. Its opposition to the young Republic was absolute and did not waver for several months. According to this publication, the whole of Eastern Bohemia was ready to secede and had only renounced by force of bayonets. The oth-

46 „Různí starostové německé mne však ujišťovali, že situace se v nejbližší době vyjasní a naznačili, že se od okresu neodloučí a dodávati budou.“ ČM PM, 1–6–22–10, b. 4516, report by the prefect Josef Ruth, Dvůr Králové, 30.11.1918.

47 „Für uns Preußen ist es nicht gerade schmeichelhaft, dass die Lust zu einer Vereinigung mit Schlesien im östlichen Böhmen weit schwächer ist, als diejenige zu einer Vereinigung mit Sachsen und Bayern in den westlicheren Gebieten. Am stärksten ist die Hinneigung zu Sachsen [...] nur die bayerischen Grenzbezirke sind für Bayern.“ Wedel (German embassy in Vienna) to Chancellor Max von Baden: Die Stimmung der Deutschböhmen (14.10.1918). In: Manfred Alexander (ed.): Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag. Innenpolitik und Minderheitenprobleme in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik. Vol. I: Von der Staatsgründung bis zum ersten Kabinett Beneš, 1918–1921. Munich 2003, p. 543.

48 Prague had the railways in Stříbro and Mariánské Lázně/Marienbad occupied as early as 11 November. The army retired soon but came back after physical assaults against local authorities on 21 November. K. Řeháček: Němci, p. 177.

er, known as the *Ostböhmisches Presse* during the period in question, remained faithful to the liberalism of its beginnings. The organ of the Trautenau linen exchange,⁴⁹ it tried harder than its competitor to provide its readers with an objective description of the world and the context of the moment. Following its front-page news between October and December 1918 shows a rapid evolution: from the preparation of the transformation of the Empire into a federation of states, we move to stupefaction on 28 October – “the world is collapsing” – and then to a succession of spotlights on the environment of the new Czechoslovakia, dominated by the fear of “Bolshevism.” The conclusion is clear: only Czechoslovakia is a reasonable option. It should be added that the Trutnov/Trautenau linen weavers had a competitive relationship with the economically mightier province of Prussian Silesia and that the memory of the miseries of the 1866 war “with Prussia” might still have been present.

Nevertheless, *a priori*, the formation of a “German” state in Bohemia-Moravia fulfilled the wishes of a German-speaking population that had been increasingly on the defensive since the 1880s due to the rise of Czech nationalism, which it interpreted as a threat of extinction.⁵⁰ So Dr. von Sterneck, prefect of Trautenau, after learning from the newspapers on 31 October that he no longer answered to the imperial and royal Bohemian administration and was now part of an administration working with the Czech National committee,⁵¹ shared his inner turmoil with his superiors. How would his German-speaking constituents understand that he refused to follow the Lodgman von Auen government in Liberec/Reichenberg, which stood in the continuity of the Empire and whose demands were based on Wilson’s Fourteen Points? At the same time, he certainly did not approve of the partitioning of the state.⁵² Apart from a few German nationalists (including the mayor), he wrote, the majority of the population and industrialists considered the attachment of their district to German-Austria an

49 Trautenau was then the capital of the Austrian linen industry. See our article on the subject: L’internationalisation des industriels liniers en Bohême du XIX^e siècle à la Première Guerre mondiale. Deux documents inédits, In: Source(s). Art, civilisation et histoire de l’Europe. Vol. 17 (2021), pp. 141–190 [online] DOI: 10.57086/sources.122.

50 See Petr Mücke, Renáta Růžičková, Jiří Vaněček. Orlíčky dolů! Východní Čechy v dokumentech z období vzniku republiky. Zámorsk 2018, pp. 53–63 for documents issued by the secessionists in North-eastern Bohemia.

51 ČM PM 1–6–22–10, b. 4516, letter from Dr Jakob Daublesky von Sterneck, prefect of Trutnov/Trautenau, 31.10.1918 at 11 pm, pp. 1–2. The letter is referring to the “decree Z 34849, also printed in Prager Tagblatt”, p. 1.

52 ČM PM 1-6-22-10, b. 4516, von Sterneck’s letter of 1.11.1918.

impossibility; “the most reasonable believe that entry into Czechoslovakia is inevitable.”⁵³ The best solution, the prefect concluded, was that his substitute swear an oath to Reichenberg while he himself took a well-deserved holiday “after four years of overwork during the war.”⁵⁴ Karel Kramář, the head of the Czechoslovak Provisional Government, actually granted himself a holiday, as well as the prefect of Braunau/Broumov, the next German-speaking city, who had chosen the same avoidance tactics.⁵⁵ On his early return on 15 December due to the occupation of Trutnov/Trautenau by the Czechoslovak army, Dr. von Sterneck had made his mind up. In Liberec/Reichenberg, secessionists retreated from a clash with the Czechoslovak army: they had failed to gather enough armed men,⁵⁶ or to secure the support of Germany.⁵⁷ An attempt to take control of the railway line between Trutnov and Liberec on 2 December had fizzled out. As for Sterneck himself, he wanted to continue to serve the state with loyalty, meaning the state as the guarantor of the laws and the public good.⁵⁸

As we see, by promoting the old organization of the territory and stability, the Republic took advantage of the divisions in German-speaking public opinion and could count on the tacit approval of a part of it. However, tensions lasted until the summer

53 “Die allgemeine Stimmung im Bezirke ist etwa folgende: Die Besonnenen halten ein Zusammengehen mit den Čechen für unerlässlich, die wirklich einsichtsvollen sogar ein Aufgehen im Čechischen Staat für das Richtige. Dem stehen aber, zunächst die Stadtvertretung gegenüber, die unbedingt einem Anschlusse an die deutschböh-mische Provinz das Wort redet [...] aber auch eine Vielheit der Bewohner [...] weniger aus Überzeugung, als aus Furcht, etwa als ‘Nicht deutsch’ gesinnt gebrandmarkt zu werden.“ ČM PM 1-6-22-10, b. 4516, Von Sterneck, 31.10.1918, p. 3.

54 Ibid.

55 ČM PM 1–6–22–10, b. 4516; letter of the Braunau/Broumov prefect, Dr Jaroslav von Kořistka, 2.12.1918. Incidentally, von Kořistka was von Sterneck’s son-in-law.

56 The German-speaking soldiers showed very little motivation to fight for secession. Hence at the beginning of November in Aussig (Ústí nad Labem), the city authority had to call the Czech military to the rescue in order to avoid looting. The German soldiers went home or even took part in the plundering: “Wir [in Aussig] müssen mit großem Bedauern und mit Beschämung feststellen, dass wir in dieser Lage tschechische Sicherheitstruppen, die uns vom Leitmeritzer Militärkommando angeboten wurden [...] anzunehmen [gezwungen waren] aus dem Grunde, weil unsere deutschen Soldaten [...] in alle Winde auseinander gestoben sind [und die Urlauber sich] an den Plünderungen in erster Reihe beteiligten.“ SOAL, series Lodgman, b. 3, no. 78, Dr Osthof’s report, 2.11.1918. See also the diplomatic report “Verhandlungen mit den Tschechen. Die Zukunft Deutschböhmens” of 13.11.1918: Von Gebattel to Chancellor Ebert on the occupation of the airport in Eger (Cheb) by “400 Czech soldiers” without any opposition from Bohemian German regiments (Alexander: Gesandtschaftsberichte, pp. 81, 107).

57 Alexander: Gesandtschaftsberichte, report of 27.11.1918, pp. 575–578.

58 ČM PM 1-6-22-10, b. 4516, von Sterneck, 22.12.1918.

of 1919. Before the definitive frontiers of Czechoslovakia were recognized (in April 1919)⁵⁹, German-Austria publicly supported the attachment of the periphery of the Bohemian quadrilateral. Parts of the German-speaking population (or at least its spokespersons) took refuge in passive resistance, pending the final decision of the peace conference, showing the same confidence in Wilson and the Fourteen Points as the Czechs almost until the signature of the Treaty of Versailles.⁶⁰ Thus, the government continued to encourage Czech speakers to make themselves more visible within the confines of the German-speaking regions. Beside other manifestations,⁶¹ the ONVs “of the Czech minority” in the mixed settlement territories were authorized by the National Council to remain in force after 4 December 1918,⁶² despite the tension their disordered initiatives fuelled.⁶³

The year 1919 began in a turbulent manner within the confines of the country. The “Bohemian-German government” still tried to maintain a shadow existence by issuing decrees and attempting to collect funds, through an appeal to the (German-speaking) population to take out loans, and it prepared clandestine elections for a German-Bohemian assembly. In the same month of January, the Trutnov/Trautenau town

59 Haslinger: Nation und Territorium, pp. 257–258.

60 For instance, a circular of the (German) municipal committee called on all villages of the Eger district to make use of their right to self-determination by insisting on being attached to Austria on the basis of Wilson’s Fourteen Points (6.1.1919) (“das vom Präsidenten Wilson feierlich verkündete Selbstbestimmungsrecht über die Staatszugehörigkeit in Anspruch nehmen”, ČM PM, 1–6–22–10, b. 4516). See also the speeches of Wilhelm Kiesewetter, a Trutnov/Trautenau councillor and popular social democratic journalist, for example on 26 January 1919 before an audience of 700 (ČM PM, 8-5-22-2, b. 5340, report of the Trutnov prefecture) or even “thousands” on 1 May 1919 (NTZ, 3.5.1919, p. 2).

61 See for example the Czech burial described by the private chronicler Oskar Nimsch: “The late Anton Melicharek, a merchant who in his lifetime had not been supported very much by the Czechs either [this probably refers to the Czech minority in Trautenau], was buried with great pomp and circumstance, with the army and the Sokol.” “Dem verstorb. tsch. [sic] Kaufmann Melicharek Anton, der auch von den Tschechen nicht sonderlich unterstützt wurde, wurde von den Tschechen ein großes Begräbnis bereitet, an der Spitze des Leichenzuges marschierten Militär u. Sokoln.” State District Archive Trutnov, series “Pozůstalost Oskara Nimsche”, b. 2: “Kronika Trutnova 1910–1934” (henceforth Nimsch’s Chronicle), p. 1715, entry of 31.3.1919.

62 Handwritten note on the “Unanimous decision of the Council of Ministers, 4 December 1918.”

63 For instance, in Trutnov/Trautenau on 15 December 1918, prefect von Sterneck had to accept a “celebration of the Czech national resurrection” (“slavnost českého Národního vzkříšení”) by members of the Czech minority, although they had not applied for due authorization. A call from the general government in Prague forbade him to oppose in any way “demonstrations of Czech spirit” (ČM PM, 1-6-22-10, b. 4516, letter 22.12.1918 and handwritten note with Prague’s order).

council was dissolved because, although it accepted members of the Czech minority, it rejected the principle of bilingualism.⁶⁴ The prefect von Sterneck was removed to Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad.⁶⁵

On 4 March 1919, the opening day of the Austrian Constituent Assembly, from which the Germans of Czechoslovakia were excluded, the German-speaking Social Democratic Party called for a general strike to protest the occupation by the Czechoslovak Army,⁶⁶ but also the end of convertibility with the Austrian currency. At that time, the already considerable weight of the left in Bohemia was reinforced by the serious social problems linked to the food shortage.⁶⁷ The call to demonstrate was taken up by the masses throughout the new Republic on 4 March (and in some cases already on the 3rd) the subject of mass emulation throughout the new Republic. The demonstrations were put down by the army, with fifty-two deaths in the Czech lands.⁶⁸ In Hostinné/Arnau (5 km south of Trutnov/Trautenau), where soldiers opened fire with machine guns, two women watching the demonstration as mere spectators were killed, whereupon the demonstrators flew into a rage and, turning on the soldiers, forced them to flee.⁶⁹

The same day, sixty kilometres away in Broumov/Braunau, a crowd of about ten thousand people threw the court's archives out of a window. When authorities sent soldiers, they happened to be from the same battalion as the rioters, some of them be-

64 Auflösung der Trautenauer Stadtverwaltung, In: NTZ 1.2.1919, front page.

65 The Bohemian political administration (former Bohemian general government) proposed to the Home Ministry as his successor Dr. Šorf, underlining that he was "an ethnic Czech" ("jenž je národnosti české"), 24.02.1919. ČM PM, 1–6–29–8. Ultimately, Dr. Jan Tauer served as prefect in Trutnov between 1919 and 1922.

66 See for example the Memorandum of the Bohemian-German government, Vienna, 11.04.1919. SOAL, Series Lodgman, b. 3, no.100.

67 "Übereinstimmende Berichte aus Deutschböhmen [...] melden, dass sich in nordböhmisches Industriebezirken Hungerkatastrophe vorbereite [...]. [Es] ist in vielen Gegenden Deutschböhmens z.B. in Karlsbad seit einem Monat nicht nur kein Fleisch und kein Fett[,] sondern nicht einmal Brot zu erhalten." SOAL, Series Lodgman, b. 4, n°116, "Telegramy do Bernu", telegram signed Lauermaann of 2.4.1919. Although well informed about the economic situation, Lodgman von Auen paid little attention to social issues (Minister Saenger to the German Foreign Office, Prague 4.11.1919, In: Alexander: Gesandtschaftsberichte, p. 217).

68 See Karl Braun: Der 4. März 1919. Zur Herausbildung sudetendeutscher Identität, In: Bohemia 37 (1996), pp. 353–380; SOAL, Series Lodgman, b. 4, no.106: Zusammenfassender Bericht über die letzten Ereignisse in Böhmen [...], Bern, April 1919, p. 2. In Cheb (Eger), Karlovy Vary and Stříbro, the army shot at the protesters (with whom the local police sided) and killed ten (K. Řeháček: Němci, p. 179).

69 NTZ, 8.03.1919, pp. 1–2, "Deutschböhmen trauert!"

ing from Braunau and the others from Náchod: a few months before, they had been fighting alongside each other at the front. Negotiations took place and the day ended without serious incident.⁷⁰ The border nevertheless remained an area of tension, with crossings to and from Germany being closely monitored. For instance, in Vrchlabí/Hohenelbe in the late March, two Germans were killed “for no good reason” by the Czech gendarmerie.⁷¹

These flashpoints notwithstanding, the situation was slowly easing. The already existing workers’ parties in the border region feared competition with the Spartacists (later to become the Communists) and they made every effort to curb their influence.⁷² For instance, the German-speaking Social Democratic Party was said to be “double-dealing”,⁷³ apparently supporting German secession, but deep down favouring joining Czechoslovakia. In March 1919, a new high-ranking officer was named to take command of the troops stationed in Trautenau, most of whom were returning from operations in Slovakia.⁷⁴ Colonel von Macha was well received, being “a former General Staff officer, most recently in Salzburg.”⁷⁵ Indeed, there were repeated peaks of tension, particularly in the June, during the conclusion of the Versailles negotiations and the municipal election campaign. Attacks on facilities of local Czech minorities (schools for example) took place. However, the municipal elections of June 1919, held for the first time on the basis of universal suffrage, seem to have marked a decisive turning point towards appeasement.

70 Account of Josef Pohl, who fought in the Second Chasseurs until the fall of 1918. Records of Heimatkreis Braunau/Sudetenland (Association of Former Inhabitants of Braunau in Bohemia), Forchheim, Bavaria, b.10/5/3, no date (1960s?).

71 Nimsch’s Chronicle p. 1715, entry of 29.3.1919: “Hohenelbe 29. März [...]. Auf der Hohenelber Straße u. bei Rennerbauden wurde je ein deutscher Mann ohne triftigen Grund von tsch. Gendarmerie angeschossen, tödlich verletzt.” (“On Hohenelbe Street and near the Renner inn, one German man was shot [in each location] [and] mortally wounded without good reason by [the] Cz. Gendarmerie”).

72 For instance, in the western part of Bohemia, Spartacists from the Bavarian towns of Selb and Klingenthal dominated the German secessionist movement of Cheb/Eger, Aš/Asch and Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad (Řeháček: *Němci*, pp. 181–182). On the animosity of the Social Democrats towards Communists on the northeastern border, see for example Franz Krejci: *Das Aupatal im Riesengebirge und seine Textilarbeiter um die Jahrhundertwende*. Aarau 1961, pp. 180–182.

73 ČM PM 1-6-22-10, b. 4516, von Sterneck, 31.10.1918. See also Alexander: *Gesandtschaftsberichte* p. 161, entry of 7.05.1919, on the closeness of the Czech and German Social Democrats.

74 Ota Holub: *Obsazení Trutnovska československou armádou a její poslání v letech 1918–1921* [The Occupation of Trutnov by the Czechoslovak Army and its Mission in 1918–1921], In: *Krkonosé–Podkrkonosí* 2 (1966), pp. 25–39.

75 Nimsch’s Chronicle, entry of 31.3.1919, p. 1715.

After the elections of June 1919: starting a new dance

Although characterized by multiple social and political disorders, at the same time the year 1919 was marked by a general tendency to reduce conflict outside the framework of institutions. The new rules of operation began to be known and accepted by a population, albeit with multiple expectations. In meeting them, Czech-speaking municipalities seem to have enjoyed an advantage over the German-speaking ones. Dr. Tauer, the official who, since the February, had been the commissioner of the Republic in charge of controlling the municipality of Trutnov/Trautenau, welcomed the newly elected officials in the July in these terms:

Ladies and Gentlemen!

[...] We all have in mind the recent events before the war, those of the war and those that accompanied the change of regime [*Umsturz*]. [...] In the Czechoslovakian state, that is to say in our Republic, liberal and democratic laws have been passed which make it possible for it to occupy one of the leading places in Europe in terms of social reforms. [...] This, however, requires our patience, our tenacity; not the passive patience that was once demanded, but the patience that comes from the intimate conviction that all progress, according to the eternal law of nature and history, can only be achieved through work, slow development, and efforts to improve [...]

The Germans have lost the war and we see to what conditions Germany and German Austria are subjected [...]. Here the Germans are on an equal footing with the Czechs and are with them on the side of the victorious Entente [...]. Soon we will see Germans and Czechs living here happily again, side by side and with each other; how they will begin to dance together again, to love each other, to marry, to send their children to each other on language exchanges, etc.⁷⁶

This conciliatory presentation of the situation ends with a long-term and depoliticized view of everyday life. In the present, it was still strained by every possible shortage the municipality was struggling to overcome. But without connection to the new state authorities, which would control the economy like in wartime until 1921, it was an almost desperate enterprise. The situation was quite different in the neighbouring town of Náchod.

76 Dr. Tauer, speech on the first meeting of the city council of Trutnov/Trautenau, 7.07.1919, published in German in *Amtsblatt der Bezirkshauptmannschaft und des Bezirksschulrates in Trautenau*, no. 8 (1.8.1919), p. 1.

Before the Great War, strong political tendencies in this small, thriving Czech-speaking town between Trutnov and Hradec Králové saw on the one side anarchist young workers and on the other “Young Czechs”, whose nationalist and democratic electorate was composed of both workers and members of the growing middle class.⁷⁷ Since 1900, these Young Czechs had dominated the town hall. In 1908, the constituents sent Young Czech deputy Jaroslav Preiss to the Bohemian parliament. In 1918, the municipality brought in the anarchists they knew already. The latter accepted a power share in order to avoid the appearance of the Communist Party in the city. Having declared themselves for the Czech National Democratic Party, founded in March 1919, the mayor Josef Čížek and the councillors maintained the best relations with Karel Kramář, the leader of the party and prime minister from November 1918 to July 1919. In addition, Kramář had recently acquired (in 1916) a spinning mill not far away in the Giant Mountains. He entered the world of Czech textile manufacturers, who generously financed the Czech National Democratic Party under the Republic – figures such as the Bartoň family, who owned and ran Náchod’s largest factory.⁷⁸ During the First Republic, the former deputy Jaroslav Preiss devoted himself to economic activities, initially as the manager of the most important Czech bank, the *Živnostenská banka*, from 1917 to 1938. In 1918, he also became the vice-president of the Central Union of the Czech Industrials (*Ústřední svaz českých průmyslníků*).⁷⁹

Here we can observe close relations between business and politics which were forged not at the end of the war, but before it. Between 1900 and 1912, the gradual opening of suffrage to male voters led to a reshaping of political forces, while the booming

77 Lydia Baštecká, Jaroslav Čáp, Jan Čížek: Vývoj městské samosprávy v Náchodě [Development of the Autonomous City Administration of Náchod]. Náchod 2007, p. 28.

78 Zdeněk Sládek: Čeští textilní průmyslníci a československá národní demokracie [Czech Textile Entrepreneurs and Czechoslovakian National Democracy] In: Z dějin textilu. Studie a materiály 11 [From the History of Textiles. Studies and Materials] (1987), pp. 183–1919, here: pp. 183,188.

79 For a biography of Preiss, see Alain Soubigou: Banques et banquiers dans la Tchécoslovaquie de Masaryk. Le cas de Jaroslav Preiss [Banks and bankers in Masaryk’s Czechoslovakia. The case of Jaroslav Preiss], In: Catherine Horel (ed.): Nations, cultures et sociétés d’Europe centrale aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Mélanges offerts à Bernard Michel [Nations, Cultures and Societies of Central Europe in the XIXth and XXth Centuries. Combinations Offered to Bernard Michel]. Paris 2006, pp. 251–264.

Czech industry allowed the promotion of new elites.⁸⁰ The compromise between political and economic actors established a strong link between Prague and Náchod, intensively connecting the peripheral textile town to the new political and economic centre after 1918.

Conversely, for the elites in Trutnov/Trautenau, it was a question of finding a place for themselves in the new Republic while retaining power at the local level, now that the census suffrage (or householder franchise) in force for municipal elections under the Empire had been abolished.

The elites themselves opened the city council to selected Social Democrats in late 1918 to make headway “under the black, red and gold banner [of German unity in 1848]”, and to Czechs in January 1919, “all speak[ing] German.”⁸¹ The elections of mid-June 1919 merely confirmed the arrival of delegates from the Czech minority and a numerous Social Democrat group. The municipality thus accepted the normal game of Czechoslovak institutions and entry into the new state,⁸² even when clashes demonstrated that links with Prague were difficult to establish.⁸³ In fact, the mayor, the former deputy Hironymus Siegel, remained a German nationalist, like many of his German-speaking colleagues from Bohemia and Moravia who, during the interwar period, belonged to Lodgman von Auen’s German National Party (DAP).⁸⁴ This party

80 For the same period, Martin Klečáček has highlighted the close ties between Czech politicians and the Bohemian–Moravian high administration, which continued unchanged after 1918. See M. Klečáček, *Převzetí moci*, p. 696 about Jan Kosima, and *Český ministr ve Vídni*.

81 Erste Sitzung des Gemeinderats, In: NTZ, 18.1.1919, p. 4. Although divergences quickly emerged between “nationalists” and the socialists, on 1 May 1919, the Social Democrats marched with the slogan “Proletarians of all countries unite”, while the National Socialists (markedly less numerous) followed the black, red and gold flag. Nevertheless, the two processions met up in the city square in the name of German unity (Erster Mai. In: NTZ, 3.5.1919, p. 2).

82 For instance, Councillor Mainr held a vote that passed “unanimously without debate” on the financing of Czech courses in the Trutnov/Trautenau schools at the city’s expense (the state took it over after 1919). *Aus der Trautenauer Stadtvertretung*. In: NTZ, 9.8.1919, p. 3.

83 In August 1919, the mayor and three councillors were rebuffed when they attempted to address Minister Klofáč in Prague (concerning the town’s difficulties supplying the local garrison) because they did not speak Czech. (*Der Trautenauer Bürgermeister muss Tschechisch können*. In: NTZ 16.8.1919, p. 6, quoting the newspaper *Bohemia* of 14.8.1919).

84 Rudolf Jaworski: *Vorposten oder Minderheit? Der sudetendeutsche Volkstumskampf in den Beziehungen zwischen der Weimarer Republik und der CSR*. Stuttgart 1977, p. 69.

granted relative independence to its members. It was personalities that carried the elections more than a program, as before the introduction of universal suffrage in municipal elections. Barely represented on the national level, the party existed only as an emblem of Germanness in Czechoslovakia.

This did not preclude other social groups from making greater integration efforts, provided that the new state met their expectations. During 1919, the chronology of the politico-social demands of the German-speaking districts of Eastern Bohemia was in line with that of the Czech districts. The reports of the prefect of Náchod, for example, show a rise in tensions from mid-January 1919 to September due to unemployment. The lack of raw materials aggravated food shortages: starving workers found no work in idle textile factories.⁸⁵ The decoupling of the Czechoslovak *koruna* from the Austrian currency in February, though the latter was in a vertiginous fall, was poorly received everywhere. Grain distribution bureaus were subject to strong criticism that sometimes spilled over into physical aggression. Thus, the fall in the prices of staple foods had become one of the mainstays of social democracy.⁸⁶ If employed, the workers demanded a wage increase of at least 50 per cent to cover the high cost of living.⁸⁷

In the mid-May, the demonstrations took on the appearance of insurrection in Náchod. The district had 4,500 unemployed, barely 500 of whom could benefit from the public interest works funded by the local authorities. "Appeals against state bodies and employers" were heard.⁸⁸ Beside intervention with the Ministry of Commerce

85 On 30.4.1919, the prefect of Nová Paka reported that no textile factory was working in the district due to a lack of raw materials (ČM PM, 8–1–55–11, 1919).

86 In the spring of 1920 for example, the city hall of Hradec Králové authorized 46 members of the Social Democratic party to enquire "tactfully" about the prices in the city's shops (ČM PM, 1–6–19–11, report of the prefecture to the Home Ministry in response to Senator Josef Thoř's claim, 23–24.6.1920).

87 Informační zprávy politických úřadů [Weekly Prefectural Reports], State District Archive of Náchod, presidentiální spisy 1918–1939, b. 19, J 80, 1919; ČM PM, 8–5–22–2, b. 5340, military police report on the strike in the Úpa/Aupa Valley, 29.2.1919; front page of Vorwärts (Social Democratic newspaper of Liberec/Reichenberg) of 27.5.1919 on the successful textile workers' general strike in Northern Bohemia. See also the series Dělnické hnutí 1919, 1920 (Workers' Movement 1919, 1920) published by the Bohemian political administration in Prague (ČM PM, 8–1–55–11).

88 ČM PM, 8–1–55–11, report of the Náchod prefecture to the Ministry of Social Care, 17.5.1919.

to accelerate the arrival of cotton wagons, an inter-ministerial meeting was then convened in Prague to discuss specific social measures: roadworks and train shipments of American rye.⁸⁹ Shortly thereafter, these measures were extended to the other municipalities in Eastern Bohemia, without privileging the Czech ones. They were part of a political consensus at the end of war to make Czechoslovakia a “social Republic” with some of the highest social spending in Europe.

Post-war difficulties were indeed the same for everyone in Czechoslovakia. In the archives consulted, the only experience formulated jointly by members of different social groups concerned the war disabled and support for dead soldiers' families. In the conservative Hradec Králové, for example, the freethinking newspaper *Kraj Královéhradecký* could call on the Catholic ladies of the Red Cross to collaborate with the nondenominational Republic on their behalf;⁹⁰ in the same way, of all the Trutnov/Trautenau associations founded or re-founded in the immediate post-war period, only the Red Cross was supranational.⁹¹ The German-speaking war-disabled protested (they and the “very numerous” women who accompanied them)⁹² with the same intensity as in the Czech districts. They used the same classical forms of parliamentary democracy that were already well established in Bohemia, especially the petition solemnly transmitted to the prefecture in the company of local politicians and sent to the competent ministry, in this case the Ministry of Social Care, in Prague.⁹³ Old habits of a “nationalized” society in which each linguistic group organized itself without collaboration with the other one⁹⁴ soon took over again. The German-speaking war disabled tried to open their own emergency funds “for fear of being reduced to the smallest portion” in a common fund because they were not Czech. As this was not possible, they openly placed

89 Ibid., final report of the inter-ministerial meeting of 20.5.1919 (copy).

90 “Občanstvu okresu královéhradeckého!” [To the Citizens of the Hradec Králové District!]. Appeal to the population signed Jan Černý, head of the Hradec Králové ONV. In: *Kraj Královéhradecký* 2.11.1918, p. 1.

91 State District Archive Trutnov, Okresní úřad 1910–1936, Spolky a politické strany [Associations and political parties], 18–22–1.

92 NTZ, 6.12.1919, p. 2.

93 Here: ČM PM, 8–5–22–2, b. 5340, report about a demonstration with around 500 participants on 22.02.1919 in Trutnov.

94 See Kristina Kaiserová, Jiří Rak (eds.): *Nacionalizace společnosti v Čechách 1848–1914* [The Nationalization of Bohemian Society, 1848–1914]. Ústí nad Labem 2008.

conditions on their loyalty to the state: the state had to guarantee them social benefits in the due proportions.⁹⁵

Conclusion

The transition in Bohemia to a republic that would avoid a Bolshevik-type revolution was based, on the local level, on a strong continuity of state administration and on the military occupation of the borders. In a society organized in a quasi-communitarian way in two groups divided according to the Czech and German languages, the ex-Austrian administration in Prague succeeded in convincing the Czech speakers of its national spirit and the German speakers that they would receive fair treatment. Using its knowledge of sub-state contexts, it worked to establish the Republic by taking advantage of the diversity of local opinions and interests. The integration was noticeably quicker when the local elites were well connected to the centre. In Náchod, these ties were strengthened around the provincial elections of 1908. After the war, local elites and national politicians came closer again, gathering around Karel Kramář and Jaroslav Preiss, who were now in key positions in the young Republic, while the municipality managed to integrate workers' representatives, including anarchists, in the name of the Czech nation.

The situation in the German-speaking districts was more difficult, as there was very little scope for interaction between German and Czech speakers. The representatives of the German-speaking districts had to build networks with Prague. In the sources consulted, the mediation of high-ranking officials and officers appears to have been indispensable. Despite some reassignments, most of the officials remained in their posts. Reports of the state representatives working in Trutnov/Trautenau show that the citizens felt understood when they had to deal with people who spoke the same language as them and who could act as a bridge between them and the central au-

95 An attitude justified by Eckert, Trutnov leader of the war-disabled, at the demonstration of 30 November 1919: "If we are citizens of this state, we have to defend our rights"; "all nations are to cooperate to build this state" (NTZ, 6.12.1919, p. 2). Natali Stegmann observed the same attitude in 1923 in Cheb, where some speakers said, at the meeting of 18.11.1923 "Unser Vaterland ist dort, wo man für uns sorgt." Cited in: *Deutsche Kriegsgeschädigte in der Tschechoslowakei 1918–39*. In: *Bohemia* 48 (2008) 2, pp. 440–463, here: p. 446.

thorities. It was also a matter of learning the new rules of the game. The social benefits related to the human losses of the war seem to have been at the centre of this learning process.

Finally, our examination of local sources shows that the Republic was accepted earlier than suggested by studies based on the central archives, which focus on the parliamentary elections of 1920. By the end of November 1918, some of the actors appearing in the documents consulted seemed to have made up their minds, and as soon as the municipal elections of June 1919 were over, the majority of political actors began to work on the “social contract” to be concluded with the new state.

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Zusammenfassung

Böhmens Ostgrenze im Wandel, 1918–1919

Der Übergang Böhmens zu einer Republik, der eine Revolution nach bolschewistischem Vorbild vermeiden sollte, beruhte auf einer starken Kontinuität der staatlichen Verwaltung und auf der militärischen Besetzung der Grenzen. In einer quasi kommunal organisierten Gesellschaft, die in zwei nach tschechischer und deutscher Sprache getrennte Gruppen aufgeteilt war, bemühte sich die Verwaltung in Prag, wie aus den Akten des Prager Nationalarchivs hervorgeht, die tschechischsprachige Bevölkerung von ihrem nationalen Geist und die deutschsprachige Bevölkerung von einer gerechten Behandlung zu überzeugen. Dank ihrer Kenntnis der lokalen Zusammenhänge konnte sie sich die Vielfalt der lokalen Meinungen und Interessen zunutze machen.

Die Fallstudie in Ostböhmen zeigt, dass die Integration spürbar schneller vorstättenging, wenn die lokalen Eliten gut mit dem neuen politischen Zentrum Prag verbunden waren. In Náchod/Nachod wurden bereits im Zusammenhang mit den Provinzwahlen von 1908 Beziehungen zu bedeutenden Politikern geknüpft. In Trutnov/Trautenau scheint die Vermittlung durch hochrangige Beamte und Offiziere nach dem Dezember 1918 unverzichtbar gewesen zu sein.

Für die Bürger ging es auch darum, die neuen Spielregeln zu erlernen, zum Beispiel durch die Inanspruchnahme von Sozialleistungen im Zusammenhang mit den menschlichen Verlusten im Krieg. Sobald die Kommunalwahlen vom Juni 1919 beendet worden waren, also lange vor den Parlamentswahlen von 1920, auf die sich die meisten Studien bisher konzentriert haben, begann die Mehrheit der lokalen politischen Akteure einen „Sozialvertrag“ auszuarbeiten, der mit dem neuen Staat geschlossen werden sollte.

Abstract

Bohemia's Eastern Border in Transition, 1918–1919

Bohemia's transition to a republic that would avoid a Bolshevik-type revolution was based on a strong continuity of state administration and on the military occupation of the borders. In a society organized in a quasi-communitarian way in two groups divided according to the Czech and German languages, the administration in Prague, as files from the National Archive in Prague show, endeavoured to convince the Czech speakers of its national spirit and the German speakers that they would receive fair treatment. Using its knowledge of sub-state contexts, it was able to take advantage of the diversity of local opinions and interests.

The case study in Eastern Bohemia shows that the integration was noticeably quicker when the local elites were well connected to the new political centre, Prague. In Náchod, ties had already been built with politicians of stature around the provincial elections of 1908. In Trutnov/Trautenau, the mediation of high-ranking officials and officers appears to have been indispensable after December 1918.

For the citizens, it was also a matter of learning the new rules of the game, for example by claiming social benefits related to the human losses of the war. Thus, as soon as the municipal elections of June 1919 were over, i.e. long before the parliamentary elections of 1920 on which most studies have focused so far, the majority of local political actors began to work on the "social contract" to be concluded with the new state.

Keywords: Transition to the Czechoslovak republic, Weberian administration, Eastern Bohemia, local collective actors, learning process of new political rules