

CIVIL SERVANTS UNDER CHANGING REGIMES

IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN
EUROPE IN THE FIRST HALF
OF THE 20TH CENTURY



edited by Veronika Szeghy-Gayer

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CSPV  SAV

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Institute of Social Sciences CSPS
Slovak Academy of Sciences
Košice 2024

First published 2024

by the Institute of Social Sciences CSPS Slovak Academy of Sciences

Karpatská 5, 04001 Košice, Slovak Republic

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The monograph was supported by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of
Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (VEGA), project n.
2/007722 and by the Slovak Research and Development Agency (APVV), project
n. APVV-23-0418.

Cover illustration: Members of the National Economic Association of Postmen in
Héviz in 1939

Fortepan / Maklári Péter, no. 900008

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ISBN 978-80-8298-001-4

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FOREWORD

The civil service constituted a key stabilizing component in all political regimes of Central and Eastern Europe during the 20th century, whether democratic or non-democratic, but recent research has suggested that the role of state and local bureaucracies might also be crucial in times of crisis and amidst changes in regimes and borders. This volume presents a series of studies which investigate selected groups of civil servants or individual career paths in the context of the changing borders and shifting political systems in the period between the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the years immediately following the end of the Second World War. Each chapter reflects upon how a wide range of functionaries at different levels of public administration, including heads of counties, prefects, mayors, policemen, foresters, state-employed actresses and many others, experienced the transition from one state to another. The studies explore how civil servants survived these transitional periods and the extent to which they adapted to the new circumstances.

Recent thematic monographs that contribute to historical discourse on the civil service and bureaucracy have primarily focused on the long 19th century and the period of the Habsburg Monarchy,¹ while a substantial part of more modern research has scrutinized the post-imperial transition from 1918 to 1920.² The papers presented in this monograph shed new light on the history of civil servants in the context of the shifting nation-building policies of post-Habsburg Central and Eastern Europe. Most of the chapters deepen our understanding of the experiences of civil servants from a micro-historical or individual perspective, while others focus on specific geographical regions or counties and the fate of their administrative elites. The authors attempt to answer questions that are related to their specialized field of research, but they all share a desire to expand our knowledge about the attitudes of civil servants to regime changes and the strategies which they employed to survive or develop their careers.

As a number of recent historiographical surveys have highlighted, there was a significant continuity in terms of administrative personnel in most of the successor states of the Habsburg Empire.³ Building upon this new research trend, the first chapter of the book focuses on the question of the loyalty and identity of civil servants in times of change, exploring the topic through a study of some examples from interwar Ro-

¹ Franz Adlgasser and Fredrik Lindström eds., *The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond. Bureaucracy and Civil Servants From the Vormärz to The Inter-War Years* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2019); also noteworthy in this context was the conference titled Habsburg Civil Servants: Beyond the State Apparatus organized in January 2022 by Daša Ličen and Alexander Maxwell.

² Peter Becker et al. *Hofratsdammerung?: Verwaltung und ihr Personal in den Nachfolgestaaten der Habsburgermonarchie 1918 bis 1920* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2020).

³ See, for example, Tomasz Pudłocki and Kamil Ruszała eds. *Postwar Continuity and New Challenges in Central Europe, 1918-1923. The War That Never Ended* (New York-London: Routledge, 2022).

mania and Czechoslovakia.⁴ Egry Gábor's comprehensive analysis highlights the key variants of personal continuities and their significance in terms of the state-building activities of the Kingdom of Romania in the mid-1930s, showing that career opportunities were available to both Romanian and non-Romanian civil servants within the new administration, even though this potential was different for non-Romanians with the exception of a small number of experts. In a chapter with close links to Egry Gábor's study, Zsolt Szabó examines the career strategies of the Maramureş-based Mihályi family. Szabó adopts a prosopographic analysis of the county elite of this multiethnic border region, exploring the role of education, social milieu, political context and local customs in shaping national identity in an effort to discern the different layers of the complex identity of this family of functionaries. Similarly, Szabolcs Czáboczký's paper investigates a historical county that, as with Maramureş, was notable for its religious, ethnic and social diversity. His analysis of the activities and careers of two mayors from the region of Spiš (in present-day Slovakia) expands upon the wider context of inter-war Czechoslovakia with a particular focus on these politicians' ambiguous relationship with Hungarian oppositional parties.

The authors who feature in the second thematic section of the book draw upon specific types of sources to bring a more personal perspective to the issues at hand. Depictions of government employees in fictional works are highlighted in Therese Garstener's study which offers a unique and thought-provoking insight into the professional practice and interactions in both the office environment but also the private lives of Austrian state functionaries from the 1920s to the 1940s. Her analysis is followed by a study co-written by Veronika Kršková and Vojtěch Kessler which draws attention to the value and significance of ego-documents in research on civil servants. The two academics' research presents the mental framework and individual perspective of historical reality as perceived by Karel Machart, a Czech gendarme who was also the author of an interesting literary legacy.

The third thematic section of the collection is dedicated to the question of refugees in post-WWI Hungary, a topic which has attracted increasing academic attention in recent years, especially among Hungarian historians.⁵ Balázs Ablonczy investigates the heterogeneous groups of Hungarian refugees in the county of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun, the largest and most populous county in post-WWI Hungary, using the county as a case study for detailing the integration process of refugees arriving from the territories ceded as part of the Treaty of Trianon. This study is followed by an article co-written by Róbert Balogh and Péter Homor which points out that a large number of civil servants

were employed in the Hungarian forestry administration. Their research demonstrates that the presence of refugee foresters interacted with general economic conditions as well as with the specific situation in the forest economy.

The fourth thematic section of the collection presents the latest findings in the historiography of the civil service in the context of the Second World War and totalitarian regimes. Zuzana Tokárová contributes to a deeper academic understanding of the role of public employees in the Aryanization of Jewish property in the wartime Slovak state. Her article examines the social mobility of civil servants and their career paths by concentrating on a small group of individuals from the town of Prešov. The following sub-chapter brings a new perspective to the hitherto neglected issue of the so-called Nyilas perpetrators at the end of WWII in the Slovak-Hungarian border region. Veronika Szeghy-Gayer explores the life trajectory of a notorious police detective from Košice, reconstructing his dramatic transformation from upright citizen to brutal killer. In the third paper of this thematic section, Andrea Lőrincz examines the post-war vetting of state-employed actresses of the Budapest National Theater, who were forced to give an account of their behavior before and during the war, as well as their participation in right-wing movements and their role as mediators of ideology.

The final section of the volume concentrates on the establishment of the state administration during the crisis period of the postwar years. Both Étienne Boisserie and David Hubený investigate a specific region of the first Czechoslovak Republic. Boisserie addresses the issue of county administrators in the territory of Slovakia and examines the administrative responsibilities of the new Czechoslovak heads of the counties, the župans, and their task of integrating Slovakia into the new state. Hubený uses Czech archival sources to describe the difficulties the Czechoslovak state faced in establishing its authority and legitimacy in the example of the formation of the state security offices in the border region of Carpathian Ruthenia. Finally, in the last paper of the volume, Eszter Tarnai compares the administrative career of two individuals who participated in managing the public food supply crisis caused by the Second World War in Hungary.

I would like to thank Balázs Ablonczy and Gábor Egry for supporting my research on the civil service during the course of my postdoctoral years and for giving me the opportunity to be a part of their academic project teams. Similarly, I am especially grateful to John Deák, Ondrej Ficeri, Denisa Fedáková, Csilla Fedinec, Patrícia Fogelová, Anna Kalistová, Michal Kšinan, Thomas Lorman and Vlad Popovici for their willingness to donate their precious time in helping me to prepare this volume. Last but not least, it should be remembered that this volume is the result of the collaboration of experts from Slovakia and abroad who participated in the international scientific conference titled *Public Employees in Changing Regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the First Half of the 20th Century*, organized by the Institute of Social Sciences CSPS of the Slovak Academy of Sciences on April 26-27, 2023 in Košice, in cooperation with the Košice City Archives, the Ján Bocatius Public Library of Košice and the Historical Association of Košice.

Veronika Szeghy-Gayer

⁴ The question of loyalty is discussed in the study by Patrícia Fogelová. See: Patrícia Fogelová, "Lojalita medzi demokraciou a totalitou. Postoje, praktiky a utváranie sietí mestského úradníka v Košiciach v rokoch 1938 – 1948," in *Verejní zamestnanci v meniacich sa režimoch v prvej polovici 20. Storočí*, eds. Veronika Szeghy-Gayer (Košice: Spoločenskovedný ústav CSPV SAV, v.v.i., 2024), 16-35.

⁵ In addition to the literature referenced in chapters 6 and 7 of this book, see also: Gábor Koloh, "The Number of Trianon Refugees," *Regional Statistics* 11, 2021, no 4 (2021): 170-181; Gábor Egry, "Magyar Returnees and Political Radicalization in Post-World War I Hungary" in *Migration and Population Politics during War(time) and Peace(time) Central and Eastern Europe from the Dawn of Modernity to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Andrei Cuşco, Flavius Solomon and Konrad Clewing (Cluj-Napoca: Editura MEGA, 2021), 253-270.

I.
CAREER PATHS IN
INTERWAR ROMANIA AND
CZECHOSLOVAKIA

1. Loyal, but to Whom? Career Patterns From Minority to Majority and From Majority to Minority in Post-WWI Romania

Egry Gábor

The notorious Romanian language evaluations conducted across all branches of the Romanian civil service from 1933 and 1935 placed the prefect of Trei Scaune county (Háromszék in Hungarian) in an extremely difficult position. The situation had arisen on the basis of an arbitrary decision made by Dumitru Luca, the undersecretary of state at the Ministry of the Interior and the prefect's superior in the chain of command of the administration. Luca's decision pertained to the evaluation of the compulsory language exams taken by minority public employees conducted at the end of the previous year. At these exams the prefect himself was the head of a three-member commission – alongside him composed of the director of a state secondary school and a secondary school professor of Romanian language – and as such he was responsible for the process and its results. The premise of these commissions all over the country was that the examinees had to gain a result not lower than 5 on a 1-10 grade scale – customary for Romanian education at all levels –, and the lists of failed and successful candidates and the civil servants concerned most probably already knew what to expect.¹

However, in the very early days of the New Year (1935), Luca surprised prefects all across the country by issuing a directive stating that a grade of 5 was also to be considered as a fail, while examinees who had obtained grades between 5 and 6 (the grading was an average of oral and written sections which meant that fractional grades were also possible) were to be reexamined.² This decision came as a bombshell to the prefect of Trei Scaune county, and he was faced with the dilemma of what to do with the large number of his subordinates who had gained grades of between 5 and six, a result which was not surprising in a region where well over 80% of the population spoke Hungarian as their mother tongue and had a poor or negligible command of Romanian. Like the overwhelming majority of his colleagues in Transylvania, a region which had been

¹ See Gábor Egry, "Unholy Alliances? Language Exams, Loyalty, and Identification in Interwar Romania", *Slavic Review* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 959-982.

² Arhivele Nationale Istorice Centrale Bucharest (hereinafter ANIC), Ministerul de Interne (MinInt) inv. no. 754, folder no. 175/1935, f. 3.

annexed to Romania from Hungary in 1920, the prefect sought to find a compromise solution that could avoid the worst consequences of the ruling from the capital and salvage the careers of those who had fallen victim of this unexpected change in the rules. He was, however, unique among other high level administrator-politicians in terms of the blatant manner in which he did so, an approach in which his fellow committee members were clearly complicit. In most cases prefects used delaying tactics or ensured that the repeat exams were arranged in favor of examinees. Others contested Iuca's ordinance through the courts or in second instance disciplinary bodies, the so-called Commission of Revision (Comisia de Revizuire) which had the authority to reinstate state employees who had been dismissed based on their exam results. The prefect in Sfântu Gheorghe, however, opted for neither of these paths and chose instead to simply reconvene the commission in order to draft a new protocol of the original examination which explicitly stated that the committee had committed a serious mistake at the first examination of three village notaries because they had intended to grant the examinees grades of 7 rather than the grade 5s they had actually received.³

While this specific case – and that of the example of the language exams as a whole – contradicts the usual perception of interwar Romania as a state which ruthlessly enforced Romanian nationalism by all means and at all levels, the most significant aspect of the affair for this chapter is the issue of loyalty in the context of state administration between Romanian and minority state employees and officials. This type of loyalty certainly took a specific form rather than a mechanical, bureaucratic one, nor did it suggest the simple acceptance of the legitimacy of the hierarchy within the state apparatus in a Weberian sense, although this kind of loyalty can also be discerned within this sequence of events. The fact that thousands of non-Romanian civil servants, many of whom had been serving continuously since 1918-1919 or had subsequently joined the public administration, were tested for their fluency in Romanian testifies to the fact that public service in the nationalizing state was neither impossible nor an anathema for non-Romanians, at least during the first fifteen years from the annexation of the Hungarian territories. Moreover, as the content of the exams shows, many non-Romanians, especially modernizers or members of the middle classes, had found ways to identify with the state, with this identification engendering a more emotional loyalty demonstrated by devotion to the state's goals.⁴

The steps taken of the examination commission are therefore indicative of an emotional aspect of loyalty and the existence of a sense of mutual obligation which Peter Haslinger and Joachim von Puttkamer have characterized as an emotional-ethical loyalty. This form of loyalty is based on mutual obligations and should be understood less

as a relationship between individuals and more as the result of the fulfillment of normative expectations from both sides. In turn, this approach facilitates a second aspect of loyalty, namely the acceptance and the predictability and stability that are conducive to fostering a loyalty that also exists beyond the bounds of mere personal ties. Finally, such norms and expectations can pervade political discourse as discursive loyalty, a factor which was particularly notable in the example of the introduction of civil service statutes in the immediate post-1919 Romanian context.⁵ This legislation accompanied the administrative unification and integration of the newly-acquired territories and sought to offer stability in terms of the conditions and responsibilities of public servants and offer the necessary entitlements to carry out impartial administration and lead exemplary middle-class lives, although the process of its legislation, which took around three years in case of the statute and another two years to enact the unified administration, was fraught with political and labor struggles, often revolving around the issue of what was to be expected from loyal civil servants and what were they entitled to in order to ensure that they stood above political considerations.⁶

Loyalty to the more consolidated Romanian state of the 1930s, however, was very different from that of the transitional period from Dualist-era Hungary to Romania in the years after the First World War.⁷ The very essence of the events of the post-WWI years revolved around the meaning of loyalty to the state, a question that vexed civilians and state administrators alike: what did it mean to switch allegiance from Hungary to Romania? Decisions on this issue were often cast in extreme moral terms, seen as a matter of life or death for the state, a betrayal of Hungary or as a legitimation of an unjust settlement and the imposition of Romanian rule over a region which many saw as inherently non-Romanian. The strength of such emotional-political claims and demands is apparent in the fact that the significant level of continuity among civil servants between pre-war Hungary and post-war Romania went largely unremarked upon in both the inter-war period and after 1945.⁸ Fortunately, continuity is no longer a taboo issue, and recent studies have confirmed its significance in the new Romanian state.⁹ Thus, in this chapter the issue which I aim to address is the role of the pre-1918 expe-

⁵ Peter Haslinger and Joachim von Puttkamer, "Staatsmacht, Minderheit, Loyalität—konzeptionelle Grundlagen am Beispiel Ostmittel—und Südosteuropa in der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Staat, Loyalität und Minderheiten in Ostmittel—und Südosteuropa 1918–1941*, eds. Peter Haslinger and Joachim von Puttkamer (München, 2007), 1-16.

⁶ Andrei Florin Sora, "Funcția publică și funcționarii publici în România în primii ani după Marele Război, 1918-1923" in *Lungul drum spre primul Statut al funcționarilor publici din România Deziderate, (ante)proiecte, legislație, opinii și dezbateri (1918-1923)*, eds. Florina Sas and Andrei Florin Sora (Cluj-Napoca: Editura MEGA, 2019), 11-52.

⁷ See Svetlana Suvieca, *Basarabia in primul deceniu interbelic (1918-1928). Modernizare prin reforme*, (Chisinau: Pontos, 2010); Francesco Magno, *Dagli imperi alla nazione. Eredità giuridiche asburgiche e zariste nella Grande Romania, 1918-1927* (Roma: Editura Viella, 2023).

⁸ Gábor Egry, *Etnicitás, identitás, politika. Magyar kisebbségek nacionalizmus és regionalizmus között Romániában és Csehszlovákiában 1918-1944* (Budapest: Napvilág, 2015); Gábor Egry, "Belátható-e felülről, ami alulról látható? Válasz Bárdi Nándornak," *Regio* 26, no. 2 (2018).

⁹ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, "Une analyse statistique du personnel de l'administration publique départementale de Transylvanie pendant son intégration administrative au royaume de Roumanie (1918-1925)," *Histoire et Mesure* 37, no. 2 (2022): 99-124.

³ Gábor Egry, "Unholy Alliances?" 975-976; ANIC Min Int, inv. no. 754, folder no. 175=1935, f. 84-87, Notably, Iuca himself fell for this ruse and sent a letter to the central disciplinary commission of the Ministry in which he claimed that the notaries had been reexamined. See f. 96.

⁴ Gábor Egry, "Unholy Alliances?"; Martin Schulze-Wessel, "'Loyalität' als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept: Zur Einleitung," in *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918-1938: Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeit*, ed. Martin Schulze-Wessel (München, 2004), 2-3.

rience of civil servants (both Romanian and non-Romanian) in their subsequent post-WWI careers. In what sense was this experience an asset to Romania and why and how was such experience integrated into a new framework of loyalty within the new state?

In order to develop this argument, I will first offer a brief introduction to the general political and legal context of the transition, including the degree of continuity in terms of civil servants, the legal changes which were introduced, and the normative and functional aspects of the Romanian state. I will then use individual examples to highlight some of the more general features of the transition in terms of personnel continuity and in civil service careers to highlight the factors behind careers, the “glass ceilings” to promotion imposed on both Romanians and non-Romanians, and the role of local contexts in what appears to be more of a patchwork of sovereignty than a unified state. I will argue that pre-1918 experiences were crucial in managing the diversity of the state and that civil servants who credibly undertook to do so gained positive career opportunities, albeit with geographic limitations. As a result, professionalization was intrinsically connected with politics, while loyalty to the state was also fostered through the replacement of institutional obligations with close personal relationships.

AN ADMINISTRATION IN TRANSITION

Interwar Romania had established an administration that was built on entirely different principles from those of Hungary under the Dual Monarchy, favoring a centralizing approach rather than the municipalism of the pre-war Hungarian authorities, but the path towards its implementation was somewhat prolonged; the law on administrative unification was passed as late as 1925 and only came into force on January 1st, 1926. Prior to the introduction of the new legislation, civil administration was conducted under the general provisions of Hungarian administrative law with various amendments being made by the incorporation of special laws or government decrees. More importantly, the most important principle of Hungarian administration, the autonomy of the mid-level territorial units of the county and of cities with municipal rights had been de facto abrogated as early as 1918, a development that completely transformed the ways in which politics interfered with administration.¹⁰

This cornerstone of the Hungarian administration was a combination of state organs and politically autonomous bodies. The right of self-government was enshrined in both law and historical tradition and allowed the administration to act as the distant arm of the government. Counties were led by two officials: the lord lieutenant (*főispán* or *prefect*) appointed by the government and the deputy lord lieutenant (*alispán* or

subprefect) elected by the municipal assembly.¹¹ While the system was originally built around this duality of county officials elected by the autonomous municipal assembly being supervised by royal delegates, the prerogatives of lord lieutenants grew over time and they were later able to successfully interfere with the operation of the municipal administration. Lord lieutenants had the right to appoint several lower and mid-level positions and also served as chairman of the nomination committee of the municipality. This seven-member body included three members appointed by the lord lieutenant and three members elected by the municipal assembly and was responsible for nominating all elected positions, including the position of deputy lord lieutenant (the administrative leader of the county apparatus) and the district chiefs (*főszolgabíró* or *prim-pretor*). Ultimately, the municipal assembly retained the final vote, half of whose members were recruited from among the highest taxpayers of the county with the other half being elected by voters on parliamentary electoral rolls from single member constituencies.¹²

Despite the continuing professionalization of the administration structure, this system meant that the recruitment and promotion of county officials remained largely dependent on contingent local contexts and conditions, and this was also reflected in the considerable disparities in salaries and pension. Mandatory qualification requirements for public employees – most notably a degree in law and “state science” (*államtudomány*, *Staatswissenschaft*) were first introduced in 1870 for the highest-ranking county officials (*alispán*/subprefect, *főjegyző*/chief notary, *árvaszéki elnök*/head of the orphans’ court) and this was later extended to all county officials in 1883. At the turn of the century, village notaries were required to possess a secondary school qualification and to have passed a specialized course too.¹³ Despite these efforts, positions within the central administration were still considered political appointments as county politics were often aligned with party loyalties – to either nationalist parties or to the warring pro-independence and pro-compromise factions of Hungarian parties – or revolved around clientelist networks.¹⁴ Moreover, the whole county apparatus, but most notably

¹¹ Judit Pál, “Who owns the land, owns the country? Land Tenure and Geographic Distribution of the Aristocratic Lord-Lieutenants’ in Dualist-Era Hungary,” *Historický časopis* 71, no. 3 (2023): 433-472; Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “Representatives of the Central Authority and County Administration in Transylvania (1867-1925),” *Journal of Modern European History* 21, no. 4 (2023): 458-473.

¹² Law 1886: XXI on municipalities §§ 82-85.

¹³ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “De la aleșii comitatului la birocrăți. O analiză statistică a nivelului profesionalizării/deprofesionalizării funcționarilor publici județeni din Transilvania anilor 1918-1925,” in *România interbelică: Modernizare politico-instituțională și discurs național*, eds. Oliver Jens Schmidt and Sorin Radu (Iași: Polirom), 159-194, 163.

¹⁴ Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874-1946* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Monographs, 1995); András Cieger, “Interests and Strategies. An Investigation of the Political Elite of the Sub-Carpathian Region in the Age of Dualism (1867-1918)” in *Elites and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici (Peter Lang, 2014), 191-210.

¹⁰ Andrei Florin Sora, “Funcția publică”; Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “Une analyse statistique”.

the district chiefs,¹⁵ played an instrumental role in parliamentary elections as they were responsible for managing the composition of electoral rolls and the mobilization and demobilization of voters and also controlled the publicity opportunities available to the various campaigns through their authority to ban public gatherings. The importance of the county structure in politics and the influence of local politics on county assembly decisions led to arrangements between local elites and central governments over the sharing of power and resources that would enable local elites to dominate their counties while providing electoral support for the governing party.¹⁶ In contrast to the county administration, organs of the ministries were gradually extended to the counties (for example, the tax authorities, the forestry commission, state construction offices and the mining administration), an approach which represented a completely different, centralized model of governing.

Hungarian politics in the pre-WWI period was moving towards the takeover of the entire county administration by the state, but although this development was widely expected, no actual administrative reform was undertaken, and by-elections continued to be held during the war years.¹⁷ Thus, from a long term perspective, centralization was by no means a novel development; rather than signaling a prominent rupture between Hungary and Romania, the years after 1918 instead represented part of an ongoing process.¹⁸ However, the immediate changes made in 1918 and 1919 brought about a profound transformation of the state of affairs both in terms of the personal composition of the administration and its modus operandi. While the new Romanian administration left the existing administrative framework intact, it amended the legal framework at two crucial points, a development which would have important ramifications. In the name of democracy, the practice of appointing half of the assembly members from the ranks of the highest taxpayers was abolished from the level of the commune to the municipal assembly. As a consequence, county assemblies, just like city councils were no longer convened, and supervision and control over the practical administration gradually slipped away from elected bodies to the government delegated prefects. Smaller commissions however, including the crucial “közizgatási bizottság” (administrative committees) of the Hungarian system remained in place. This powerful organ of the county administration was formed from an equal number of elected members and ex officio delegates (such as the police chief, the head of the state construction authority,

the leader of the state forestry commission or the school inspector), most of whom were either ministerial employees or individuals who had been nominated to their positions by the prefect. With the suspension (or de facto abolition) of elected bodies from 1918 onwards, not even elected members were sent by the autonomous bodies, with these representatives being delegated directly by prefects or selected by the other members of the committee through a process of co-optation by the existing members.¹⁹

In general, the new system closely resembled the earlier arrangement with its framework of counties and districts, central county and outer district administration, strict county control over communes and the growing influence and involvement of the prefect, who despite their claims of their professional credentials, were delegated by the government and were thus inevitably political figures. The similarity between the old and new systems was so great that Hungarian language newspapers continued to use the earlier terminology for the county and its officials, thereby implicitly suggesting that their modus operandi and social role was also similar to their prewar status. This interpretation was certainly not without justification, as the bulk of the regulations which they applied and the means by which they did so were still subject to Hungarian laws and decrees, and many familiar faces remained in situ in county offices.²⁰

The new administrative law created a uniform system for the whole country that was more centralized than the pre-1918 arrangement, but new local and county councils were created on a more democratic basis in which representatives were elected by a suffrage much broader than the abolished Hungarian one. Nominally, these councils could also elect the leaders of the local administration. The system, however, preserved all of the ambiguities of the earlier structure, and the prerogatives of elected bodies continued to be stifled by the new combined administrative bodies which, in a similar manner to the older committees, were composed of high ranking state employees from the branches of the central administration, the education, health and veterinary services, and delegates of the elected council and the prefect.²¹

While there was significant fluctuation in the personal composition of this administration, the continuity of personnel was an important aspect of its operation. At the highest administrative levels, primarily in county-level positions that had been considered as political appointments prior to 1918, change came relatively soon, with well-connected Romanians replacing Hungarians (in contrast, officials from the Saxon minority largely remained in their posts).²² However, the state was more than willing to allow non-Romanians to continue their service, often forgoing the requirement for

¹⁵ On the role of district chiefs (*főszolgabíró*) and their jurisdiction over communal administration, see Judit Pál and Vlad Popovic, “The Transformation of the Mid-level Civil Servants’ Corps in Transylvania in the Aftermath of the First World War: The High Sheriffs between 1918 and 1925” in *Hofratsdämmerung? Verwaltung und ihr Personal in den Nachfolgestaaten der Habsburgermonarchie 1918 bis 1920*, eds. Peter Becker et al. (Böhlau: Wien 2020), 155–178, 157–159.

¹⁶ Gábor Egry, “Regional Elites, Nationalist Politics, Local Accommodations.Center-Periphery Struggles in Late Dualist Hungary”, in *Österreich-Ungarns imperiale Herausforderungen: Nationalismen und Rivalitäten im Habsburgerreich um 1900*, eds. Wolfram Dornik, Stephan Lehnstaedt and Bernhard Bachinger (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 333–353.

¹⁷ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “Representatives of Central Authority and County Administration in Transylvania (1867–1925),” *Journal of Modern European History* 21, no. 4 (2023): 458–473.

¹⁸ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “Representatives of Central Authority.”

¹⁹ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “De la aleşii comitatului,” 165–166.

²⁰ Many articles in Hungarian language newspapers from the interwar period use pre-1918 terminology to denote official titles and institutions of the Romanian counties. As late as 1930, some Hungarian newspapers were using “alispán” for the head of the county delegation, an elected body entrusted with the day-to-day management of the administration; a similar body in the pre-1918 administrative structure had been presided over by the Hungarian alispán. See “Újból megalakult a megyei tanács,” *Székely Nép*, August 28, 1930, 1.; “Szabályozzák az alispán és a főispán hatáskörét,” *Székely Nép*, November 2, 1930, 4.; “A törvény által adott cím”, *Székely Nép*, November 27, 1930.

²¹ Law no. 95 on the Administrative Unification from June 13, 1925. Monitorul Oficial no. 128. June 14, 1925.

²² Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “Une analyse statistique”.

such officials to pledge an oath of allegiance to the new state. This was especially marked in cases where the new state lacked the required knowledge, and it is likely that hundreds of Hungarians managed to maintain their positions for many years in specialized branches of the administration (forestry, financial administration, construction etc.).²³ In 1925, between 40 and 45% of all county officials in the original sixteen counties of the historical principality of Transylvania (i.e., excluding the Romanian counties of Caraș-Severin, Timiș, Arad, Bihor, Satu Mare and Maramureș incorporated into the country in 1919) had held administrative positions prior to 1919, and in a more general scope, more than 50% of Hungarian (around 27% of all county officials) and more than 30% for Romanian officials had begun their administrative careers before the start of the First World War.²⁴ One important change was the way in which officials from the lower levels of the county administration, primarily villages notaries, had been propelled to the upper echelons of the counties.²⁵

Moreover, many of the new officials who had not held administrative positions before 1918 had still gained some experience of the earlier administration as elected members of various assemblies or councils. For example, the first Romanian prefect of Caraș-Severin, Gheorghe Dobrin, had never held an administrative position before 1918 but he had been a long-term elected member of the county's assembly and was thus familiar with various administrative tasks ranging from the election of officials to supervising their work and reports.²⁶ Whenever one of his constituents or acquaintances needed something done, it was Dobrin himself who negotiated with the county administration, having learned about its operations in both formal and informal terms.

Despite the efforts and claims to create a depoliticized and strictly meritocratic administration,²⁷ politics remained an important factor within local administration, in terms of both direct and indirect political intervention from above into its workings or through the use of political influence in making appointments. The absence and shortcomings of the democratization process (even after 1926 local elections were held irregularly and elected local bodies were often suspended by the government and re-

placed with appointed interim bodies) empowered local groups who were entrenched within the administration and helped local elites, including those of non-Romanian minorities, to retain their influence and local power but also improved their leverage vis-à-vis the government. Just as Hungarian governments had entered into compromise agreements with local elites, Romanian governments also eagerly sought out to their support.²⁸ The management of diversity became one of the most significant and paradoxical tasks of the administration, even amidst the efforts to unify the country.

ROUTES TO ROMANIA

For many years, the diversity of the newly expanded Romanian state was undeniably apparent in a formal sense. As long as the lack of legal unification persisted (for example, a new, unitary civic code was never legislated), public officials needed specific knowledge that was often unavailable or partly inaccessible in the form of teaching materials and manuals at the country's universities.²⁹ This problem was particularly acute in the case of key aspects of social activism such as the rights of association and of assembly which were regulated in Hungary only through ministerial decrees rather than by codified legislation. As a result, experience with the intricacies of the shifting and changing internal ordinances and ad hoc regulations was crucial in keeping the system running. As most of the existing legislation was in Hungarian, this also meant that bilingualism was a valuable asset in communicating with non-Romanians in Transylvania. Finally, as the representation of Hungarians was claimed by a local and regional elite rooted in the culture of nobility and urban bourgeoisie/middle-class, it was always a benefit to show a familiarity with the manners and customs of this social environment.

The importance of such knowledge and skills is highlighted by the fact that those who possessed them enjoyed excellent career prospects even if they lacked strong Romanian nationalist credentials or, in extreme cases, if they harbored Hungarian nationalist convictions. A case in point is that of Victor Hodor, a stalwart of interwar Romanian administration. He was mayor of Sighetul Marmăției in April 1919 when the Romanian administration was installed, later becoming prefect of Cluj county and, during the king's dictatorship, general secretary (administrative head of) the province of Someș.³⁰ Hodor came from the county of Maramureș, a region run since the 1860s by a tight network of Hungarian and Romanian nobles who usually supported the current governing party.³¹ Relatives and protégées of this coterie held advantages when it came to advancement within the county administration, but the elites also integrat-

²³ Gábor Egrý, "Posztbirodalmi átmenetek?" in *Összeomlás, uralomváltás, nemzetállam-építés 1918-1925 Dokumentumválogatás I. Románia*, eds. Barna Ábrahám and Gábor Egrý, (Budapest: Napvilág 2019), 13-45.

²⁴ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, "Une analyse statistique", 106-108. It is reasonable to suppose that both ratios would be significantly higher if complemented with data from the missing counties. Recent research on Satu Mare conducted by Tamás Sárándi highlighted the existence of a large adaptable Greek Catholic group within the administration that survived administrative transitions in both 1919 and in 1940. Studies by Gábor Egrý on Maramureș, Bihor and Caraș-Severin revealed ethnic ratios and continuities in 1935 which were at comparable levels with those of historical Transylvania from 1925. See Gábor Egrý, "Unruly Borderlands? Border-Making, Peripheralization and Layered Regionalism in Post-First World War Maramureș and the Banat," *European Review of History = Revue européenne d'histoire* 27, no. 6 (2020): 709-731; Egrý, "Unholy Alliances"; Tamás Sárándi, "Konzolidáció után konszolidáció.: Szatmárnémeti közigazgatásának változásai 1918-1924 között" in *Trianon és a magyar közigazgatás*, ed. L. Balogh Béni (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 2020), 69-86.

²⁵ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, "Une analyse statistique".

²⁶ Elemér Jakabffy, "Caras-Severin (Krassó-Szörény) vármegye története. Különös tekintettel a nemzetiségi kérdésre. VIII. Nemzetiségi megnyilatkozások a törvényhatóság közgyűlésein," *Statisztikai Közlemények* 19, no. 18 (1940) 421-428.; Elemér Jakabffy, "A szerb és francia megszállás," *Magyar Kisebbség* (1940): 570-584.

²⁷ Andrei Florin Sora, "Funcția publică".

²⁸ Gábor Egrý, "Unruly Borderlands"; Egrý, "Regional Elites, Nationalist Politics."

²⁹ Francesco Magno, *Dagli imperi alla nazione*.

³⁰ Zoltán Györke, "Prefecții Clujului, analiză prosopografică, studiu apărut în Anuarul Institutului de Istorie 'George Barițiu'", *Series Historica* 49 (2010): 305-323, 313-314.

³¹ See András Cieger, "Interests and Strategies"; Egrý, "Unruly Borderlands"; Ágnes Deák, "Vizsgálat egy megyei királyi biztos ellen hivatali visszaélés ügyében, 1863," *Századok* 152, no. 1 (2018): 171-214.

ed county employees into their own social milieu. Hodor started out as an apprentice in Aknasugatag (Ocna Șugatag) in the fiefdom of the strongest Romanian family of the Maramureș political network, the Mihályi/Mihali.³² He was soon relocated to the district of Ökörmező (Mizhiria or Volove Polje) as a *szolgabíró* (Romanian pretor), an official elected by the county assembly. Having been awarded the Civilian War Cross, III Class in 1917, he remained in position there until 1918-1919 when he took over the county capital as its mayor.

During his time in Ökörmező, Hodor was politically active as the secretary of the governing Party of National Work³³ whose leader, István Tisza, was the favorite Hungarian protagonist in interwar Romanian memorialist works which castigated the Hungarian *szolgabíró* in stories of officially sanctioned violence, electoral fraud and intimidation. However, despite Hodor's clear association with Tisza and the fact that he himself was a *szolgabíró*, his career prospered, and he rose ever higher in the administration. After serving as prefect in Transylvanian countries, he later became inspector general within the Ministry of the Interior and was the Transylvanian representative on the Ministry's commission for administrative unification where he was to contribute with his knowledge of Hungarian administrative law and practice.³⁴

Hodor clearly made a career mostly as an expert in administration, but his first years of service after 1919 reveal another important role within the new state; as prefect in the multiethnic county of Bihor on the Hungarian border, he was perfectly placed to act as an interlocutor between local elites and the government. Interwar Romania was not only a unified state with unitary administration, it was also an example of a parliamentary system with clear autocratic tendencies; it was customary in Romanian politics for the government to have its own parliament rather than the other way round. Prime ministers were firstly dismissed or installed by the King and, with the sole exception of 1937, went to the polls to garner a parliamentary majority aided by administrative abuses and unfair electoral rules.³⁵

Governing parties also typically showed little tolerance for local councils whose political colors differed from those of the government, and this was one of the reasons why local elections were first postponed until 1926 and later held only infrequently. Even if local voters elected an opposition majority council, the prefect was able to suspend its authority and appoint an interim body which would nominally rule until early elections were called but in reality remained in effect for years with changes in personal composition. The initial non-democratization and the later introduction of inadequate democratization allowed local elites to amass more power and negotiate from stronger

positions with the governing parties. This effect was even more pronounced in areas with majority or significant non-Romanian populations, where ethnic parties held sway over large segments of the electorate. These contexts created a demand for special skills and knowledge not only in terms of administrative specificities but also the ability to engage with these local elites.

This trend was especially important in areas where non-Romanians formed a local or regional majority. Even though minority political parties could never entirely mobilize ethnic Hungarians or Germans for elections because of the challenges they faced from workers' parties and agrarian movements (and even from Romanian parties), it was usually the leaders of the Hungarian and German communities who held dominant positions among the local elites.³⁶ As the Romanian state lacked the capacity to change this state of affairs rapidly in areas where the new Romanian administrators were unable to foster connections with a broader social strata, opportunities opened up for interlocutors, individuals who were acceptable to both the center and the provinces and who could serve as mediators between the Romanian state and politics and local demands. If necessary, these interlocutors could also be drawn from the pool of newcomers without an existing network of local contacts. For example, when the county prefect of Ciuc removed Aurel Țețu from the position of the mayor of the county seat at Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) in early 1923, local Romanian and Hungarian political leaders tried to convince him to reconsider his decision.³⁷ Țețu was not a local Romanian but had seemingly established some trust with local society, or at least enough to provoke the fear of possible disruption as a result of his departure.

While there were cases of local figures with a history of administrative service prior to 1918 acting as interlocutors (see below), one way of establishing local contacts and embedding was through the initiation of a single person who would hold the post of prefect or mayor recurrently with the help of non-Romanian aides. Unsurprisingly, the counties of the Székely Land, where Hungarian speakers constituted over 90% of the population, was one area in which this practice was typical. The most notable case was probably the county of Odorheiu (Udvarhely) and its seat of Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely) in which the district chief Gábor Szabó remained in his position after the Romanian takeover and soon advanced to the position of vice-prefect. After a brief stint as a member of parliament, Szabó returned to the administration and served repeatedly as the vice-prefect of the county, especially when the National Liberal Party were in power. Curiously, Gheorghe Andreiaș, a Romanian from outside the county who had

³² For more on the Mihali family, see Zsolt Szabó's chapter of this volume.
³³ *Az Újság*, June 21, 1912, 5.
³⁴ Gábor Egry, "Zárványok, hagyományok, szakemberek: A magyar közigazgatás és Nagy-Románia működése" in *Trianon és a magyar közigazgatás*, ed. Béni, L. Balogh (Budapest: Magyar Kormánytisztviselői Kar-Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 2020), 131-150, 142.
³⁵ Hans-Christian Maner, *Parlamentarismus im Rumänien (1930-1940). Demokratie im autoritären Umfeld*. (München: Oldenbourg, 1997).

³⁶ For more on the Hungarian workers' movement, see János Főcze, *A MADOSZ. Baloldali magyar történet a Román Királyságban (1934-1944)* (Kolozsvár: Kriterion Könyvkiadó – Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2020); for the challenge of agrarian movements, see Csongor Szabó, "Csík megye közigazgatása, 1918-1940 (2.)", *Magyar Kisebbség* 20, no. 1-2 (2015): 221-270. In addition to German and Hungarian movements, Jewish political organisations were also active in this period. In the context of Transylvania, however, local Jewish elites were more typically aligned with Hungarians rather than acting separately. See Attila Gidó, Úton. *Erdélyi zsidó társadalom- és nemzetépítési kísérletek (1918-1940)* (Dokumentumválogatás, Csíkszereda Pro Print, 2009); Beáta Kulcsár, *Adónyomorítás miatt zárva: Egy nagyváradi család története (1858-1944)* (Kolozsvár: Kriterion 2022).

³⁷ Csongor Szabó, "Csík megye közigazgatása 1918-1940 (1.)", *Magyar Kisebbség* 19, no. 3-4 (2014): 209-231, 221.

been a village notary prior to 1918, typically served as prefect of the county when the National Liberals formed the government. Andreiaș soon earned a good reputation among local Hungarians, and his regular returns to the position of prefect during the 1930s were usually greeted warmly. When he died in 1936, the local and provincial Hungarian newspapers paid generous tribute to him, praising the late prefect with accolades that went well beyond what was customary for state dignitaries of his stature.³⁸

Some of the newspaper reports hinted that it was Szabó who had initiated Andreas into local society, but this partnership was matched by another important interlocutor, the Cluj (Kolozsvár) based lawyer and politician Augustin Pordea. Pordea, the scion of an educated middle class Greek Catholic family of lawyers and a graduate of the Kolozsvár Faculty of Law, had impeccable Romanian nationalist credentials through his membership of the Cluj Romanian National Council in November 1918.³⁹ Unlike most Transylvanian Greek Catholic Romanians who had fiercely opposed Bucharest's centralization efforts and detested the liberals, Pordea joined the National Liberal Party, and it soon became clear that he had made a highly profitable choice. He quickly found himself in parliament and was soon being solicited by Hungarian businessmen seeking to salvage their lost assets in Romania.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, Pordea's familiarity with Hungarian manners and his popularity among the community's elites⁴¹ meant that he was an ideal choice to serve as the member of parliament for Odorhei during National Liberal governments.

This type of arrangement was not only reserved for the county level, and districts and cities were often managed in a similar manner. Stefan Șorban was a district chief in the county of Ciuc who enjoyed considerable affection from the Hungarian community who fondly termed him "Pista bácsi" (Uncle Stephen). When he was transferred from Miercurea Ciuc to another city in the county, Gheorgheni (Gyergyószentmiklós), in 1924, the Hungarian newspaper *Brassói Lapok* wrote that he had "proved during his three-year service that someone could be a good Romanian without oppressing citizens of other languages".⁴² In 1927 he was even rumored to be the first choice for mayor on a Romanian-Hungarian electoral list.⁴³ Șorban certainly seems to have been a conscientious public servant who started his career in the county of Hunyad (Hunedoara) in the early 1890s. He later became the notary of Marosillye (Ilie) and later of the Jiu-valley commune of Petrilla where he successfully broke up a corrupt plot by his superior

connected to the management of the communal forests.⁴⁴ In Hunedoara he was also an active member of the local Historical Association, and – much like Hodor – an active politician of Hungarian nationalist parties,⁴⁵ both signs of his social links with the Hungarian speaking elites of the county. However, it was only after 1918 that he could reach the higher ranks within the administration; nonetheless, his "Hungarian" credentials certainly served him well in his roles as district chief and provisory vice-prefect in Ciuc.

If such arrangements might strike us as paternalistic or even feudalistic, this is by no means coincidental. The case of Maramureș was one example of how feudal county elites of noble origins ensured their continued dominance of local society by acting as advocates of Bucharest and by providing crucial votes for the government. The above mentioned Mihályi/Mihali family, most significantly Gavrița Mihályi/Mihali, was the key actor in this arrangement. In 1918 Gavrița's brother Petru held the parliamentary seat that the family had maintained on the basis of a decades old political pact made with the then Hungarian government.⁴⁶ At this time, Gavrița was district chief in the district of Aknasugatag, and he managed the region with an iron grip which yielded him considerable profit. With the dissolution of Hungary, Petru fell into temporary disgrace after contradicting the future prime minister of Romania, Alexandru Vaida Voevod following his famous speech on Romanian self-determination. As a reply, Petru claimed that Romanians from Hungary will always remain loyal to their Hungarian homeland. In the meantime, however, Gavrița remained one of the mainstays of the new Romanian administration, serving as vice-prefect and later as prefect.

Gavrița aligned the family fortune with the National Liberal Party despite their apparent lack of support in the region. The National Liberals were seeking out local strongmen who could contribute to their electoral machine and the Mihályi/Mihali family, with their extensive kinship ties within the county and pro-Hungarian credentials dating back to the prewar era, were an ideal choice in the multiethnic county of Maramureș. Gavrița eventually became so indispensable that he even retained his tenures when the National Liberals were out of office; similarly, he could also sometimes parachute clients of his family to the position of prefect, as occurred with Flavius Iurca. The arrangement which the proudly aristocratic Hungarian Mihályi/Mihali family made with the National Liberals resembled the similar compromises they had made with Hungarian governments before 1918, and it was therefore not surprising that their opponents and rivals described the situation as a continuity of feudal oligarchic rule.⁴⁷

While the cases of Șorban or Andreiaș are examples of geographic and social mobility and that of Gavrița Mihályi one of geographic sedentism and social mobility, there were cases of simultaneous stability and sedentism. Again, a highly contextual but nonetheless telling case was that of the city of Caransebeș (Karanschebes, Karánsebes)

³⁸ "Andreás György ismét Udvarhelymegye élére került," *Erdélyi Futár*, July 3, 1927, 12.; "Megint vizsgáznak az Udvarhely megyei tisztviselők," *Brassói Lapok*, March 11, 1928, 9; *Keleti Újság*, August 3, 1936, 9.

³⁹ "Kolozsvárt megszállják a románok. 8" *Órai Újság*, December 19, 1918, 5.

⁴⁰ "Bonyodalom egy bankátulás körül," *Ellenzék*, January 25, 1924, 2. The Erdélyi Bank which is mentioned in the article was a key subsidiary of the Pesti Hungarian Commercial Bank, one of the largest Budapest banks with very significant assets in Romania. See also Rigó Máté, *Capitalism in Chaos. How Business Elites Prospered in the Era of the Great War* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2022).

⁴¹ See how the Hungarian press reported on the inauguration of Augustin's son, Augustin Jr as Doctor of Law in 1938; "Íjabb Pordea Gusztávot doktorrá avatták," *Ellenzék*, June 28, 1938, 8; "Pordea Bubukát doktorrá avatták," *Erdélyi Futár* 12, no. 4 (1938): 25.

⁴² "Elhelyezték Sorban főszolgabírót," *Brassói Lapok*, December 22, 1924, 6.

⁴³ "Sorban István – polgármesterjelölt," *Erdélyi Futár*, July 2, 1927, 24.

⁴⁴ "Erdőpanama," *Budapesti Hírlap*, February 6, 1907, 9.

⁴⁵ "Közigazgatás," *Szászváros*, September 27, 1906, 2-3.

⁴⁶ Ágnes Deák, "Vizsgálat egy megyei királyi."

⁴⁷ Gábor Egry, "Unruly Borderlands."

in the Southern Banat. A small military center, once home to the headquarters of a border regiment, this city with its mixed population of Romanians and Germans along with a smaller but growing group of aspiring Hungarian state officials and small-scale entrepreneurs was the scene of a political arrangement similar to that found in Maramureş. Prior to 1918, agreements had been brokered between Hungarian governments and local Romanian elites.⁴⁸ Tellingly, the position of chief notary of the city was held for the entire period between 1907 and 1943 by a single individual, Teodor Dragomir, who survived various political and regime changes. In 1918 an official from the county seat of Lugoj named Friedrich Pauck took over as city mayor. Pauck was German, a passionate musician and choir master, an energetic associationist and a voluntary firefighter who later became regional inspector of the firefighters – by all accounts, an excellent choice as administrator of the city, as there were no attempts to remove him from his position after 1919 and no sign of serious conflict within the city leadership despite the changing political winds.⁴⁹ Upon leaving Caransebeş after more than a decade of service as city mayor, Pauck became a member of the Banat Regional Audit Commission, again demonstrating the trust which the Romanian government placed in him.

LOYALTY IN TRANSITION - LOYALTY TO ALTERNATING COMMUNITIES

Caransebeş was obviously a unique case: a town with a history of strong pro-Habsburg military traditions, associationism with the local voluntary firefighters in its center, and a tolerant attitude towards Hungarians.⁵⁰ The legacy of the military border had instilled a strong sense of loyalty to the erstwhile monarch, one manifestation of which was the efforts of the local council to salvage the statue of Franz Joseph that had been removed from its pedestal in 1919.⁵¹ Politics prior to 1918 had often been based on cooperation between pro-government Romanians and local Hungarian elites,⁵² and as the conflict with the center over the dissolution of the firefighter association and the latter's role in the preservation of the statue of Franz Joseph statue demonstrated, voluntary associationism was also a key element of this local identity.⁵³ However, even here figures like Pauck had to consider what was required of a public servant within the context of changing sovereignty

and new statehood. Despite all the stories about the unjust dismissals of non-Romanians from the state administration, the leaders of the new state were well aware of the need to retain as many public employees as possible and to limit the changes to political positions and administrative branches where key human resources were concerned. The state first needed knowledge of the special situations on the ground and the skills and social capital that enabled public servants to manage diversity, whether ethnic or social.

While the majority of Hungarians ultimately left the state administration for various reasons, including the insistence of Hungarian governments on public demonstrations of loyalty over their refusal to legitimize Romanian territorial annexations, examples of continuous service were by no means exceptional. The transference of loyalty and the factors behind choices were important issues in the first years of transition. People who had served the Hungarian authorities, regardless of their ethnicity, still had something to offer the new Romanian state, and many of them realized the advantages they could enjoy by staying put, in particular the improved prospects of promotion. The examples of figures such as Andreiaş or Şorban show how and why village notaries could become prefects or subprefects, allowing such individuals the possibility of gaining a high-ranking and secure position within the county administration that would have been largely beyond their reach prior to 1918.⁵⁴

For Romanian officials, the accession of a Romanian nation state was probably an important change that made their career choice and the transfer of loyalty easier. But when adopting the role of mediators, even Romanian officials often masked an implied form of loyalty to non-Romanians and to local communities as a whole too. The sources of this loyalty varied. Caransebeş was an example of how a strong local identity helped to foster its emergence. In the Székely counties, loyalty was often based more on a sense of social commonality, a shared middle-class culture, while in Maramureş its roots were to be found in the joint history of nobility. Moreover, this loyalty to the local community could bring concrete benefits in the form of social acceptance or social and even material capital.⁵⁵

Besides their considerations linked with their ethnicity, they often understood their public service as the realization or promotion of ideas of fair administration, social justice and equality, concepts that could be understood as superceding issues of ethnicity. Ideas like these were part of a broader discursive framing of state and public service and the definition of its relationship to the common good. Integration into the body of public servants was not impossible, and everyday gestures reinforced this sense, thereby creating another axis of loyalty. Ultimately, it is impossible to say how these possible

⁴⁸ Gábor Egry, "Regional Elites."

⁴⁹ Gábor Egry, "Zárványok, hagyományok"; Gábor Egry, "Fallen Between Two Stools? Imperial Legacies, State-society Relationship and the Limits of Building a Nation State in Romania after the First World War," *Südost-Forschungen* 79 (2020): 4-31.

⁵⁰ Gábor Egry, "Fallen between Two Stools."

⁵¹ Gábor Egry, "The strange afterlife of Francis Joseph's Statue," <https://1918local.eu/the-strange-afterlife-of-francis-josephs-statue/> accessed March 14, 2024.

⁵² Gábor Egry, "Unruly Borderlands"; Florina Raita, "Comportamentul electoral al românilor din Ungaria dualistă la începutul secolului al XIX-lea" in *Raporturi și imagini româno-maghiare*, ed. Sorin Mitu (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut – Mega, 2023), 116-160.

⁵³ Gábor Egry, "Fallen between Two Stools."

⁵⁴ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovic, "Une analyse."

⁵⁵ Gábor Egry, "A Crossroad of Parallels: Regionalism and Nation-Building in Transylvania in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," in *Hungary and Romania Beyond National Narratives: Comparisons and Entanglements: Comparison and Entanglements*, eds. Anders Blomqvist, Constantin Iordachi and Balazs Trencsenyi (New York and Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013); Gábor Egry, "The Moral Economy of High Imperial Capital?: The (Non-) Nationalization of Foreign Companies in Post-WWI Romania and the Idea of a Romanian National Economy," *Halbjahresschrift für Geschichte und Zeitgeschehen in Zentral- und Südosteuropa* 35, no. 1-2 (2023): 8-27.

loyalties played out within individuals, but by looking beyond nation-statehood and minority policies, many people were able to foster a sense of loyalty both to institutions and to the individuals who served within them. Providing that this loyalty was reciprocated by the center, albeit in a not entirely symmetrical manner, the act of serving the Romanian state was seen not a matter of ethnicity but rather as a viable option for all.

2. Adaptation, Assimilation, Integration or Opportunism? The Case of a Family of Romanian Functionaries in Maramureş Under Changing Regimes*

Zsolt Szabó

INTRODUCTION, METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

“Treachery is the heritage of that family. [...] Legend and tradition has it that the blood of the family was mixed with that of the gypsy Mleşniţa Vodă. Armenian blood was mixed in through the Simon family of Budapest [...] this does show in their character; above all, they love money. [...] Our »beloved« traitors and renegades know no shame or scruples when following their personal interest. [...] In [political] opposition they are cowards, in power they are cruel, tyrannic, ferocious, so much so that they surpass even the horrific deeds of the crazed Nero.”¹ This was the damning judgement on the Mihalyi family made by a newspaper in interwar Romania. The hyperbolic vitriol and racism of the article – stemming from the political bias of the era – should obviously be dismissed, but there is a hint of truth in the account of the family, one which did indeed have a history full of contradictions. It was a Romanian family from Maramureş which had fought on the side of the Hungarians in the 1848 Revolution. It was a family which supported important Romanian cultural institutions in the Dualist period while, acting as a well-integrated part of the Hungarian elite, often marrying into Hungarian families. Part of the family also came close to assimilation at the beginning of the 20th century, but ultimately ended up as one of the local pillars of the National Liberal Party of Romania after 1918. It was a family whose member served as MPs both in Budapest and Bucharest. This was not entirely unusual in regions of Central-Eastern Europe in

* The study was supported through the OTKA K20 K137378 project entitled *A dualizmus kori parlamentarizmus regionális nézőpontból* [Parliamentarism in the dualist era from a regional perspective].

¹ “Un deputat trădător”, *Patria*, July 19, 1922, 2.

which nationalist aspirations met the multiethnic realities of the empires ruling over them.² The aftermath of their dissolution and the homogenizing ambitions of the successor states only complicated the problem further. Scholars continue to struggle to understand and explain these larger processes,³ but some headway has been made in delineating the relationship between nation-building and the individual. Notions such as everyday ethnicity,⁴ national indifference⁵ or banal nationalism highlight the fact that nationalism was present in often overlooked ways throughout everyday life, although it is also apparent that this presence was not an all-encompassing and sweeping power in the 19th century⁶ as it might appear at first glance.⁷

Identities are often multifaceted in nature, and it is not possible for a single ideology to fully permeate all of these layers. The aim of this paper is to identify some of the factors that can influence these layers by examining the career paths of the functionaries of the Mihalyi family. Another aim is to examine how these building blocks affect the ways in which individuals adapted to major political changes. In the case of our subjects, we argue that national identity can be transactional; individuals can make a conscious choice to espouse or hide certain aspects of this identity if it suits their personal or familial interests. We will also analyze the role which upbringing, schooling, social milieu, political context and local customs played in the shaping of an individual's national identity. The importance of one factor over another will be weighed based on the historical context and period in which the subjects of this article were active.

Firstly, however, we must take a wider perspective and present an overview of the social elite of Maramureş county in terms of its ethnic compositions and the elements that shaped its structure. The methodological tool of our endeavor is prosopography. Collective biographies allow us to reconstruct the personal careers of the main actors but also provide insights into the broader group to which the individuals belonged. Nonetheless, there is always a risk of generalization and oversimplification in using this method, not to mention the fact that the level of detail found in the sources differs based on the time in which they were created.⁸ One major issue is the difficulty

of establishing the ethnicity of the main actors, as many sources offer contradictory information with no criteria of determining which interpretation is correct; as a result a great deal of attention to detail is required when critiquing them.⁹ The fact that many public servants were engaged in an ongoing process of assimilation only further complicates the challenge of assigning a specific national identity to them. The contrast between a quantitative analysis of the officials in Maramureş county and a qualitative account of the personal career paths of members of the Mihalyi family may help alleviate these shortcomings. We have also chosen to restrict our analysis to data regarding the familial ties, education, administrative experience and ethnicity of the elites found in a series of almanacs, newspapers, obituaries, school matriculation registries, registries of functionaries, county records and lists made by the central administration on county functionaries and personal correspondence.

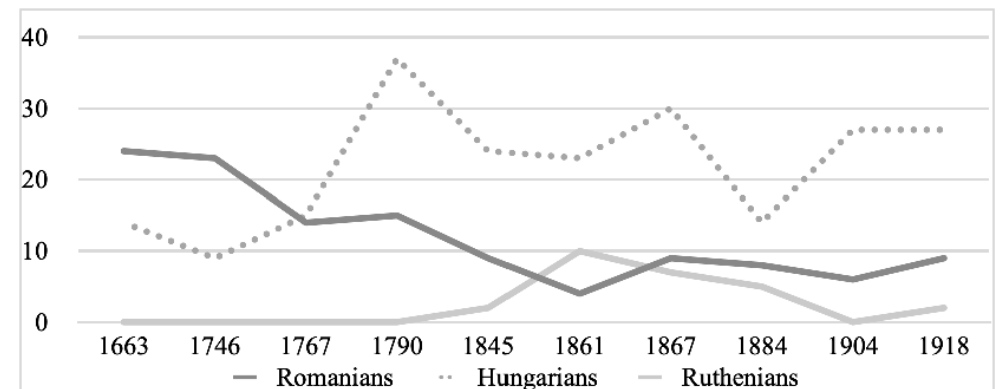


Chart 1: The ethnic composition of the administrative elite between 1663 and 1918

THE COUNTY ELITE OF MARAMUREŞ

Originally forming part of the northeastern region of the Hungarian Kingdom, the county of Maramureş was split into two after 1918, with its southern part becoming part of Romania and the northern part being annexed to Czechoslovakia. With the Vienna Arbitrations of 1938 and 1940, the county was returned to the Hungarian state and remained so until the end of the Second World War. The main features of the county are its predominantly mountainous terrain, with the lack of arable land leaving it among the poorer regions of the Kingdom, and the multiethnic nature of its population. In a statistical work by Elek Fényes published in 1847, the population of the

² Ignác Romsics, *Nemzeti, nemzetiség és állam Kelet-Közép- és Délkelet-Európában a 19. és 20. században* (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 2020), 9.

³ It would be impossible to list all the relevant literature on nationalism and nation-building here; for the best known studies, see: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism (New perspectives on the Past)* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2016); Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (Teaneck: Holmes & Meier, 1983); Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: nation-building process in Europe," *New Left Review* 1, no. 198 (March/April 1993): 3-20.

⁴ Gábor Egry, "National indifference as everyday ethnicity" in *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe*, eds. Maarten van Ginderachter and Jon Fox (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2019), 157-158.

⁵ Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (spring 2010): 93-97.

⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 174-177.

⁷ For example, the theory of path dependency shows the importance of economic and/or historical factors of a certain situation in the manifestation – or lack thereof – of national identity. Paul A. David, "Path Dependence: A Foundational Concept for Historical Social Science," *Cliometrica* 1, no. 2 (May 2007): 6-7.

⁸ Lawrence Stone, "Prosopography," *Daedalus* 100, no. 2. (Winter, 1971), 58-64.

⁹ K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, "Introduction: Chameleon or Chimera? Understanding Prosopography" in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications, a Handbook*, ed. K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, 2007), 27-28.

county was given as 176,615, of which 13,463 (7.6%) were Hungarians, 7268 (4.1%) Germans, 56,811 (32.1%) were Romanians, 89,454 (50.6%) were Ruthenian speakers and 9619 (5.4%) were Jews.¹⁰ In 1900 the total population of the county was 311,252 of which 42,134 (13.6%) were Hungarians, 47,383 (15.3%) were Germans,¹¹ 74,758 (24.2%) were Romanians and 146,379 (46.4%) were Ruthenian speakers.¹²

As is shown in the graph, the ethnic composition of the administrative elite does not reflect this diversity and is in fact inversely proportional to that of the population as a whole. Hungarians initially made up the smallest part of the population but their numbers increased after settling in the southeastern part of Maramureș, the only non-mountainous part which featured some arable land, together with the eventually assimilated Saxons in the 14th century to exploit the region's salt mines, and by 1767 they already formed the largest ethnic group in the county. They established the five royal cities of Sighetu Marmației (Máramarossziget), Khust (Huszt), Viskove (Visk), Tyachiv (Técső) and Câmpung la Tisa (Hosszúmező); the first two were the most important settlements, the former serving as the administrative centre of the county, while the latter was the local economic centre.¹³ After the Reformation, a school system was introduced in these cities, the most important of which was in Sighet,¹⁴ which also had a law academy from 1838 onwards. The administrative and educational centres of the county were therefore centred around the Hungarian community, and political power also gravitated towards Hungarians as the government in Budapest typically saw them as being more loyal to the governing party, especially after 1867.

The number of Romanian officials was approximately commensurate with the ethnically Romanian share of the population, making up between 20 to 25% of the elite. Their situation was, however, somewhat unique because they had traditionally held most of the senior positions in the county until the middle of the 18th century.¹⁵ Settlements of Romanians under the rule of knyazes had first arrived in the southeastern part of the county in the 13th century¹⁶ having been granted privileges by the Hun-

garian king.¹⁷ By the end of the 14th century, these communities had developed an extensive strata of lesser nobles,¹⁸ and a few exceptionally influential Romanian families had also amassed sizeable land holdings.¹⁹ Since the number of Hungarian nobles in the county prior to the 17th century was insignificant, these Romanian landowners were seen as the only suitable candidates for holding senior positions.²⁰ These larger Romanian houses started to segment in the 16th century, but although this process led to an increase in their numbers it was accompanied by a decrease in influence, a trend which was reinforced by emigration to more prosperous areas in Transylvania in the 17th century and the assimilation of the remaining Romanian landowners into the Hungarian nobility.²¹

This process came to a close at exactly the same time as the Hungarian nobles began organizing themselves in three of the five royal cities at the beginning of the 18th century.²² In this period, Hungarians served under aristocrats by filling the roles of lord lieutenant (főispán) and the captain of the castle (várkapitány) of Khust.²³ However, the strategic value of the county declined after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, and aristocratic interest in the region fell off, leaving the local Hungarian nobles jobless. Under the rule of Maria Theresa, the bureaucratic apparatus of the county was expanded, and senior officials began to be selected on the basis of their educational qualifications. By living in or in close proximity to the center of the county administration and with access to the best schools, the Hungarian nobility were ideally positioned to transition “naturally” into the county administration leadership, and, with small exceptions, they remained in situ up until 1918. The process accelerated further from the middle of the 19th century as the decline in the agricultural economy led to losses in the incomes of many nobles, forcing many, who broadly overlapped with the Hungarian gentry of the Dualist period, to seek paid employment in administrative positions, a calling which was deemed highly prestigious at that time.

Ruthenian speakers were the most underrepresented ethnic group in the county administration. Their presence in the county can also be traced back to at least the 14th century, but they settled in larger numbers over the course of the 17th century, primarily from Galicia, and occupied the most mountainous part of the county in the north-

¹⁰ The statistical works typically refer to Ruthenian speakers as Russians, referring to the mother tongue of the inhabitants. However, given that the two terms were sometimes used interchangeably in this period and since this ethnic group had not formed a clear national identity in the 19th century, we found it best to use the term “Ruthenian speakers” as the group is often referred to in other official sources. Elek Fényes, *Magyarország leírása* 2. (Pest: Beimel Nyomda, 1847), 371.

¹¹ Most of these Germans were Jews. In the dualist era Jews were not treated as a separate ethnicity. They spoke Yiddish, a language close to German, which is why they were referred to as Germans in the census.

¹² *A Magyar Korona Országainak 1900. évi népszámlálása. Első rész. A népesség általános leírása községenként* (Budapest: Pesti Könyvnyomda-Részvénytársaság, 1902), 21.

¹³ Vilmos Bélay, *Máramaros megye társadalma és nemzetiségei* (Budapest: Sylvester Nyomda, 1943), 26–28.

¹⁴ Béla Balogh, *A máramarosszigeti református líceum diáksága, 1682–1851* (Debrecen: Tisztántúli Református Egyházkerület és Kollégiumi Levéltár, 2001), 7–9.

¹⁵ Direcția Județeană a Arhivelor Naționale Maramureș (hereafter DJ ANR MM), Baia Mare, Prefectura Județului Maramureș, F 45, inventory no. 391, folder no. 1, Evidența funcționarilor comitatului Maramureș pe anii 1629–1849, 2–29.

¹⁶ Vilmos Bélay, *Máramaros megye társadalma*, 55–64.

¹⁷ Teofil Ivanciuc, “Din istoria nobilimii maramureșene. Aristocrația. Lista numelor de familie,” *Revista Arhivei Maramureșene* 15, no. 15. (2022): 10–11.

¹⁸ Sándor Jaczkó, “Vallás és etnikum Máramarosban a 18. században,” *Athanasia* 20, no. 14 (2015): 150.

¹⁹ Elek Fényes mentions 26 300 nobles living in Maramureș in 1847, most of whom were Romanian.

²⁰ Nonetheless, the lord lieutenants and county commissioners were drawn largely from Hungarians even before the 18th century.

²¹ Livia Ardelean, “Contribuții la studiul nobililor maramureșeni” in: *Istoria ca datorie: omagiu academicianului Ioan-Aurel Pop la împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani*, eds. Ioan Bolovan and Ovidiu Ghitta (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2015), 471–479.

²² László Glück, *Az öt máramarosi város társadalma a 16–18. században* (PhD diss., Pécsi Tudományegyetem, 2013), 230–236, 271–272.

²³ László Glück, *Az öt máramarosi város*, 236.

east and northwest.²⁴ These communities were typically without a noble class,²⁵ and remained relatively impoverished and ill-educated,²⁶ as such, few Ruthenian speakers met the prerequisites for holding leading administrative positions until the emergence of a small Ruthenian speaking intelligentsia class in the 1850s.²⁷ The few Ruthenians who were educated to a high standard prior to this time had usually been assimilated into the Hungarian elite.²⁸

The division of power between the local ethnicities remained largely static from the middle of the 18th century until the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. The groups were divided more on confessional, rather than national lines;²⁹ the Hungarian lesser nobility of the royal cities made up the majority of the administrative elite, sharing power with the Roman Catholic Hungarian landowners and the Greek Catholic Romanians. National sentiment, however, gradually replaced confessional ties, and eventually culminated in the Revolution of 1848. The power of the Romanian elite was not under threat in this period because of the concept of *hungarus identity*; as nobles, the Romanian elite associated their privileges with the feudal *natio hungarica*,³⁰ with the term *natio* referring not to an ethnic group but to the medieval estate of the nobility. This concept drew no distinction between linguistic or ethnic differences but instead saw all members of the Hungarian nobility as essentially equal, and Romanian nobles were therefore afforded modern rights as part of the Hungarian political nation, an understanding which was essentially a reformulation of the national-liberal Hungarian nobility.³¹

This redefinition was successful in the case of the most influential Romanian nobles and is best exemplified by the events of the Revolution of 1848. Ruthenian speakers were largely indifferent or somewhat suspicious of the Revolution, but the leaders of their communities, the clergy of the Greek-Catholic Church, supported it and this prevented the outbreak of ethnic conflict in the region.³² However, some elements of the Romanian lower nobility were dissatisfied because they had been stripped of their privileges and feared that their livestock would be requisitioned by the Hungarian National Guard (Nemzetőrség). The Imperial forces stationed in Northern Transylvania

exploited these fears to gain influence over the village of Borșa (Borsa). The village was quickly reoccupied, and five Romanian “conspirators” were executed in the process.³³ The situation did not escalate, however, because Maramureș was isolated from the main theaters of war,³⁴ but also because the Romanian administrative elite used its local influence and familial ties to pacify the wider population.³⁵

The first significant change in the dynamic came during the neoabsolutist and liberal period, when the traditional elite, whether Hungarian or Romanian, was forced out of official posts due to suspicions that they had supported the Hungarian Revolution against Habsburg rule. This change opened up opportunities for Hungarian Roman Catholics from other counties who were assumed to be more loyal to the Catholic ruling house, but the supposedly politically disinterested Ruthenians also began to enter the ranks of local county officials in larger numbers, such as, for example, Péter Dolinay, an individual of Ruthenian origin who became the local royal commissioner (királybiztos).³⁶ Tensions were particularly high between the Romanians and Ruthenian speakers, with the delineation of the Greek Catholic Bishopric of Mukachevo proving to be a particular flashpoint. When the southeastern part of Maramureș was incorporated in the newly formed Bishopric of Gherla in 1856, the city of Sighetu Marmăției found itself on the border between the two bishoprics and its status remained unclear, with both parties claiming it for themselves.³⁷

Further change came in 1865 with a shift in imperial policy in 1865 that eventually led to the establishment of the Dual Monarchy of 1867 and the emergence of Hungarian home-rule.³⁸ In Maramureș this change meant the return to power of the veterans of the Revolution, but the situation had changed in the intervening years, and the strong position of the Ruthenian speakers could no longer be ignored. An agreement called the “compromise of Călinești” was reached at a meeting between the representatives of the three ethnic groups held in the home of the Romanian lord lieutenant,³⁹ Iosif Man (József Mán) in Călinești (Kálinfalva). The Compromise resolved the ecclesiastical dispute and reached an agreement about the number and ethnicity of the members of parliament who would represent the county. Of the county’s six seats, two would go to Hungarians (one Protestant and one Roman Catholic), two to Ro-

²⁴ Vilmos Bélay, *Máramaros megye társadalma*, 25, 96.

²⁵ Vilmos Bélay, *Máramaros megye társadalma*, 102.

²⁶ István Szilágyi ed., *Máramaros vármegye egyetemes leírása* (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Egyetem Nyomdája, 1876), 559.

²⁷ Mária Mayer, “A ruszinok (kárpatukránok) és az 1865. évi képviselőlérválasztás,” *Századok* 108, no. 4-5 (1974): 1142.

²⁸ Zoltán Szentiványi, *Századunk névváltoztatásai; helytartósági és miniszteri engedéllyel megváltozott nevek gyűjteménye, 1800–1893* (Budapest: Hornyánszky Viktor Nyomdája, 1895), 55.

²⁹ Direcția Județeană a Arhivelor Naționale Cluj (hereafter DJ ANR CJ), Cluj-Napoca, Fond Familial Mihályi, F 245, inv. no. 1204, folder no. 288., Documente despre alegerile de deputați, 1843-1845, p. 2.

³⁰ Ambrus Miskolczy, “A „hungarus-tudat” a polgári-nemzeti átalakulás sodrában,” *Magyar kisebbség* 3-4, no. (2012): 196, 199.

³¹ Hungarus identity was not specific to Romanians, see: Diána Bozó-Szűcs, *Egy 19. századi lelkesválasztási vita társadalomtörténeti aspektusai* (PhD diss., Eszterházy Károly Egyetem, 2020); Károly Halmos, “A hungarus, a fia az osztrák tiszt és a magyar nemzeti szabadságharc. Hild Rafael megmenekülése és bukása,” in *A város örök. Tanulmányok Bácskai Vera emlékére*, eds. Gábor Czocho, Csaba Sasfi and Árpád Tóth (Budapest: Korall, 2022) 182-194.

³² Molnár Ferenc, “A munkácsi görög katolikus püspökség az 1848-49-es események viharában,” *Kisebbségkutatás* 21, no. 2 (2012): 307.

³³ Gábor Várady, “Máramarosmegye 1848-ban,” *Hazánk. Történelmi Közöny* 3, no. 3 (1885): 175-176.

³⁴ Solymosi József “Forradalmi átalakulás Északkelet-Magyarországon 1848-ban,” *Századok* 143, no. 1 (2009): 115.

³⁵ DJ ANR MM, Baia Mare, Colecția de Documente „Acad. Dr. Ioan Mihályi de Apșa”, F 48, inv. no. 427, folder no. 8, Mihályi János és Mán József kegyelmi kérelme, October 31, 1849, 2.

³⁶ The royal commissioner was a position appointed by the ruler to restore order in counties which were deemed unruly or unstable, and commissioners were granted power over the administration to achieve this goal. However, the appointment of this position was often just a façade to shift the political climate of the county towards an environment which was more favorable for the central authorities. For a more detailed analysis, see: Zsolt Szabó, “Máramaros vármegye közigazgatása 1860 és 1867 között,” *Erdélyi Múzeum* 85, no. 1 (May 2023), 143-154.

³⁷ Gábor Várady, *Hulló levelek II.* (Máramarosziget: Máramarosi Részvény-Nyomda, 1892), 241.

³⁸ Csapó Csaba, “Az önkényuralom kora (1849-1867),” in *Magyarország története a 19. században*, ed. András Gergely (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 312-316.

³⁹ The lord lieutenant was appointed as the head of a county by the king. Until the dualist period, their role was largely formal, but with the centralizing tendencies of the Dualist period, they started to hold significant political power.

manians and two to Ruthenian speakers. This informal agreement would also influence the ethnic composition of the administrative elite elected in 1867, where for the first time in the county's history, three county deputy lord lieutenants (alispán) were elected:⁴⁰ one Romanian, one Hungarian and one Ruthenian. Although the Hungarians remained overrepresented, the most important positions in the administration were at least shared more equitably.⁴¹

THE ROMANIAN ADMINISTRATIVE ELITE

This consensus would last for as long as the generation that created this arrangement remained in power. Their vivid memories of the revolutionary years of 1848 and 1849 and the threat that tensions between nationalities could pose moderated the tone and action of the elites in their everyday political dealings. However, the younger generations, whether Hungarian or otherwise, had no such recollections and were thus less tolerant and more outspoken.⁴² The death of the last Romanian deputy lord lieutenant of the Dualist period, Ladislau Mihalka (László Mihálka), in 1886 would signal the start of this shift.⁴³ The ethnic composition of the administrative elite also exemplified this new trend. In 1884 the elite was composed of 14 Hungarians, 8 Romanians and 5 Ruthenian speakers, but by 1904 there were 27 Hungarians, 6 Romanians and no Ruthenian speakers. Despite the reduction in its diversity, these statistics also show that the Romanians had managed to retain some important posts even in the early years of the 20th century.

A total of 37 Romanian functionaries belonged to the elite in the period between 1822 and 1918, and they can be categorized into two different groups: 14 who had started their career during the Hungarian Reform Era and 23 who did so after 1860. The members of the first group were part of the Romanian lesser nobility, and their ancestry can be traced back to the 13th century.⁴⁴ They were relatively new to administrative service as their names only appear amongst the list of dignitaries after 1790. Their fathers were preponderantly members of the Greek Catholic clergy.

Positions of leadership had become open to them through a combination of their *hungarus* identity, their own merit and advantageous marriages. Of the 14 officials, six had law degrees, two were practicing lawyers and three had studied law. Most of them started their education at the Piarist Gymnasium of Sighetu Marmatei (Máramaroszigeti Piarista Gimnázium) before moving on to study philosophy (a prerequisite

for acceptance to legal studies at that time) at the Royal Roman Catholic Lyceum of Satu Mare (Szatmárnémeti Római Katolikus Bölcsészeti Líceum), and then progressing the Academy of Law in Kosice or Oradea (Kassai Jogakadémia, Nagyváradai Jogakadémia). One of the deputy lord lieutenants of the pre-1848 period, Ladislau Man (László Mán), placed great emphasis on his son's education, the afore-mentioned Iosif Man, who would later enter service with the county administration. Iosif studied at the law academies of Cluj (Kolozsvár), Eger, Košice (Kassa) and the Evangelical Lyceum of Bratislava (Pozsonyi Evangélikus Líceum).⁴⁵ Iura Gheorghe (Jura György) who also started his career in the pre-1848 period and who would become chief county notary in 1860⁴⁶ and a member of parliament in 1861, spoke 8 languages⁴⁷ and wrote articles for several important liberal newspapers in the capital.⁴⁸ The majority of these men also had long careers in the administration, with the average length of service lasting 24 years. The *hungarus* identity is signified by the fact that eight of the 14 Romanian officials took part in the Revolution as soldiers or functionaries. Five of these functionaries had Romanian wives, while four were married to Hungarian women; more interestingly, perhaps, is the fact that eight of these women were members of families which were already active in the administrative elite.

Among the second category of administrators consisting of those who entered service after 1860, the majority in fact started their career after 1867, with some even living long enough to serve under the Romanian state after 1918. These 23 functionaries were mostly second or third generation members of the families that had cemented their position during the Reform Era. Eleven of the group were themselves the sons of senior officials and already part of the county elite. The careers of those from more humble origins partly facilitated by their studies at the Law Academy of Sighetu Marmatei (Máramaroszigeti Jogakadémia), a local institution which allowed even poorer families to ensure a higher education for their children. The historian Alexandru Filipaşcu states that an influx of Romanians was encouraged by the director of the Reformed Gymnasium István Szilágyi, who would try to steer talented Romanian pupils towards careers in administration, even arranging potential marriages with women from Hungarian families; indeed, many of these officials did marry Hungarian women and became more integrated in Hungarian society.⁴⁹ Szilágyi likely had a good eye for talent, since many of the alumni of the Academy had long and successful careers with an average of 27 years service.

The remaining eleven functionaries took a somewhat different introduction to administrative service. They typically studied law at the Royal University of Budapest (Budapesti Királyi Tudományegyetem), but two went to Vienna while a further two remained

⁴⁰ The county commissioner was at the top of the hierarchy of elected county positions. He was responsible for running day-to-day administration, and his power was surpassed only by the appointed lord lieutenant in the dualist period.

⁴¹ Balázs Szöllősy, "A nemzetiségi igények, II. rész," *Máramaros*, February 21 1866, 2-3. For more information, see: Szabó, "Máramaros vármegye közigazgatása," 143-154.

⁴² Ferenc Pölöskei, "A dualizmus válságperiódusa (1890-1918)," in *Magyarország története a 19. században*, ed. András Gergely (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 490-491.

⁴³ Gábor Várady, *Hulló levelek III.* (Máramarosziget: Máramaroszigeti Részvény-Nyomda, 1894), 293.

⁴⁴ György Petrovay, "A máramarosi oláhok," *Századok* 45, no. 1 (1911), 612-615.

⁴⁵ Gábor Várady, "Mán József 1817-1876," *Vasárnapi Újság*, February 4, 1877, 67-68.

⁴⁶ DJ ANR MM, Baia Mare, Prefectura Judeţului Maramureş, F 45, inv. no. 340, folder no. 1/1860, Máramaros megye közönségének képviselő bizottmányi ülési jegyzőkönyve, December 13. 1860, 9.

⁴⁷ Hungarian National Archives, Budapest, Abszolutizmus-kori levéltár, D 188, Személyügyi Nyilvántartások 1847-1867, box 3, Jura György minősítési táblája, March 31, 1852, 223-225.

⁴⁸ György Jura, "Máramarosból," *Pesti Hírlap*, February 27, 1845, 134.

⁴⁹ Alexandru Filipaşcu, *Istoria Maramureşului* (Baia Mare: Editura Gutinul, 1997), 175.

closer to home, studying at the Law Academy in Sighetu Marmăției. Five of these officials had doctorates in law. In contrast to the other groups, however, they had shorter careers, averaging only 21 years. Some of them used the county administration as a stepping stone to the Hungarian Parliament, while others chose to focus on developing their estates. They were also well integrated into Hungarian society, with seven of the eleven taking Hungarian wives. Five even managed to surpass their father's success, mostly by taking advantage of the opportunities brought about by the political shifts in 1918–1919.

THE CASE OF THE MIHALYI FAMILY

The example of the Mihalyi family mirrors the broader picture sketched out in the preceding paragraphs. The family's origins can be traced back to the 14th century,⁵⁰ but the first member to join the ranks of the county administration was Gabriel Mihali (Gábor Mihályi), the son of the Greek Catholic archpriest of Ieud (Joód) Ion Mihalyi (János Mihályi), who was born in 1807. He began his studies at the Piarist Gymnasium of Sighetu Marmăției, from where he went on to study at the Law Academy of Oradea, becoming a lawyer. His administrative career began in 1830, when he was named honorary county attorney (tiszteletbeli alügyész),⁵¹ and he was later elected as a district chief (főszolgabíró) in 1833⁵² before being elected as a delegate to the Hungarian Diet in 1843. In 1845 he took over the position of the afore-mentioned Ladislau Man, whose daughter he had married, as one of the two county deputy lord lieutenants of Maramureș. After the outbreak of the Revolution, he became a member of parliament in May 1848. In August of the same year, he was made royal commissioner of Máramaros, Ugocsa, Bereg, Ung, Szatmár, Középszolnok and Kraszna counties, the domain of Kővárvidék and of the 17th Border Guard Infantry Regiment (17. számú határőrgyalogezred) also known as the 2nd Romanian Border Regiment (2. román határőrgyalogezred).⁵³ When Hungary declared complete independence in May 1849, he was named lord lieutenant of Maramureș county. As a leading figure in the Revolution, he helped to organize the defense of the region, ensuring the defence of the borders with Galicia and Transylvania and facilitating the creation of small arms and cannon factories to support the revolutionary army.

⁵⁰ Pál Joódy, *Máramaros vármegyei 1749–1769. évi nemesség vizsgálata* (Máramarossziget: Varga Béla Könyvnyomda Vállalata, 1943), 138.

⁵¹ In most cases, honorary functionaries did not receive remuneration; they were appointed by the lord lieutenant and rarely had actual administrative duties, with their position largely seen as a form of distinction. But in the cases discussed here, the position was granted to young members of important families to ensure a seat in the county administration, and involved actual duties. It was thus seen as a way of gaining administrative experience without the need to be elected as was the case with most positions.

⁵² The counties (vármegye) were split into districts (járás), each district was led by an elected district chief who played a major role in the proper administration of the district.

⁵³ DJ ANR MM, Colecția de Documente „Acad. Dr. Ioan Mihalyi de Apșa”, F 48, inv. no. 427, folder no. 8, Mihályi János és Mán József kegyelmi kérelme, October 31, 1849, 1.

After the defeat of the Revolution, he was sentenced to death and stripped of his wealth,⁵⁴ but his sentence was commuted to six years imprisonment⁵⁵ and his wealth was returned to him.⁵⁶ With the advent of the October Diploma which restored limited parliamentary rule in Hungary, his career took a turn for the better. He was named regency councilor (helytartósági tanácsos) in December 1860,⁵⁷ then joined the Hungarian Parliament for a second and last mandate in March 1861.⁵⁸ Many members of the elite who had been active in 1848 were restored in 1860,⁵⁹ so it is no surprise that he too returned to favor, but nonetheless, his appointment as regency councilor, a rank of national importance, is certainly unusual.⁶⁰ A prominent member of an ethnic minority, he was a moderate liberal who never openly endorsed the secession of Hungary from the empire⁶¹ but he also disapproved of the reorganization of the empire into autonomous regions based on national borders.⁶² A man of such background and convictions fit well into the agenda of the Hungarian Conservative elite, into whose hands the emperor trusted the leadership of the country in 1860. Sharing their desire to reestablish the pre-1848 stability of the country, Mihalyi could greatly aid the leadership from such an important position, swaying other wavering moderate liberals to their cause.

However, this does not explain how he was able to retain his position during the Schmerling Provisorium.⁶³ It could be that Mihalyi's experience as a functionary and his knowledge of the northeastern regions made him an important asset even in the new situation. The fact that he was not part of the wealthier landed nobility could be a further reason why he was even if the country was headed towards a direction different from his own political convictions. Ultimately, however, this would compromise his public image and cost him the elections of 1865.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, he landed on his feet after the compromise of 1867; like many other highly experienced but politically compromised functionaries that had served under the Liberal Era,⁶⁵ he would find a prestigious place in the justice system, becoming a judge on the Supreme Court (Leg-

⁵⁴ “Hadtörvénytörvényes ítéletek”, *Pesti Napló*, October 9, 1851, 477.

⁵⁵ Gábor Várady, *Hulló levelek II*, 89.

⁵⁶ “Hivatalos rész”, *Budapesti Hírlap*, July 16, 1856, 1.

⁵⁷ “Hivatalos rész”, *Sürgöny*, January 1, 1861, 1.

⁵⁸ “Országgyűlési-képviselő-választások”, *Nefelejts*, March 31, 3.

⁵⁹ József Pap, *Magyarország vármegyei tisztkara a reformkor végétől a kiegyezésig* (Szeged: Belvedere Meridionale, 2003), 277.

⁶⁰ “Nemhivatalos rész”, *Sürgöny*, January 29, 1.

⁶¹ DJ ANR MM, F 48, inv. no. 8, Mihályi János és Mán József, 2–4.

⁶² The Regency Council (Helytartótanács) was the governing body responsible for the administration of Hungary between 1723 and 1848 and for a brief period between 1860 and 1867. The regency councilors were appointed by the king from all corners of the country and were part of the decision-making body of the institution. “Mihályi Gábor beszéde”, *Sürgöny*, May 28, 1.

⁶³ Ágnes Deák, *From Habsburg Neo-absolutism to the Compromise 1849–1867* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 472, 497–498.

⁶⁴ “Követválasztási mozgalmak”, *Pesti Napló*, December 1, 1865, 2.

⁶⁵ Judit Pál, *Unió vagy „unificáltatás”? Erdély úniója és a királybiztos működése 1867–1872* (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2010), 346.

főbb Ítélszék), the highest forum of the Hungarian legal system,⁶⁶ a position which he would retain until his death in 1876.⁶⁷

Gabriel Mihalyi was an enthusiastic patron of any movement that sought to promote or develop Romanian culture, and he avidly believed that the survival of Romanian identity could only be assured through the promotion and preservation of its language and culture. He was one of the founders of the Romanian Theatre Fund (Societatea pentru crearea unui fond de teatru român) which aimed to develop a Romanian theatre troupe that could perform in settlements inhabited by Romanians.⁶⁸

An interesting parallel can be drawn with the life of Transylvanian jurist Alexandru Bohățiel, born in 1816. Like Mihalyi, he too was the son of a clergyman from a noble family, but his career would take a different path. He had studied in Blaj and Cluj alongside the iconic figure of the Romanian National Movement, Avram Iancu, and his involvement in the movement meant that a career in the administrative service was closed off to him. As a result he earned a living as a lawyer until the Revolution of 1848 when he was elected to the Cluj Diet. Although he never openly took up arms against the Hungarian authorities, he advocated for the rights of the Transylvanian Romanians and mediated between the two sides in 1849. After the Revolution he remained a lawyer, before becoming the supreme captain of the district of Naszód (Naszódi kerület) in 1861. After its dissolution in 1875, he was once again barred from any positions in the administration or the judicial system of Dualist Hungary due to his political views, and he continued to work as a lawyer in Cluj until his death in 1897.⁶⁹ The contrasting career paths of Alexandru Bohățiel and Gabriel Mihalyi highlight the differences between the Transylvanian Romanian elites and those from northeastern Hungary.

Mihalyi had seven children, three of whom enjoyed highly successful careers, but only two, Petru Mihalyi (Péter Mihályi) and Ioan Mihalyi (János Mihályi), entered administrative service. The third, Victor Mihalyi (Viktor Mihályi), lies beyond the scope of our study due to his different career and his strong national conviction, but it would be useful to mention him in passing. Born in 1841, he studied theology in Rome and became the Greek Catholic Bishop of Lugoj in 1875 and was appointed Archbishop of Blaj (Balázsfalva) in 1895. He would use his influence to ensure important positions in the administration for talented young Romanians. Amongst the Mihalyis he was the most open in his endorsement of the Romanian National Movement and made considerable efforts to bind the Movement more closely to the church under his leadership.

The appointment of Victor as archbishop was partly due to the political influence of the eldest brother,⁷⁰ Petru, who was born in 1838. He probably started his studies in

the Piarist Gymnasium of Sighetu Marmației and then moved to Vienna to study law. Due to his father's connections and his excellent education, he rose through the ranks much quicker than his father had, starting as deputy county notary (aljegyző) in 1860.⁷¹ By 1865 he was already an MP, and was then briefly appointed as district chief for one year in 1867. In 1868 he once again earned the trust of the voters of the Vișeu district (Visói kerület), retaining the seat until 1881 and regaining it in 1884.⁷² From 1887 he was the representative of the Sugatag district (Sugatagi kerület) until he retired in 1910.

Petru Mihalyi also established strong ties in the capital by marrying the daughter of a successful Roman Catholic Hungarian-Armenian lawyer from Budapest, Simon Lujza.⁷³ He was also a wealthy landowner, holding a total of 2 687 acres of land by 1897.⁷⁴ His political career began in the governing Liberal Party (Szabadelvű Párt), the least chauvinistic party of the time in terms of attitudes to minorities despite its strong opposition to the extension of the minority rights granting in the Nationalities Law of 1868.⁷⁵ In 1879 he joined the Moderate Opposition (Mérésékelt Ellenzék), which later took on the name of the National Party (Nemzeti Párt),⁷⁶ a somewhat more conservative and Hungarian nationalist party that favoured a more aggressive assimilatory policy towards various minorities, including the Romanians.⁷⁷ However, when Petru Mihalyi was elected to parliament for this Hungarian nationalist party in 1884, a Hungarian-language newspaper paradoxically claimed that he had been a supporter of the Sibiu conference of May 1881.⁷⁸ This conference had led to the formation of the unified Romanian National Party (Partidul Național Român) which sought, among other goals, the restoration of Transylvanian autonomy and a more substantial defence of the distinct identity of Romanians within Hungary.⁷⁹ Petru Mihalyi was also president of the Petru Maior Association of Romanian Students in Budapest (Societatea Academică "Petru Maior" a Studenților Români de la Budapesta) and the Cultural Association of the Romanian People of Maramureș (Asociațiunea pentru Cultură a Românilor din Maramureș).⁸⁰ The doubts that were raised over Mihalyi's actual ideological orientation

⁷¹ DJ ANR MM, F 45, inv. no. 340, folder no. 1/1860, Maramaros megye, 9.

⁷² Judit Pál et. al., *Parliamentary Elections in Eastern Hungary and Transylvania (1865–1918)* (Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2018), 240–241, 243.

⁷³ "Különfélék," *A Hon*, November 11, 1873.

⁷⁴ *A Magyar Korona Országainak Mezőgazdasági Statisztikája II* (Budapest: Pesti Könyvnyomda Részvény-Társaság, 1897), 576–577.

⁷⁵ The law guaranteed cultural and linguistic rights in the lower administration and judicial system in counties where a non-Hungarian nationality comprised 20% of the population; in practice, the law was rarely applied. 1868. évi XLIV. törvény a nemzetiségi egyenjogúság tárgyában, accessed 28 August 2023, <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=86800044.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torveny?keyword%3D1868>.

⁷⁶ Henrik Fabro and Ujlaki József eds., *Sturm-féle Országgyűlési Almanach 1905–1910* (Budapest: Pesti Lloyd-Társulat Könyvnyomdája, 1905), 338.

⁷⁷ Dániel Szabó, "Parlamentari pártok Magyarországon (1867–1919)," in: *Magyarországi politikai pártok lexikona, 1846–2020 – Párt és politika*, ed. István Vida (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó–MTA–ELTE Pártok, 2011), 89.

⁷⁸ "Új emberek," *Budapesti Hírlap*, August 7, 1884, 2.

⁷⁹ Keith Hitchins, *România 1866–1947* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2013), 209.

⁸⁰ "Különfélék," *A Hon*, October 25, 1874, 3.; "Petru Mihályi de Apșa," *Unirea*, November 14, 1914, 1.

⁶⁶ "Hivatalos rész," *Budapesti Közlöny*, October 28, 1869, 3651.

⁶⁷ Mihályi Gábor gyászjelentése, accessed 28 August 2023, <https://dspace.oszk.hu/handle/20.500.12346/425614#>.

⁶⁸ "A románok színházegyesülete," *Pesti Napló*, August 27, 1904.

⁶⁹ Teodor Buhățel, *Din "Panteonul" marilor patrioți români ardeleni: Alexandru Bobățel* (Cluj-Napoca, Editura Diotima, 2008), 25–28, 35–37, 42–49, 58–60, 86–96.

⁷⁰ Nicolae Bocșan and Ion Cârja eds., *Memoriile unui ierarh uitat: Victor Mihalyi de Apșa (1841–1918)* (Cluj-Napoca, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2009), 8, 13–51.

may have contributed to his defeat in a parliamentary election held two months after the Sibiu conference in 1881.⁸¹

On the surface, Petru Mihalyi shared the political attitudes of his father, including his absolute loyalty to Hungary, but he was active in a different era. A more astute judgement of his career would be that he was a pragmatist who believed that Romanian culture could only be preserved through the support of the government and by strengthening the financial backbone of the Romanian elite, a possibility which he also believed had been facilitated by liberal rule.⁸² Of course, his position as a member of the governing party also served his interests as he was all but guaranteed a parliamentary seat, and this likely explains his willingness to rejoin the governing Liberal Party after the merger with the National Party in 1900.⁸³ His long-standing membership of the opposition party might also be explained by the fact that the National Party represented agrarian interests; as a major landowner, the party's stance likely aligned with his own interests. The Liberal Party dissolved after the electoral loss of 1905, and its place was taken by a new coalition of parties, including the former National Party, which ruled the country from 1906-10 with a much more aggressive brand of Hungarian nationalism, and this might also account for Mihalyi's participation in the opposition.⁸⁴ He was involved in several attempts to dissuade the government from curbing the rights of national minorities, including the example of the *Lex Apponyi*, an attempt to severely restrict Romanian language education which was named after its sponsor, the minister of education of the coalitional government Albert Apponyi. Apponyi and Mihalyi had previously been colleagues in the National Party, and Petru Mihalyi lobbied his long-term confidante to moderate or at least delay the implementation of this magyarizing policy.⁸⁵

Petru Mihalyi's career is certainly remarkable, but it is not wholly unique. He was one of the most successful Romanian MPs who stood for Hungarian ruling parties, a group of men who were mostly recruited from the ranks of the county intelligentsia serving as in the county administration, schools, church or military, sometimes with a noble background, and who believed that the interests of the Romanian minority could be protected through the backing of the governmental party. Although he was of orthodox faith and did not serve as part of the administration, the somewhat more successful figure of György Szerb from the county of Bihar enjoyed a career which shared similarities with that of Mihalyi. Szerb also came from a Romanian noble family, and his father was also a high-ranking bureaucrat. Mihalyi and Szerb were both elected to the Hungarian Parliament seven times; they were the longest serving Romanian

MPs and were fully integrated into the highest echelons of Hungarian society. While Mihalyi used his influence to empower the cultural and educational institutions of the Romanians of his local region of Máramaros, Szerb did the same on a national level through his involvement in the Gojdu Foundation and the Romanian Theatre Fund.⁸⁶

In many respects, the career of Petru's youngest brother, Ioan Mihalyi (born in 1844), was similar to that of his own. They both initially studied at the same school, although Ioan Mihalyi continued his education at gymnasiums in Uzhhorod (Ungvár) and Kosice⁸⁷ before obtaining a doctorate in law at the University of Pest.⁸⁸ As with his brother, Ioan Mihalyi was a large landowner with a holding of 1325 acres.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, he never considered a career in high politics and spent the entirety of his career as a county official, serving first as deputy county notary of Máramaros from 1866, then as its chief attorney (*főügyész*) from 1871,⁹⁰ a position he would hold for 40 years.⁹¹ A career focused on local administration meant that he lived most of his life in the administrative center of the county, Sighetu Marmătiei, a town which at that time had only a small number of Romanian inhabitants. Like his brother, Ioan was also a supporter of Romanian cultural associations, and the two brothers even took out a loan to help build a dormitory for Romanian pupils studying in Sighetu Marmătiei.⁹² Ioan was also in charge of the finances of the Cultural Association of the Romanian People of Maramureș⁹³ and a benefactor of the Petru Maior Literary Society of Budapest.⁹⁴

Ioan Mihalyi's views on Romanian national rights went beyond the mere preservation of Romanian culture and language, and this was due, at least in part, to his interest in history and his social background. While studying at the University of Pest, he took private classes in history, archaeology, numismatics and paleography,⁹⁵ and he applied this knowledge to compile and publish medieval documents about Maramureș from the 14th and 15th century. His work in this field led to him becoming a member of the Hungarian Historical Society (*Magyar Történelmi Társulat*) and also a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy of Sciences (*Academia Română*) where he drew

⁸⁶ Ovidiu Emil Iudean: *The Romanian Governmental Representatives in the Budapest Parliament (1881-1918)* (Cluj-Napoca, Mega Publishing House, 2016), 223-227, 237-238.

⁸⁷ Mihai Dăncuș, "Casa muzeu Mihalyi de Apșa în Pantheonul neamului românesc," *Acta Musei Maramorosiensis* 3, no. 1 (2005): 395.

⁸⁸ "A Máramaros-szigeti Ügyvédi Kamara jubileuma," *Ország-Világ*, June 3, 1900, 452.

⁸⁹ Gusztáv Beksics, *A Román Kérdés és a Fajok Harca Európában és Magyarországon* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1895), 186.

⁹⁰ The chief attorney was elected by the county, and while he lacked the direct political power of other officials such as the district chief or the county commissioner, the position's responsibility for legal matters meant that it was crucial to the functioning of the county.

⁹¹ *Magyarország tisztii cím- és névtára, XXX. évfolyam* (Budapest: Pesti Könyvnyomda-Részvény-Társaság, 1911), 113.

⁹² Jenő Gagyi, *A Magyarországi Románok Egyházi, Iskolai, Közművelődési, Közgazdasági Intézményeinek és Mozgalmainak Ismertetése* (Budapest: Uránia Könyvnyomda, 1909), 248.

⁹³ "Asociațiunea pentru Cultura poporului român din Maramureș," *Gazeta Transilvaniei*, October 10, 1902, 3.

⁹⁴ "A román ifjúság mulatsága," *Budapesti Hírlap*, March 3, 1907, 15.

⁹⁵ Mihai Dăncuș, "Casa muzeală," 395.

⁸¹ "Az új képviselők betűrendes névsora," *A Hon*, June 28, 1881, 2.

⁸² Other Romanian MPs who were members of the governing parties also shared his views; see: Ovidiu Emil Iudean, *Deputații guvernamentali români în parlamentul de la Budapesta* (PhD diss., Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, 2012).

⁸³ Gábor Egry, "Unruly borderlands: border-making, peripheralization and layered regionalism in post-First World War Maramureș and the Banat," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 27, no. 6 (December 2020): 715

⁸⁴ István Dolmányos, *A koalíció az 1905-1906. évi kormányzati válság idején* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976), 166.

⁸⁵ "Apponyi és a románok," *Az Újság*, September 9, 1909, 3.

the attention of the famous Romanian historian and politician Nicolae Iorga.⁹⁶ He believed that as one of the first nationalities to be present in the region, the Romanians had both a demographic and historical right to their own autonomy.⁹⁷ Both of his wives were Romanian; the first was from a Transylvanian Romanian family from Sibiu (Nagyszeben), one of the centers of the Romanian National Movement,⁹⁸ while his second was from a local Romanian family from Vișeu de Sus (Felsővisó) which was also active in the county administration.

Ioan Mihalyi sought to create a separate “Romanian faction” in the county elite that would serve as a more powerful means of representing Romanian national interests.⁹⁹ This was possible providing that the consensus established by the compromise of Călinești was still functional. Nevertheless, he never publicly embraced the program of the Romanian National Party (Partidul Național Român). When running for the office of deputy lord lieutenant he gave a speech that omitted any mention of his ethnic or nationalist sympathies, stressing the importance of peaceful cohabitation among all of the different ethnicities of the county. This was to little avail, however, as he lost the election regardless. It may have been this experience that encouraged him to become involved in business, in particular the mineral sources of the county, and by 1904 he had established three ore mines in 1904. The financial stability that these ventures offered him allowed for a greater degree of freedom in his political career, and his nationalist sympathies grew bolder towards the end of his life. In 1913, he publicly supported a proposal that a branch office of the Association for Romanian Literature and Culture of the Romanian People (Asociația Transilvană pentru Literatură și Cultura Poporului Român), the cultural backbone of the Romanian National Movement, be founded in Maramureș. In addition to the influence of his advancing age, his increasing willingness to express his political views more openly may have been a result of the radical political climate of the early 1900s and also the position which he held at the Romanian Academy of Sciences.

As with his older brother, Petru, Ioan Mihalyi’s career is not without parallel, and the life of the journalist and editor of the *Familia* newspaper, Iosif Vulcan from the county of Bihar shows some resemblance. Both men developed their sense of Romanian identity by studying in Budapest; both subsequently lived in cities in which Romanians were in a minority; both had familial ties with Hungarian families and were well integrated into Hungarian society; their sense of local identity tempered their nationalist convictions; and both were recognized for their achievements (either scientific or literary) by both Hungarian and Romanian academic institutions. In both cases, however,

this success did necessitate some degree of self-censorship, but both men attempted to strengthen Romanian identity through culture.¹⁰⁰

Petru’s correspondence with Ioan was mostly conducted in Hungarian but also included some letters written in Romanian or a combination of the two languages.¹⁰¹ Both brothers died in 1914,¹⁰² but the fates of their sons, who lived to see the southern half of Máramaros become part of the Romanian state, was more paradoxical. Petru Mihalyi had two sons, Petru and Gabriel, while Ioan had one, Longin, who was also involved in the county administration. Petru’s children were both old enough to have had successful careers in the Dualist period. The older son Gabriel (Gábor) was born in 1872¹⁰³ and obtained his law doctorate at the University of Budapest¹⁰⁴ before starting his career at the age of 25, when he became a trainee (közigazgatási gyakornok). By 1896 he was already a district chief (szolgabíró),¹⁰⁵ from 1900 he was deputy district chief (helyettes főszolgabíró)¹⁰⁶ and was finally appointed district chief in 1901,¹⁰⁷ a position he would hold until the installation of Romanian authority in 1919. Politically he was initially affiliated with the governing Liberal Party¹⁰⁸ and later to its successor, the National Party of Work (Nemzeti Munkapárt).¹⁰⁹

Our knowledge of the early years of Petru Mihalyi the younger is more detailed. Born in Kosice in 1880, he started his studies at the city’s Premonstratensian Gymnasium (Premontrei Rend Kassai Főgimnáziuma) before continuing to Vienna and Budapest where he obtained a doctorate in law. Judging by his early career he was an ambitious young man, and he came closer than his relatives did to renouncing his Romanian identity. While still in Kosice he was the president of an association that promoted Hungarian culture and, by extension, assimilation, the Arany Learning Circle (Arany

¹⁰⁰ Iosif Vulcan was editor of the *Familia* newspaper for most of his life and was a regular feature of high society in Oradea. His plays and translation of Romanian folk poetry to Hungarian brought him membership of the Kisfaludy Society (Kisfaludy Society) but he also was a member of the Romanian Academy of Sciences. Robert Nemes: *Another Hungary, The Nineteenth-Century Provinces in Eight Lives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 121-149.

¹⁰¹ DJ ANR CJ, Cluj-Napoca, Fond Familial Mihalyi, F 245, inventory no. 1204, folder no. 183, Scrisoarea lui Petru Mihalyi către fratele său Ioan Mihalyi, February 23, 1871, pp. 2-6.

¹⁰² *Mihályi Péter gyászjelentése*, accessed 28 August 2023, <https://dspace.oszk.hu/handle/20.500.12346/425743#>; Dr. Mihályi János gyászjelentése, accessed 28 August 2023, https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/Gyaszjelentések_DebreceniRefKollNagykonyvtara_MEC_MOLD/?query=mih%C3%A1lyi%20W%20j%C3%A1nos&pg=255&layout=s.

¹⁰³ Trainees were appointed by the lord lieutenant and took on roles which the honorary offices carried out in the first half of the 19th century, functioning as a starting position in the administrative service. DJ ANR MM, Baia Mare, Prefectura Județului Maramureș, F 45, inventory no. 629, folder no. 5, Evidențele funcționarilor comitatului Maramureș, 1892-1916, p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ *A Budapesti Királyi Magyar Tudomány-egyetem Almanachja MDCCCXCII-XCII. Tanévre* (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Egyetem Könyvnyomdája, 1893), 100.

¹⁰⁵ “Máramaros megye,” *Pesti Napló*, April 4, 1896, 3.

¹⁰⁶ A district chief usually had two deputy district chief under his command handling the less important tasks of the district. The deputy district chief was an interim position, appointed in cases when the elected district chief had died during his mandate or was incapable of performing his duties. “Helyettesítések,” *Kárpáti Lapok*, July 29, 1900, 4.

¹⁰⁷ “Máramaros vármegye,” *Alkotmány*, May 4, 1901, 8.

¹⁰⁸ “Választási mozgalmak,” *Magyarország*, January 18, 1905, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Armand Fehéri, “Panamacsokor – mákvirágokból,” *Pesti Hírlap*, October 29, 1913, 6.

⁹⁶ Mihai Dăncuș, “Casa muzeală,” 381, 395.

⁹⁷ “Új emberek,” 2.

⁹⁸ “Hymen, mennyegzők a mult hétről,” *Hölgyek Lapja*, May 5, 1878, 216.

⁹⁹ “A máramarosi közművelődési egyesület,” *Nemzet*, March 21, 1886, 3.

Önképző-kör), named after the famous Hungarian poet János Arany. For a brief period, he was a journalist at the nationalist newspaper, *Magyarország* which called for even greater autonomy for Hungary within the Habsburg Monarchy. As a member of the nationalist National Party, he became the president of the Hungarian Student's Circle of Budapest (Egyetemi Kör).¹¹⁰ Unlike his father, he never joined the Petru Maior Association of Romanian Students in Budapest.¹¹¹ He married Kamília Kovássy, a member of a Protestant Hungarian family which was well embedded in the administrative apparatus of Maramureş.¹¹² By 1905 he was honorary district chief (tiszteletbeli szolgabíró) and spent time in the border police until 1910 when he took over the parliamentary seat for Sugatag district (Sugatagi kerület) which his father had held.¹¹³

Longin, the son of Ioan Mihályi, took a different path, studying at the Greek Catholic Gymnasium of Blaj,¹¹⁴ another important center of the Romanian National Movement, before returning home to complete his studies at the Law Academy of Sighetu Marmătiei. He was in his second year when the war ended in 1918.¹¹⁵ Longin's political views were probably shaped to a considerable degree by the influence of his father but also his uncles, including the aforementioned Victor Mihályi, who was still archbishop when his nephew was studying in Blaj. It is therefore understandable that his reaction to the approach of the Romanian Army differed from that of his cousins. Both Gabriel and Petru were initially hostile at first, and Gabriel, at this time still a district chief, allegedly disobeyed the order given by a Romanian army officer to remove the Hungarian flags from the district's official buildings.¹¹⁶ Petru attracted attention for a speech he gave in the Hungarian Parliament on October 23rd 1918 in which he stated that the Romanians of Maramureş still wished to belong to the Hungarian nation and state.¹¹⁷ Longin, on the other hand, brought the first Romanian flag to Sighetu Marmătiei from Cluj and flew it on his father's house; the same flag was used in the ceremony in which the first functionaries swore loyalty to the Romanian state.¹¹⁸

The Romanian chief notary of Sighetu Marmătiei in 1919, Aurél Faur Szent-Gály, chronicled the events that followed the Romanian occupation of Maramureş, and his journal mentions rumors spreading about the possibility of Gabriel and Petru switching their allegiances. Gabriel placated the officer who he had supposedly defied by invit-

ing him to a tea party at his estate in Sarasău (Szarvaszó). Petru was even said to have changed his clothing style to appear more "Romanian", and he held soirees in honor of the officers of the Romanian Army at the house of his uncle in Sighet.¹¹⁹ Gabriel was appointed subprefect of the county in April 1919,¹²⁰ founding and leading the local branch of the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal). When this party came to power in 1922, he became the prefect of the county until 1926, with further periods of office in 1927–1928 and 1933–1935.¹²¹ Petru also joined the liberals, serving as an MP in Bucharest for 5 years, after which he was mayor of Sighetu Marmătiei between 1932–1936, ending his career as prefect of Maramureş in 1937.¹²² All three were decorated with the Iron Cross of Romania. Little is known about Longin in this period, but he likely lived in the shadow of his cousin, serving as pretor in 1922 and prefect between 1934–1935.¹²³

The rapid turnaround and the efficiency of the Mihályis' adaptation to the new settlement should come as no surprise. The likelihood of the complete dissolution of the Monarchy was only apparent after the very end of October 1918, and the possibility that Hungary would be partitioned was almost unthinkable until the beginning of 1919. These two monumental events therefore came as a tremendous shock for most of the Hungarian political elite, and it is little wonder that both Petru and Gabriel were at first hostile and skeptical towards the new Romanian authorities. However, the brothers were fortunate that process of the romanianization of the administration in the new Greater Romania could not be implemented overnight. The process was slowed by the Romanians' inability to quickly replace the expertise of the departing Hungarian functionaries.¹²⁴ Local customs also stubbornly persisted in face of the central authorities,¹²⁵ and therefore the Romanian authorities were extremely grateful to have ensured the support of a family of Romanians with a long history in local administration and with considerable local influence; this is especially true in the case of the National Liberal Party which had no political infrastructure of its own in the newly acquired territories. In exchange for the support of the Mihályis, the liberals would agree to turn a blind eye to the sins of the past. The same approach would be taken in the aftermath of the

¹¹⁰ "Az egyetemi választás," *Magyarország*, September 16, 1900, 8.

¹¹¹ "Din societatea Petru Maior," *Tribuna*, September 12, 1900, 792.

¹¹² "Házasság," *Kárpáti Híradó*, February 20, 1944, 3.

¹¹³ Ferenc Zimmer and Ferenc Végváry (eds.), *Sturm-féle Országgyűlési Almanach 1910–1915* (Budapest: Pázmáneum nyomda és irodalmi vállalat, 1910), 361.

¹¹⁴ *Anuarul Institutelor de Învățământ Gr.-Cat. din Balázsfalva (Blaj)* (Balázsfalva (Blaj): Tipografia Seminariului Teologic Greco-Catolic, 1916), 61.

¹¹⁵ György Gergely and Péter Balogh (eds.), *A Máramaroszigeti Ref. Lyceum, Jogakadémia, Főgimnázium és Internátus Értesítője az 1918–919. Tanévről* (Máramarosziget: Wizner és Dávid motorerőre berendezett könyvnyomdája, 1919), 32.

¹¹⁶ "Rolul trădătorului Mihály Peter în timpul revoluției," *Patria*, November 18, 1922, 3.

¹¹⁷ *Az 1910. évi június hó 21-ére Hírdett Országgyűlés Képviselőházának Naplója, Negyvenedik kötet* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1918), 425–426.

¹¹⁸ Dăncuș, "Casa muzeală," 382.

¹¹⁹ Aurél Faur Szent-Gály, *Máramaroszigeti Napló 1919* (Budapest: Erdélyi Szalon Könyvkiadó, 2023), 7–12, 63–65.

¹²⁰ In the Romanian administration, the prefect played a similar role to that of the county commissioner deputy lord lieutenant in the Hungarian structure, but the position was appointed by the government and was not elected. The subprefect was the deputy of the prefect.

¹²¹ Alexandru Filipașcu, *Istoria Maramuresului*, 211, 214.

¹²² Alexandru Filipașcu, *Istoria Maramuresului*, 208, 214.

¹²³ The pretor was the leader of one of the districts (plasă) that comprised the counties in the Romanian administration. The position was similar to that of the district chief but it was an appointed post rather than an elected role. "Trădătorii de neam din slujba liberalilor," *Patria*, February 11, 1923, 3; Alexandru Filipașcu, *Istoria Maramuresului*, 214.

¹²⁴ Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, "Une analyse statistique du personnel de l'administration publique départementale de Transylvanie pendant son integration administrative au royaume de Roumanie (1918–1925)," *Histoire & Mesure* 37, no. 2 (2022): 118–120.

¹²⁵ Gábor Egrý, "Zárványok, hagyományok, szakemberek. A magyar közigazgatás és Nagy-Románia működése" in *Trianon és a magyar közigazgatás*, ed. Béni L. Balogh (Budapest: Magyar Kormánytisztviselői Kar – Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 2020), 145–150.

Second Vienna Award in 1940, when the southern half of Maramureş was returned to Hungary. The shock of the Romanian political elite was just as great as that of the Hungarians in 1918, and the Hungarians immediately undertook the re-magyarization of the administration, with Gabriel Mihalyi becoming a member of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament.¹²⁶ The brothers would be decorated once again, this time by the Hungarian state for their efforts in modernizing the economy of their county.¹²⁷ Petru was arrested by the Hungarian authorities in August 1944 and was later freed by the Soviet troops upon their arrival. He served briefly in the interim leadership of the county, but he was arrested once again, probably by the communists, and died in 1951.¹²⁸ Nothing is known about the fate of Gabriel in this period, but if he chose to remain in Romania, he would likely have met a similar fate to that of his brother.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to identify three factors that influenced the relationship of the Mihalyi family to their national identity: self-interest (either political, personal or familial), national convictions and local customs. These factors also affected the ways in which family members related to the sudden political earthquakes of the era. The predominance of one factor over the other underwent changes depending on the specific historical context.

Gabriel Mihalyi Senior was responsible for consolidating the family's position in the elite. Local customs played the most important part in the success of his career together with his own innate merit and marriage choices, but it was ultimately his *hungarus* identity that allowed him to climb towards the upper echelons of the Hungarian dominated administrative hierarchy. His sons Petru and Ioan were presumably raised among the milieu of their father, but other factors were also involved in determining their views concerning the fate of Romanians under the Dual Monarchy. Petru's approach was shaped largely by local customs and the compromise of Călineşti, but his many years as an MP in the Hungarian Parliament also played a role. He pragmatically believed that ruling the county in collaboration with the elites of other nationalities and with the support of the governing parties would ensure the cultural and linguistic rights of the Romanians, as well as serving his familial and personal interests. Also significant was his decision to take a Hungarian wife. Nationalism had a push and a pull effect on the brothers. Ioan was drawn towards it through his familial ties in Sibiu, his historical studies and his desire to ensure territorial rights for the Romanians under the Dual Monarchy. He never advocated openly for autonomy, as that would have probably endangered his position within the elite, and it is therefore possible to suggest that

local customs and personal interest tempered his nationalism. Petru on the other hand, probably less out of his own volition, was pushed towards a more open defense of the rights of Romanians by the rising Hungarian nationalism of the coalition government in power between 1906–1910.

The third generation of the family came closest to assimilation. While it is certainly apparent in the career paths of many family members, national identity in these cases appears to be primarily transactional in nature. This can perhaps explain why the sons of Petru, Gabriel and Petru the younger, appeared initially indifferent towards their Romanian heritage at first. Culturally, they were the most integrated into Hungarian society, but their main motivation seemed to be the advancement of their careers and increasing the wealth of the family. This did not change under the interwar Romanian regime other than the fact that they could not reveal their "Hungarian side" so openly, and that same pragmatism was once again evident when they were reincorporated into the Hungarian state during the Second World War. Central government needed their support to maintain the peace in the county, while the brothers needed support to retain their own power. One exception to this trend was Longin, the younger and thus more radical son of Ioan, who had been raised in the different environment of Blaj. His national conviction in 1918–1919 seems to be much stronger than that of his cousins, but somewhat ironically, his career under Greater Romania was less successful than those of Gabriel and Petru.

This study offers a general overview covering a more extensive timespan, and it therefore leaves many open questions. A more detailed analysis of the Mihalyi family is thus necessary, with a greater focus on the years between 1919–1944 and other important members and how they related to each other. The afore-mentioned archbishop Victor Mihalyi is another good example here, and his life perhaps requires more detailed study. The careers of the functionaries of the family should also be compared to those of other Romanians from the same background in Maramureş. Their reaction to important events, such as the Transylvanian Memorandum, is also deserving of further study. Lastly, an inquiry into the perception of the family as found in contemporary newspapers and in Romanian historiography would also be warranted.

¹²⁶ "Kik az új választott felsőházi tagok," *Nemzeti Újság*, January 21, 1943, 3.

¹²⁷ "Mi újság a piacon?" *Brassói Lapok*, May 22, 1940, 9.

¹²⁸ Ovidiu Emil Iudean, *The Romanian Governmental Representatives*, 2016, 171-173.

3. Career Paths of Zipser Deutsche Partei Mayors in Interwar Spiš*

Szabolcs Czáboczký

One of the most important works on the political and cultural activities of the German communities of Slovakia during the 19th and 20th century was written by Dušan Kováč roughly 35 years ago.¹ Despite studies by Mária Ďurková drawing attention to the cooperation between the Zipser Deutsche Partei (ZDP) and the Hungarian opposition parties in the first Czechoslovak Republic² or Michal Schvarc's research into the impact of agitation by the Karpathendeutsche Partei,³ a fuller analysis of the political behaviour, preferences, cultural life and economic self-organisation of the German-speaking community in Slovakia remains a gap in our knowledge which is still waiting to be filled. In contrast, the range of works focusing on the local history of various villages and towns of the Spiš (Szepes in Hungarian, Zips in German) region is noteworthy and can also serve as relevant starting points for research into different ethnic groups, since the county was notable for its religious, ethnic and social diversity in the years before the Second World War. The scholars who played the greatest role in reconstructing the past of the municipalities of Spiš were Ivan Chalupický and Jozef Sulaček, but their research focused primarily on the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Since this paper analyses the careers of two local politicians active in Levoča (Lőcse, Leutschau) and Poprad (Poprád, Deutschendorf), it is inevitable that we will rely heavily on the work of these two historians.⁴

* This chapter was supported by the Scientific Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (VEGA), pr. n. 2/0077/22.

¹ Dušan Kováč, *Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku (1871–1945)* (Bratislava: Veda, 1989).

² Mária Ďurková, "Spolupráca nemeckých a maďarských politických strán v predmníchovskom Československu," in *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v procesoch transformácie po roku 1989 (Historické, politologické a právne súvislosti)*, ed. Jana Šutajová and Mária Ďurková (Prešov: Universum, 2007), 121–131. Mária Ďurková, "Spišskí Nemci a ich politická strana v medzivojnovom období na Slovensku," in *Slezský ústav szm. Profil – Výzkum – Perspektívy. Sborník z mezinárodné vědecké konference konané ve dnech 4. a 5. listopadu 2008 v Opavě* (Opava: Slezský ústav SZM, 2009), 191–200. Mária Ďurková, "Spolupráca Spišskonemeckej strany s maďarskými politickými stranami v regióne Spiša začiatkom dvadsiatych rokov a koncom tridsiatych rokov 20. storočia," *Človek a spoločnosť* 13, no. 2 (2010): 10–25.

³ Michal Schvarc, "Politická agitácia a činnosť Karpatonemeckej strany v oblasti Hauerlandu na Slovensku v rokoch 1935–1938," *Historický časopis* 52, no. 1 (2004): 87–118. Michal Schvarc a Anton Hruboň, "Od 'ochrany nemeckej veci' ku kultu hákového kríža. Rola Karpatskonemeckej strany pri fašizácii nemeckej menšiny na Slovensku," in *Fašizmus náš slovenský. Korene, podoby a reflexie fašizmu na Slovensku (1919–1945)*, ed. Anton Hruboň (Bratislava: Premedia, 2021), 175–201.

⁴ Ivan Chalupický and Jozef Sulaček, *Dejiny Levoče, II. časť* (Košice: Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1975). Jozef Sulaček, "Administratívno-správny a spoločensko-politický vývoj v rokoch 1919–1938," in *Dejiny Popradu*, ed. Ivan Chalupický (Košice: Oriens, 1998), 210–238. Jozef Sulaček, "Ekonomicko-sociálny vývoj v rokoch 1919–1938," in *Dejiny Popradu*, ed. Ivan Chalupický (Košice: Oriens, 1998), 239–266.

A broad analysis and summarization of the topic will allow us not only to specify the data available on the topic but also to identify new lines of fracture. Political parties of the period believed it was vital to be seen as a homogenous, indivisible unit before the public eye, and this is why historians must tread carefully in accepting this interpretation at face value. The presentation and comparison of the two examples offered in this paper aim to challenge the image of the ZDP which was primarily created by Ďurková and later by Furmanik⁵ that the party was exclusively oppositional, blindly loyal to the Hungarian opposition and entirely unified, without any internal dissent. Before we introduce Artur Polnisch, the former deputy mayor of Levoča, and Emmerich Varga, the former mayor of Poprad, both of whom were leading figures in the ZDP's local organisations, it is necessary to contextualise their political activity. The party's name makes it apparent that the ZDP relied first and foremost on the German-speaking population of Spiš as a voter base, and the following section of this chapter aims to define their exact place of residence between the two World Wars. The following sections will attempt to explain the circumstances under which the ZDP emerged, and with the help of the two featured political actors, we can also gain an impression not only of the ethnic-language or geographically based groups which came under the purview of the ZDP but also the social classes which formed their backbone.

THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES OF SPIŠ: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Even prior to 1918, the local Slovak speaking population were the majority group in the Spiš region, but the German speakers formed the second largest ethnic group, with a local presence dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries. In addition to these two main ethnic groups, the Spiš region was also home to other significant ethnic-linguistic or religious minorities such as Hungarian, Jewish and Roma communities.⁶ The region's German community was mostly centred around the towns and villages along the banks of the Poprad and the Hnilec rivers, but smaller groups could also be found among the residents of the towns of Levoča, Spišská Nová Ves (Igló, Zipser Neudorf), Spišské Podhradie (Szepesváralja, Kirchdrauf) and Spišské Vlasy (Szepesolaszi, Wallendorf), and there was also a tiny diaspora consisting of two villages along the Dunajec river in the northern part of the county.⁷ German-inhabited mining settlements were also located near the historical borders of the county of Spiš: Nižný Medzev (Alsómecen-

zéf, Untermetzenseifen), Vyšný Medzev (Felsőmecen-zéf, Obermetzenseifen) and Štós (Stósz, Stooß) along the Upper Bodva river, which originally belonged to the county of Abov-Turňa (Abaúj-Torna). Not far from the western borders of Spiš in the northern part of the Gemer (Gömör) region lies the mining town of Dobšiná (Dobsina, Dobschau), many of whose former inhabitants were known for their unique German dialect called "bulleener". According to the population census of 1921, just under 40 thousand people considered themselves German by nationality in the Spiš region, including the four above-mentioned municipalities.⁸

THE FOUNDING OF THE ZIPSER DEUTSCHE PARTEI

The establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic on the October 28th 1918 was not recognised immediately by the international community, nor were its borders confirmed by the peace treaties of Versailles. Indeed, the entry of the first Czechoslovak legionary troops into the territory of the northern counties of the Hungarian Kingdom had been preceded by an attempt to form a more democratically-oriented country through the successful revolution in Budapest on October 31st 1918 led by Count Mihály Károlyi and the declaration of the Hungarian People's Republic on November 16th 1918. The most effectively organised political movement of the era, the Social Democratic Party of Hungary,⁹ joined Károlyi's governmental coalition, and they naturally saw one of their main interests as expanding into different regions of the country.

The county of Spiš was caught up in these revolutionary efforts. For example, the Social Democratic Party of Kežmarok (Késmárk, Kesmark) (KSDP)¹⁰ was founded on November 22nd 1918 in a textile factory owned by Karl Wein,¹¹ and Theodor Sauter¹² was elected as party leader.¹³ As the Czechoslovak troops drew closer to Spiš, the hopes of the German elite of Kežmarok that the county of Spiš would remain in the hands of the Hungarian administration became more and more unrealistic. At the end of November and the beginning of December 1918, the *Karpathen Post* published articles about the

⁸ Exact data can be found in the database created by the Centre for Social Sciences Institute for Minority Studies (MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont Kisebbségkutató Intézete): "Szlovákia településeinek etnikai és felekezeti adatai 1870-2021," accessed September 4, 2023, <https://kisebbssegkutato.tk.hu/szlovakia-etnikai-felekezeti-1870-2021>.

⁹ In Hungarian: Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt (MSZDP).

¹⁰ In German: Kesmarker Sozialdemokratische Partei (KSDP).

¹¹ Karl (Károly) Wein (1858-1935): Textile factory owner. Influential entrepreneur in the Poprad-valley. He was also the main shareholder of many German-related companies in Spiš, such as the Zipser Bank a. g. (Spišská banka a. s., Szepességi Bank r. t.), the most important bank of the German bourgeoisie of Spiš. "Wein Károly," *Szepesi Híradó*, August 10, 1935. Božena Malovcová, "Politický a hospodársky vývoj mesta 1918-1945," in *História Kežmarku od 2. polovice 18. storočia*, eds. Nora Baráthová, Ivan Chalupický, Erika Cintulová and Božena Malovcová (Kežmarok: Jadro, 2017), 138

¹² Theodor (Tivadar) Sauter (1886-1949): Printer, book publisher, businessman. Publisher of the *Karpathen Post* weekly newspaper, one of the most frequently read newspapers amongst the German-speaking citizens and bourgeoisie of Spiš. On the life of Theodor Sauter, see Andrej Janovský, "Pred 130 rokmi sa narodil Theodor August Sauter," *Z minulosti Spiša* 24, (2016): 280-282.

¹³ "Késmarker Sozialdemokratische Partei," *Karpathen Post*, November 28, 1918.

⁵ Martin Furmanik, "Spišskí Nemci v rokoch 1920-1937," *Kultúrne dejiny* 13, no. 2 (2022): 248-272.

⁶ On the social structures of the Spiš region before World War I, see: Robert Ištók and Zuzana Lesniaková, "Národnostná a konfesionálna štruktúra obyvateľstva sídiel Spišskej župy v roku 1880," in *Spiš v kontinuite času*, ed. Peter Švorc (Prešov: Universum, 1995), 103-108.

⁷ While the majority of the Spiš Germans originally came from Saxony, the families who settled near the Dunajec river in the 1780s around Nižné Sváby (Alsólehnic, Sublechnitz, now part of Červený Kláštor) and Majere (Vyšné Sváby, Ómajor, Alt-Meierhof) hailed from Württemberg. On the topic of the German settlers near the Dunajec river, see: Hans Kobialka, *Nemeckí osadníci na Dunajci. Dejiny krajiny a Nemcov na severnom Spiši* (Kežmarok: ViViT s.r.o., 1998).

possibility of forming a so-called “Zipser Republik” (Spišská republika, Szepesi Köztársaság), an idea which originated with two German speakers Gyula Andor Hefty¹⁴ and Tibor Kéler.¹⁵ Slovak and Hungarian historians (notably Ladislav Tajták, Zoltán Ilyés, Balázs Ablonczy and Gábor Sztancs) have studied the topic of the Zipser Republik in detail, but opinions differ on whether this – in theory short-lived – state was ever formally established or announced. Martin Furmanik’s research is, however, the most persuasive as he concludes that the Zipser Republik only existed as a concept.¹⁶ The attempt to create a Zipser Republik was not unique if we take into consideration the other ephemeral states which were either proclaimed or founded (or otherwise) by local elites throughout the Carpathian Basin due to the power vacuum of the years after 1918.¹⁷

Czechoslovak forces occupied the county of Spiš in the first half of December 1918 and encountered no civilian resistance, since the German speaking elite loyal to Hungary (like the ethnic Hungarians living in the southern part of present-day Slovakia) assumed that the situation would eventually change.¹⁸ After the declaration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on March 21st 1919 and the escalation of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian War in April 1919, the Minister with Full Power for Slovakia¹⁹ Vavro Šrobár (1867–1950) declared the imposition of indefinite martial law. During these months the political interests of the Spiš Germans were still represented by the social-democratic KSDP, which initially tried to cooperate with the new Czechoslovak administration led by Ján Rumann (1876–1925), the new lord lieutenant (župan) of Spiš. Despite this cooperation, the KSDP under the leadership of its founder Sauter and, from Autumn 1919, by its head secretary Hefty, also demanded the right to the unrestricted use of German in all official capacities, a regional school inspectorate for German schools under the supervision of German-speakers from Spiš, self-government and a sovereign Lutheran Diocese led by the regional German clergy.²⁰ While most of these demands were acknowledged and filed by the Czechoslovak authorities, they were not fulfilled because the Czechoslovak authorities saw no need to make major conces-

sions to the German speaking minority. By the end of 1919 the Treaty of Saint-Germain had consolidated the status of the Czechoslovak Republic in the international community. Although the southern borders of the state were not formally codified until June 1920 with the Treaty of Trianon, Hungarians living in the territories occupied by Czechoslovak forces began to organise their own political movements according to Czechoslovak law. The first to emerge was the National Christian-Social Party (OKP)²¹ which was mainly backed by the Roman Catholic, conservative elite loyal to Hungary. The party’s rhetoric sought to attract all of “the indigenous people of Slovakia” who had formerly been living under the rule of the Hungarian Kingdom, thereby including not only Hungarian but also Slovak, German, Ruthenian speakers and others, rather than with the Czech (and Sudeten German) “colonists”, who had migrated to Slovakia and began their new careers in the new Czechoslovak educational institutions and administration.²² The OKP and its leaders such as Jenő Lelley (1879–1949) or later Géza Szüllő (1873–1957) were in close contact not only with the Office of Foreign Affairs in Hungary, but also with the Prime Ministers Pál Teleki (1879–1941) and István Bethlen (1874–1946). This was also the case with the Provincial Hungarian Smallholder and Farmers’ Party²³ which was formed in Komárno (Komárom) in February 1920 and led by an influential landowner from the Gemer region, József Szent-Ivány (1884–1941). The establishment of both of these parties came at the turning point of 1919–1920, prior to the onset of the first parliamentary elections on April 18th and 25th 1920.

On January 24th 1920 the editors of the *Karpathen Post* published a proclamation informing the German speaking inhabitants of Spiš of a forthcoming unified German party of Spiš, the goals of which included not only the political representation of the Germans living in the region but also the organisation of the Germans of the Hauerland²⁴ and other communities of German speakers in the far-eastern region of Czechoslovakia known as Podkarpatská Rus.²⁵ The new party, to be called the Zipser Deutsche Partei, established its first local organisations during Hefty and Kéler’s agitational trips across the Poprad and Hnilec valleys in February and March. They mostly relied on members of the voluntary fire brigades and male choirs which had been founded 40–50 years earlier and had maintained a traditional role in German speaking civic society. These types of connections between political parties and civic organizations were not unusual; for example, the Slovak People’s Party (HSLŠ) led by Andrej Hlinka, a Roman

¹⁴ Julius Andreas (Gyula Andor) Hefty (1888–1957): Teacher, mountaineer, journalist. During November and December 1918 his social and political activity concentrated on maintaining the territorial integrity of Hungary, and he also worked as editor-in-chief of the *Karpathen Post*. On the life of Gyula Andor Hefty, see: Jozef Suláček, “Aktivity Gyulu Andora Heftyho pri vzniku Československa”, *Z minulosti Spiša* 26 (2018): 41–61.

¹⁵ Tibor Kéler (1885–1957): Lawyer. Member of the Director’s Council in several German-related companies, including the Zipser Bank and the Local Railways of the Poprad-valley (Poprad-völgyi helyi érdekű vasút r. t.) and served as their legal representative.

¹⁶ Szabolcs Czáboczký, “Szepesi németek az első Csehszlovák Köztársaságban. Historiográfiai áttekintés,” *Századok* 157, 3. sz. (2023): 591–592.

¹⁷ On the Ephemeral States between 1918–1921 on the territory of the former Hungarian Kingdom, see: Veronika Szeghy-Gayer and Csaba Zahorán eds., *Kérésállamok. Átmeneti államalakulatok a történelmi Magyarország területén (1918–1921)* (Budapest: Ludovika, 2022).

¹⁸ On the topic of the behaviour of the Hungarian population living in the counties occupied by Czechoslovak legationaries between 1918 and 1919, see: Attila Simon, *Az átmenet bizonytalansága. Az 1918/1919-es impériumváltás Pozsonytól Kassáig* (Somorja–Budapest: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2021).

¹⁹ In Slovak: Minister s plnou mocou pre správu Slovenska.

²⁰ Štátny archív v Prešove, špecializované pracovisko Spišský archív v Levoči (hereinafter ŠA PO, šp. ŠA LE), fund Spišská župa, box. 2809, inv. no. 955/1919.

²¹ In Hungarian: Országos Keresztényszocialista Párt (OKP). In Slovak: Krajinská kresťansko-socialistická strana.

²² Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, *Felvidékből Szlovénzkő. Magyar értelmiségi útkeresések Eperjesen és Kassán a két világháború között* (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2016), 80–81.

²³ In Hungarian: Országos Magyar Kisgazda és Földmívelő Párt (OMKFP)

²⁴ The German-language press published in the first Czechoslovak Republic used the term “Hauerland” to refer to the region of Handlová (Nyitrabánya, Krickerhau), Kremnica (Körmöcbánya, Kremnitz) and Nitrianske Pravno (Németpróna, Deutschproben) and their neighbouring villages, which were mostly inhabited by ethnic Germans. The etymology of the term comes from the suffix “-hau”, since it was used in the German form of many village names (such as Glaserhau, Honneshau, Kuneschhau etc.). Schvarc, “Politická agitácia a činnosť Karpatonemeckej strany v oblasti Hauerlandu na Slovensku v rokoch 1935–1938,” 87–88.

²⁵ “Aufruf zur Organisation einer Zipser Deutsche Partei,” *Karpathen Post*, January 24, 1920.

Catholic priest in Ružomberok, cooperated closely with the youth organisation Orol, which promoted the benefits of physical education. After the first ceremonial general assembly of the ZDP which was held in the Casino building of the Manufacturers' and Traders' Organisation on March 22nd 1920,²⁶ the party participated in most of the elections organised during the years of the first Czechoslovak Republic, including the local elections which were held nationwide in 1923, 1927, 1931 and 1938. The party achieved some success in these elections, with several of their candidates being elected as mayors, including the two mayors who are the focus of this article. An analysis of their lives can offer insights into the social groups on which the ZDP relied and also indicate some differences between the parliamentary and regional policy of this party.

THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND THE ECONOMIC ELITE: ARTUR POLNISCH

The local patriotism of the German speaking communities of Spiš was derived above all from the wide range of privileges granted to them by the Hungarian kings in the medieval period,²⁷ and this thinking was quite common in the historical centre of the county, the town of Levoča. The 1921 census shows that the town had a population of 7477 of which 1414 individuals considered themselves German by nationality.²⁸ It is important to note here, however, that the borderlines between German and Hungarian nationality are somewhat porous, and personal ethnic-language identification as German, Hungarian or Jewish was often superceded by the traditional "Zipser" local patriotism amongst the usually bi- or trilingual bourgeoisie to which the mayors examined in this study also belonged. In Czechoslovakia this local Spiš patriotism was mostly represented and supported by the pro-Hungarian and the oppositional movements which were still able to exert significant influence on local government following the reform of local government that infuriated many Zipser German-speakers. According to the decree on public administration, which came into effect on January 1st 1923, the territory of Slovakia was divided into new administrative districts called "velžupa". This change meant the disappearance of the county of Spiš from administrative maps and its absorption into the Podtatranská and Košická velžupa. The resistance to this reorganization was led, not surprisingly, by members of the former Hungarian political elite, such as Lajos Neogrády (1860–1924), the former deputy lord lieutenant (alispán)

of Spiš County, and János Rejovszky, the deputy mayor of Levoča until 1921, who founded the Committee for the Unity of Spiš County in January 1921²⁹ which attempted to prevent the enactment of the new velžupa system. Their cause attracted support from several influential Slovak representatives, for example, Jozef Krššák, the Roman Catholic priest of Levoča and a leading member of HSLŠ.³⁰

Neogrády's movement was also supported by a talented young man in his late twenties, Artur Polnisch, who, according to his own narrative, owed his prominence to the trust of a local Jewish-Hungarian printer, Elek Singer. The Levoča-based *Zipser Anzeiger* (Szepesi Értesítő, Spišský Oznamovateľ) was one of the longest running newspapers in the region, dating back to 1862. Renamed as *Zipser Bote* (Szepesi Hírnök, Spišský Chyrník) in the early 1900s, the newspaper stayed in print until 1919 when the editor-in-chief József Ábrányi was no longer able to resolve the newspaper's financial issues and was forced to sell out to the owner of the *Szepesi Lapok* newspaper, Gyula Telléry (1879–1932), one of the most promising journalists in Spišská Nová Ves. During the chaotic days of 1919, Singer and Neogrády assured Ábrányi's fellow editor, Artur Polnisch (1892–1965) of their moral and financial support for the release of a new Hungarian-German language newspaper to be printed in Levoča. According to Polnisch's published memoir, another important figure stood by his side at this time, since "my initiative would have been an absolute failure, if it had not been for the selfless support of one young man, who was always so dear to me and whom fate has drawn away from us, but he will remain in my heart for the rest of my life: the former trainee solicitor of Levoča, Dr. Ernő Flachbarth."³¹ Any academics carrying out research in the field of the upper mentioned Hungarian oppositional parties will inevitably come across the name of Ernő Flachbarth, a local journalist in the Spiš region who was also involved in establishing the ZDP in the region. Flachbarth hailed from a trader's family based in the town of Gelnica (Gölnicbánya, Göllnitz).³² The young lawyer served as editor-in-chief at the weekly newspaper for only a few months because *Szepesi Híradó* was prohibited by the authorities in 1920, only being "relaunched" in January 1921. As a prominent newspaper editor, Flachbarth was one of the main organisers of the event in the Bourgeois Casino (Burgercasino, Polgári Kaszinó) in Levoča where the attendees agreed to form the local organisation of the ZDP.³³ In March, 1921 Flachbarth became the Head Secretary of the Office of the Hungarian Oppositional Parties in Prague and focused on fostering collaboration between German and Hungarian speakers in Slovakia. In 1929, the leading Slovak nationalist Vojtech Tuka was convicted of running a Hungarian espionage ring in

²⁶ "Konstituierung der Zipser Deutschen Partei," *Karpathen Post*, March 27, 1920.

²⁷ Zoltán Ilyés, "A Szepesség a szepesieké'. Szepesi német autonómiatörekvések és lojalitáskényszerek a két világháború között," in *Etnikai identitás, politikai lojalitás. Nemzeti és állampolgári kötődések*, eds. Nóra Kovács, Anna Osvát and László Szarka (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 193.

²⁸ Data on the nationality and religion of the population census of 1921 calculated in Levoča: Population: 7477. German: 1414 (18,91%). Czechoslovak: 5041 (67,42%). Hungarian: 466 (6,23%). Jewish nationality: 381 (5,1%). Roman Catholic: 5465 (73,09%). Lutheran: 910 (12,17%). Judaist: 694 (9,28%). "Szlovákia településeinek etnikai és felekezeti adatai 1870–2021," accessed September 4, 2023, <https://kisebbssegkutato.tk.hu/szlovakia-etnikai-felekezeti-1870-2021>.

²⁹ In Hungarian: Szepesvármegye Egységéért Küzdő Bizottság. "Szepes vármegye egységének kérdése," *Szepesi Híradó*, January 22, 1921.

³⁰ "A 'Fekete város' gyászja," *Szepesi Híradó*, November 25, 1922.

³¹ P[olnisch Artur], "Hogyan lett belőlem 'újságcsináló,'" *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, January 30, 1932.

³² "Flachbarth Hermann", *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, March 5, 1932.

³³ "Zipser Deutsche Partei," *Karpathen Post*, March 27, 1920.

which Flachbarth was involved,³⁴ and he was therefore forced to flee Czechoslovakia. He became one of the main advisors to government officials in Hungary dealing with the situation of the Hungarian minority of Czechoslovakia.³⁵

Artur Polnisch was born on January 14th 1892 in Beli Manastir (Pélmonostor, present-day Croatia) which was at that time a part of the county of Baranya in the far south of Hungary,³⁶ but it is not clear when exactly his parents moved to Levoča. His father, Árpád Polnisch (1860–1931) worked as a forester in the region on lands belonging to the Esterházy-family,³⁷ and the young Artur attended the Catholic High School in Levoča despite being baptised as a Lutheran, so it is most likely that the family migrated to the urban centre of the Spiš region at the turn of the century. After finishing his studies, Polnisch registered at the Eastern Commercial Academy in Budapest³⁸ where he made friends with Gyula Germanus (1884–1979), an orientalist professor who held a presentation about Islam in Levoča in 1915 which included a contribution by Polnisch. In his own writings, Polnisch described his younger self as always having been fond of writing and journalism, even though by profession he became an economist. He combined his profession and his passion by leading the editorial staff of the *Szepesi Híradó*, one of two Hungarian-language newspapers which were published in Spiš during the interwar period. It was while working on this paper that Artur became acquainted with Flachbarth who served as the editor-in-chief of the paper from 1919–1921.³⁹

Like the majority of the Burgers in Levoča, Polnisch was bilingual, speaking both German and Hungarian, though he didn't originally hail from Spiš and his feelings of loyalty were deep towards the Hungarian language and ethnic symbols. He struggled to come to terms with the accession of the Czechoslovak regime and was arrested as an "untrustworthy individual" in 1928 on the suspicion of conspiring against the republic and of membership of a secret organisation connected to the Rothermere campaign,⁴⁰

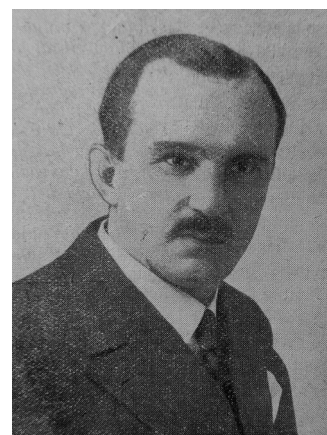


Fig. 3.1: The Portrait of Artur Polnisch journalist, banker, politician, published by *Szepesi Híradó* – *Szepesi Hírlap*, January 30, 1932.

although the charges were ultimately dropped due to the lack of evidence.⁴¹ Despite his lack of sympathy for the newly founded republic, Polnisch took an active part in Levoča's local political life, and this culminated in his candidacy as a representative of the ZDP in the 1923 local elections. He was successfully appointed to the position of first deputy mayor under the mayor Jozef Chládek, a member of the HSLS, the strongest party in Levoča in the interwar era.⁴² Chládek, a journalist and economist retained his position alongside the two deputy mayors after the 1927 local elections,⁴³ but he was later replaced by another member of the HSLS, the secretly pro-Hungarian landholder and lawyer Tivadar Ujfalussy (1882–?).⁴⁴ By that time, the Provincial Hungarian Smallholder and Farmers' Party had transformed into the Hungarian National Party⁴⁵ and entered into a coalition with the ZDP and the Sudeten German

Agrarian Party⁴⁶ prior to the 1925 parliamentary elections held in November. This was the first breaking point between the two Hungarian oppositional parties, the OKP and the MNP: while the OKP remained a firm oppositionist⁴⁷ party, the MNP-ZDP-BdL coalition sought to identify ways of cooperating with the Czechoslovak government. After the announcement of the founding of the MNP at the beginning of October 1925, the party also formed a county branch in Spiš in addition to sub-branches in Spišská Nová Ves and Levoča. According to a news article published on December 31st

³⁴ ŠA PO, šp. ŠA LE, fond ŠtZ LE, box. 124, inv. no. 1454/1928. Tk III 511/28.

⁴² The results of the 1923 local elections in Levoča: HSLS – 935 (11 mandates), OKP-ZDP – 650 (7 mandates), Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, KSČ – 612 (7 mandates), Coalition of the State-forming Parties – 369 (4 mandates), Agrarian Party – 327 (4 mandates), Jewish Party – 234 (3 mandates). Ivan Chalupický and Jozef Sulaček, *Dejiny Levoče*, 281. "Lôcse a választás napján," *Szepesi Híradó*, September 22, 1923.

⁴³ The results of the 1927 local elections in Levoča: HSLS – 1036 (13 mandates), OKP-ZDP – 768 (9 mandates), Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party, ČSSD – 383 (5 mandates), KSČ – 313 (4 mandates), Agrarian Party and State-forming Parties – 200 (3 mandates), Jewish Party – 160 (2 mandates). "Választások után," *Szepesi Híradó* – *Szepesi Hírlap*, October 22, 1927.

⁴⁴ The author hypothesises that Tivadar Ujfalussy didn't identify himself as a Slovak, even though he was a local politician of the HSLS. The lawyer from Levoča was the legal representative of land in Čencice (Csontfalu, present-day Jánovce) owned by one of his relatives, István Kray (1887–1967), a Hungarian parliamentary representative known for his pro-Habsburg and monarchist views. After the declaration of the sovereign Slovak State, Ujfalussy was arrested as an "untrustworthy individual", because the authorities confiscated a Hungarian flag found during the search in his home. ŠA PO, šp. ŠA LE, OÚ LE, box. 37, inv. no. 599/36. prez. 548-2/34.; ŠA PO, šp. ŠA LE, OÚ LE, box. 64, inv. no. 933/1940. prez. St 1515/40., 361/40.

⁴⁵ In Hungarian: Magyar Nemzeti Párt (MNP). In Slovak: Maďarská národná strana.

⁴⁶ In German: Bund der Landwirte (BdL).

⁴⁷ By firm oppositionist I mean the party would not support any drafts handed in by the Czechoslovak government, thus attempting to sabotage the country's governing procedures. A firm oppositionist politician would not support a draft handed in by a governmental representative, even though it would benefit those, who the oppositional politician claim to represent.

³⁴ Vojtech (Béla) Tuka, a former law professor at the Elisabeth University in Bratislava (Pozsony, Preßburg) who became a member of the HSLS after 1918, gaining the trust of Andrej Hlinka. He published an essay with the title "On the tenth anniversary of the Declaration of Martin" (V desiatom roku Martinskej deklarácie, A turócszentmártoni dekrétum tizedik évében) in the *Slovák* daily newspaper on January 1st 1928 in which he referred to a secret clause of the declaration according to which Slovakia had joined the Czechoslovak Republic with a ten year time period. After the expiration of the specific period, a so called "vacuum iuris" would commence, with the territory of Slovakia "having the right" to gain independence from the country. The political scandal created by the article led to Tuka's prosecution and conviction for treason and espionage for Hungary, and he was sentenced to 15 years of prison. During the trial, Flachbarth had been accused of being involved in Tuka's case, after which he fled to Munich. On the topic of the Tuka case, see Peter Fedorčák, *Tuka proti republike. Proces z roku 1929* (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2018).

³⁵ Béla Angyal's following work presents details about the political activity of Flachbarth: Béla Angyal, *Érdekvédelem és önszerveződés. Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyar pártpolitika történetéből 1918–1938* (Galánta–Dunaszerdahely: Fórum Intézet–Lilium Aurum, 2002).

³⁶ ŠA PO, šp. ŠA LE, fund Okresný úrad v Levoči (hereinafter OÚ LE), box. 212, inv. no. 171/928. adm. Riadne členovia zastupiteľstva.

³⁷ "Polnisch Árpád," *Szepesi Híradó* – *Szepesi Hírlap*, October 31, 1931.

³⁸ In Hungarian: Keleti Kereskedelmi Akadémia.

³⁹ P[olnisch Artur], "Hogyan lett belőlem 'újságcsináló,'" *Szepesi Híradó* – *Szepesi Hírlap*, January 30, 1932.

⁴⁰ ŠA PO, šp. ŠA LE, fund Štátne zastupiteľstvo v Levoči (hereinafter ŠtZ LE), box. 124, inv. no. 1454/1928. St 1454/1928.

1927, “based on an older decision aimed at emphasising fraternity, an agreement states that the Zipser Deutsche Partei will not set up a separate department in Spišská Nová Ves, with only the Hungarian National Party establishing its own organisation here, which will also serve as the centre of their county branch.”⁴⁸ The county branch was led by a retired factory manager called Lajos Förster and his deputy became none other than Artur Polnisch.

Another reason to conclude that Artur Polnisch was loyal to Hungary was his membership in the Budapest-based Spiš Alliance,⁴⁹ whose cadres were drawn mostly from refugees from the region who had fled Czechoslovakia after 1918 and found employment as officials in Hungary from where they attempted to assist their fellow refugees and promote the idea that the people of northern Slovakia yearned for reincorporation into Hungary. Polnisch was one of its few members of this association who remained in Czechoslovakia.⁵⁰ Polnisch was also an influential force behind the scenes due to his appointment as Head Director of the Zipser Creditbank a.g. in Levoča in 1935.⁵¹ This prominent financial institution had been founded in 1869 and preserved its sovereignty throughout the interwar period in contrast to many other banks which required government bail-outs. The bank had wisely concentrated its share capital (2.4 million crowns) in valuable properties, primarily the hotels and spas of Starý Smokovec (Ótátrafüred, Altschmecks) in the High Tatras.⁵² The Grand Hotel in Starý Smokovec served as a venue for negotiations between Hungarian oppositional politicians. Polnisch initially served as head inspector of the recreational baths before taking control of the bank.⁵³ The Zipser Creditbank was also the financial institution of choice for the wealthiest Hungarian noblemen of the Levoča region who generally lived in isolation and had little enthusiasm for the politics of the new Czechoslovakia.⁵⁴ Thus, Polnisch was not “merely” a deputy mayor of the town; his role as head of the editorial staff of the *Szepesi Híradó*, his contacts with refugees in Budapest including Flachbarth, and his involvement in the Zipser Creditbank all indicate that he was one of the most influential members in the background of the Hungarian opposition.

Despite the unsuccessful requests of the German-speaking Lutheran pastors of Spiš for their own (ethnically German) diocese under their own German-speaking bishop which they had voiced through the KSDP in 1919, two deaconates remained in the region after the change of power in 1918–1919: the Archdeaconate of the Spiš Cities and the Archdeaconate of the Subtatras.⁵⁵ These two bodies became a part of the Eastern District of the Lutheran Church of Slovakia,⁵⁶ and the installation of its new bishop in 1919 was attended by Albert Kübecher (1857–1938),⁵⁷ the then head of the Archdeaconate of the Spiš Cities who was also the Lutheran pastor of Lúbica (Leibic, Leibitz) between 1902 and 1937.⁵⁸ Kübecher held the position of archdeacon until 1931, when he was replaced by a much younger and promising pastor from the town of Poprad, Emmerich Varga (1883–1951).⁵⁹

Poprad was still a much smaller town than Levoča, but it was undergoing a period of dynamic growth, with the population increasing from 2881 in 1921 to 4029 just nine years later;⁶⁰ in contrast, the population of Levoča grew from 7477 to 8906 in the same period. As Antal Fodor’s brief travelog entitled *Zipserföldön* states, Poprad was a “hardworking town, an eternal example of enthusiasm. There is no more beautiful sound in the world than the noise of work, and this small town is the Bayreuth of industry. Factories and workshops rattle and rumble cheerfully. – ‘Nothing is impossible!’ growls the iron will, and all obstacles perish under its heavy hammer”.⁶¹ Poprad was home to an important railway junction of the Košice–Bohumín railroad which provided a direct train connection between the far east and the west of Czechoslovakia, and the town’s regional importance grew rapidly, with many Slovaks finding work in local industries, the tourism sector or the railways. While the local German- and Hungarian-speakers (both Gentiles and Jews) had not welcomed the unwanted change of power, they had managed to retain their influence in the town through their economic position. Jozef Sulaček highlights a survey made in the 1930s which stated that 75% of small businesses in Poprad were run by Germans, Hungarians and Jews.⁶² Significantly, the town’s largest companies were affiliated with the German-speaking elite of the

THE CLERGY: EMMERICH VARGA

⁴⁸ “A Magyar Nemzeti Párt szepesmegyei körzetének ülése Iglón,” *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, December 31, 1927.

⁴⁹ In Hungarian: Szepesi Szövetség.

⁵⁰ Balázs Ablonczy, „Lesz még kikelet a Szepesség felett” Kormányzati befolyás és menekülthálózatok társadalmi a két világháború közötti Magyarországon», in Balázs Ablonczy, *Nyombiztosítás. Letűnt magyarok. Kisebbség- és művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok* (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2011), 135–146.

⁵¹ Not to be confused with the Zipser Bank a. g. based in Kežmarok. In Hungarian: Szepesi Hitelbank r. t. In Slovak: Spišská úverná banka a. s.

⁵² Ivan Chalupecký and Jozef Sulaček, *Dejiny Levoče*, 238.

⁵³ “Kinevezések a Szepesi Hitelbanknál,” *Szepesi Híradó*, June 1, 1935.

⁵⁴ For example, Gusztáv Csáky of Spišský Hrhov (Szepesgörgő, Gorgau) or Ákos Wieland of Markušovce (Márkusfalva, Marksdorf). Archiv Národnej banky Slovenska, fund Spišská úverná banka a. s. Levoča, U-0001-0004, S0-000-071-289.

⁵⁵ In Slovak: Spišský mestský seniorát, Podtatranský seniorát. In Hungarian: Szepesi Városi Főesperesség, Tátraaljai Főesperesség.

⁵⁶ In Slovak: Východný distrikt Evanjelickej cirkvi na Slovensku.

⁵⁷ Božena Malovcová and Peter Olexák, “Cirkevné dejiny”, in Zuzana Kollárová et al., *Lúbica (1271–2021)*, II. část (Kežmarok: Jadro, 2021), 25.

⁵⁸ “Kübecher Albert,” *Szepesi Híradó*, November 12, 1938.

⁵⁹ “Evangelischer Festtag in Poprad,” *Karpathen Post*, October 17, 1931.

⁶⁰ The results of the 1921 population census in Poprad: German: 1002 (34.78%). Czechoslovak: 1263 (43.84%). Hungarian: 249 (8.64%). Jewish nationality: 127 (4.41%). Roman Catholic: 1695 (58.83%). Lutheran: 666 (23.12%). Judaist: 446 (15.48%). In 1930: German: 1052 (26.11%). Czechoslovak: 2200 (54.6%). Hungarian: 153 (3.8%). Jewish nationality: 268 (6.65%). Roman Catholic: 2417 (59.99%). Lutheran: 763 (18.94%). Judaist: 618 (15.34%). “Szlovákia településeinek etnikai és felekezeti adatai 1870–2021”, accessed September 12, 2023, <https://kisebbssegkutato.tk.hu/szlovakia-etnikai-felekezeti-1870-2021>.

⁶¹ Antal Fodor, *Zipserföldön* (Igló: Magánkiadás, 1921), 61.

⁶² Jozef Sulaček, “Ekonomicko-sociálny vývoj v rokoch 1919–1938,” 260.



Fig. 3.2: Photograph of the Participants of the Convent held by the Lutheran Archdeaconate of the Spiš Cities on 26–27th June 1935. Sitting from the left: Artur Polnisch, Andor Nitsch, Albert Scholtz, Emmerich Varga, Albert Kübecher, Hugo Kalchbrenner, Michael Holko, Lajos Förster, Ludwig Hritz, published by *Képes Hét*, July 4, 1935.

ZDP; for example Tibor Kéler and Andor Nitsch⁶³ were on the board of directors of the First Steam Brewery and Malthouse of Spiš,⁶⁴ whose majority owner was the Zipser Bank of Kežmarok.⁶⁵ Despite the fact that the people who considered themselves to be of German nationality on the census only formed between a quarter or a third of the population, their influence in local politics can be measured by the fact that the post of mayor in Poprad between 1922–1939 was held exclusively by candidates of the ZDP. In the 1923 municipal elections, the “Zipsers” won 8 mandates in the thirty-member Council of Representatives, although the councillors representing the Agrarian Party, the HSLŠ, the KSC and the Jewish Party were also forces to be reckoned with.⁶⁶ The winner among the mayoral candidates was a well-known local baker, Alexander Bresel (1863–1930), who even managed to gain the support of the communist and Jewish rep-

representatives after the 1927 elections.⁶⁷ This interesting alliance can be understood from an ethnic-nationalist, but also religious aspect, as the German-speaking Communist and Jewish Party members favored the Lutheran Bresel over the Slovak and Roman Catholic candidate of the HSLŠ. Bresel resigned from his post due to ill health, and in May 1928, the local Lutheran pastor Emmerich Varga was elected as his successor.⁶⁸

Although his name was quintessentially Hungarian, Varga was in fact born in the predominantly Slovak Roman Catholic village of Letanovce (Létánfalva, Lethensdorf) near Spišská Nová Ves. After successfully completing his early education in the nearby town, he studied theology at the Lutheran College of Prešov (Eperjes, Preschau) and also spent almost a year at the University of Leipzig. He was initiated into the ranks of the Lutheran clergy in 1906 and was first sent out to a congregation in the Croatian capital of Zagreb (Zágráb) where he spent almost four years as an assistant pastor. Afterwards he was relocated to the village of Szepetnek in Zala County in western Hungary where his son, Ottó Varga (1909–1969) was born.⁶⁹ Although he grew up in Poprad where his father served as pastor from 1910–1942, he went on to become a talented mathematician in Hungary and received the country’s top award, the Kossuth Prize. Emmerich Varga prioritized the use of German, but he spoke Hungarian and Slovak equally well. This multi-lingualism and the ambiguous and adaptable loyalty which it entailed may explain Varga’s ability to forge relationships with officials of the new Czechoslovak administration, for example Michal Haviar (1889–?), the district captain (okresný náčelník) of Poprad.⁷⁰ In contrast to Polnisch, Varga’s position as mayor, which offered the opportunity of attracting investments and state funding, meant that he was considered a loyal citizen of the republic in the eyes of the authorities,⁷¹ despite the fact that he was a member of the openly oppositional ZDP. In 1930 Haviar was criticised by an article in the *Slovák*, the HSLŠ newspaper, which accused him of corruption and financial manipulation. In the same year, the Agrarian Party and the ZDP jointly organised a demonstration defending Haviar against the accusations at which Emmerich Varga was one of the key speakers.⁷² The infrastructural improvements undertaken by Varga, such as the electrification of the town, likely would not have been accomplished without the support of the district captain or the most influential party in the government, the Agrarians. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that at a public meeting organised by the ZDP on October 19th Varga “emphasised the importance of German culture in Spiš and how it had been supported by the old Hungarian kings, and how it had managed to

⁶³ Andor Nitsch (1883–1976): Politician, landowner, agricultural expert. Nitsch replaced Hefty as the leading figure in the ZDP after his resignation from the position of head secretary in 1922. The 1925 parliamentary elections saw his election to the Parliament in Prague as a candidate of the MNP-ZDP-BdL coalition, and he held his seat until 1938. After the declaration of the independent Slovak State, he was imprisoned twice in Ilava. On the life of Andor Nitsch: Jozef Sulaček, “Medailón Andora Nitscha – politika Spišskonemeckej strany,” *Z minulosti Spiša* 9-10, (2001/2002): 220-230. Adalbert Hudak: “Andor Nitsch – ein Lebensbild (1883–1976),” *Karpatenjahrbuch* 34 (1983): 69–74.

⁶⁴ In Hungarian: Első Szepességi Gőz-sörfőzde és Malátaház. In German: Erste Zipser Dampfbrauerei und Mälzerei. In Slovak: Prvý spišský pivovar a sladovňa.

⁶⁵ Jozef Sulaček, “Ekonomicko-sociálny vývoj v rokoch 1919–1938,” 252-253.

⁶⁶ Results of the 1923 local elections in Poprad: ZDP – 434 (8 mandates), Agrarian Party – 355 (7 mandates), HSLŠ – 319 (6 mandates), KSC – 272 (5 mandates), Zsidópárt – 183 (4 mandates). “Wahlergebnisse,” *Karpathen Post*, September 22, 1923.

⁶⁷ Results of the 1927 local elections in Poprad: ZDP – 393 (9 mandates), HSLŠ – 279 (6 mandates), KSC – 196 (5 mandates), ČSSD – 131 (3 mandates), Citizens’ Party – 96 (2 mandates). “Választási eredmények a Szepességen,” *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, October 22, 1927.

⁶⁸ Jozef Sulaček, “Administratívno-správny a spoločensko-politický vývoj v rokoch 1919–1938,” 228.

⁶⁹ “Varga Imre, az új szenátor,” *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, June 10, 1934.

⁷⁰ The district captain was the head representative of the state administration in his own district, who was assigned by the head of the county, the lord lieutenant between 1919–1928, what right was taken over by the Provincial President in 1928.

⁷¹ ŠA PO, pobočka Poprad (hereinafter pb. PP), fund Okresný úrad v Poprade (hereinafter OÚ PP), box. 17, inv. no. 938/1930. prez. 20/30.

⁷² Jozef Sulaček, “Administratívno-správny a spoločensko-politický vývoj v rokoch 1919–1938,” 213.



Fig.3.3: Photography of Andor Nitsch standing in front of the Rudolfinum in Prague (Parliament of Czechoslovakia in the interwar era), published by *Képes Hét*, March 9, 1930.

maintain its originality”.⁷³ It is also no coincidence that Varga was one of Andor Nitsch’s key allies within the ZDP, since it was in the interests of both Szent-Ivány and Nitsch to become a political force with whom the Agrarian Party would have to cooperate after the 1925 parliamentary election; this would allow them to make demands regarding the granting of economic advantages and a wider range of political and cultural rights.⁷⁴

One of the main political goals of the ZDP had always been to facilitate the construction of railway networks in the German-inhabited regions of Spiš, but while Andor Nitsch demanded a connection between Margecany (Margitfalva, Margareten) and Červená Skala (Vereskő) along the line of the River Hnilec,⁷⁵ Varga favored the construction of a line between Poprad

and Dobšiná. Varga believed that this route would attract more tourists, and accordingly he and the town representatives proposed this alternative to the government in December 1935.⁷⁶ After the death of the MNP senator János Richter (1872–1934), Varga was named as his successor,⁷⁷ and he took over his seat in the upper house of the Czechoslovak parliament after swearing an oath of loyalty to the state on June 19th 1934. Although he lost his mandate after the 1935 parliamentary elections, during his one year in parliament he made two speeches decrying the negative consequences of the decision by the Ministry of Education to close the German-language Catholic High School in Levoča.⁷⁸

Varga was also active in Poprad’s cultural life, serving as head of the local branch of the German Cultural Association⁷⁹ that promoted German-language culture and funded schools in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period. After the declaration of the independent Slovak State in 1939, both he and Nitsch were briefly imprisoned in Ilava. In the spring of 1942, he attempted to flee the country when he was faced with criminal charges after admitting to having baptised eight Jews to avoid them being deported to the concentration camps.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

The careers of Polnisch and Varga are only two specific examples of the many ZDP mayors active in this period, the majority of which was comprised of the German small landholders organised under the umbrella of the Farmers’ Association of Spiš,⁸¹ which was under the influence of Andor Nitsch. Nonetheless, the Levoča-based journalist and banker and the Lutheran pastor of Poprad represent the existence of two different political agendas not only within the same region, but within the same political party. The majority support for oppositional parties in Levoča is not surprising given the changes in the city’s status in the wake of Act 275/1922 which had stripped Levoča of its rank as an administrative centre. According to the new legislation, Bratislava and Košice were the only municipalities of Slovakia which had the right to have independent city administration, thereby degrading the status of the formerly free cities of Spiš such as Kežmarok, Lúba and Levoča, a fact which deeply offended the civic patriotism of the local German-Hungarian speaking bourgeoisie. Polnisch was the head of the editorial staff of a newspaper which was funded by the Common Committee of the Allied Oppositional Parties of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia⁸² and its political communication could be characterised as pro-Hungarian and firmly oppositional.⁸³ Varga on the other hand was more of a pragmatic politician, who was as much concerned with the economic development of his town as the preservation and prioritization of German language use. The careers of these two mayors also show that neither the party nor the Spiš region as a whole should be viewed as a homogenous unit, since the priorities of the “Zipser” politicians of, in this case, Levoča and Poprad clearly differed. Even though they were willing to ally themselves with the Hungarian opposition, this alliance was by no means without clashes of opinion or conflicts.

⁷³ ŠA PO, šp. ŠA LE, fund ŠtZ LE, box. 311, inv. no. Nst III 73/34. 10949/1934.

⁷⁴ On the topic of Szent-Ivány’s “realist politics,” see: Attila Simon, *Az elfeledett aktivisták. Kormánypartí magyar politika az első Csehszlovák Köztársaságban* (Somorja: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2013), 60–77.

⁷⁵ “Společná česko-slovenská digitální parlamentní knihovna. Národní shromáždění republiky Československé, Poslanecká sněmovna 1925–1929 – stenoprotokoly, 30. schůze (11. června 1926),” accessed September 14, 2023, <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/stenprot/030schuz/s030014.htm>.

⁷⁶ Jozef Sulaček, “Ekonomicko-sociálny vývoj v rokoch 1919–1938,” 240.

⁷⁷ “Richter utóda a szenátusban Varga Imre evang. esperes,” *Szepesi Híradó*, May 26, 1934.

⁷⁸ “Spoločná Česko-Slovenská Digitálna parlamentná knižnica, Národné shromáždzenie (1929-1935), Senát – stenozáznam, 268. schůze (21. června 1934).” accessed September 14, 2023, <https://www.nrsr.sk/dl/Browser/Document?documentId=42584>.

⁷⁹ In German: Deutscher Kulturverband.

⁸⁰ ŠA PO, pb. PP, fund OÚ PP, box. 76, inv. no. 441/42. prez. 370/1942.

⁸¹ In German: Zipser Bauernbund.

⁸² In Hungarian: Szlovenszkői és Ruszinszkői Szövetkezett Ellenzéki Pártok Közös Bizottsága.

⁸³ Národní archiv České republiky, fund Předsednictví ministerské rady, box. 577, volume 1537, inv. no. 19/pres/1922.

II.
CIVIL SERVANTS IN
FICTIONAL WORKS AND
EGO-DOCUMENTS

4. “Yes, my dear Hofrat, we are having a difficult time...” Austrian Civil Servants as Authors and Protagonists of Fictional Works from the 1920s to the 1940s*

Therese Garstenauer

INTRODUCTION

In 1926, the legal scholar Hans Nawiasky wrote that for a state to function, everything depends on the population’s implicit trust and belief in the importance of the civil service as the qualified advocate of the common interest against the divergent ambitions of political parties.¹ Even today, contemporary administrative studies continue to show that public opinion about civil servants is crucial because if the population holds public employees in low regard, trust in the state and its government can be jeopardised.² When looking into the social, cultural, political and economic history of government employees, it is thus essential to consider, among other things, the issue of public image and how they are perceived by the wider public. One way of assessing the public image of civil servants is by examining how state officials are portrayed in fiction, and popular fiction in particular. The use of civil servants as protagonists in fictional works is not an exclusively Austrian phenomenon – this is most apparent in the cases of famous

* The article is based on research conducted during the course of my habilitation project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF, Elise-Richter-Programme V 539-G28, 2017-2023) titled Austrian government employees and conduct of life (1918-1940).

¹ Hans Nawiasky, *Die Stellung des Berufsbeamtentums im parlamentarischen Staat* (München: Karl Pfeiffer, 1926), 12.

² See, for example, Hal G. Rainey, “Public Opinion toward the Civil Service,” in *Civil Service Systems in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Hans Bekke et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 180-203; Tom Christensen, Per Lægveid, “Trust in Government: The Relative Importance of Service Satisfaction, Political Factors, and Demography,” *Public Performance & Management Review* 28, no. 4 (2005): 487-511.



Fig. 4.1: Karl Hans Strobl
(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

Russian writers such as Anton Chekhov or Nikolaj Gogol.³ Nonetheless, it is safe to say that civil servants were a popular subject in early 20th century Austrian literature.⁴

This article focuses on the image of government employees in novels and one play between the 1920s to the 1940s whose storylines are set mainly during the interwar period. The study examines government employees both as authors *and* as protagonists of novels and plays, including (partially) autobiographical works, in which these two roles can overlap. Books of this nature are not typically renowned for their outstanding literary qualities. For the sake of clarity, we should state at the outset that we are not talking about the writings of luminaries of Austrian literature such as Franz Werfel, Robert Musil or Joseph Roth in this study, although works by these authors also feature government employees, sometimes prominently.⁵ The reason for excluding works by these authors is the fact that their works are primarily written in retro-

spect or are set in the Monarchy period. Instead, this chapter will rely on another type of source materials, primarily works of fiction in which the depicted events take place within the interwar period *and* which were also written during this time.

Works of popular fiction are valuable complementary sources for a number of reasons. Firstly, they give insight into professional practices and the interactions within offices, albeit in an idealised or exaggerated manner and always with a certain degree of poetic license. Secondly, apart from the professional sphere, we are also offered a glimpse into the homes and private lives of government employees and their families which allows us to draw conclusions about the conduct of life as expressed in consumption patterns, relationships and communication between family members, leisure activities, and more.

³ Interestingly, civil servants were popular characters in the fiction of the 19th century Ottoman Empire: “Literary pictures of Ottoman society reflect this occupational pattern in the prominence of civil officials or former officials as leading characters. In a society with a largely invisible royal family, few military heroes of recent memory, no media celebrities, and perforce no captains of industry, handsome young officials figured as literary protagonists to a degree that is difficult for anyone unacquainted with the literature to imagine.” See Carter Vaughn Findley, *Ottoman Civil Officialdom: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 12. For an international overview of works of fiction featuring civil servants see Sabine Zelger, *Das ist alles viel komplizierter, Herr Sektionsschef. Bürokratie – Literarische Reflexionen aus Österreich* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 2009), 399–402.

⁴ Waltraud Heindl, *Josephinische Mandarine. Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich 1848–1914* (Wien/München: Böhlau, 2013), 235.

⁵ See, for example, district captain Franz Freiherr von Trotta und Sipolje, the father of the main character in Joseph Roth, *Radetzky marsch* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer, 1932).

Thirdly, in many cases, these works are contemporary accounts that reflect current social, economic and political events and their repercussions on government employees. Finally, these works were often relatively popular and were thus read by a large audience. This holds true for the novels of the 1920s, such as Hugo Bettauer’s serial novel *Der Kampf um Wien* (The Fight for Vienna 1923) in the daily *Der Tag*⁶ or *Die Freudlose Gasse* (The Joyless Street). In the latter novel, the orphaned daughter of a civil servant is the main “damsel in distress” who is driven to the brink of prostitution by the family’s poverty. Published in 1924, it was adapted into a film by G.W. Pabst the following year, with a young Greta Garbo in the starring role.⁷

The purpose of this research is to outline how literature focusing on civil servants differs over various stages of the period from the early 1920s to the 1940s. The study examines how civil servants, and their families and social circle are depicted in novels and plays, highlights the topics and stereotypes which appear in these works, and assesses how the political and economic background is reflected (if this is indeed the case). The study opens with an overview of Austrian fiction of the 1920s – 1940s with a focus on how civil servants figure within the genre. Three examples of such works will then be presented and their differences and similarities discussed. The study concludes with an analysis of how the reputation of Austrian civil servants is reflected in the fiction of the interwar period (and slightly beyond).

GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES IN AUSTRIAN FICTION OF THE 1920S – 1940S

As early as 1977, the renowned Austrian philologist Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler had discussed the representation of the First Austrian Republic in contemporary fiction. He rejected Claudio Magris’ claim that authors of the First Republic were writing exclusively with a perspective on the past and were, thus, captives of the ever-powerful Habsburg myth.⁸ Although Magris’ approach is more or less accurate when focusing on the more famous works of fiction, it is somewhat amiss when considering popular and trivial literature.⁹ Several novels of the 1920s give accounts of the consequences of the massive wave of inflation as experienced by Austrians of the time.¹⁰ Schmidt-Dengler refers to these works as “Viennese novels” (“Wiener Romane”), given that they are generally set in Vienna. The picture of Austrian interwar fiction becomes more structured when we turn to Friedrich Achberger’s categorisation which consists of three phases. The earliest

⁶ Hugo Bettauer, *Kampf um Wien*, (Wien: Milena 2012 [1922]).

⁷ Hugo Bettauer, *Die freudlose Gasse: Ein Wiener Roman aus unseren Tagen* (Wien: Gloriette, 1924).

⁸ Claudio Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1966), 11–12.

⁹ Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, “Die Erste Republik in der Literatur. ‘Roman’ und Feuilleton,” in *Staat und Gesellschaft in der modernen österreichischen Literatur*, ed. Friedbert Aspöckl (Wien: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1977), 65–78.

¹⁰ Apart from the works by the aforementioned Hugo Bettauer, one can cite Robert Hohlbaum, *Zukunft* (Leipzig: Staackmann, 1922) or Felix Dörmann, *Jazz. Wiener Roman* (Vienna/Prague/Leipzig: Ed. Strache, 1925) as examples.

phase, from the early 1920s to approximately 1926, is characterised by works of fiction that reflect socially relevant problems in an immediate and lively manner with an “eminently pugnacious spirit”.¹¹ The phase from 1927 to the early 1930s is that of the more famous novels that are generally seen as archetypal of Austrian interwar literature: Robert Musil’s *The Man without Qualities*, the aforementioned *Radetzky March* by Joseph Roth or Franz Werfel’s *Class Reunion*,¹² novels which are themselves primarily set in the former Habsburg Monarchy. In addition to the aforementioned works that are still held in high regard today, some novels have been almost forgotten despite the degree of popularity which they enjoyed upon publication. Felix Braun’s epic *Agnes Altkirchner*, which is centred around the family members and friends of civil servants and officers, would be a case in point.¹³ Achberger sees the third phase as being linked to the period and values of the conservative Dollfuß-Schuschnigg-regime from 1933 onwards, one which is characterised by a shift away from urban settings and an idealization glorification of rural and peasant life. Although not all works of fiction can be assigned precisely into this framework,¹⁴ it is nonetheless an essential means of assessing the variety of perspectives and tendencies present in interwar Austrian literature.

This paper will focus on three works, the first of which is *Wir hatten gebauet* (We had built, 1923), a partly autobiographical novel by Karl Hans Strobl about the fate of a government employee’s family in the first years after the end of the Habsburg Monarchy.¹⁵ Although it is also set in the outskirts of Vienna, with specific chapters featuring the town of Jihlava/Iglau, it can be considered as an example of the “Viennese novels” written and published in the early 1920s which reflect the crises of these years. The second work to be examined is Gustav (von) Festenberg’s novel *Ein Tag wie alle* (A Day Like Any Other), which describes a day in the life of a civil servant of a provincial district administration who bears a striking resemblance to the novel’s author.¹⁶ Although this work by no means glorifies life in the countryside (as its position in Achberger’s periodisation would imply), it is set in a provincial district town, but it differs markedly from earlier works in terms of its exclusion of almost any reference to the political and economic background.¹⁷ The third text is the play *Familie Rannsdorff* (Family Rannsdorff, 1946) by the government employee/playwright Hans Naderer about the experiences of a high ranking official and his family before, during, and after

the National Socialist regime in Austria.¹⁸ Although this work lies beyond the interwar period (and thereby also Achberger’s periodisation) insofar as it was published and probably also written after the end of the National Socialist regime and also because its plot unfolds between 1937 and 1945, it is included in this study as a specific case of a highly ideological work of literature.

KARL HANS STROBL: WIR HATTEN GEBAUET

With a title borrowed from a German students’ league song (*Wir hatten gebauet ein stattliches Haus*, i.e. We had built a stately house), the novel *Wir hatten gebauet* was written by Karl Hans Strobl, a Jihlava/Iglau-born German-National novelist who later turned to National Socialism. Strobl was a prolific and popular writer of historical and fantasy novels, but he had also spent some years employed in the civil service in Jihlava/Iglau and Brno/Brünn. *Wir hatten gebauet* is the second book in a trilogy of works which tells the story of the Freisleben family. The book narrates the experiences of the family and their home in the vicinity of Vienna from the final years of WWI to the early 1920s.¹⁹

The main character is Eberhard Freisleben, who had worked as a teacher in Moravia before becoming an official of a non-descript state department in Vienna that deals, among other things, with war bonds. The department is described as a rather contemplative place – the author compares it with a little stream at whose banks the government employees sit with fishing rods and collect their salaries, although these fish are growing smaller from month to month due to the rising inflation (Strobl is fond of metaphors and figures of speech and uses them lavishly in his works). Strobl also notes that most government employees have given up on the old values such as diligence, loyalty and obedience and have instead discovered that *not working* (i.e., striking) can sometimes bring more benefits than hard work. Freisleben, however, is different. Although his true vocation is that of a gardener, he is a government employee of the old school, and he shares these convictions with Nedorost, a stereotypical Czech office factotum – loyal, smart, and endowed with a typical accent. Freisleben’s ideals do not prevent him from losing his position in the department after allegations surface of his involvement in a case of corruption of his direct superior. Although Freisleben is ultimately acquitted of the charge, he is still made redundant because his reputation has been damaged, and personnel cuts have to be made anyway.²⁰

¹⁸ Hans Naderer, *Familie Rannsdorff*, (Wien: Österreichischer Bühnenverlag Kaiser & Co, 1946).

¹⁹ The location is most likely modelled on the town of Perchtoldsdorf to the south of Vienna, where Strobl was living while writing the novel. Some distinctive architectural features of Perchtoldsdorf are recognizable in the book.

²⁰ This procedure is not quite authentic, in my opinion, and would probably have required disciplinary procedures to justify such an action. However, this is a work of fiction, not a historical account.

¹¹ Friedrich Achberger, “Die Inflation und die zeitgenössische Literatur,” in *Aufbruch und Untergang. Österreichische Kultur zwischen 1918 und 1938* ed. Franz Kadrnoska, (Wien/München/Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1981), 29-42, 29, author’s translation.

¹² A number of fictional works featuring civil servants in the late Habsburg Monarchy were published after WWII, such as Heimito von Doderer, *Die erleuchteten Fenster* (München: Biederstein, 1951), or the semi-autobiographical works by Friedrich F. G. Kleinwächter such as *Der fröhliche Präsidialist*, (Zürich/Leipzig: Amalthea, 1955).

¹³ Felix Braun, *Agnes Altkirchner*, (Leipzig: Insel, 1927).

¹⁴ Christoph Mattle points out that Festenberg’s writing does not conform to the standards of conservative fiction of the 1930s; see Christoph Mattle, *Gustav von Festenberg – zwischen Schöngest und Beamtentum* (Oberhausen: Athena, 2002), 115-120.

¹⁵ Karl Hans Strobl, *Wir hatten gebauet* (Leipzig: Staackmann, 1923).

¹⁶ Gustav von Festenberg, *Ein Tag wie alle* (Berlin/Wien/Leipzig: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1939).

¹⁷ For an extensive biography of the author, see Christoph Mattle, *Festenberg*.

“Wir hatten gebauet I“

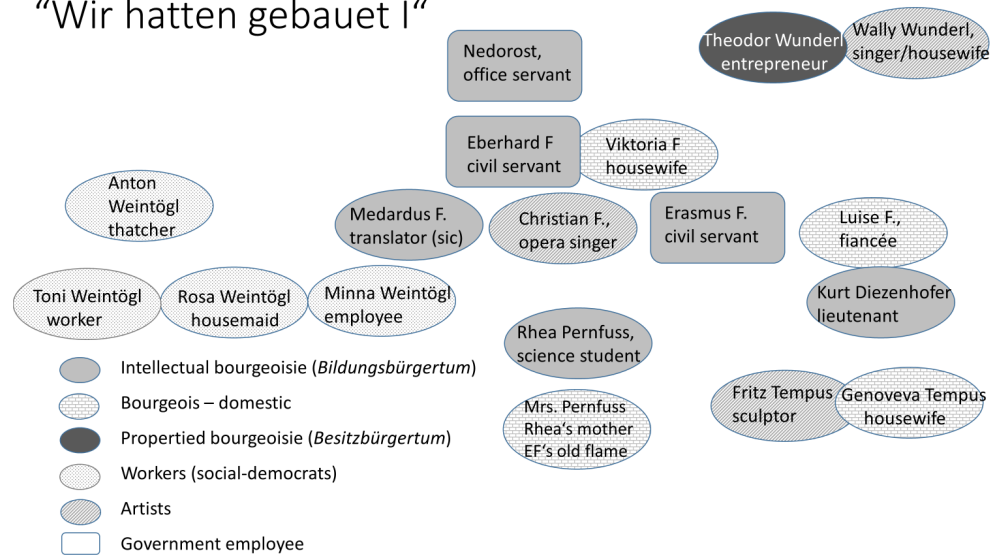


Chart 1: The characters of *Wir hatten gebauet* (at the beginning of the novel)

Freißleben is married to Viktoria, a devoted housewife and mother who is loyal to her husband and who grapples bravely with the hardships of inflation. Until the point at which the family is forced to move out when everything falls apart, all of her activities are carried out within the household and the garden, with the exception of occasional shopping trips. The couple has four grown-up children: the eldest is a son from Viktoria's first marriage called Medardus who suffers from an unnamed illness from which he is cured over the course of the novel. His contribution to the family income is restricted to small sums of money which he earns from translations. The next child is Christian, an opera singer who is reduced to working in the film business due to a lack of bookings at the opera and who later loses his singing voice in a traumatic incident. His fiancée Rhea, a science student and later teacher from Jihlava/Iglau with strong German-national sentiments, convinces him to leave the entertainment business and become a clerk. Erasmus, the third son, is a dismissed government employee who, after a period of unemployment, becomes a journalist. His perception of the situation in the fledgling First Austrian Republic is as follows: “He soon realized, that the new Austria was similar to the only lifeboat of a sunken ship that, being much too small to hold all the people who huddled together in it, was bound to sink at any moment due to overcrowding”. Having served in Bohemia before the dismemberment of the Monarchy, he had expected to be welcomed with open arms upon his return to the Austrian Republic and offered a job. On the contrary, what he found were awkward faces and an “economic body that was

so ridden with constipation that a general twisting of the bowels was impending”.²¹ The youngest child of the Freißlebens is Luise, who, traumatised by the death of her fiancé in the last days of WWI, turns to a spiritualist leader, develops psychic abilities, and eventually leaves the family to join her guru in Switzerland. Their neighbours are also representatives of the bourgeoisie, both the intelligentsia as well as the propertied class, an entrepreneur with a wife who would have had a successful opera career had it not been for her marriage, and a sculptor with a wife who discovers her sympathies for the social democratic movement, or more specifically in one social democrat in particular, the thatcher Anton Weintögl.

Over the course of the novel, the main protagonist, Eberhard Freißleben, is repeatedly laid low by blows of fate. He is stripped of his family home, at first through a compulsory order from the housing authorities to accommodate workers, in particular the Weintögl family, including Rosa, a former maid of the Freißlebens. Their new working-class housemates gradually take over more and more space, and Freißleben finally loses the property entirely due to massive water damage and the economic pressure of inflation, together with much of his family's other property as more and more family heirlooms are sold off in order to buy food for the family. The most significant symbolic blow in this respect comes when the piano, the epitome of cultural capital, is taken away. Freißleben loses his job and his good reputation. He loses his daughter to a guru. As in every hero's journey narrative, the main character must endure a deep fall before his ultimate redemption.²² What saves him, in the end, is a cathartic experience which incorporates alcohol, the almost fulfilled fantasies of vengeance against the Weintögl family, and his witnessing a confession of altruistic love from his eldest son to his beloved (one of the Weintögl girls). The reformed Freißleben accepts an offer from his former neighbour Theodor Wunderl to become caretaker and gardener of the estate of a company and a country estate he runs in lower Austria (the same company in which Christian Freißleben has been employed as a clerk). The economic conclusion seems to be that public employment has become unsustainable in the early 1920s and that it has fallen upon the *Besitzbürgertum* (propertied bourgeoisie) to save the *Bildungsbürgertum* (the educated middle class). An additional moral of the story might be that only contact with the soil (even if not one's own) is the remedy for all of the ills brought about by economic and political crises.

²¹ Karl Hans Strobl, *Wir hatten gebauet*, 69. This translation and all following are the author's own as none of the cited works have been published in English.

²² For more on the structure and elements of the “hero's journey” narrative, see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (3rd ed.) (Novato: New World Library, 2008).

“Wir hatten gebauet II“

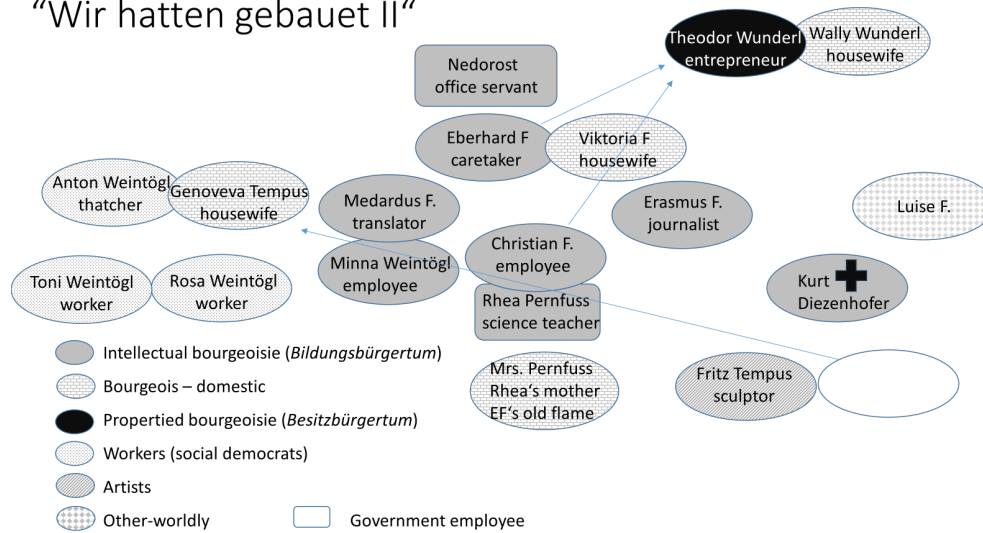


Chart 2: Schematic representation of the characters of *Wir hatten gebauet* (by the end of the novel)

The novel cannot be described as a pleasurable read. It is bristling with resentment against non-German nationalities (overtly against Czechs, but also with a subtle but discernible animus against Jews) and social democrats. Furthermore, the writing style is somewhat tiring due to the excessive use of metaphors, jocular idioms and forced humour. These features all serve to distinguish the work from other novels of the same period, such as Robert Hohlbaum's²³ *Zukunft* [Future], which also deal sympathetically with the fate of government employees, albeit in a much more sombre tone.²⁴

GUSTAV VON FESTENBERG: EIN TAG WIE ALLE

Gustav Festenberg's novel *Ein Tag wie alle* [A Day Like Any Other] was published in 1939 and is based on the author's experiences and memories of serving at a district authority in the rural town of Eferding in Upper Austria in the 1920s and 1930s; indeed, the name of the fictitious town of “Erdlingen” in the novel is reminiscent of

²³ Robert Hohlbaum, a librarian at the University of Vienna, was a friend of Strobl's and also a German National who later turned to National-Socialism. His works, like Strobl's were published by the German National oriented publishing house of Ludwig Staackmann in Leipzig; see Johann Sonnleitner, *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Robert Hohlbaum. Die Schriftstellerkarriere eines Österreichers in der Zwischenkriegszeit und im Dritten Reich*, (Wien/Cologne: Böhlau, 1989).

²⁴ Robert Hohlbaum, *Zukunft*. The novel, set in the first years after WWI, depicts the sufferings of a judge who is cast into poverty and who loses his wife to an illness for which he cannot afford a cure. In the end, he is driven literally insane by the injustice of a system that persecutes petty thieves but pardons war profiteers and traffickers.



Fig. 4.2: Hans Naderer
(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

the place where Festenberg had been working from 1919 to 1934.²⁵ The protagonist of this novel is Franz von Taxenbach, a man in his thirties who lives in a small castle with his mother. Taxenbach is fond of routine; he prefers to eat the same food for breakfast every day and becomes uneasy when his routines are disturbed.

Interestingly, unlike the civil servants in the other two works who identify strongly with their positions, Franz Taxenbach shows little affinity with his post at the district authority: “He does not care about his official position. This goes as far as him being vexed when someone addresses him with his official title. He wants to be valued and treated as a person, as a personality, as Franz Taxenbach. He demands personal respect, and he finds that through honouring him the office that he holds is honoured, likewise.”²⁶ This distinguishes him from his superior, Dr. Hebert, who comes from

a farming family rather than the noble origins of Taxenbach. Hebert, for his part, feels honoured by and through the position that he holds; his own personality fades into the background and is subsumed by his official position as district commissioner. Hebert has a friendly relationship with Taxenbach, although he would prefer the latter to be more ambitious with regard to a career in the civil service. When these two men meet outside the office, Franz Taxenbach becomes self-conscious and is very keen to keep a polite and prim distance.²⁷

In interactions with peers, specific problems can arise due to the hierarchical structure of the civil service. Festenberg describes one of Taxenbach's colleagues, the former military man Mr. Edlacher, as follows: “There is no trace of friendliness or obligingness in him. Friendliness is not compatible with dignity, in his opinion. Dignity, however, is the basis of authority”. Edlacher treats people who come to his office as supplicants, showing a tendency to shout at them (a legacy of his military background), and he becomes irate easily, always suspecting others of insubordination. His relationship with Taxenbach is problematic because the precise status which one has over the other is somewhat unclear. On the one hand, in terms of the office hierarchy, Taxenbach is Ed-

²⁵ Christoph Mattle, *Festenberg*, 88-141.

²⁶ Gustav Festenberg, *Tag*, 56

²⁷ Gustav Festenberg, *Tag*, 300-301.

lacher's superior. On the other hand, Taxenbach is only the deputy head of the district commission; additionally, he is much younger than Edlacher and does not command the respect of others. This problem manifests itself when the two men meet and have to greet one another. There are no issues when one enters the other's office: the one who enters is the first to extend his greetings. But when they meet on "neutral ground" outside their own offices, complications start to arise: "Edlacher pretends to be busy, Franz pretends to be absentminded, and they part without exchanging greetings. Franz never greets first. Edlacher sometimes does, then Franz pretends to be surprised and says, 'Ah, good morning', as if he had just become aware of Edlacher who has been standing only two steps away from him until that moment."²⁸ It would, of course, be possible to avoid all this: "He could simply say, Mr. Secretary, I am the deputy commissioner, I am a jurist and I will never greet you first. Deal with it. The knot would be cut. But Franz Taxenbach is not a man of action."²⁹

The novel follows Franz and his thoughts, feelings and dreams from the moment he awakes in the morning to the moment at which he falls asleep. Very often, especially during office hours, he indulges in daydreaming. Towards the end of the novel, there is a summary of the purpose of his existence.

"Everything will be just like today. And still different. Because Franz himself will be a different person tomorrow, just like today he has been a person different from the one he had been yesterday. And therein lies the meaning and value of life. Not whether it proceeds confusedly and fiercely or clearly and quietly, not whether it appears bright or dark from the outside, but in that within the small and ephemeral events of the day, the big undying happens: that a man can find himself."³⁰

What distinguishes this novel from the other two works discussed in this paper is its strong focus on the protagonist's perspective and the almost complete absence of references to political events. Franz von Taxenbach does not have to worry about inflation eroding the value of his income or savings. There is not the slightest hint that he might lose his position due to cutbacks in the administrative apparatus or on political or "racial" grounds – after all, the novel was published in 1939, at a time at which such things were known to occur. Given the fact that the author Gustav Festenberg had been employed in Eferding between 1919 and 1934, the day described in the novel must have taken place during this period. If we take the liberty of paralleling the author's age with that of the main protagonist, who is in his late thirties during the events of the novel, the likely year in which the work is set would be around 1930. Due to the vagueness of

the social and political environment presented in the novel, however, it might as well be set in the late Habsburg Monarchy.³¹

Unlike the other two examples, political attitudes and affiliations play no role in determining the characters of the protagonists. The social distinctions which are fleshed out in most detail are those which exist between civil servants of different hierarchies, but they, too, pale in comparison with the primary distinction of the novel: that between Franz von Taxenbach on the one hand and everybody and everything else on the other.

HANS NADERER: FAMILIE RANNSDORFF

Familie Rannsdorff is a play by Hans Naderer, a former stenographer for the Imperial Council and then the Austrian parliament. He was also the secretary of the largest nonpartisan civil servants' association for several years and served as the chronicler of the civil servants' movement. In tandem with his work in the civil service, he was also prolific and successful author of popular stage plays. A Christian Democrat, he was forcibly transferred to a different position by the Nazi government in 1939 and then placed into temporary retirement in 1940. After the war he was unable to return to his desired position as a parliamentary stenographer and turned instead to writing full-time.³²

Familie Rannsdorff is highly ideological in nature, evincing a basic statement of Austrian patriotism as seen and projected from the early post-WWII era; it is a mixture of Christian-Social/Austrofascist ideology and budding post-WWII Austrian identity which is construed as forming a continuum from the Habsburg Monarchy. Perhaps of greater interest, however, is the play's depiction of a high-level civil servant and his family. As a writer of folk plays, Naderer tends to depict his characters in a woodcut-like manner, often relying on stock outward appearances which point to the function of the figures within the narrative, and this is particularly explicit when the characters are first introduced. Let us begin with Hofrat Richard Rannsdorff, the main protagonist.

"A man of rare serenity and poise, energetic, purposeful, uncompromising and at the same time of a compelling kind-heartedness. He does not resemble a bureaucrat at all, and is instead a friend of nature and collector of art. An open-minded person, he can also be humorous and mischievous, sometimes even quaint. When involved in intrigues he can be as naïve as a child."³³

²⁸ Taxenbach is addressed as "Herr Baron" throughout the novel, but nobility had been de jure abolished in Austria in 1919. The practice of using titles of nobility in everyday interaction likely survived the "Law on the Abolition of Nobility" of April 3, 1919. However, it is also mentioned that Taxenbach's former lover, the Russian dancer Elizaveta, has danced before the Soviets, which means that the day described in the novel must be some years after 1917 (Festenberg, *Tag*, 93).

³² For Hans Naderer's biography see Hans Naderer, *Hans Naderer – ein österreichischer Volksdichter. Dem Dichter zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet. Herausgegeben von Freunden des Dichters* (Wien: Wedl, 1961).

³³ Hans Naderer, *Rannsdorff*, 6.

²⁸ Gustav Festenberg, *Tag*, 54–55.

²⁹ Gustav Festenberg, *Tag*, 65.

³⁰ Gustav Festenberg, *Tag*, 281.



Fig. 4.3: Gustav Festenberg (published with the kind permission of Christoph Mattle)

His adversary in the play, Sektionsrat Malota, is described in a somewhat different manner: “always nervous and irritated; himself being deceitful and devious, he sees a hidden enemy in everyone, even the Hofrat. He is a yes-man towards his superiors but is oppressive to those below him. He is always on the lookout, as if he had to hide something and as if he wanted to spy on others.”³⁴

Johanna Rannsdorff, the wife and mother of Richard’s four children, is characterised as follows: “a genteel and amiable lady of about 50 years, the ideal type of a middle-class (original: *bürgerlich*) housewife and mother. Devoted to her husband and deeply loving, all of her cares are focused on the wellbeing of her family. She is no fighter, for she is too soft and sensitive, but a quiet helper and endurer; despite all this she proves her worth and resolve in difficult times.”³⁵

As in Strobl’s novel, the play also features a subaltern office factotum with a Czech accent named Wogrisek who, like Eberhard Freißleben’s sidekick Nedorost, is a loyal, sardonic character who adheres to the traditional values of civil service. Wogrisek even helps the ladies of the Rannsdorff family with the provision of necessary goods during wartime.

The play consists of five acts, the first of which opens in in early 1937, with Hofrat Rannsdorff expressing his concerns about the political situation. His friends and adversaries are introduced, as is his daughter Gertrud, a talented pianist and composer, and her two most recent love interests: Baron Rapp and Dr. Lengauer. Gertrud is shown as the spitting image of her father, a nice young girl who “despite her success as an artist [has] retained her inherent naturalness.” She gets on very well with her father, who loves her dearly. She is always in a positive and jocular mood, “but [is] also capable of striking the right note, quite serious, if the situation requires it.”³⁶

Baron Rapp is a civil servant in the Ministry who, while by no means the sharpest knife in the drawer, is a decent person with good manners. Dr. Lengauer, a journalist, is introduced as “a man around 30, big horn-rimmed glasses, wavy, back-combed hair, looking more like an artist than a journalist. Not exactly ugly, but also not an the ideal type for young girls; he is someone who becomes likeable when they talk, and when their intellectuality and their deep inner life unfolds, when they warm up and they come

across someone who is in harmony with their feeling.”³⁷ It is subtly suggested that it is the Doctor who will ultimately win the heart of the Hofrat’s daughter. In the course of the first act, Richard Rannsdorff is also visited by a former schoolmate, a professor of German literature who has always been a German National and is an ardent proponent of the *Anschluss* between Austria and Germany.

The second act takes place in January 1938, by which time the Hofrat’s political forebodings have grown even deeper. He advises his Jewish art dealer, who is preparing to leave Austria, to go to the USA, helps him with some paperwork and promises to keep some of the artworks the dealer cannot sell before his departure. It is rather obvious that this character has no other function in the play than underlining that Rannsdorff is a) an art connoisseur, b) not an antisemite, and c) a generally helpful person.

The third act takes place after the Anschluss in March 1938 and culminates with the Rannsdorff’s youngest son being shot by a Gestapo officer while resisting his father’s arrest. Hofrat Rannsdorff is taken to the Dachau concentration camp. He perceives his predicament in terms of his Christian faith, accepting his fate and entrusting it to God’s will. The fourth act takes place in 1943 during the war, and we see Johanna and Gertrud struggling to survive under difficult conditions, now restricted to living in only one room of the apartment. Gertrud is giving piano lessons, while Johanna carries out household chores. Wogrisek brings them food and promises to exchange Gertrud’s fox fur for a goose. At the end of the act, Dr. Lengauer appears, having escaped from the concentration camp, bringing news from Hofrat Rannsdorff and asking Gertrud if he could see her again, to which she agrees. The fifth and final act takes place at the end of 1945 and ties up the story with a series of happy endings: the war is over, the Nazis are gone, Lengauer has been appointed minister and proposes to Gertrud. Gustav, her brother, introduces his bride (his superior’s daughter) to the family. Hofrat Rannsdorff has survived the concentration camp and is finally promoted to Sektionschef, the highest rank in the Ministry. He even forgives Malota, who had informed on him to the Gestapo in 1938 and offers to help him find an occupation in the private sector; as a former National Socialist activist, Malota is barred from working in the public sector. The only tragic incident in the final act is a letter from Professor Lamm in which he explains his suicide due to his disillusionment with National Socialism and his dismay after learning of its atrocities. At the end, Gertrud plays the tune “Oh, du mein Österreich” (Oh, thou my Austria) – a 1849 song by Franz von Suppé,³⁸ on the piano, and everybody joins Sektionschef Rannsdorff who sings along as the curtain falls.

While reading the play, it is hard to imagine how the work would have been staged.³⁹ All of the characters are clichéd portrayals which serve largely to affirm Austrian ideals

³⁷ Hans Naderer, *Rannsdorff*, 13-14.

³⁸ The song was first featured in a musical comedy in 1849 but became more popular in the form of a march composed by Ferdinand Preis in 1852; see Friedrich Anzenberger, “Ferdinand Preis, der Komponist des Marsches O du mein Österreich - zum 150. Todestag”, *Blasmusikforschung. Mitteilungen des Dokumentationszentrums des Österreichischen Blasmusikverbandes* 8 (2014): 2-4.

³⁹ A TV adaptation of the play was produced in the 1960s directed by Norbert Kammil and Hermann Lanske.

³⁴ Hans Naderer, *Rannsdorff*, 5.

³⁵ Hans Naderer, *Rannsdorff*, 33.

³⁶ Hans Naderer, *Rannsdorff*, 9.

as perceived by a Catholic author shortly after the end of the National Socialist regime. The reader is often left with the impression that the authorial message is more important than the narration of a convincing story. Yet, Naderer, as both an experienced playwright *and* a civil servant, likely conveys a certain degree of authenticity.

“Familie Rannsdorff“ (1947)

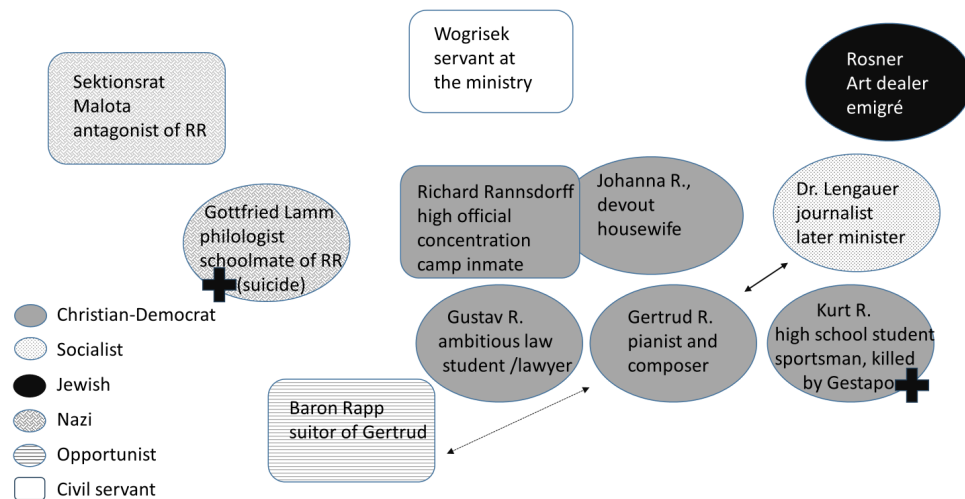


Chart 3: Schematic representation of the characters of *Familie Rannsdorff*

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Sabine Zelger, the author of a substantial monograph on bureaucracy in Austrian fiction, characterised the portrayal of the archetypal civil servant in Austrian fiction as follows: “male, and he differentiates himself from non-civil-servants: by a lack of sportiness, functionalized movements, a meticulous segmentation of [his own personal (ed.)] time and space, the formalization of everyday routines in office and leisure time (meals, contacts, thoughts, dreams, walks...), a predilection for putting things in order and a fear of unforeseen events and changes. The dominant features of the psychological portrait of the characters of civil servants are a bashful appetite for adventure or a sentimental penchant for marriage. No matter what the nature of their relationship to a woman is, the classic civil servant will submit himself to his landlady, mother, lover or wife. The use of physical violence is repulsive to most of the civil servants in fiction, as are open confrontations.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Sabine Zelger, *Sektionschef*, 378.

This would seem to be an apt description of most of the civil servants depicted in our three examples, but a closer look at some of the differences and similarities between the three works of fiction chosen for this paper will provide a more nuanced analysis which can also take the social environment into consideration. This analysis will briefly discuss three aspects: (1) social and political differentiations, (2) gender relations, and (3) experiences of social and economic decline. What is remarkable in Strobl’s novel is the fact that the main dividing lines between the characters are defined by class, political attitudes and nationality. In Naderer’s play, however, this role is primarily fulfilled by politics, with just a hint of class differences, most notably nobility in the case of Baron Rapp. The socialist Dr. Lengauer is not a worker but an intellectual and is thus on a par with the more elevated civil servant and his family, at least in terms of cultural capital. Issues of religion, ethnicity or race (the latter in a National Socialist sense) are touched upon in the case of the Jewish art dealer, a character who, as we have already noted, seems to serve mainly to highlight the positive traits of Richard Rannsdorff. In Festenberg’s novel, however, the situation is very different. Here, the primary differentiation is between Franz Taxenbach with his rich emotional life on the one hand and everyone else on the other. A number of persons appear in this novel: Taxenbach’s colleagues, the citizens who come to his office with various requests, his friends, and his former and current love interests. They all have different traits; there are peasants, vagrants, tradespersons, postal employees, artists and shopkeepers, but their status is of little regard because Franz maintains a distance from all of them. The relationship between the civil servants, namely Franz and his boss, his colleague and his subordinate clerk, are acted out in the most detail, regardless of the fact that the main protagonist does not even identify with his position as a civil servant. Political differences, in terms of affiliation or sympathy with political parties, are not mentioned at all in *Ein Tag wie alle*, which certainly says more about the author and the time in which the novel was published than about the period in which the novel is set.

In terms of gender relations, we can discern a sharp generational divide in the texts; the housewives who feature in both Strobl’s and Naderer’s texts are exclusively from the parents’ generation, while the women of the younger generation take on more diverse roles. Luise Freißleben helps out in the parental household until she takes the spiritual route after becoming a young widow, and she is the only young female character without gainful employment. Rhea Pernfuß/Freißleben, Rosa and Minna Weintögl are domestic servants, students, workers or employees in different parts of the novel. In Festenberg’s novel, the little information which is provided about the professional backgrounds of the women of the main protagonist’s generation suggests that they are clerks, farmers or, in the case of his former love interest, an artist. The young Gertrud Rannsdorff is an aspiring artist at the beginning and end of the play and a piano teacher during wartime out of economic necessity. The male members of the younger generation have more or less respectable occupations but either live under dire conditions during the early 1920s (the Freißlebens), maintain a stable job in provincial administration (Taxenbach) or are educated to become lawyers in the 1930s (the Rannsdorffs). There are depictions of women performing household chores which does not seem appropriate as these tasks should rather be done in full or at least in part by a maid. A maid is

present in the household at the opening of Strobl's novel before everything falls apart and also at the conclusion of Naderer's play when order has been restored. In Festenberg's novel, Taxenbach's mother is depicted as more a mistress of the household than a housewife; there are maids who can take care of such work. In contrast, the women of Franz Taxenbach's generation are more likely to be involved in gainful employment.

The eventual manifestations of middle-class fears of decline⁴¹ are a major theme in the *Freißeleben* story and are also reflected in the Rannsdorff play. In the former case, this is a result of the economic crises of the early 1920s, while in the latter it is due to the absence of the principal breadwinner and the impact of wartime shortages. On a trip to Jihlava/Iglau, Eberhard *Freißeleben* visits an old flame, now Mrs. Pernfuss, who is busy cooking and frying pork, whereas in his own household in Vienna, the only available meat is tough horsemeat, and often not even this can be reliably obtained. A recurrent motive is the desirability of goose meat; Mrs. *Freißeleben* feeds and tries to fatten a goose in order to serve a proper dinner on St. Martin's Day, but her plan comes to nought when the animal is poisoned by the wicked *Weintögl*s. Gertrud Rannsdorff sacrifices her fur coat in order to obtain a goose for Christmas. Social decline (or the fear thereof) is not an issue in the story of Franz Taxenbach, whose life, as reflected in the single day of the novel, is marked by a total absence of variety or disruption. The only mention of meat has nothing to do with shortages: Taxenbach's Catholic mother is offended by her son eating meat on a Friday. It is somewhat telling that the piano is a central issue in two of the works, with the instrument representing both cultural and economic capital simultaneously. The *Freißeleben*'s piano has to be sold in order to make ends meet, whereas the Rannsdorff's changes its role from the instrument of an artist to a means of earning money, with Gertrud offering music lessons to tone-deaf butchers' wives (we might also note the allusion to class differences here). Franz von Taxenbach is an amateur violinist who plays the instrument as part of his late afternoon routine after work, but at no point is he forced to part with the instrument. In any case, art and culture are present in some way as something that the civil servant and his loved ones cherish or perform themselves.⁴²

CONCLUSION

This study opened by pointing out the connection between the public image of state employees and the general public's trust in the civil service. How, then, did Austrian government employees fare in the popular fiction of the 1920s to 1940s? In summary, the impression of government employees given by the fictional works analyzed here and in others is rather a sympathetic one. Take, for example, this paragraph in Hugo Bettauer's *Fight for Vienna*, in which civil servants are not the main protagonists, but they are perceived by one of those as follows: "Educated persons, but unhinged and embittered, driven over the edge by the uncertainty of the circumstances and the change of attitudes. A civil servant used to be a person commanding respect in the suburbs, was considered a harmonious, reputable person, whose small income was compensated by a secure pension and the sanctity [of the civil servant's profession]. Now, the spectre of cutbacks was going about, a hatred against civil servants emerged within the population who perceived them as a burden [...]. And the people became insecure, were no longer proud of being civil servants and felt out of place; they grew increasingly depressed by the knowledge that they were eating bread which was grudgingly given to them by an impoverished populace, and this made them unhappy and bitter."⁴³

There are individual bad eggs in the three examples discussed in this paper; we are thinking here primarily of Eberhard *Freißeleben*'s corrupt superior, Franz von Taxenbach's nemesis Edlacher or the devious *Sektionsrat* Malota in Rannsdorff's *Ministry*. There are, however, no resentments against the government employees as such, providing that they do not develop habits like organising themselves or striking, ideas that were anathema to a conservative author such as Strobl. This may have to do with the authors being or having been government employees themselves. There certainly were harsher portrayals by contemporaries if we consider the acerbic polemical writings of the lawyer Walter Rode from the late 1920s.⁴⁴ The popular literature of the type which we have studied in this paper seems to take a friendlier view and adds valuable pieces to the jigsaw of a portrait of government employees in the interwar period. I argue that these works provide additional insights into the conduct of this socio-professional group and should be acknowledged as a valuable source with the capacity to complement more conventional sources of historical research such as laws, personnel files, memoirs and newspaper articles.

⁴³ Hugo Bettauer, *Kampf*, 202.

⁴⁴ Walter Rode, *Österreichs Beamtenpyramide* (Wien: Carl Konegen, 1927); For more on Rode's biography see Gerd Baumgartner, *Walter Rode – Leben und Werk, Vol. 4* (Wien: Löcker, 2007).

5. “The gendarmerie drum is thundering and booming again...” Gendarmerie Service in the Interwar and Wartime Period in the Memoirs of Karel Machart*

Veronika Kršková – Vojtěch Kessler

INTRODUCTION

This study is a micro-historical probe which aims to outline the identity of a state employee from a subjective perspective. The research presents the mental framework and individual perspective of historical reality as perceived by a state employee, more specifically a gendarme who was also the author of an interesting literary legacy: Karel Machart, who upon his return from military service in the First World War decided to join the ranks of the gendarmerie.¹ In the early stages of his new career, his place of work changed frequently, but he later spent much of his service in Písek, South Bohemia. During the Second World War, he was arrested for assisting the resistance and imprisoned by the Gestapo in České Budějovice.

Karel Machart left behind a fairly extensive legacy of writings, but three major works stand out above the rest. Two of these are memoirs, the first of which is an account of how he came to join the gendarmerie, the second relates his gendarmerie service up to 1927.² The third work is a family chronicle which also incorporates genealogical

*The study is part of the project “Uchování historické paměti v době digitální (Preserving Historical Memory in the Digital Age)” of the program: Strategie AV 21: Anatomie evropské společnosti (Anatomy of European Society).

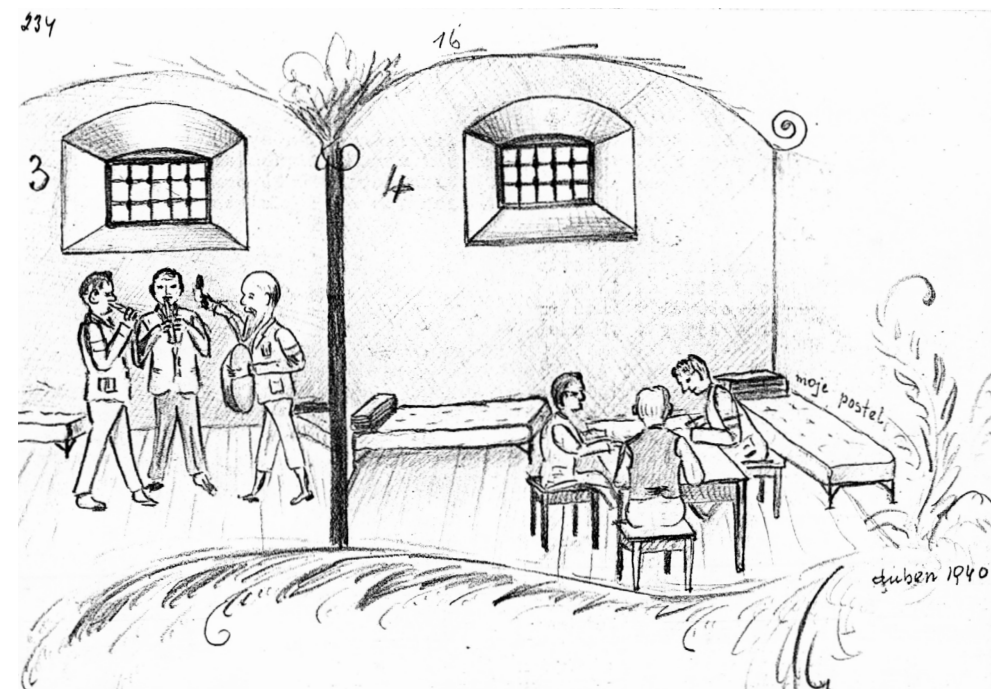
¹ On the genesis of the Czechoslovak gendarmerie after the fall of the Habsburg monarchy, see, among others, Martin Klečáček, “Národní výbor a četnictvo: převzetí rakouského četnictva do služeb československého státu (1918-1920),” *Moderní dějiny: sborník k dějinám 19. a 20. století*, 2012, vol. 20, no. 2 (2012): 61-82.

² Karel Machart, *Žandárový paměti*, Historický ústav Akademie věd České republiky (hereinafter HIU AV ČR), Prague, fund Databáze dějin všedního dne (hereinafter DDVD), accessed 22 August 2024, <https://ddvd.kpsys.cz/records/52228bcd-98bf-4b45-b57d-e0af7d061a93>; HIU AV ČR, DDVD, Karel Machart, *Básně z doby služby u četnictva*, accessed 22 August 2024, <https://ddvd.kpsys.cz/records/97862cca-6bd8-403e-8053-013d6214cac2>

research which he undertook in 1942 and which relies heavily on land registers.³ In his chronicle, Machart focuses not only on reporting information regarding members of his family and their residence in Kestrány (a village in the Písek district of South Bohemian) but also the history of his family beginning with the period following the Thirty Years' War, 1618–1648. This family chronicle provides information that the author does not include in his other two works, including details about the period prior to his joining the gendarmerie in addition to additional information on the gendarmerie after 1927 which had marked the end of his earlier memoirs.

All these works were handed over by Machart's estate to the Archive of the Everyday at the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences,⁴ which was recently renamed and transformed into the digitised and publicly accessible *Databáze dějin všedního dne* (History of Everyday Life Database).⁵ This resource is part of an international scientific research project which aims to collate various sources on the history of ordinary life in the Czech Republic and Czechoslovakia. Among the participants of the project are the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, as well as the Institute of Czech History of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University and the Collection of Biographical Records based at the University of Vienna (Dokumentation lebensgeschichtliche Aufzeichnungen),⁶ the latter of which was the initiator of the project in the early 1990s. Throughout its existence, the project has preserved its relevance, corresponding with the rising interest among Czechs in the history of everyday life, "history from below" and microhistories.⁷

The goal of the project is to establish and publish a systematic collection of documents in Czech and German which encompasses different sources including memoirs, family chronicles, diaries and other ego-documents related to the history of the Czech lands which can help scholars in their research into both modern and contemporary history. Although the database is in itself a valuable testimony of how life used to be in the past, numerous memoirs have also been published with the consent of their authors



Sousedům na "trojce"

Tluče Bubeníček - v umejvák tříska
Míka bručí basu - Nachtigal píská:
Všechno vzhůru co tu žije
nebo tady nudou shnije,
Hola - trojko - hej,
ke Matchi nám hrej!

V neděli když touha ve zlost se zvedá
"čtyřka" hru sem danou ráda vyhledá.
Touhy ve žalářní kobce
niší hrou: Clovšče jen zlob se"
Hrejte nám k matchi
seč Vám dech stačil!

Za tento Váš koncert, tu je náš díček
gt kapelník žije - Mistr Bubníček!
Zandár Machart - písmák Mixá,
kterým srdce v base kiksá
pučifous Kálal
přejí trojce zdar!

T r o j k a .

Fig. 5.1: Drawings by Karel Machart, in which he depicts his imprisonment (HIU AV ČR, f. DDVD, Machart, Karel – Výpis z Archivu země České; Rodinná kronika, 235).

³ HIU AV ČR, DDVD, Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, Výpis z Archivu země České, accessed 22 August 2024, <https://ddvd.kpsys.cz/records/00fa2c7d-d2ca-4a2a-a4cb-0b7f02358b9b>

⁴ For the web presentation of the Institute see, accessed 22 August 2024, <https://www.hiu.cas.cz/en/database-of-the-history-of-the-everyday>.

⁵ Milan Hlavačka, Vojtěch Kessler and David Smrček, *History of Everyday Life Database* (Prague: Academia, 2020).

⁶ For more see, accessed 22 August 2024, <https://wirtschaftsgeschichte.univie.ac.at/forschung/doku-lebensgeschichten/> or Michael Mitterauer and Günther Müller, "Aus Lebensgeschichten lernen: Zur interaktiven Sammelpraxis der 'Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen,'" in *Gelehrte Objekte? – Wege zum Wissen. Aus den Sammlungen der Historisch-Kulturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Wien*, eds. Matthias Beit et al. (Wien: Löcker Verlag, 2013), 222–241.

⁷ We refer here to a wide spectrum of approaches and concepts, from the French "histoire vue d'en bas", Italian "microstoria", English "oral" or "case history", German "Geschichte von unten", etc. All of these movements abandon structure-oriented social history, focus their research on those who belonged to the so-called "silent majority" in the past, or offer a new perspective on the middle and upper classes and their activities.

and owners.⁸ At the same time, the database represents a thorough thematic register, improving access to the materials for both students and researchers.

At the time of writing, this database is comprised of over 600 memory documents, all of which are freely accessible and fully catalogued. It should be noted that this is an ongoing project, and new documents continue to be added to the collection.⁹ The value and significance of “ego-documents”¹⁰ is now widely accepted by most historians. Such sources of information about the past offer an illustrative diversification of the interpretation of conventional “grand history”, but thanks to the “new reading of the sources”, these types of documents can serve as an independent, authentic and above all fully-fledged epistemic tool. Sources such as, for example, private correspondence or the diaries and memoirs of “ordinary” people reveal that the histories of private lives have their own specific rhythm which is largely independent of the grand history narratives mentioned above. Life goes on regardless of the seemingly dramatic changes in foreign diplomacy and international politics, and people continue to be born, marry, celebrate and mourn in the midst of historic times. The stories and images of the past presented in ego-documents such as memoirs are also valued for their narrative structure. The three texts by Karel Machart which are the focus of this study have an additional peculiarity in the fact that their author chose to write them in verse format.

Texts of this type can be analysed most effectively by recognizing and taking into account the author’s self-censorship. Scholars should also reflect upon the influence of presentism and the ways in which past events are narrated based on present circumstances and ideas. Last but not least, the selection of memories can be influenced by what is termed dominant memory which is disseminated, among others, by the education system or the mass media. The historical actor in this particular study, the gendarme Karel Machart, is therefore not just an individual whose thinking, desires or family background we can attempt to determine; he and his writings also serve as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of social ties, the economic aspects of everyday life and public life and the socio-cultural features of the period under study.

At the start of the 21st century, Michal Dlouhý, an amateur historian with a particular interest in the gendarmerie, used Machart’s works as the basis for a series of works of popular history.¹¹ Interest in the gendarmerie was high in this period as a result of

the popularity of the television show *Četnické humoresky*,¹² which featured stories about the gendarmerie and in which Dlouhý himself was involved as an advisor. In this study, however, we adopt a more analytical approach to Machart’s works. Our research poses a number of questions which we aim to address in the limited space which this study provides. What actually motivated Machart to become a gendarme? How did he respond to the milestones in life associated with his occupation?

THE GENDARMERIE IN THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC AND THE PROFILE OF A GENDARME

In interwar Czechoslovakia, the gendarmerie and its service was governed by Act no. 299 of 1920 as amended by Act no. 28 of 1928,¹³ legislation that was largely based on the regulations of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy governing the gendarmerie.¹⁴ It should also be noted that the responsibilities of both the state and local police also extended to enforcing discipline within the Czechoslovak Republic.¹⁵ The political office of the first degree was the superior office for the gendarmerie in whose district the service was performed and was responsible for the immediate management and supervision of the service. If the gendarmerie had to be used by a self-governing town, or by a town with so-called municipal law (where a police force was established), the political office of the second degree called them into service. The gendarmerie was not subordinate to other state civil and military authorities, as well as to municipal authorities. The competencies of the gendarmerie of the Czechoslovak Republic were characterised such that, “according to legal provisions in force and according to the regulations of relevant state authorities they maintain public order and public safety across the entire territory of the Czechoslovak Republic.”¹⁶ Gendarmerie stations were located in major towns and cities, and the seat of each political authority included a district gendarmerie headquarters, which was subordinate to the gendarmerie department. At the level of its component states (or “lands”), a regional state gendarmerie headquarters was set up in each provincial capital, which was subordinate to the Interior Ministry. The gendarmerie was a voluntary force, and candidates were initially accepted as trial gendarmes.

⁸ The project has its own publishing series at the Historical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences called *Dějiny všedního dne* (History of Everyday Life). So far, three publications have been published in this series already. See Vojtěch Kessler and Josef Šrámek, *Tvoje války. Velká válka 1914–1918 očima českých účastníků*. (Prague: Nakladatelství Historický ústav, 2020); Vojtěch Kessler and Josef Šrámek, *Děti křtěné Dunajem. České vzpomínky na meziválečnou Vídeň* (Prague: Nakladatelství Historický ústav, 2021); Jana Losová, Vojtěch Kessler and Veronika Kršková, *Babičky očima vnoučat* (Prague: Nakladatelství Historický ústav, 2023). The unorganised *Databáze dějin všedního dne* was used as a source base from the 1990s by the Viennese organisation *Dokumentation lebensgeschichtlicher Aufzeichnungen* for publications produced as part of a specialised series released by the *Boeblau* publishing house.

⁹ Accessed 22 August 2024, <https://ddvd.kpsys.cz/>.

¹⁰ Kaspar von Greyerz, “Ego-Documents. The Last Word?” *German History* 28, no. 3 (2010): 273–282.

¹¹ Michal Dlouhý, *Četnické trampoty* (Prague: Pragoline, 2014).

¹² *Četnické humoresky* (2001–2007), directors Antonín Moskalyk and Pavlína Moskalyková. See, accessed 22 August 2024, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0279551/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

¹³ Act of 14 April 1920, No. 299 Coll., with Act of January 31, 1928, No. 28 Coll.

¹⁴ Radek Galaš, *Československé četnictvo (1918–1929)* (Prague: Academia, 2019); Martin Klečáček, “Generálmajor Václav Řezáč – četnickým důstojníkem z monarchie do republiky,” *Paginae historiae: sborník Národního archivu*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2013): 28–64; Miroslava Breburdová, *Každodennost příslušníka četnického sboru v Čechách v první polovině 20. století* (Prague: Filozofický fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2019).

¹⁵ Jan Malypetr, František Soukup and Jan Kapras, *Armáda a národ* (Prague: Národní rada československá v nakladatelství L. Mazáče, 1938), 281–285. Available online, accessed 22 August 2024, <https://kramerius5.nkp.cz/uuid/uuid:e3019240-6480-11e4-be62-005056825209>.

¹⁶ Act No. 299 Coll., of April 14, 1920, § 1.

Candidates were expected to meet eight basic requirements:

- to be a citizen of the Republic of Czechoslovakia,
- to be upstanding, of sound mind and mentally capable,
- to be between 21 and 35 years of age,
- to be single or a childless widower,
- to have a strong and healthy body and to be of good height,
- to possess a good command of Czech or Slovak languages in spoken and written form,
- to have evidence of educational attainment at general school,
- to have had military training, undertaken military service with a weapon for at least that period prescribed by conscription law for normal full-time military service.¹⁷

Upon joining the gendarmerie, all candidates undertook to carry out four years of service, including the first year as a trial gendarme.¹⁸ Candidates were also required to take a specialist exam in front of a committee, generally after six months of training. Candidates also took the gendarmerie oath of service upon signing up. The training, education, discipline and inspection of the work of gendarmes was undertaken by gendarmerie officers. A gendarme's service also had an impact on his personal life, as he was only able to get married once he had been appointed a "full" gendarme and with the permission of his particular commander.¹⁹

KAREL MACHART: "BEFORE I BECAME A GENDARME..."

Karel Machart was born in Kestřany, in 1897; his father, Matěj Machart, was a blacksmith, and his mother, Kateřina, née Kinkorová, had already been widowed.²⁰ At the time of his birth, the couple were already bringing up Kateřina's son from her first marriage, František, and two years later a daughter, Ludmila, was born. Although the three siblings attended elementary school (obecná škola),²¹ none of them were able to continue their studies or undertake an apprenticeship as it was assumed that they would begin working on the family farm as soon as they were able. Karel Machart described this moment as crucial for his future. The Macharts owned 77 korec (roughly 22 ha) of land,²² which would be inherited by the eldest son František, but because it would be

a long time until he could pay out anything to his younger brother Karel, it was assumed that he would marry into another farm and that the land would instead go to Karel.²³

This all changed with the outbreak of the Great War. František had been in the army since 1912 and was thus sent directly from training to battle in 1914. Karel was drafted in October 1915 and was initially sent to the town of Gyula in eastern Hungary before being deployed to the Isonzo Front in 1916. His diary from this period of his life still survives as part of his *Rodinná kronika* (Family Chronicle), and he noted down his experiences of the war almost every day.²⁴ When the Czechoslovak Republic was established, he chose to remain in the army, in contrast to his brother who was demobilised in 1918. In the spring of 1919, he was again on active duty and was drafted into an infantry regiment on the Slovak-Hungarian border, arriving home in December 1920.²⁵ Upon returning home from military service, Karel's domestic circumstances had changed markedly. His mother had died during his time in the army,²⁶ and his older brother had decided to get married and settle at the family farm.²⁷ Assessing his circumstances, his lack of education and his recent military service, Karel concluded that he had little choice but to join the gendarmerie.²⁸ As he states in *Rodinná kronika*: "Both of us could not take on one farm, and so I – having received no formal learning with just general school – had to settle for service in the gendarmerie – meaning a continuation of the army – and so I became a 'shepherd of the people'".²⁹ This is perhaps one of the few occasions when Machart discusses his motivation for joining the gendarmerie.³⁰

KAREL MACHART: "GENDARMERIE MEMORIES" AND "POEMS FROM MY SERVICE WITH THE GENDARMERIE"

As was noted above, Machart's life in the gendarmerie is the focus of two loosely connected ego-documents: *Žandárovvy paměti* (Gendarme Memories) and *Básně z doby služby u četnictva* (Poems from My Service with the Gendarmerie). These two works portray the period from his joining the gendarmerie in 1922³¹ and the completion of his training, his appointment as a gendarme and the approval of his marriage, concluding in 1933 when he was living and serving in Písek.³² That same year, he had bought a house

²³ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 154.

²⁴ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 169-213.

²⁵ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 166.

²⁶ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 158.

²⁷ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 214.

²⁸ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 166.

²⁹ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 214.

³⁰ On the issue of the social mobility of the Czechoslovak gendarmerie, see, among others, Ivana Kolářová and Ondřej Kolář, "Sociální postavení příslušníků československého četnictva 1918-1939," *Český časopis historický = The Czech Historical Review* 113, no. 1 (2015): 76-96.

³¹ Karel Machart, *Žandárovvy paměti*, 8.

³² Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 215.

¹⁷ Act No. 299 Coll., § 17.

¹⁸ Act No. 299 Coll., § 19, 20.

¹⁹ Malypetr, Soukup and Kapras, *Armáda a národ*, 282.

²⁰ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 152.

²¹ Karel Machart does not state exactly how long he and his siblings attended elementary school.

²² Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 153.



Fig. 5.2: Title page of the text of "Žandárový paměti" (HIU AV ČR, f. DDVD, Machart, Karel – Žandárový paměti, 4).



Fig. 5.3: Wedding photograph of Karel Machart (HIU AV ČR, f. DDVD, Machart, Karel – Žandárový paměti, 186).

in Písek and had started training to become a gendarme officer. The two memoirs are a collection of the author's poems, lyrics to well-known tunes and press clippings dealing with cases in which the author had been involved, but it also includes poems by other authors such as the writer Petr Bezruč and a teacher at a Czech main school in Prague, František Tesař. The memoirs can also be read as a satirical discourse on the period as experienced by the author, evoking society-wide sentiments and accounts of specific people whom Machart encountered.

Machart's texts feature four main topics: 1. reflections on society-wide events of the period; 2. personal and family milestones; 3. the author's personality as implicitly presented in the writings, and 4. the daily life of gendarmes and the impact of government service on their personal lives. In this study, we focus exclusively on the last of these topics. Machart's writings often feature satirical characterisations of the people with whom he came into contact during his service, either other gendarmes, the mayors of towns in his district, or the population whose security he was tasked with ensuring. These people are often mocked in his writings, making reference to certain "qualities" in their character, although we also encounter positive assessments of people who Machart believed had acted in a morally praiseworthy manner: in essence, that of being upstanding citizens. Although it is necessary to take into account a certain degree of exaggeration and artifice in his writing, it is evident that Machart is attempting to address not only the changing times in which he lived and the various new conflicts which arose, but also with his own personal situation in this period, and in particular his ambiguous attitude towards his occupation and the training and work that was required of the gendarmerie.

His description of the gendarmerie has two basic aspects: a formal aspect which encompasses professional procedures, training and his actions in the service itself; and the everyday aspect, which reflects the impact of the job on the gendarme's personal life. Several examples illustrate both the formal aspect and everyday life in the gendarmerie, and the extended timeframe of the works allows us to trace the entire process of "becoming" a gendarme from the time he joined the service, his period as a trial gendarme, his appointment as a "full" gendarme, or in the words of the author, as a "gendarme on the books", to the actual execution of his gendarme duties.³³ We now present three examples which represent different aspects linked to the author's career as a gendarme and his relationship to the public service.

The first example is a text from June 1922 in which the author discusses his decision to join the gendarmerie through a rather satirical poem called *Medlešice*.³⁴ The poem touches upon not only the events of his own life but also the environment in which he lived, also incorporating the characteristics of certain significant figures from amongst the population of the town of Medlešice.

„Sem do čerta moje cesta až z domova vedla,
hrom vem vojnu – tady si mě zase na krk sedla,
žandárem mě udělali – svoboděnkou vzali,
a na štaci ‚fungl‘ novou do Medlešic dali;
pátýho sem máje nastoup; tu vtročskou službu,
‚halapartnu‘ na sáh dlouhou dali mě co družbu.³⁵
(...)

Starostou tu v Medlešicích je bručavý Mádlo,
na prodej má uhlí-mouku-cukr-kafe-sádlo;
je to prach starej partyka – na četníky sočí,
za to jeho vnučka Bóža – se po nich jen točí!³⁶

“This is where the devil my journey from home led,
to hell with the army – here she's got me by the throat again;
They made me a gendarme – they took my liberty,
and put me on a new mission to Medlešice;
On the fifth of May, I joined the slave service,
...a halberd a fathom long, they gave me for company.
(...)

The mayor here in Medlešice is the grumpy Mádlo,
He sells coal-flour-sugar-coffee-lard;
He's a dusty old bastard – he slanders the gendarmes,
His granddaughter Bozha – she wants them!”

The above extract demonstrates Machart's exaggerated reflection of the feelings he experienced when he first began working as a budding state employee. There is an evident aversion to the military organisation of the service, and also to the new environment in which the author has found himself. An important factor which impacted the daily life of gendarmes, as well as the atmosphere within specific stations, was the officers based there, and of course the group as a whole. Machart's writings give a description of this specific society, yielding more space to the "makeup" of the gendarmerie officers and his colleagues in a poem which portrays the training which he received at Mnichovice from September 1922 to January 1923. The poem is called *Index všech frekventantů mnichov[ické] školy* (An Index of All Those Who Frequented the Mnichovice School)³⁷ and the text also features images of most of the individuals named in the poem. This text offers us a unique opportunity to see the relationship between the novice gendarme and his superiors based on one specific example.

³³ Karel Machart, *Žandárový paměti*, 37.

³⁴ Karel Machart, *Žandárový paměti*, 4-8.

³⁵ Karel Machart, *Žandárový paměti*, 4.

³⁶ Karel Machart, *Žandárový paměti*, 5.

³⁷ Karel Machart, *Žandárový paměti*, 10-14.

„Kapitán Riedl je zde velitelem školy,
z trestního nám zákona – notné porce solí;
tancoval nám zakázat hned po posvícení,
jen se učit a zas učit – z tance prý nic není.

Vládl jako despota – jako tyran Nero
ani tady nechci psát – co se všechno dělo.³⁸

(...)

Pan zástupce Komárek – měl sice rád švandu
ale znal si přidržet na uzdě nás bandu.

Ten strašně rád kázával mravokárné doušky,
fousama si zapraskal – vo každým psal ‚kroužky‘

Při učení doved lhát – více než se sluší,
pro každý klep nastavil přeochočně uši.³⁹

(...)

Každý čtvrtek Povondra učil nás pátrati
a potom jak četník má veřejnost klamati.⁴⁰

“Captain Riedl is the schoolmaster here,

On behalf of the criminal law – he makes life difficult for us:

He forbade us to dance right after holy days,
just to learn and learn again – they say dancing is for nothing.

He ruled like a despot – like the tyrant Nero.

I don't even want to write here everything that has happened.

(...)

The deputy Mr. Komárek – he liked a good joke,
but knew how to keep us in line.

He was very fond of preaching in a moralistic way,

he fiddled with his beard and made a note of everyone's name;

He would lie more than he ought,

And for every gossip he set his ears too willingly.

(...)

Every Thursday Povondra taught us how to search,
and then how a gendarme should deceive the public.”

The final extract is from 1926, by which time Machart had been a full gendarme for three years. He had now completed his mandatory four-year service obligation and had furthermore been given permission to marry Josefa Zobalová,⁴¹ also known

as Pepča.⁴² He joined the gendarmerie station in Písek, where he remained until the end of 1934.⁴³ The following extract clearly demonstrates how the author perceived his occupation in practice.

„S nadávkama začít na tu naši slotu,
že z roboty jedné jdu hned na robotu,
že četnickej život samej bodák píka,
že ať se hneš kam chceš, všude řeže – píchá
je četnická píseň otrěpaná sice
nebudu ji proto roztahovat více.⁴⁴

(...)

Volno nemáš nikdy

pořád něco honíš

nespíš, nejíš–nebdíš

přec to nedohoníš.⁴⁵

“It was about time to start complaining,

that from one task I'm going straight to another,

that the gendarme life is a pain

that no matter where you go, it cuts and stabs me!

This is a gendarme song that's a bit worn out.

I won't stretch it any further.

(...)

You're never free.

You're always chasing something.

Never to sleep, to eat, to be wake.

You can't catch anything.”

These texts obviously feature a significant degree of exaggeration, but they still reveal individual experiences and allow us to analyse not just the preparation for gendarmerie service, but also how it was carried out in practice. They tell us how the training of gendarmes was organised, what subjects they studied and how they were taught, and how difficult the author believed a gendarme's role to be. We can find plenty of examples in his writings which relate, for example, the scope of the competencies which gendarmes were given or their relationship with the police and how they collaborated in investigating specific cases, but these topics are perhaps beyond the scope of this study. The key point to be made here is to note the absolutely essential aspect of his writings, specif-

³⁸ Karel Machart, Žandárovy paměti, 10.

³⁹ Karel Machart, Žandárovy paměti.

⁴⁰ Karel Machart, Žandárovy paměti, 11.

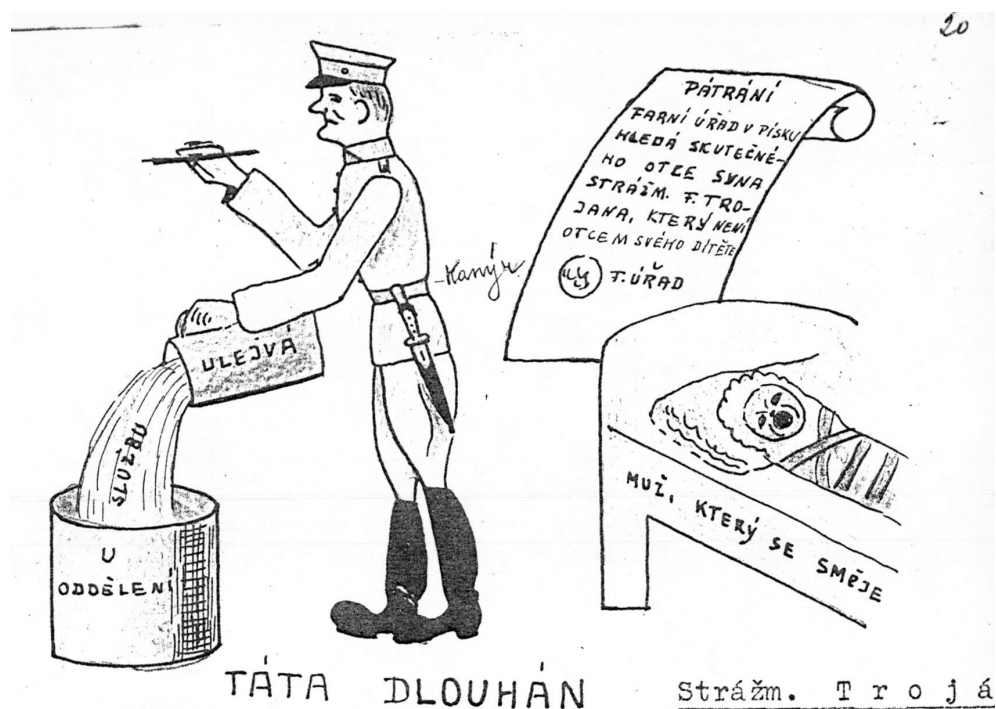
⁴¹ Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 283.

⁴² Karel Machart, Žandárovy paměti, 103.

⁴³ Karel Machart, Žandárovy paměti, 215.

⁴⁴ Karel Machart, Básně z doby služby u četnictva, 1.

⁴⁵ Karel Machart, Básně z doby služby u četnictva, 2.



TÁTA DLOUHÁN

Strážm. T r o j á

Trojan nejradš ulejšvá,
dělá čmáry -máry- šket,
a když chodil na "štrajfunky",
docela to jednou krk.

S Artingrem měl slavnej haftík,
pak ze Strakonice Koubu,
tento si sám "špíčko" napsal,
on ho jen poslal k soudu.

S jeho synem /:mezi námi:/
to je zvláštní novinka,
Trojan celý usoužený
hledá k němu tatínka.

Erfolk tu prozradím na něj
jen se po něm píděte,
má na krku utajené,
o d l o ž e n í dítěte.

ically their subjective perspective that reflects the author's own distinctive approach to his chosen profession.

A GENDARME IN THE RESISTANCE – IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

The occupation of the Czech lands by Nazi Germany and the declaration of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia on March 16th 1939 represented a critical juncture for Karel Machart. At this time he was commanding the gendarmerie station in Tábor, and he was instructed by his officers that the gendarmerie "should not put up any resistance",⁴⁶ an order which evidently went against his personal convictions. In October of that year, gendarmes from the Budějovice station had been advised to contact him, and they sent him a radio transmitter for use in resistance activities.⁴⁷ He was now faced with the decision of whether or not to join the resistance. Machart recalled his thoughts from this period: "I knew that agreeing meant death, but was refusal even an option? The idea never even entered my head".⁴⁸ The transmitter was a "Petruška" transmitter,⁴⁹ and it was to be used to connect the South Bohemia military command with the 5th division of the Main Defence of the Nation Command in Prague.⁵⁰ However, he never got the opportunity to take part in other illegal activities; as early as February 1940, the activities of the officers organised under the Defence of the Nation led by Artillery Major Antonín Szafran had been detected and arrested,⁵¹ including Karel Machart himself.⁵² His involvement with the illegal group was eventually revealed and after more than a year behind bars he was released from prison. He was also discharged from the gendarmerie and stayed with his wife's family in Zátaví, where he worked as a labourer until the end of the war.⁵³

But not even these dramatic events could dissuade him from returning to the gendarmerie in May 1945, and he led the State Security Service in Písek with the rank of First lieutenant until January 1948.⁵⁴ Even so, many years later, he characterised his professional life as follows: "It was generally a dramatic and busy life which did not

⁴⁶ Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 222.

⁴⁷ Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 225.

⁴⁸ Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 224.

⁴⁹ Miloslav Pecha and Václav Vondra. *Českobudějovicko v době nacistické okupace a osvobození: 1939-1945* (České Budějovice: M. Pecha, 2004), 123.

⁵⁰ "Vysílačka 'majora šafrána". In *Lidové noviny*, February 28 2022, accessed 22 August 2024, <https://www.pressreader.com/czech-republic/lidove-noviny/20220218/281822877229984>.

⁵¹ Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 226.

⁵² Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 227.

⁵³ Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 269.

⁵⁴ Karel Machart, Rodinná kronika, 215.

Fig. 5.4: Caricature of Constable Trojan (HIU AV ČR, f. DDVD, Machart, Karel – *Básně z doby služby u četnictva*, 40).

suit my nature, as it is uncreative, joyless work which is preoccupied with the negative sides of life.”⁵⁵

In the limited space allowed by the study we have not been able to fully answer all of the questions set out in the introduction. We have established that the reason for Karel Machart’s entry into the service of the state was related to changes in his family circumstances and the resulting impact on his social situation. The fact that he had spent the years before joining the gendarmerie at the front and had become accustomed to a certain kind of “barracks” life no doubt also contributed to his decision to join the ranks of the gendarmerie. Machart’s verse is laced with satirical humour, and he flashed the same literary blade when describing the key events in his service life. He willingly used humour to confront both the inflexible nature of the service environment and also the issues related to his relationship with the state. The sarcastic stance which is found throughout his writings suggests that not only was he not an unquestioning servant of the state but also that his opinions towards the Czechoslovak Republic were less than flattering. In his case, we would not be talking about a question, but rather a question of personal preference. How then to understand his activities during the Second World War and his active involvement in the anti-Nazi resistance? One possible answer may be that Machart was first and foremost a Czech patriot. And this brings us to the key, oft-repeated thesis that one can be loyal (yet also critical) to the state while not “belonging to it”, in much the same way that one can belong to a nation.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Karel Machart, *Rodinná kronika*, 214.

⁵⁶ Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 165.

III.
CIVIL SERVANTS AND
THE QUESTION
OF REFUGEES IN
POST-WWI HUNGARY

6. “Budapest cannot provide decent accommodation” Refugee Civil Servants in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County after World War I*

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Until recently, Hungarian historiography has largely neglected the issue of the flight of refugees in the period after World War I, and relatively few comprehensive monographs or studies have been published on the topic to date. One of the earliest works on this topic was written in 1983 by a American-Hungarian historian, but although it made some substantial and valuable points, it was hidebound by the fact that it did not make use of archival sources.¹ More recently, the documentary filmmaker István Dékány has published a substantial monograph on the issue, but despite the growing number of studies on the issue, there are still many questions that remain unanswered.² This study will explore the issue of state and county officials fleeing the former territories of Hungary in the wake of Trianon, a sub-topic of this wider field which has also been largely neglected. There are a number of reasons why this topic has failed to attract sufficient academic attention, not least of which is the lack of surviving archival sources; the destruction of the records of the National Office and Council for Refugees and the large-scale destruction of county archives all certainly play a role in this respect.³

The records of the Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county relating to refugee officials appear to have suffered far fewer losses than similar documents from other regional archives, and the primary source for the research presented in this paper was the documents of

* The study developed within the framework of the “Lendület/Momentum Trianon 100 Research Group”. Here I would like to thank László Somogyi, Chief Archivist of the Budapest City Archives and István Gergely Szűts of the Ottó Habsburg Foundation for reading a draft of the manuscript and for their advice. They are, of course, not responsible for any errors or mistakes found within the paper.

¹ István Mócsy, *The Uprooted. Refugees and their Impact on Hungary's Domestic Politics, 1918-1922* (New York: East European Monographs), 1983.

² István Dékány, *Trianoni árvák* (Budapest: Noran Libro Kiadó, 2018).

³ Csaba Csóti, “A menekült köztisztviselők társadalmi integrációjának kezdetei, 1918-1924,” *Limes* 15, no. 2 (2002): 2, 25-37; Gábor Bojtos, “Újratervezés. Adatok a Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok vármegyében új életet kezdő menekült tisztviselők pályafutásához,” in *Trianon és a magyar közigazgatás*, ed. Béni L. Balogh (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 2020), 153-168.

the sub-prefects (alispán) from this county. This material offers the possibility of answering some important research questions: 1. who can actually be considered a refugee? What different statuses, individual and group life situations could be included under the term in public discourse? 2. what policies were followed by the central and county administrations in integrating refugees, providing them with work and support? and 3. how many of those who had been repatriated in the early twenties remained in the county administration in the 1930s? What type of careers did they have?

HEARTLAND

After acquiring its final form in 1876 after the abolition of the so-called Kiskun district, the county of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun (until 1950) was the largest county in Hungary in terms of both population and area. With an area of 13,000 square kilometres, it was larger than some modern European states, such as Cyprus, and only slightly smaller than Montenegro. In 1920 it had a population of more than 1.1 million and was one of the few Hungarian counties that was not stripped of territory as a result of the Treaty of Trianon. The county was also interesting in that it was located in the centre of the country and had its seat in the nation's capital, and this made the county a desirable destination for those who had chosen to leave their residence at the end of 1918; if they were unable to find accommodation in the capital, they could typically choose to move to the surrounding suburbs or settlements which were still independent cities at the time. A similar situation had already been experienced by the mayors of the capital and the county leaders during the invasion of Transylvania in 1916, and it did not change during the collapse of the Monarchy.

Once refugees started arriving at the end of the war, the administration began to react with practices that had been developed in the Great War. Only gradually did they realize that they were facing something radically different from what they had seen before. The hope of a rapid return for many of the refugees quickly vanished, and the fragmented sectoral and municipal approaches and the social welfare-based aid would not be able to assist this time around. Only partly relevant to our subject is the fact that from the end of 1918, it was not only individuals and families who had fled to the capital and its environs, but also entire institutions and properties. Perhaps more closely related to our topic is the fact that in 1916 entire institutions had also been transferred to the county; the council of Visegrád was still corresponding with the sub-prefect in 1919 about covering the costs of the Girls' Orphanage in Kézdivásárhely (present-day Târgu Secuiesc, in Romania). In addition to the institutions, objects and even whole archives were also moved from one country to another. In December 1922, in the presence of the chief archivist, a representative of the Ministry of Finance and a representative of the Romanian Restitution Commission, two previously unidentified boxes containing securities, accounts and other documents of various municipalities in Háromszék/Trei Scaune, Szárazajta/Aita Seacă, Bölön/Belin and other municipalities of the former Szeklerland were opened in the county's archives. The contents were taken into the



Fig. 6.1: Distribution of clothing for the refugees from Transylvania at the Museum of Applied Arts of Budapest in 1916, published by Fortepan / Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, no. 256263.

custody of the archives at the end of 1918 and were kept by the county authorities until they could be returned to their original owners.⁴

THE FLIGHT OF THE CLERKS

Who exactly could be considered a refugee? In the documents of the sub-prefects who were primarily responsible for the administration of the county, there are at least three different concepts, and it is often impossible to distinguish who belongs in which category. Refugees who had fled the invasion of Transylvania in 1916 were treated differently, and even as late as 1922 their cases were handled separately from those of later groups of refugees. The next wave to arrive in the county was that of notaries (jegyzők), county clerks nominated by the central administration for the management of local affairs, and displaced municipal employees. A special government commission was set

⁴ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Pest Vármegyei Levéltára (hereinafter MNL PVL) IV. 408.b. 6676/1923. Letter from Tivadar Rexa, Chief Archivist to Tivadar Agorasztó, sub prefect. Budapest, 18 July 1922, or *ibid.* Minutes. 1, 2, 4 December 1922.

up in December 1918 to deal with their cases, led by the ministerial counsellor Pál Kiss Hegymegi Kiss.⁵ These arrivals were followed by (or subsumed into) other groups of refugees who were now arriving from the ceded territories, but the notaries were also considered as refugees or exiles within the county, and dealing with their situation was clearly a priority for the sub-prefect Tivadar Agoraszto, who had been inaugurated on November 25th 1918 during the Aster Revolution and who would retain his post throughout the 1920s.

A surviving summary notes that 80 notaries and other municipal employees (such as deputies, tax clerks and tax collectors) from 66 offices (out of a total of 238) in 17 districts of the county had been driven out of their posts by the local population (or, in the succinct terminology of the report “had left their posts”). Many of those who had fled were technically “on leave”, but this was clearly just another euphemism.⁶ Tihámér Kisfaludy, the district notary of Vecsés, complained that on November 1st drunken soldiers and a local mob had caused 100,000 crowns worth of damage to his wine cellar. After attempting to persuade his superior authority to refund the 80 crowns he had spent on his journey to Kiskunfélegyháza, he was reassigned to Ókéske.⁷ In order to replace the displaced notaries, the county authorities generally experimented with intra-county mobility by trying to replace missing municipal or district staff with others who had been displaced from elsewhere in the county; at that time, the employment of personnel from the occupied or lost territories had not yet arisen.

When asked the question on a questionnaire of whether it was “desirable to employ foreign county employees,”⁸ Sándor Almássy, the ousted district chief (főszolgabíró) of Pomáz district, gave a firm answer of “no”. A similarly negative attitude was also observed in other counties, such as Tolna, which did not welcome notaries who had fled from Transylvania or Slovakia,⁹ but this mood soon changed. For example, a summary from the period of the Soviet Republic lists 25 refugee notaries who were employed by a “specialised group” (central administration) of the directorate, only seven of whom were former local municipal employees, with the remainder having recently arrived from the lost territories.¹⁰

Gusztáv Tabak, a district notary from Bélád/Beladica (in present-day Slovakia) was a refugee twice over. After soldiers stormed his offices on November 4th 1918 and “assaulted” the clerk, he fled the town with his family but his superiors ordered him to return to his post on November 22nd, probably partly on the basis of an optimistic report that the city militia had been raised and the disturbances had subsided. However, only

two days later he was forced to flee again together with his pregnant wife and their four children, first to Vác, where he was employed by the Budapest IX District Police Headquarters.¹¹ An intermediate category was comprised of temporary refugees from areas such as Tiszántúl, the northern part of Bács-Bodrog county or Baranya which had initially been occupied by troops from neighbouring countries but which would have to be returned to Hungary. As with other refugee city councils, Budapest was home to the refugee council of the city of Baja which was headed by József Wunderlich, the former city comptroller.¹² Refugees from Baja who had served in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county were ordered to report to their places of duty after the re-annexation of the city and its surroundings in August 1921, thereby reducing the burden on the county administration.¹³ An apt example of the total confusion between all of these categories (displaced notaries, refugees from the lost territories and refugees from temporarily occupied territories) is a list of 336 names from the records of the Budapest refugee council of Baja, which presumably includes the names of individuals from Pest county. The names on the list are predominantly from the ceded territories, but also include the police captain of Makó and the exiled district notary of Kisoroszi.¹⁴

ASTER REVOLUTION POLICIES

The policy of the Károlyi government regarding the refugee civil servants was clearly summarized in the circular of the Secretary of State for the Interior Zoltán Jánosi to the senior authorities of the counties, dated December 10th 1918, No.155286/1918 BM. The great advantage of this document is that it largely avoids legal jargon and is quite clear about the objectives of the Ministry of Interior.¹⁵ In general, the officials who drafted the circular would have preferred the employees of the occupied counties to be relocated to the same place as the sub-prefect’s offices and their salaries paid by the local tax office, but the text of the decree itself seems to accept that this was largely impossible given the prevailing circumstances of late 1918. It allowed the payment of civil servants returning from demobilisation and those who had fled to other counties if they could confirm their identity and their eligibility. Their subsequent employment was entrusted to the administrative head of the local jurisdiction who was granted fairly

¹¹ MNL PVL IV. 876/1920. Salaries of Gusztáv Tabak. December 17, 1918; MNL PML IV. 876/1920. Private letter addressed to unknown “Dear Gusztai”. Pusztahatár [Bars county], November 11, 1918.

¹² Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Bács-Kiskun Vármegyei Levéltára (hereinafter MNL BKVL), IV. 1407. j. Papers of the council of the town of Baja thj. in Budapest. 1. d. 31/1920. Transcript of the refugee legal authority. Budapest, February 8, 1920.

¹³ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 38590/1921. Passim.

¹⁴ MNL BKVL IV. 1407. j. 9/1920. Register of administrative officials who fled. Budapest, May 22, 1920.

¹⁵ Circular No. 155.286 of 1918 of the Hungarian Minister of the Interior to all the county authorities on the payment of the allowances of county employees and pensioners who were forced to leave their place of residence due to exceptional circumstances. The document also reached Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county, see MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 13736/1919.

⁵ “Hivatalos rész,” *Budapesti Közlöny*, December 11, 1918, 1.

⁶ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 52/1919.

⁷ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 114/1919. Minutes. H. n., December 5, 1918.

⁸ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 52/1919. Employment and accommodation of refugee notaries.

⁹ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Tolna Vármegyei Levéltára (hereinafter MNL TVL), IV. 401.b. Documents of the lord lieutenant of Tolna County. General documents. 44. d. 10/1919. Cf. “... at this time there is no need for the placement of notaries who have fled from abroad...” *ibid.* Telegram from the district chief of the Bonyhád district to Dr. Gyula Mayer, Government Commissioner and lord lieutenant. Bonyhád, January 8, 1919.

¹⁰ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 22440/1919.

extensive discretionary powers (the circular uses the phrase “at the discretion of the deputy”, a formulation of unusual leniency for a legal text). The ruling also provided for the possibility of making payments to trustees without the need to produce a payroll. Since the provision of benefits to refugees continued under the brief period Soviet Republic, there are many examples in the county’s records of additional payments being made to state employees who remained across the border, with salaries either being forwarded directly to them or being made to trustees living in Budapest. Until the end of July 1919, the deputy mayor of Hátszeg/Hațeg (in Romania), Lajos Deák, drew monthly salaries for seven employees of the small town in Hunyad/Hunedoara county, and the same arrangement was made by officials of Zsombolya/Jimbolia (in Romania), Versec/Vrsac (in Serbia) or Nagyszombat/Trnava (in Slovakia).¹⁶ These possibilities, however, began to be curtailed during the Soviet Republic and were finally abolished in the early autumn of 1919.

If the refugee officials could not be re-employed locally, in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county it was necessary to contact the leaders of neighbouring counties to find employment for them. However, the counties and councils in the vicinity of Pest were themselves overburdened; the cities of Eger, Gyöngyös and Komárom were struggling with the flood of refugees or the threat of foreign occupation. The only exceptions were Csongrád, which was willing to accept three refugee officials, and Esztergom, which was willing to take two, but this did little to alleviate the situation. Even at this early stage of the flight, the decree laid down two basic principles of government refugee policy, which determined behaviour across systems: 1. relieving the burden on the capital (“employees forced to flee [...] should avoid travelling to the capital and should seek a place where the provision of accommodation and food are not likely to cause major difficulties”); 2. to urge officials to remain in their posts (“I consider it necessary to warn the employees of the county once again in the strongest possible terms that the public interest absolutely requires them to remain in their posts and to carry out their duties until they are prevented from doing so by violence or serious threats to their safety”).¹⁷ The decree also laid down the conditions for the payment of allowances and salaries; this provision is particularly useful in terms of our research because these payments would only be made once applicants had stated the circumstances and reasons for the flight, and this has provided us with a series of ego-documents of an unusual type. The differing narratives of the officials who had fled shows the change in thinking over the course of the period; under the Károlyi government, civil servants stated that they had fled due to the lack of public security, possibly involving nationalist riots, while in the reports made after August 1919, the collapse of the Soviet Republic, stress the applicants’ national loyalty and their refusal to take the oath of allegiance to the successor states.

During the brief period of the Károlyi government, the authorities considered a launching a nationwide house-building initiative to solve the refugee problem, but this was ultimately not implemented. The government planned to invest 58 million Crowns in the project which would have been overseen by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The scheme was designed to ensure that two-thirds of the cost of the acquisition and construction of land and utilities would have been covered by municipalities and one-third by the government.¹⁸ Although the plan mainly concerned cities with jurisdictional rights, including municipalities already under foreign occupation at the time such as Temesvár/Timișoara, Losonc/Lučenec and Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, there was also a plan to extend the scheme to smaller municipalities. Residential construction would become an accepted instrument of government policy on refugees only a few years later, as introduced by the counterrevolutionary governments.

Endre Liber was appointed by the Károlyi Government as Government Commissioner for Refugees, and he retained this position under the Friedrich government (in the autumn of 1919). He confirmed the guiding principles of the previous year in a circular which was issued to the government commissioners-lord-lieutenant at the end of November 1919 in which he called on the leaders of the counties to resolve the situation of the wagon-dwellers, a problem that was particularly acute given the approach of winter. The circular also reaffirmed what had been one of the central ideas of the authorities not only in 1918, but also during the refugee crisis of 1916: the capital should be relieved of the burden of caring for refugees as far as possible. In a study of the 1916 refugee crisis which he himself wrote in 1927, Liber stated that “Budapest was not designated by the government to accommodate Transylvanian refugees”.¹⁹ However, the flood of refugees to the capital continued. A week after the arrival of the National Army in Budapest in November 1919, Liber, who had been a city hall official before his appointment as government commissioner, once again stated that “Budapest, which had been a permanent refuge for refugees since the outbreak of the war, cannot provide decent accommodation for the newly arrived expelled officials, who are the elite of Hungarian society”.²⁰ The responses to his call, sometimes arriving six months later, reflect the general ambivalence with which the country treated the arriving refugees, ranging from complete exclusion (Szentendre, Kiskunfélegyháza) to the restriction of the country to wagon-dwellers (while at the same time insisting that there were no such refugees in the administrative area, as was the case in Kalocsa, Aszód, Kispeszt and Jánoshalma), to administrative quibbling (Újpest: “Rákospalota-Újpest railway station is in the territory of Rákospalota municipality”), to the claim that the wagon dwellers really did not want to go elsewhere (Vác: “I did not want to force them to

¹⁸ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 8551/1919. Circular of the Minister of Commerce. Budapest, February 19, 1919.

¹⁹ Endre Liber, “Budapest a menekültügy szolgálatában,” in *A nagy vihar hajótöröttei. Hivatalos feljegyzések, tanulmányok, és más írások a háború és a pusztító béke idejéről.* (Budapest, 1927), 31-38. [Citation: 32.]

²⁰ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 6319/1920. Liber Endre’s circular to the government commissioners. Budapest, November 23, 1919.

¹⁶ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 12347/1919.

¹⁷ On the financial consequences of the Károlyi government’s refugee policy, see János Kollár, “Zilahi menekültek Debrecenben 1919 tavaszán,” *Debreceni Szemle* 30, no. 3 (2022): 272-274.

move to make their already very bitter lives more unbearable”).²¹ Documents dating back to before the Soviet Republic also indicated that the county administration was unable to cope with the influx of refugees. The county’s financial department hurriedly set up a separate refugee department, preferably staffed by displaced officials, to deal exclusively with bills, vouchers and paperwork, because the current arrangement was not functioning effectively.²²

A county census made before the Romanian evacuation had already counted more than a thousand civil servants who had fled to the capital, of whom almost two thirds (612) had previously been employed in municipal service, 165 in city service and 236 in county service. Of these, only 651 had managed to find employment, the majority in Budapest and a smaller proportion in rural areas of the county.²³

Before the ratification of the peace treaty by the National Assembly (November 1920), the Teleki government (July 1920–April 1921) drastically restricted “resettlement” (beköltözés) in the country, specifying only three categories of people who were automatically eligible for residency in Hungary. Expellees were not included in this program, and with this bureaucratic step, the entire issue of “refugeedom” had been dealt with; the discursive context (“refugee”-“resettler”) shows that the government was simply trying to eliminate the whole issue from everyday life. In addition to the transfers regulated by Decree 8352/1920 ME, there were also laws which temporarily prohibited the change of country (6135/1921 ME and 8358/1921 ME) until March 31st 1922. In the meantime, the government also took care to ensure that refugees without a residence permit, or those whose residence permit had been issued after July 29th 1921, were not allowed to cross the border.²⁴ Subsequently, the Ministry of the Interior instructed the municipal and communal authorities not to issue certificates to people moving across the border proving that they had lived and earned their livelihood there and stating that the municipality had “no objection” to their relocation. These certificates made it was easier to obtain an expulsion order and be granted a railway wagon in the annexed territories, but since many did not have the authorisation of the National Office for Refugees (Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal (OMH)), refugees usually spent long days waiting at border posts in order to obtain the document.²⁵

RESTRICTIONS AND THE RESTRICTED

From the end of 1919 onwards, municipalities were flooded with orders from above for censuses which were intended to count all kinds of groups: Transylvanians, civil servants, those who had already been under Hungarian administration under the Soviet Republic, those who were receiving the refugee allowance, all refugees and others. The growing scale of the administration’s activities was particularly noteworthy, partly prior to the creation of the OMH in April 1920 and partly afterwards. The resulting statistics and lists are sometimes difficult to interpret (for example, the records state that only 27 Transylvanian refugees were registered in Újpest in May 1920²⁶) because they were collated on the basis of newspaper advertisements for applicants, the inefficiency of some municipal authorities also meant that they were often not carried out. From Budafok, for example, detailed OMH questions generally received one-word responses, and for statistical purposes it was satisfied with “refugees, but since they did not come forward despite repeated advertisements for the census[,] their precise number and their status as settlers or temporary residents cannot be determined”.²⁷ The management of the refugee case was complicated to a large extent by conflicts over competence between the various branches of the administration; the system as a whole had been disrupted by the Aster Revolution and the Soviet Republic and was unprepared for the flood of refugees. In Gödöllő, it was reported in August 1920 that refugee officials had been employed partly locally and partly in Budapest, and that some families were living in wagons at the station, but their needs were being taken care of by the municipal housing office. No one had yet applied to the municipality for assistance, but there would have no financial means to assist them even if they had done so; if such a need were to arise, the sub-prefect was told, the wagon dwellers would have be supported from collections and the municipal poor fund.²⁸

Meanwhile, the way in which the refugees were perceived also varied. Following the collapse of the Soviet Republic they were subjected to special screening as suspects, but the establishment ultimately considered them to be reliable Hungarian patriots under all circumstances and deemed them suitable for employment in the censorship office, with a total of 21 refugee officials receiving additional lump-sum payments at the Budapest Censorship Office in 1922.²⁹ The Grain Centre (Terményközpont), a body responsible for the redistribution of agricultural products which was generally unpopular with the landowners, also employed a large number of refugee officials. Later, tax retraining courses were one of the escape routes for B-listed refugees; however, neither profession

²¹ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 6319/1920. Passim.

²² MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 3473/1919. Draft. Budapest, February 15, 1919.

²³ Circular No 37509/1919 of Tivadar Agorasztó, sub-prefect. *Pest-Pilis-Solt Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja*, no. 40, October 23, 1919, 396.

²⁴ MNL PVL V. 79. documents of the housing office of the town of Cegléd. 4. d. 1158/1921. circular of Endre Bor-sos, Ministerial Commissioner for Housing. Budapest, September 21, 1921.

²⁵ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 17611/1922. Instruction of the Minister of the Interior to the lord-lieutenants. Budapest, March 15, 1922.

²⁶ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 10609/1920. Report on Transylvanian refugees residing in the territory of the town of Újpest. Újpest, May 5, 1920.

²⁷ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 24142/1922. The council of Budafok to the sub-prefect. Budafok, August 14, 1920.

²⁸ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 24142/1922. Letter from the council of Gödöllő to Tivadar Agorasztó, subprefect. Gödöllő, August 22, 1922.

²⁹ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 7178/1934. Statement of the Royal State Treasury of Budapest. Budapest, September 28, 1922.

was seen as a route to cheap popularity in the period.³⁰ B-listing was initially a tool of post-revolutionary retribution policing, and it affected those who had participated in the two revolutions, with the first wave largely consisting of teachers. In subsequent waves, other (county, town) officials or other state employees (e.g., railway workers) were also b-listed, more generally because of the poor condition of state finances. These refugees were first placed on the reserve list and then dismissed with severance pay or sent into retirement. This policy affected around 40,000 people in the country in the first half of the 1920s.³¹ These issuing of these certificates seem to be quite formal. In December 1919, the police captain of Kishunhalas certified in advance that the 44 refugees on his list (mostly schoolmasters from Sáros/Šariš county, but also including a police captain from Borossebes/Sebiš and a school inspector from Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc) “were not engaged in activities in the service of Bolshevism”.³² A similar approach was taken by the county’s accounting office and a number of municipalities from Tápiószőlő to Szentendre and Csepel. The certification was also another opportunity for the refugee notaries and officials to redefine their own careers in the eyes of the bureaucracy and to demonstrate their willingness to adapt to the new regime that was established after August 1919 and which quickly consolidated itself after March 1920. In these reports, a greater emphasis was placed on escaping from the place of employment, travelling to Budapest without permission during sick leave, or even participating in the local Soviet during the period of the Republic.³³

THE SOLUTION

A reduction in the number of officials who were employed in the county took place in the summer of 1922 with many being assigned to the aforementioned “B-list”. In parallel with this reduction, lobbying by the municipalities and the district chief (*főszolgabíró*) to retain their B-listed officials in Pestszentlőrinc, Budakalász, Alsódabas, Kiskőrös, Dunavecse and Kiskunfélegyháza districts and countless other places increased. As an indication of the scale of the numbers involved, a list compiled by the Budapest State Treasury of the refugee officials on the B-list contained 282 names.³⁴ After the B-listings had been completed, the county still had 268 employees in 1923, including officers, apprentices and clerks at the centre and in the districts, but excluding municipal

and town employees.³⁵ Of the 282 refugee officials on the B-list, 64 were considered by the Ministry of the Interior to be worthy of extending their employment as refugees in the summer of 1922. More than three quarters of the refugees were thus B-listed. The fact that they were registered as being in local employment did not necessarily mean that they stayed in the county; although they were registered with the county of Pest, they were also entitled to work in a variety of places, from the Ministry of Public Supply to the Censorship Office and the irredentist Hungarian National Association (*Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség*). However, the list also includes the names of people who were likely never actively involved in county service; for example the adventurous Győző Dvortsák/Viktor Dvorčák, who was variously employed as the former chief archivist of Sáros/Šariš county and president of the Slovak People’s Republic proclaimed in Kassa/Košice in December 1918, and a member of the National Assembly. Others went into the private sector, such as Gyula Gerey, the former mayor of Déva/Deva, became a lawyer in Budapest, while others died soon after, for example, Miklós Sztancsay, the former deputy mayor of Selmechánya/Banská Stiavnica, or Lajos Bódogh, the former mayor of Léva/Levice). Others moved into municipal service, joined the finance administration or even accepted retirement.

The records also contain a limited number of civil servants who had been considered refugees but who had subsequently returned to their annexed homelands and who were therefore automatically excluded from employment as civil servants in the future. Lajos Rohonczy, the president of the Orphans’ Office (*árvaszék*) of Kolozs/Cluj county, returned to Cluj in October 1922, and the records state that he stayed there permanently.³⁶

However, the cuts continued; a year later, Iván Rakovszky, the Minister of the Interior, an individual who himself had strong ties to the lost Slovak region, announced that he had “no plans to abolish the county’s staff” but qualified this with a convoluted explanation that this did not mean that all staff could be retained. He also proposed the creation of a six-member county committee to review the posts deemed surplus to requirements and to determine what should be done with any surplus staff. Although he did not offer any criteria for the consideration of this committee, he did say that he would “not determine the number of persons to be dismissed under this title, but you must propose the number of refugees who are employed in the county service in excess of the number of staff, i.e. not as deputies, in regular posts”. Refugees did not fall into the category of war widows, war widowers or war invalids who could be exempted from dismissal, but the Minister’s order endeavoured to appoint them to vacant posts in order to make it easier for the county to dismiss certain employees.³⁷ The county

³⁰ “Ingyenes adóügyi tanfolyamok.” *Pest-Pilis-Solt Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja*, no. 8, February 24, 1921, 103.

³¹ See: Imre Novotnik, “Létszámapasztás a két világháború közötti Magyarországon 1. rész,” *Comitatus* (August–September 2005): 81–99.

³² MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 28320/1921. Kiskunhalas, December 12, 1919.

³³ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 28320/1921. Kornél Königh, a refugee from Vágdebrőd/Drahovce, then a notary in Szank to the chief of the Kiskunfélegyháza district, Zsigmond Endre. Szank, December 17, 1919.

³⁴ The list aggregates all employees who, having been placed on the B-List, were receiving 80% of their salary advances while waiting for their severance payment. MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 7178/1934. s. d. A few days later, a replacement statement was also drawn up, listing another six persons. Replacement statement. Budapest, August 26, 1922.

³⁵ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 7178/1934. Subprefect Agoraszto to the Minister of the Interior. Budapest, February 14, 1923.

³⁶ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 7178/1934. Illegible transcript from the Ministerial Counsellor to the sub-prefect. Budapest, December 19, 1923.

³⁷ MNL PVL IV. 408.b., 7178/1934. Iván Rakovszky, Minister of the Interior to the people of the county. Budapest, September 15, 1923.

made further cuts in 1924, for example by abolishing all 19 local servants (hajdú) posts in the county office.³⁸

So, what can we deduce from this brief overview? On the one hand, the experiences of the state administration, and of other areas, in the organisation and management of the flight of officials shows a surprising continuity before and after 1918; in both cases, administrations were more or less unsuccessful in keeping of refugees away from the capital and in their insistence on legal frameworks and encouragements to refugees to stay in rural areas. The fragmented problem-solving mechanisms introduced in these crises persisted for a long time and remained in place across different political systems, and new features were slow to emerge, in particular public housing projects, centralised social policies and the linking of the stabilisation of the country's financial situation with the elimination of administrative redundancies. These approaches shifted a substantial share of the social and financial costs to the private sector and the social insurance system, solutions which may have seemed ideal at the time but which would ultimately lead to serious imbalances in the late 1920s.³⁹ We have also seen how vague the category of “refugee” could be; it was used to denote at least three groups that often overlap, and it would perhaps be more appropriate to use it as a general synonym for “victims of the collapse” as it is often unsuitable for describing individual situations.

THOSE WHO STAYED

Returning to the county office of Pest, an examination of sources describing the officials of the Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county reveals the scale of the officials who were refugees or at least connected to the lost territories in the administration of the county in the interwar period. The county staff registry sheets are described as providing information on county officials between 1883 and 1944, but in fact the bulk of the information is related to the 1920s and 1930s; earlier information is scarce, and the new registry sheets, introduced in the late 1930s and early 1940s, provide limited data in comparison to the earlier documents. The forms were usually filled in on typewriters, with some kind of assistance from the clerks, as is attested by the occasional use of the first-person singular. A record card usually stated the refugee's place and date of birth, details of their spouse, their education and qualifications, military service for men, and the numbers of any legislation or appointments by which the person's status had changed. Details of any disciplinary cases, special services or decorations were given under a separate heading. A few survivors of the great turnover of the early 1920s are also listed, but most had disappeared from the county civil service by this time, having been assigned to the B-list, retired or transferred.

³⁸ “Vármegyei szabályrendeletek és közérdekű határozatok,” *Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegye Hivatalos Lapja*, no. 42, October 9, 1924, 471.

³⁹ István Mócsy, *The Uprooted*, 185-188.



Fig. 6.2: The repatriation of Endre László, war criminal in 1945, former secretary for internal affairs, published by Fortepan / Rózsa László, no. 211085.

officials in the county administration who had served in the areas outside the historic borders of Hungary prior to 1918-1919.⁴⁰ However, the category of “refugee official” remained almost as imprecise in these civil registers as it did in public discourse. The records show a total of 27 civil servants, including 10 women, who had been assigned to posts in the county as a “refugee” by order of the government commissioner for county, town and village officials or by explicit reference in the civil registry sheets, or who had changed their post in an annexed territory between 1918 and 1920 and had been immediately transferred to the centre of the country. This number accounts for less than a tenth of the identifiable county officials and less than half of the 64 who had been retained during the B-listing. However, some of these officials are not necessarily typical refugees. László Endre, born in Abony and later to achieve notoriety as sub-prefect of the county and as state secretary for internal affairs in 1944, was undoubtedly a district chief in Temes/Timiş county in 1919; indeed, he was already a trainee in the office of

The archive of these reports consists of around 476 cartons in two boxes, but the precise number of documents is unclear as many are incomplete, damaged or otherwise unusable. Around 90 to 100 reports are of new type indicating only that promotions have taken place. The files mostly contain the details of officials who had entered the service from the late 1930s onwards. Given the shortcomings of the archive, any analyses should focus on orders of magnitude rather than precise figures, as the data listed in the reports may be misleading.

Some of the most important inter war officials of the county were born in the annexed territories, such as Lóránd Erdélyi, the sub-prefect in Nagyvárad/Oradea, István Fáy, the lord-lieutenant in Pozsony/Bratislava, and Ákos Barcsay, the lord lieutenant in Transylvania, who had spent a significant part of his career there. There are also many lower level

⁴⁰ For the most important officials of the county, see “Vezetői életrajzok,” in *Pest megye évszázadai. Hivataltörténeti áttekintés*, ed. Dr. László Péter Schramek (Budapest: 2016), 145-215.

the district chief of Kishunfélegyháza, headed by his father, Zsigmond Endre as early as the autumn of 1919, and his election as chief of the Gödöllő district in December of the same year was the starting point of his entire administrative career.⁴¹ Family legend has it that he went into hiding at home during the Soviet period and later joined the National Army with a cavalry troop which he had raised himself, but this story cannot be corroborated.⁴² He had few ties to the lost territories apart from the few months he spent in Temes/Timiș county and his first marriage in Arad (then Romania) in November 1918. Given the tenuous nature of these ties, perhaps “repatriation” is a better term in the case of Endre.

Only five of the 27 clearly refugee officials came from Northern Hungary/Slovakia (two from Nyitra/Nitra, two from Trencsén/Trenčín and one from Pozsony/Bratislava county), two from the South (Zenta/Senta and Pancsova/Pančevo) and twenty others from the territories annexed by the Romanian state. A further six also came from the counties of Temesvár/Timișoara or Temes/Timiș, which is probably not entirely unconnected to the fact that Gyula Hódi, the reigning Attorney General of the city of Timișoara until November 1920, became the elected Attorney General of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county for life in 1929, and was thus the highest-ranking former Temesvár official in the administration of the Hungarian county (if we exclude the aforementioned László Endre’s brief spell in Banat).⁴³

The civil registry sheets also contain details of 94 other officials who are linked to the ceded territories through their place of birth, education or former employment but who do not meet any of the three criteria above; they are not named as refugees, they were not appointed by the government commissioners and they did not come directly to Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county from the annexed territories. Tibor Csapó, born in Arad in 1891 and an honorary chief of Temes/Timiș county, was captured as a prisoner of war in 1916 and returned home from Russia to the Pest region in 1921.⁴⁴ Many other former prisoners of war were in a similar position, returning from captivity in Russia directly to post-Trianon Hungary. Others completed their schooling only after returning from the front before then entered the county administration; Olivér Édeskuty, born in Besztercebánya/Banská Bystrica, first graduated from the Eastern Trade Academy (Keleti Kereskedelmi Akadémia), then from the Agricultural Academy (Gazdasági Akadémia) and continued his studies in law after returning from captivity in Italy, and finally became an administrative trainee in the county at the age of 30; his progress in the civil service was relatively slow, but he was ultimately promoted to Counsellor of the Interior Ministry in July 1944.

One noteworthy category among the large group of those with ties to the annexed territories was that of the physicians (both county officers and district doctors) who had been born in areas now lying beyond the border or had practised there for some time but who had been assigned to Pest county before the war. Ferenc Surjászky served as a doctor in Nyitra/Nitra until January 1919, when he joined a clinic of the University of Cluj/Kolozsvár which had itself relocated to Budapest, from where he was subsequently transferred to the county service.

Language skills and ancestry also occasionally helped to identify cross-border connections; although Bálint Fernbach (later Apatini-Fernbach), a clerk at the Orphans’ Office and secretary to the lord lieutenant, had been born in Budapest in 1899, his family was one of the wealthiest families in Bács-Bodrog county and in 1936 he himself became lord lieutenant in Baja, the seat of the rump county in Southern Hungary. A similar connection can be assumed for Baron Boldizsár Kemény, an aristocrat of Transylvanian origin, who had also been born in the capital; he entered the service of the county in 1934 and was appointed legation counsellor by his brother, the Arrow Cross foreign minister Gábor Kemény, in 1944.

These war veterans was followed by a generation of “wagon dwellers” in the county from the late 1920s comprised of young people who may have graduated from high school in the annexed territories but who had fled to post-Trianon Hungary, likely with their families, and continued their careers in the county administration. Tibor Újhelyi, who graduated from high school in Banská Bystrica/Besztercebánya, completed his further education in post-Trianon Hungary. Other figures from this group include Gábor Szent-Ivány, also born in Banská Bystrica/Besztercebánya, the author of a widely respected biography of János Esterházy written following his emigration to the United States.⁴⁵

There are also, of course, those who stand out from all categories: a lapsed priest-teacher, Nándor Gorzó Bilkei was the president of the National Council in Rozsnyó/Rožňava until the arrival of Czechoslovak forces in the town; he fled to Budapest where he became a high school teacher in the city’s First District. He was subsequently banned from public service as a result of his activities in 1918-1919, and he then worked as the managing director of the Gömöri Bank in Rožňava between 1920 and 1922, later the general manager of a pipe soap factory and a car sales company until he joined the county archives in 1929. However, this was not the end of his story; he continued to take on numerous public roles into the early 1950s.⁴⁶ From the 370-380 county officials listed here, 121 came from or fled to the border, a not insignificant number. Taken as

⁴¹ MNL PVL IV. 478. archival collection of records of officials of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county, personal sheets of county officials 1. box dr. Endre László.

⁴² István Szappanos, *A főlegyházi Endre-család legendáriuma* (Mentor, OH, USA), 2021. 246, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://mek.oszk.hu/21100/21176/21176.pdf>; Zoltán Vági, “Endre László. Fajvédelem és bürokratikus antiszemitizmus a közigazgatási gyakorlatban, 1919–1944,” in *Tanulmányok a holokausztról. II.*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (Budapest: 2002), 86.

⁴³ The lawyer himself was born in Hódmezővásárhely. MNL PVL IV. 478. 1. d. dr. Gyula Hódi.

⁴⁴ MNL PVL IV. 478. “Dr. Tibor Csapó. Cf. Ki tud róla?” *Az Újság*, September 21, 1918, 7.

⁴⁵ Gábor Szent-Ivány: *Graf János Esterházy*. Vienna-Cologne-Weimar, 1995. Szent-Ivány was also the secretary general of the National Committee of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia during his emigration in the United States. See Alice Esterházy, “A Felvidék washingtoni kutatója. Emlékezés dr. Szent-Ivány Gáborra (1911–1993),” *Világszövetség*, June 22, 1993 18.

⁴⁶ MNL PVL IV. 478. 1. d. Bilkei Gorzó Nándor. For more on his eventful life, see Éva Ständeisky, “Szerzetestanár, kormánybiztos, autókereskedő, költő, tápszergyáros, forradalmi bizottsági elnök és még sok más: egy 20. századi sors önéletrajz-változatokban,” *2000* 4 (2004), 56-64.

a whole, the personal records demonstrate the veracity of the commonplace wisdom that official definitions can never encompass the fullness of life: a refugee is not always who the law says he or she is.

CONCLUSION

The documents analysed in this study may allow some cautious conclusions to be drawn on the question of refugee officials in the years after Trianon. The first statement may seem rather flat, but it is worth recalling that the flight of civil servants/officials does not necessarily mean that this was a middle-class exodus. Assistant clerks with several children, notary's widows and single fee-earners were not considered as members of the middle class even prior to 1918, and in the crises of the postwar period they suffered a further loss of status. Of the models of integration outlined by Csaba Csóti, the largest county in the country was very firmly committed to offering a refuge for fleeing officials; refugees or those born in the ceded territories could be found at the highest levels of the administration in the interwar period, even among the lord lieutenants, sub-prefect and mayors; the leading stratum of the county was not closed to those who had come from across the modern border.⁴⁷ As was mentioned above, the management of refugee officials was for a long time governed by frameworks inherited from the late Dualist era, and new practices requiring much more intensive state intervention were slow to take shape. There is a striking continuity, even in terms of personnel, in the basic principles and management methods between the late dualist era, the Károlyi government and the early Horthy era.

Secondly, the analysis of cases in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county has highlighted that individuals who are colloquially referred to as “refugees” were divided into at least three broad groups, and in many cases their fate is also conflated in official documents. The groups who remained in the centre of the country after the 1916 invasion of Transylvania, the administrative employees who were driven out of the county at the end of 1918, and those who left the territories which were only briefly occupied by foreign powers were often treated in the same way, although it is hardly necessary to draw attention to the difference between the situation of the young chief returning to Szentkút from the Banat and that of the MÁV locksmith living on the street.

Refugees trying to reach the centre of the country found themselves in a complex, shifting game in which they had to call on all of their ingenuity, connections and determination to obtain work, accommodation and benefits for themselves and their families. Under such circumstances, it seemed a perfectly logical strategy to insist on the exploitation of state resources, while stressing loyalty to the state, moral firmness or anti-communism, and emphasising the tales of their suffering. In parallel with the bitter battles over incomes, especially for further social support after the cancellation



Fig. 6.3: An irredentist monument in Kiskunhalas, Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county, published by Fortepan / Gali, no. 128867.

who, although not refugees in the sense used in the early twenties, had fled the annexed territories as children and had left behind a homeland, school and family beyond the frontier; this group, whose numbers were far greater than the original refugees who remained in service, nonetheless bore the same sense of loss as that suffered by those a generation older.

of the refugee allowance in the autumn of 1919, refugee officials also consistently exchanged, for example, unused coal and ration coupons with the county,⁴⁸ a struggle that was all the more necessary because the wider situation was often not welcoming, not out of any elementary malice against refugees but because the inhabitants of post-Trianon Hungary were all facing similar problems, and refugees were merely more competitors in the housing and labour market or in public services.

From 1922, the solution to the problem of the large numbers of refugee civil servants was finally B-listing, forced retirement and dismissal, an approach that obviously caused a great deal of suffering. As a result of this approach, three quarters of the refugee civil servants were no longer employed by the county, and by the 1930s the number of those who remained had been reduced to half of their previous number. By this time, however, a new generation of civil servants were working under the county administration

⁴⁷ See Csaba Csóti, “A menekült köztisztviselők,” 34.

⁴⁸ MNL PVL IV. 408.b. 1264/1922. Reimbursement of food ration coupons for refugees.

7. Linking the Refugee Question and Environmental History in Post-1918 State Succession: the Case of Forestry in Hungary

Péter Homor – Róbert Balogh

INTRODUCTION

Our interest in the relationship between the history of professional forestry in Hungary after World War I and its impact on environmental history developed from our work in the archives of the National Forestry Association and the paradoxes which we uncovered during the course of that research. In essence, an exceptionally comprehensive forestry policy emerged at the level of central administration in the immediate post-World War I period, but while the weight of these structural changes and intellectual innovations is clear, currently, many members of the professional community of foresters believe that the real reason behind the large-scale afforestation campaigns and infrastructural development in forests was much more direct and mundane: it was a result of the arrival of foresters who had left their designated posts in the formerly Hungarian territories which had been ceded to neighbouring states in 1920. To what extent is this claim accurate?

From the outset, the question implies that the state successions of the post-WWI era are events that should be addressed by environmental historians, but it also suggests that decisions and changes concerning the environment were on the agenda of high politics in the period. More specifically, we might also draw attention to the links between the movement of people as refugees arising from state succession and changes in the institutions and politics of forest management. The history of professional groups, such as foresters, constitute a connection between the history of political conditions and that of environmental change. Academic literature has largely neglected the link between refugees and forestry policy to date, but we believe that a fuller understanding of this issue can offer considerable insight into the factors behind the shifts in Hungary's approach to refugees from the ceded territories and the responses that professional groups gave to the developing situation.

Who were these refugees and why did they take flight in the post-war period? By the time the Hungarian National Assembly ratified the peace treaty on June 26th 1921, refugee policy had already been established to a considerable degree. In 1918–1919,

when the armies of the Allied Powers began to occupy the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, many civil servants left their jobs and fled to the interior of the Hungarian state. There were many reasons for their decision to leave, including their refusal to take oaths of loyalty to the successor states, the loss of the status previously enjoyed by Hungarian state employees, voluntary opt-out procedures, and other political events such as the takeover of Hungarian-language schools and the growing presence of revolutionary right-wing movements. Until the creation of the National Office for Refugees (OMH) in April 1920, the state response had been somewhat fragmented, with some specialized bodies being set up.¹ At the end of 1918, government commissioners were appointed to provide care for the refugees.² In September 1919, shortly after the fall of the Soviet Republic of Hungary, the post of the government commissioner for refugees with the title named the Transylvanian Office for Refugees was created.³ In that period, the government of Hungary deemed it necessary to provide permanent accommodation for officials who were eligible for the allowance. The establishment of the OMH on April 19th 1920⁴ was followed by a sharp policy turn, with the Hungarian government introducing a ban on settling in Hungary from October 1st 1920.⁵ This policy shift led to a drastic fall in the number of new arrivals in 1921. In terms of employment options, the labour surplus of refugees in some areas meant that the Hungarian government was forced to introduce a program of compulsory retirement for state employees as a solution.⁶

Several studies have examined this issue in more detail and studied the impact of post-World War state succession on various social and professional groups. Research into this topic has raised the question of how contemporaries understood the term “refugee”. Based on an analysis of the opt-out records for civil servants, Gergely István Szűts noted that between one-fifth and one-quarter of the heads of families who had found themselves as foreigners due to the change in borders subsequently returned to their place of birth in Hungary.⁷ The length of time that individual civil servants had spent in the ceded territories by late 1918 varied considerably, and therefore rather than trying to fit them into a single legal definition, it makes more sense to perceive refugees as being all of those who received assistance from the Hungarian state after

the end of the war. Clearly, state employees were overrepresented among refugees and it is worth outlining the many factors that influenced their decisions. Individuals of higher status and income were more likely to have the resources to leave,⁸ however, there were exceptions to this pattern. For example, lower-ranking employees of the Hungarian railways were more likely to leave since state railway employees operated the transport infrastructure, they symbolized the Hungarian state and were thus among the first to be subjected to the rage of local ethnic populations upon state succession.⁹ Concerns about the potential drop in material wellbeing and the fear of future hardships if they left their homes and moved to Hungary might have also deterred people of higher social status from leaving.

Studies focusing on specific groups reveal that the size of the Hungarian community living in the locality and whether the Hungarian officials themselves had local ties were also relevant factors in determining whether or not Hungarian officials chose to remain in the locality. Also, violence, whether threatened or actual, were important factors in the case of two groups in particular: notaries and railway workers. As the local representatives of the Hungarian state, notaries were immediately targeted for harassment and abuse not only by occupying troops but also by local populations living in non-occupied areas.¹⁰ From the autumn of 1918, Hungarian railway employees working for the Hungarian State Railways (MÁV) were also victims of violence on several occasions.¹¹ Moreover, studies have also shown that strikes were key events determining employment history and influencing decisions about the willingness of civil servants to migrate. Some railway workers were dismissed in the aftermath of one strike and then expelled to a successor state.¹² Regionally specific case studies also show that civil servants who chose to remain played a role in establishing services in the successor state. For example, at least 15–25% of the staff of the post office in Kassa (Košice in present-day Slovakia) remained in Czechoslovakia.¹³

In terms of the history flight of Hungarians following the Treaty of Trianon, college and university students are often mentioned in literature as forming a significant group among those who relocated to Hungary in late 1918. The state-run College of Mining and Forestry located in Banská Štiavnica (in Hungarian: Selmechánya) was the only institution offering specialized training for foresters in the Kingdom of Hungary. After a series of dramatic events and scenes, the College’s students and teaching staff eventually moved from Banská Štiavnica to Sopron, a town near the border between Austria and Hungary, where they were initially provided with meals, money and shoes

¹ Katalin Cserhádi, “Vasutasok az első világháború és Trianon sodrában”, in *Ezerarcú közlekedés II.: Fókuszban a személyszállítás*, Csaba Sándor Horváth et al., eds. (Budapest: Közlekedéstudományi Egyesület, 2023), 382.; István Gergely Szűts, “Vasutas vagonlakók és a MÁV menekültpolitikája, 1918–1924”, *Múltunk* 57, no. 4 (2012): 97–98.

² *Budapesti Közlöny*, November 8, 1918, 3.

³ István Gergely Szűts, “Optálási jegyzőkönyvek mint a trianoni menekültkérdés forrásai”, *Századok* 152, no. 6 (2018): 1237.

⁴ István Gergely Szűts, “Optálási jegyzőkönyvek”, 1238–1239

⁵ Balázs Ablonczy, “‘It Is an Unpatriotic Act to Flee?’ The Refugee Experience after the Treaty of Trianon. Between State Practices and Neglect”, *Hungarian Historical Review* 9, no. 1 (2020): 69–89.

⁶ Ágnes Ordasi, “*Hazaszeretettől jeles?: A fiumei tanárok érvényesülési stratégiái és lehetőségei az impériumváltások éveiben.*”, *Pro Minoritate* 11, no. 2 (2019), 51–92.; Ágnes Ordasi, “Lavorare al servizio dello Stato?: Le possibilità e le scelte dei funzionari governativi a Fiume dopo il crollo dell’Impero Austro-Ungarico” In *Raccolta degli atti del convegno per i cento anni dalla fondazione dello Stato libero di Fiume*, ed. Danko Švorinić (Rijeka: Muzej Grada Rijeka, 2021), 170–176.

⁷ István Gergely Szűts, “Optálási jegyzőkönyvek”, 1251–1252.

⁸ Balázs Ablonczy, *Ismeretlen Trianon* (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2020), 185.

⁹ Katalin Péterffy and Cserhádi Katalin, “A vasút és Trianon” In *Trianon enciklopédia*, eds. Balázs Ablonczy et al. (Budapest: Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó - Habsburg Ottó Alapítvány, 2023), 301–303.

¹⁰ Balázs Ablonczy, “Budapest nem tud méltó elhelyezést biztosítani”, *Az első világháború utáni menekült tisztviselők Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun Vármegyében.*” *Történelmi Szemle* 65, no. 2 (2023): 275–279.

¹¹ István Dékány, *Trianoni árvák* (Budapest: Noran Libro, 2018), 42, 155.

¹² István Dékány, *Trianoni árvák*, 156.; Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, “Trianon és a kassai postások”, *Archivnet* 20, no. 2, (2020) accessed 2 January 2024, <https://www.archivnet.hu/trianon-es-a-kassai-postasok>.

¹³ Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, “Trianon és a kassai postások”.

by the National Refugee Office. Later, the Office also operated an independent department in Sopron from June 1922 until the abolition of the Office in 1924, headed by Professor Móric Krippel. In the statistics published in the College yearbooks from the academic year 1923/1924, the number of students from the annexed territories (i.e. foreign residents) was indicated separately; the figures from 1926/1927 show that only 17% of students came from the ceded territories compared to the total number of college students. Although this data does not take into account refugee students from the annexed territories who had subsequently acquired Hungarian citizenship, we can still state that while the majority of students before the Treaty of Trianon came from the annexed territories, by the mid-1920s students hailing from post-Trianon Hungary predominated.¹⁴

The episodes of “escape” and resettlement left a lasting legacy on the foresters’ identity. Institutional efforts to preserve the sense of continuity led to the emergence of a special body of historical sources that form the basis of the research presented in this study. A total of 150 forest engineers received their degree between 1918 and 1927 and became entitled to receive a so-called Golden Diploma on the 50th anniversary of the commencement their professional career between 1968 and 1977. To celebrate this occasion, forestry engineers produced autobiographical accounts of their lives. Since around half of these 150 individuals had been born in the territories ceded to successor states in 1918, these memoirs can help us to map the positions of refugee foresters in programs and institutions in the post-war years.

FORESTERS IN FORESTS – COMMODIFICATION, PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND AFFORESTATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL BEFORE 1918

In order to understand how environmental history intertwines with the dramatic post-war moment in the history of a professional group, it is first necessary to outline the roles which professional foresters played in the development of forests over the course of the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Several factors influenced the eventual shape of forestry policy in Hungary in this period: these included changes in the categorisation of forest ownership, the availability and loyalty of trained personnel, the availability of wood and timber, and also the introduction of comprehensive programmes intended to redefine the relationship with state administration as proposed by interested actors. The available written sources offer some insight into how the social and political contexts of their own activities were understood by contemporaries themselves. The most valuable of these narratives dates to just before World War I, namely the major monographic study of the forests within the Kingdom of Hungary

¹⁴ István Dékány, *Trianoni árvák*, 115, 314–315.; Soproni Egyetem Központi Levéltár (hereinafter SOE KL), 2.c. 1085/1920, 1963/1920, 322/1921, 591/1921, 386/1921, SOE KL 401. Krippel Móric iratai.

published by Tibor Blattny and Lajos Fekete in 1913 defined forestry in the following terms: “We shall not forget that the present state of the forests is only a certain state of development and not the final stage. However, while in the distant past it was almost exclusively climatic causes that triggered changes, changes in the extent, state and composition of forests is now due to human activity. [...] One of the key tasks for the forestry service is to maintain or develop forests for the future that strengthen both their owners’ wealth and the national economy using the intentions of nature. While preserving the area of forests is the priority, it is also necessary to ensure stability and increases in the volume of timber. The prime condition for this is that all efforts to renew forests and increase afforestation are carried out in the shortest possible time.”¹⁵ Another important set of sources are the above-mentioned autobiographical essays deposited at the archives of the University of Forestry in Sopron, Hungary.¹⁶ Two of these memoirs merit particular attention from the perspective of this paper: those of Heribert Loványi and Ákos Simonfy. These two accounts are invaluable not only because they are the longest and most detailed accounts but also because the careers of their authors encompass a broad geographical swathe of the Austria-Hungarian Empire including the territory of present-day Croatia.

Ákos Simonfy (1867 – 1962) was born in Háromszék County near the southeastern border of Austria-Hungary, a region within Transylvania in which Hungarian Szeklers formed the ethnic majority. He was the son of Sámuel Simonfy, a noted veteran of the revolutionary wars of 1848 and 1849. Simonfy’s account is a nine page document with small handwritten script. Simonfy began his career at one of the most important centres of the Hungarian forestry administration, Nagybánya (Baia Mare in present-day Romania) before moving to Banská Bystrica (in present-day Slovakia). Simonfy’s supervisors were top-ranking foresters, and he seemed to have had a great deal of respect for them. Over the course of the 1890s, he specialized in measuring the dimensions and assessing the value of forests and was also skilled in drawing up management plans. Simonfy argued that the intensive commodification of forests was a by-product of a decision by the Minister for Agriculture Count Gyula Szapáry who had ordered that timber on forest stands was to be sold acre by acre.¹⁷ In Simonfy’s opinion this method would have suited the limited stands of *Robinia pseudoacacia* stands in the Great Plains but required excessively burdensome measurement work in the large pine forests in the north. However, the low salaries and slow career progress in his position encouraged Simonfy to leave Banská Bystrica, and in 1896 he moved to Nagykőrös, a small town on the Great Plains. This was a sandy area where extensive afforestation was needed to achieve actual forest cover. From this time onwards, Simonfy was primarily known for his expertise in reforestation and afforestation, and he was active in this field for more

¹⁵ Lajos Fekete and Tibor Blattny, *Az erdészeti jelentőségű fák és cserjék elterjedése* (Selmechánya, 1913), 721. and 730.

¹⁶ SOE KL 104.

¹⁷ Szapáry held the post of finance minister for more than 8 years between 1878 and 1887 and played an important role in consolidating the national budget. He was prime minister between March 1890 and November 1892.

than a decade in Croatia and the western part of Transylvania. After World War I, local officials recalled him to Nagykőrös where he undertook another major afforestation project throughout the 1920s.

Loványi's account is more than 25 typewritten pages long, with the first 21 pages covering the period between 1898 and 1928. He was a forest engineer who had worked in various geographical conditions and regions of pre- and post-World War I Hungary, ranging from the old privately owned beech forests in the mining-oriented Krassó-Szörény county (in present-day Romania, near Făget) Biharsályi (Șauaieu in present-day Romania), in the Western Transylvanian Hills (Munții Apuseni) the sandy areas of the Hungarian Great Plains, the town of Debrecen, and different locations in the territory of Central Slovakia, such as Brezno, Voznica (Garamrét in Hungarian), Liptovská Teplička (Teplicska in Hungarian), and the elevated regions of the Tatra Mountains. Eventually, he would spend much of his career near Visegrad where he was also involved in construction and wildlife management including the archaeological excavation of medieval remains and the attempted rewilding of the forest by resettling bison.

Loványi's account describes his roles in these positions and the type of activities which he carried out. These descriptions make it clear that foresters were key actors in what we would now call anthropogenic landscape change. His main expertise seems to have lain in civil engineering; he designed and oversaw the construction of tourist lodgings, an office building and a storage yard for timber, roads and also temporary narrow-gauge railway lines, but he also managed waterflow between dams and installed infrastructure for rafting and floating timber. In addition to these tasks, he was also actively involved in prospecting for minerals, managing fisheries and organising auctions of lumber and negotiating compensation for damage caused by wild game animals in agricultural areas.

For the purposes of our paper, it is particularly interesting that Loványi emphasizes his efforts in increasing the forest cover of sandy areas that were subject to erosion, work that he carried out in around 1905 but the fruits of which he would only see decades later. Moreover, he explicitly mentions reusing the notes he had taken in the first years of the 20th century in the 1920s when afforestation had gained importance once again. He also lists tree species that he believed would be crucial to afforestation efforts, mainly *Robinia pseudoacacia* and various pine species, but also the Kentucky coffee tree, *Gymnocladus dioica*, a species that is rarely mentioned in historical summaries of afforestation in Hungary. "...The task was to carry out afforestation in a puszta of 40,000 cadastral acres called Peszéradacs. Some related works had been carried out in the same place four or five years previously to a smaller extent. The management of the estate decided that the area should be prepared using a steam plough. We planted black locust, black pine and *Pinus banksiana* over an area of 70 cadastral acres. I wrote detailed notes about my experiences especially regarding the problems that layers of sand and sandstone cause for black locust... I made great use of these notes later on during the afforestation campaign in the Great Plains. What can make a forester happier than seeing the outcome

of his work after 30-36 years? I had such an experience when I visited the area on the occasion of a hunting invitation."¹⁸

Although Loványi's account emphasized only the technical aspect of his work around Visegrad and his role in securing timber supplies for Budapest, his actual position there was more important; he was part of a five-member committee formed in November 1918 in Visegrad that preceded the National Committee. On the one hand, this episode shows that foresters of a certain rank were considered to be part of the respectable local elite, but it also reveals that foresters may have been among those who were more likely to retain their position regardless of changes in political regimes.

Overall, the autobiographical statements of Simonfy and Loványi indicate that foresters were crucial in implementing infrastructural change in a large number of localities across various geographical settings; they also played a key role in developing and organising the timber market both locally and at a larger scale. It is also apparent that afforestation projects were a significant part of forestry strategies as early as 1900.

However, there is another aspect of these narratives that are of greater significance to the story that we wish to tell here, and that is the shock and reorganisations of the general conditions of forest management in the years after 1918. From the perspective of the Kingdom of Hungary, the Treaty of Trianon led to a massive loss of territory and a similarly drastic fall in the proportion of state-owned forests. Hungary became one of the least forested countries in Europe; with just 1.2 million hectares of forests, only 11.8% of the remaining territory had forest cover.¹⁹ Moreover, there was a landslide change in terms of ownership patterns. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, state-owned forests made up 15.2% of the total forest area, other state-controlled forests with different ownership rights accounted for 49.3% and private forests for 35.5%. After 1920, however, only 5.4% of forests remained under state ownership; nearly half of the forest was managed but not owned by the state, while the remaining 45.4% of forests were privately owned.²⁰ Given this situation, one of the primary challenges for forest management in post-Trianon Hungary was to develop a new compromise about the scope of state control over economic activities and land use in forested areas and to formulate corresponding management principles for areas which were largely privately owned. The main task of the foresters of the period was the restoration, exploration and management of forests that were poorly managed by contemporary standards. The other key aspect of the post-war conditions determining the scope of forest management was the scarcity of timber. This crisis had arisen as a result of the Romanian military occupation of the heavily forested former Hungarian territories in Transylvania coupled with the violence and resource extraction within the provisional boundaries that the ceasefire agreement stipulated, but the situation was exacerbated by Romania's refusal

¹⁸ SOE KL 104, Heribert Loványi, *Pályafutásom 1898-1958*, (manuscript).

¹⁹ Szabolcsné Kolossváry, „A magyar erdőgazdaság történelmi fejlődése,” in *Az erdőgazdálkodás története Magyarországon*, ed. Kolossváry Szabolcsné (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975), 56. and 64.

²⁰ Szabolcsné Kolossváry, „A magyar erdőgazdaság történelmi fejlődése.”

to export timber to Hungary. Further study is needed to determine the extent to which the upheaval in late 1918 and in 1919 led to the overexploitation of the forests,²¹ but as we shall see below, the scarcity of wood and timber also prompted the expansion of state control and centralization over timber distribution.

As those familiar with the history of forestry and conservation are aware, a single outstanding personality put forward a comprehensive response to these challenges. Between 1919 and 1924, Károly Kaán (1867–1940) was the leading figure in the Hungarian forestry administration, formally acting as Deputy State Secretary, then as National Government Commissioner for Forestry and Timber Affairs, and later again as Deputy State Secretary. In his writings, he called for increased state investment into the forestry sector and actively promoted the afforestation of the Great Hungarian Plain. He also formulated legislation that was aimed at modernizing forestry policies which were more appropriate to the reduced area of Hungary; based on the Forestry Administration Act established forest directorates which merged the previously separate state forest inspector offices, forest directorates and forestry offices.

Having outlined the connections between pre-World War I forestry practices and the new institutions and ambitions of forestry of the post-Trianon era, in the following subchapter we will establish how many refugee foresters were in service and indicate the chronology of their return as well as the state responses to the situation.

DIMENSIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REFUGEE SITUATION AMONG FORESTERS

Using the three different lists in the archives of the Ministry of Agriculture related to refugee foresters and the collection of autobiographies, we attempted to establish the numbers of refugees actively involved in state forestry after 1918. It is important to note here that the circumstances and history under which these lists were created reflects the shifts in the context of the post-1918 refugee situation. To start with, it is not a straightforward task to determine exactly who could be termed a refugee, as the term “refugee” was not clearly defined in contemporary sources and was applied to several different groups of people; it lacked a fixed legal character and contemporaries were fully aware of this ambiguity.²² In October 1920, the future Prime Minister István Bethlen was President of the OMH, and he stated that: “The majority of those who leave (70%) do so voluntarily and cannot therefore be considered as refugees... A good number of them emigrate mostly in search of easy employment, an aspiration that is largely supported by the occupying power.”²³ In our study, we chose to consider all those

on the Ministry’s list about personnel receiving aid as refugees even if their route was fairly complicated. The lists of those receiving aid occasionally noted that the person was a refugee. For example, this is the case for Imre Ágfalvi (1893-1980) who had been born in Banská Štiavnica, but in the spring of 1915 he was appointed to the State Forestry Office in County Máramaros (in present-day Romania), then enlisted in to the army where he was captured and held as a prisoner of war. He returned to his position at the end of November 1918, but by the spring of 1919 he had fled to Budapest. Also featured on the list is Károly Soós (1891-1973), born in Ászar, Komárom county. During his military service he was appointed to the Forestry Office in Susak (in present-day Croatia) where he received a ministerial allowance. Although his career was closely linked to Miskolc, Károly Soós described himself as a refugee, since he was member of the *Selmeczbányaiak Egyesülete* (Association of Former Citizens of Banská Štiavnica) in Budapest and is also listed in the “*Selmeczbányaiak emlékkönyve*” (Memorial Book of Citizens of Banská Štiavnica), even though he only graduated from the College of Mining and Forestry rather than having lived there

Our sources demonstrate that refugees in post-World War I Hungary were individuals who had either been 1) born in territories which were ceded under the Treaty of Trianon but who remained in Hungary after 1918-1922, 2) born in the territory of present-day Hungary but whose place of service before 1918-1922 had been in the historical territory of Hungary.²⁴ Similar to other civil servants, such as medical doctors, forest engineers were also geographically mobile, often serving for only short spells in the areas to which they were assigned.

This poses the further question of the possible reasons that may have motivated foresters to leave their posts and return to Hungary?²⁵ Based on the individual cases identified in various sources, several reasons can be identified. Firstly, there was the refusal of some officials to take oaths of allegiance to successor states. For example, nearly one third of the staff left the directorate of Banská Bystrica around the turn of the year 1918 and 1919.²⁶ However, not all of the dismissed state employees left the occupied territories immediately.²⁷ Aurél Mayer (1880-1962), the chief forest engineer in Nagybocksó (Velikij Bicskiv/Bocicoiu Mare in present-day Ukraine), was dismissed from his post by the Romanian authorities after the annexation of Maramures, and he was compelled to work as a teacher of arithmetic, geometry and measurement at the Reformed Church Grammar School in Sighetu Marmăției. The Czech forest director, who had been appointed after another regime change in the Carpathian region, approached him in Sighetu Marmăției and tried to persuade him to resume his post in Nagybocksó, but

²¹ Budapest Főváros Levéltára (hereinafter BFL), IV 1517. Registry of Trees planted by street.

²² Balázs Ablonczy, “Budapest nem tud méltó,” 275-290.

²³ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (hereinafter MNL OL), K-26. 1922.-XLIII. t. 1299. cs. 8617/1920. cited by István Gergely Szűts, “*Vasutas vagonlakók*,” 105.

²⁴ The Ministry’s refugee lists also include mostly these two categories, plus a single forest engineer from the temporarily occupied Sárospatak and one from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

²⁵ There are two plausible hypotheses here: it is likely that foresters of higher rank tended to opt for their homeland, or that their spouses’ links to their homelands may also have influenced the decision.

²⁶ Viliam Stockmann, *Dejiny lesníctva na Slovensku* (Bratislava-Banská Bystrica: Lesy Slovenskej republiky, 2016), 281-282.; Sándor Horváth ed., *Erdészeti zsebnaptár az 1918-dik rendes évre* (Budapest: 1917), 329.; MNL OL X67 (L15) 54098/1919.

²⁷ SOE KL 104.

he rejected the offer and instead returned to Hungary in 1921 and was assigned to the Forest Inspectorate of Győr.²⁸ On June 19th 1919, the Romanian authorities dismissed Ferenc Révay (1887-1974), a forest engineer who would later become a renowned cave explorer in Hungary, from the civil service over his refusal to take an oath of loyalty to the Romanian state. He then worked for a logging company until he had saved enough money to repatriate himself and his family to Hungary on October 3rd 1920. On arriving at the railway station in Szolnok from Lippa, the family of four were accommodated in railway wagons for several weeks; according to István Dékány's online database, the family was still in Szolnok on November 24th 1920. Immediately after their arrival in Budapest, Révay reported to the Forestry Department where he registered himself and his family and presumably applied for a position at the logging branch in Parád within the organisation of the Timber Valuation Office. He was assigned a servant's residence in Recsk, and he and his family arrived there on December 14th 1920. Révay was eventually assigned to the chief forest engineer of the forestry division on the outskirts of Recsk, where he was responsible for transporting and loading timber onto trains.

As the above account shows, the refugee forest engineers first point of contact was the Ministry of Agriculture, whose officials did their best to help the refugees find a place, sometimes in quite extraordinary ways. Károly Babós (1887-1973) was a student at the College of Mining and Forestry of Banská Štiavnica until 1913, and during his apprenticeship he enlisted as a soldier in 1914. "I was a soldier until August 15th 1918, when I was released from military service as an invalid and applied for service at the State Forest Inspectorate in Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca in present-day Romania]. Here I took over the Hidalmás state forestry department and remained in charge until December 31st 1919, when I was expelled and arrived in Budapest as an expellee on January 12th 1920. Here I reported to Károly Kaán, the State Secretary in the F.M. and he immediately assigned me to the Ministry and told me that the state examinations would begin immediately and that I should apply. That same night I wrote the necessary specification and the next day I submitted it and took the written examination and later the oral examination; on the basis of this I received my engineer's diploma on January 17th 1920."

In some cases, the foresters faced the direct threat of violence that led to forced resettlement or even death. This is clearly the case in Jósikafalva (present-day Beliș in Romania) in Transylvania, the location of one of the bloodiest clashes of the period,²⁹ and also in Jasyna (in Hungarian Kőrösmező, now in present-day Ukraine) where the Ukrainian national movement applied force against foresters and interned them for months.³⁰ There were several cases of foresters being forcibly deprived of their property,

livestock or money. Romanian and Serbian authorities also demanded money in return for allowing state officials, including foresters, to leave for Hungary.³¹

Identity may have influenced decisions but it was not a straightforward matter. Romania struggled with a lack of forestry professionals and tried to attract experienced men from the Hungarian administration, with our research revealing that three foresters joined the Romanian organization.³² In the summer of 1919, the head of the Forestry Directorate of Banská Bystrica, Emil Karvas, reported that Viktor Pascu and one of the forestry officials of Uzhorod (Ungvár in Hungarian), Vazul Radonics, had left and opted for Romanian service together with other forestry employees of Romanian origin.³³ However, we also identified cases in which foresters who had recently changed their identity to Hungarian reverted back to, for example, Slovak identity around 1919. At the same time, ethnic communities could adopt various strategies in this situation; Pál Koudela has suggested that Germans living in Upper Hungary tended to assimilate into the dominant ethnic group.³⁴

Changing policies and arguments emerging in the public sphere might have led some of the foresters to reassess their initial decision to flee. Intellectuals such as Károly Kós, Miklós Bánffy, Pál Esterházy and Oszkár Sziklai accepted their new position as part of an ethnic minority the Hungarian state also used administrative means to prevent large-scale returns. In the course of 1921, the Deputy State Secretary Károly Kaán agreed with the government that the resettlement process must be stopped. According to Pál Király, Kaán's removal from his position as vice-president of the National Forestry Association in 1923 and his eventual resignation as state secretary was partly due to the fact that some of the foresters who had moved to post-war Hungary resented him because of Kaán's stance; he had allegedly asked them: "What are you doing here? Stay where you are! That's where you belong, that's where you have to be!"³⁵ We may perhaps draw attention to one particularly tragic case as the culmination of all these processes. Lajos Szaltzer (1880-1920) had origins in the Spiš region and had been teaching at the Forestry School of Liptovský Hrádok (Liptóújvár in Hungarian) until the end of World War I. After the annexations, he moved to a school near Szeged that was within the territory of Hungary, but he committed suicide shortly thereafter.³⁶ He specifically identified his flight from his home as the reason for his suicide, a tragic outcome that highlights the weight of the conflict between loyalty to the state and attachment to the homeland.

²⁸ István Dékány, *Trianoni árvaok*, 307-309; Chief Forestry Engineer István Héjj János was forced to pay 15,000 crowns in Dorgos, Arad county. During the transfer of the forestry office to the Serbs, Mihály Bacsó, the chief clerk of Deliblat, had to hand over 800 crowns from his own assets. MNL OL, K 178 1107/1920.

²⁹ MNL OL, X67 (L15) 1756/1919.

³⁰ Viliam Stockmann, *Dejiny lesníctva*, 276.

³¹ Pál Koudela, *Négy felvidéki város* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2016), 87-88.

³² Pál Király, *Az Országos Erdészeti Egyesület története: 1866-1966* (Budapest: MTESz soksz, 1967), 143.

³³ István Dékány, *Trianoni árvaok*, 483.; See also the daily *Szeged és Vidéke*, 1920. január 30., 24 (283): 3.; „Halálózások” and in the forestry journal *Erdészeti Lapok*, 1920 (3-4): 86.

²⁸ SOE KL 104.

²⁹ The family of Károly Illyés (1889-1956) became wagon dwellers, and one of their children was born under such conditions.

³⁰ SOE KL 104 Biographical notes by Kacsó András and Jónásch Kornél

The context of the various lists of refugee foresters also mirrored the changing approaches to the refugee issue taken by the Hungarian state: we see the provision of aid at first and the concern for employment in the second half of 1920. Moreover, there were multiple attempts to create lists of refugee officials between autumn of 1919 and the summer 1920 and none thereafter.

On October 11th 1919, the Transylvanian Office for Refugees had requested the Minister of Agriculture to draw up a list of officials who had fled or had been expelled from Transylvania, in order to register, house and provide financial support to them. This file was a compilation of statements from the departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, and it therefore included not only foresters but also other state officials such as veterinarians, water engineers, economic administrators and inspectors.³⁷ Additional refugees were added later from other occupied parts of Hungary, and the complete list was finally compiled on January 22nd 1920 was specifically created for the purpose of to the refugees.

There is a second list forming part of the file on the Carpathian Villages Relief Action Report (Kárpáti falvak segélyakció ügyében tett jelentés).³⁸ The Minister of Agriculture agreed that the sum exceeding 100 000 Crowns that remained on the account of the “State Aid for the Reconstruction and Relief of the Carpathian Villages Devastated by the War” should be used to provide aid to officials and non-commissioned officers (and their families) who had fled the occupied territories under the Ministry’s jurisdiction and to agricultural officials in general. The third list was completed on 15 June 1920 with some overlapping names with the previous one.³⁹ This latter one focussed on who had not yet been appointed to a new post.

From the various related files from the Ministry of Agriculture which survive in the archives, a total of 191 refugee foresters can be identified. In addition to this, the online refugee database compiled by István Dékány lists an additional 104 such persons working in the forestry sector.⁴⁰ Since only six persons appear in both databases, this means that a database of 295 persons can be formed of individuals who served in the institutions of forest management in Hungary after the First World War beyond the demarcation zone defined by the armistice and were therefore registered as refugees in Hungary. However, if we take into account the collection of biographies which include Simonfy’s and Loványi’s memoirs, we can further expand these databases. Of the 281 biographies of forest engineers born between 1862 and 1905 who graduated between 1888 and 1927, 74 fall in the category of refugees based on the above criteria. While 49 of these people appear in the refugee database described above, 25 appear only in the collection of biographies deposited in the Archives of the University of Sopron.

As we have indicated in the introduction, the majority of the hundreds of thousands of people who fled to Hungary after 1918 were typically of the middle classes. Likewise, the majority of refugee foresters were forest engineers, a professional group who would have been considered part of the lower middle class in this period. While the files of the Ministry of Agriculture list only 19 forest rangers (subordinate officers), Dékány’s compilation contains a total of 48 subordinate officers. In addition to forest engineers and forest rangers, Dékány also recorded forestry accountants and other officials, all of whom would have been state employees. The vast majority of foresters registered by the Ministry and in István Dékány’s database were highly qualified forestry graduates who were in higher pay grades. The 295 persons included 213 forest engineers of various grades, 6 forest accountants and other forestry officials, 61 forest rangers and subordinate forest officers, the wives or widows of 8 forest engineers, 3 forest accountants and 4 forest rangers. These proportions among forestry employees may be explained by the fact that the more experienced forestry engineers with better careers would have been more willing to take the risk of fleeing. Similarly, those in managerial positions had a more detailed awareness of the reality of the situation, and individuals in these positions were more familiar with relocating because it was common for forestry engineers employed by the state to change their place of employment regularly by ministerial order. It is important to emphasize that the lists that the Ministry of Agriculture regarding refugees only include details about state employees.

In terms of the places in which the refugees had been working prior to the annexation of Hungarian territory by successor states, 76 refugees came from Transylvania, 47 from Upper Hungary, 26 from Banat, 23 from Croatia and Slavonia, 18 from Transcarpathia and one refugee forester from Bosnia Herzegovina. This distribution reflects the fact that prior to 1920, state-owned forests were mostly located in areas in which the Hungarian population formed a minority; in essence, forest engineers could be seen as representatives of the Hungarian state in the ethnic areas.

Clearly, in purely numerical terms, foresters were not a major group among the hundreds of thousands of refugees who fled to Hungary after World War I. Yet, the 300 who appear in the various lists constitute a significant proportion of the pre-1918 forestry service, constituting nearly one third of the total pre-war personnel. In the 1914-15 financial year, the departments at the ministry, the forest inspectorates, the state forest offices and the forestry directorates together with the network of forestry schools and forestry experimental stations, required the employment of 800 forest engineers within a forestry service that employed more than 3,000 people in total.⁴¹ The 1921-1922 budget plan allowed for 271 forest engineer posts in a forestry administration employing just over 400 people in total,⁴² and this was further reduced from

³⁷ MNL OL, K 178 5048/1919.

³⁸ MNL OL, K 178 1107/1920.

³⁹ MNL OL, K 178 1507/1921.

⁴⁰ István Dékány, *Trianoni árvák.*; See also Menekültek, accessed 29 March, 2024, <http://trianon100.hu/menekultek>; The wives and widows of some of the forestry employees are also included, thus, the list contains 16 women.

⁴¹ *Jelentés a magyar királyi pénzügyminiszternek az 1917/18. évre szóló állami költségvetési előirányzat tárgyában. Kiegészítő jelentések.* Kimutatás az állami alkalmazottak Létszámáról az 1904., 1914/15. és 1917/18. évi állami költségvetések alapján. Budapest, 1917., 164-185.

⁴² *A magyar állam költségvetése az 1921/22. számadási évre.* Budapest, 1921, 12-13.,

259 to 222 in 1927.⁴³ This meant that there were more trained professional foresters in the post-war period than the pre-war and wartime forest management service had required. The number of state-employed forest engineers who arrived in the reduced territory of post-Trianon Hungary was practically the same as the number of forest engineers employed by the Ministry in the mid-1920s. Together with the large number of war-affected forestry graduates who had fled from Banská Štiavnica to Sopron as fresh graduates of the forestry college, the profession was greatly overstaffed in the interwar period. In short, the refugee issue and the employment crisis coexisted in Hungarian forestry so that there was a pressure to create more job positions. At the same time, two more factors were equally important: changes were already underway during the war years, and post-war forest and supply conditions triggered an expansion in state intervention in and of themselves.

An anecdote source relates how Daniel Fehér, a professor of botany at the College of Mining and Forestry, concluded his lectures in the first semester by making the following statement to his students: “Gentlemen, this concludes my lectures for the first semester. I would like to inform you that the devastated forestry of a devastated Hungary [i.e. post-Trianon Hungary] needs eight new forest engineers a year, and so I will let only these eight of you pass.”⁴⁴ One might infer from this statement that the state institutions were somewhat passive in the face of the surplus of forestry specialists and the greatly reduced geographical scope of forestry in general. However, the relationship between resettlement and the environmental impact of forestry was perhaps more complex than it might appear.

RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEE FORESTERS, FORESTRY POLICY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

The analysis of the autobiographical sketches of refugee foresters preserved at the University of Sopron revealed that a majority of these professionals (49 persons) made their way to Hungary between 1919 and 1920. At least six of the returning foresters also played an important role in maintaining institutions of professional training, while others served at urban, estate and church-owned forests or worked in the timber trade; some of them, however, left the profession. However, as we shall see in this section, a number of refugee foresters indeed found employment in the state administration and large-scale state-run programmes. Within this context, three areas and projects are relevant: the expansion of the railway network serving the exploitation and distribution of timber resources, primarily firewood, among the population under the conditions of timber shortage, and the large-scale afforestation projects of the 1920s.

⁴³ “Az állami tisztviselők státuszrendezéséről”, *Erdészeti Lapok* 64, no. 12 (1925): 408.

⁴⁴ “Nagy Imre erdőmérnök visszaemlékezései”, In: *Gyökerek és lombok* 1. Kötet, ed. Gábor Pápai (OEE: Budapest, 2000), 193.

The clearest evidence supporting the argument that the arrival of refugees was in fact the main driver behind the initiation of state financed projects and institutions in this period is a confidential circular issued by the Council of Ministers of October 1st 1920, in which the Prime Minister ordered that efforts be made to ensure that the permanent employment of civil servants entitled to refugee benefits, vacant or new posts should be filled by refugee civil servants.⁴⁵ The Prime Minister also requested information on job vacancies in the Ministry of Agriculture to which the ministerial councillor, Kálmán Péch, replied on October 31st 1919 that in the forestry sector, refugee employees were to be employed in the woodworking plants to be established in the forests and islands along the Danube. This logging activity was aimed at ameliorating the post-war shortage of wood and was carried out under the auspices of the Office of Timber Sales.

It would be useful to explore the context of each of these three main projects. Eight persons worked in the construction department of the Ministry of Agriculture, the institution responsible for building narrow-gauge railway lines facilitating timber extraction. The shortage of timber in this period was acute, as is attested by the documented examples of felling of trees in Budapest recorded in the register of trees planted by the city municipality.⁴⁶ As was mentioned in the first section of this paper, Heribert Loványi (1878-?), a forest officer in Visegrád after World War I, described the link between the wood shortages in the capital and the activities leading to landscape change:

“In 1919, the firewood shortage was so severe that there was not enough firewood to bake the bread needed for the hospitals, and since the railway network was not functioning, firewood could only be transported to the capital by river. It was at this point that the People’s Commissariat came up with the idea of producing the firewood needed in Visegrad [...] I took it upon myself to extract the required quantity using workers from the surrounding area. This I started to do with great effort and also the delivery of the firewood which I arranged by sledge due to the lack of cart horses. In order to transport the supplies to the Danube, I conceived the idea of an industrial railway which would be built in Lepence. [...] During these two years, I delivered 70 barrels of firewood, and I was fully up to the task.”⁴⁷

Writing in 1925, a contemporary statistician, Zoltán Szöllősy, emphasised that the ownership pattern of the forests aggravated the fuel and timber shortage in the post-World War I years. 63.9% of forests were part of large estates even though the share of estates with more than 100 acres fell by 5% between 1918 and 1925. Only 5.4% of forests were state-owned. It should be noted, however, that there were large differences between regions and counties, with figures varying between less than 50% and up to 95%. Szöllősy pointed out that forested areas were mainly formed of forest stands located between land used for agricultural purposes, most of which were relatively young and had not yet reached the end of their rotational cycle. Indeed, this was one of the

⁴⁵ MNL OL, K178, 5056/1919.

⁴⁶ BFL IV 1517. Registry of Trees planted by street.

⁴⁷ SOE KL 104, Heribert Loványi, *Pályafutásom 1898–1958*, (manuscript) 26.

main forestry challenges of the period; management had to be planned for areas that had been considered marginal from the point of view of the timber sector and which had primarily been assigned as hunting grounds.⁴⁸

A remarkable source written by Károly Soós (1891-1973) gives us some insight into what was involved in transforming previously less valued areas into the main sources of resource exploitation. “The Forestry Estate of Miskolc had been part of the former State Forestry Office of Sívár (Solivar) and was not particularly important prior to World War I; in fact, it only supplied the city of Miskolc and the needs of the Iron Works of Diósgyőr. After the war, however, it became the only state-owned forest estate in Upper Hungary and acquired national importance. It became necessary to shift to a more comprehensive and regular system of exploitation in order to counter the shortage of wood and timber. It was deemed necessary to maximise both the production and transportation capacity of the estate. In order to do so, [Károly] Kaán government commissioner for timber ordered the installation of a 40 km railway track which was constructed in 1919 and over the course of subsequent years. For the time being this was used exclusively for freight transport. The forestry engineer Ferenc Modrovics, who later became a university professor, supervised the construction personally.”⁴⁹

From these sources we can see that the timber shortage was grave and existed regardless of the presence of refugee foresters. The presence of refugee foresters was the single most important motive behind the Ministry of Agriculture’s efforts to respond to this situation by allocating resources to the development of railway lines.

The same is true of the Office of Timber Sales (Faértékesítő Hivatal). This office was established in May-June 1917 in response to the transition to a war economy during the First World War and was disbanded in 1923.⁵⁰ A further sixteen foresters worked for this office for some time. Although the archival materials relating to the Office of Timber Distribution have not survived, its organization in 1919-1920 can be traced from the collection of autobiographies of forest engineers. The Office had important centres in Southwestern Transdanubia. In addition to the seat of Tolna county, Szekszárd, there were also offices along the Danube in Gemenc, Kalocsa and Paks, but also in Feketeerdő on the island of Szigetköz, and in the in Parád, Putnok and Recsk. Employees of the timber sales office also took delivery of timber from Romania in Lökösháza. The exploration of the locations of the branches of the Office of Timber Sales allows us to assess the new topography of the state forestry in the light of the above description of the changing role of Miskolc.

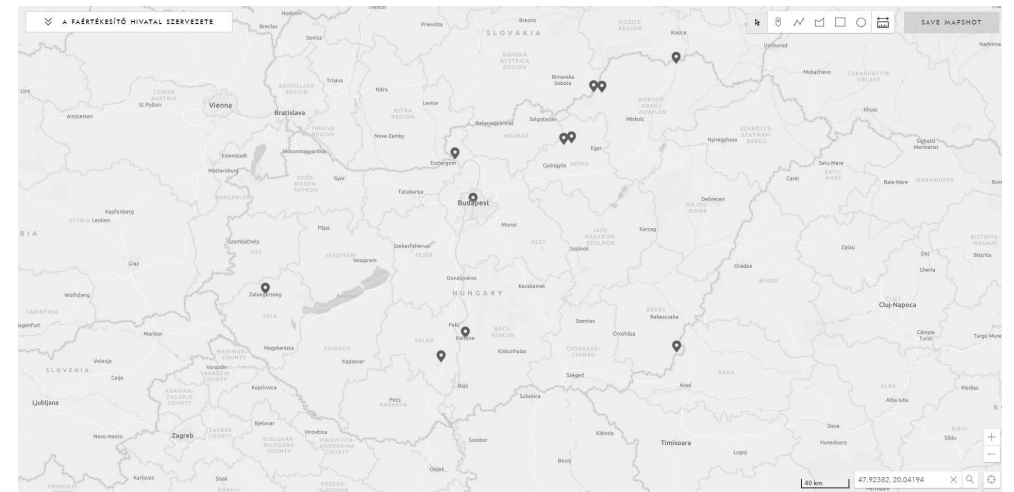


Fig. 7.1: Map showing the centres of the Office of Timber Distribution⁵¹

It was clear to many that the situation in Hungary had changed so much and the lack of timber was so pressing that there was a need for a new compromise about the extent to which the central state organs could interfere with and control the management of forests in private hands. In fact, this was not an entirely new realization. Senior officials at the Ministry for Agriculture had long believed that the terms of the Forest Law of 1879 were incapable of ensuring sustainable forest management and had initiated several legislative changes since the late 19th century. Law no. XIX of 1898 had brought about additional levels of state forestry administration and granted the state the right to take over the management of forests owned by village communities and municipalities. During World War I, a proposed new forest law was drafted which would have introduced tighter controls over privately-owned forests. Although World War I pushed the draft off the agenda, other decrees were introduced which imposed greater limits on logging.

Some of the resettled foresters played a role in the post-1918 afforestation campaign, but we should see this campaign within the context of a longer historical attempt to reverse the desertification of the Great Hungarian Plain through large-scale afforestation, a project which had already been underway for around two centuries by the 1920s. Debates on the issue had intensified in the second half of the 19th century due to the severe droughts which affected the Great Plains region in the 1860s and the devastating floods in the 1870s. Nonetheless, the legal framework that Károly Kaán proposed and which came to force in 1923 was a culmination and intersection of a high modernist perspective, Keynesian economic thought and environmental consciousness. As deputy secretary for Forestry at the Ministry of Agriculture, Kaán

⁴⁸ Zoltán Szöllősy, “Az erdőterületek megosztása birtoknagyság csoportok és a tulajdonjogcímek szerint az 1925. év elején”, *Magyar Statisztikai Szemle*, no. 3 (1926): 148-154.

⁴⁹ SOE KL 104.

⁵⁰ Jolán Szijj and István Ravasz, eds., *Magyarország az első világháborúban: lexikon A-Z* (Budapest: Petit Real, 2000), 236.

⁵¹ Accessed 22 August, 2024, <https://mapmaker.nationalgeographic.org/map/05ee0056dfa242a59da98ecab197f777/edit?mapShot=42c48ad9-59d2-454b-9d97-4811d11aa3c1&passcode=5pro9w>

stressed the interaction between conscious and large-scale investments serving the purposes of landscape change and the changes of the biology of specific areas as the key to sustainable improvements in the standard of living. The law, passed in 1923, was officially put into effect in 1927, but Kaán had in fact made initial moves on the project as early as late 1918. By 1921, afforestation branches had been opened in Kecskemét, Szeged, Debrecen, Nyíregyháza and Eger, and local agents for afforestation were active in 21 locations.⁵² As a result of these efforts, the proportion of forest cover in the Trianon area increased by 0.8% in eight years.⁵³

Kaán saw the role of state investments in the national economy and the interaction of ecological changes resulting from conscious landscape transformation as an organic whole. In planning his frameworks, he saw sustainability (in the 21st century understanding of this term) as being key to transforming the quality of life. As Kaán himself wrote: “The climate of the countryside will be different if small and large patches of forest, like so many sponges, can slowly evaporate the atmospheric moisture that so quickly rises in the unforested zones [...] In the light of what I have just outlined, it is not difficult for me to demonstrate that we hope that our large-scale program to replant the lowland forests will produce considerable results in terms of public health and economic value [...] All of these works are, in any case, moves in the right direction and are efforts which are intended to promote a certain consolidation of our economic life”.⁵⁴ Thus, data about the involvement of refugee foresters in afforestation programs is of particular interest in answering our initial research question, and an analysis of the group of dozen people who worked at least briefly in afforestation campaigns between the two wars will offer a greater understanding of the impact of state succession on major events of environmental history.

The example of the Forestry Directorate of Debrecen, which seems to have been an important location in terms of the employment for refugee foresters in the second half of the 1920s, reveals some details about career paths. Looking at their dates and places of birth and the sites on which they worked in the afforestation campaign, we can see that they may have been involved in afforestation activities at different stages of their careers; this primarily came in the middle stages of their career for those born around 1885 this type of work came in the middle of their career, while they were in their late 30s or early 40s, and it would have represented a career break for them. The exception to this pattern is Andor Kallivoda (1866-1936) who was forest director in Bistrita between 1915 and 1919; as a ministerial councillor from 1921, he was an active manager of the afforestation program in Kecskemét. For those who were involved in afforestation projects in their early 20s, this was likely among their earliest assignments. As such, this typically short-term occupation could mean the possibility of professional advance-

ment. In short, working at afforestation sites did not have a specified and standard timing in foresters' career. For these refugee foresters it was the territorial annexations sanctioned and guaranteed for Hungary by the Third Reich and Italy between 1938 and 1940 which marked a high point in their career.

The birthplace and the site where would-be refugees worked in late 1918 also demonstrate the degree of diversity in this period rather than any pattern: several resettled refugee foresters from multiple successor states all worked on afforestation projects. At the same time, in terms of geography, a pattern can be discerned: nearly all of the twelve refugee foresters worked at the afforestation station in Debrecen. This is likely connected to the fact that the city was the seat of the regional Forestry Directorate, a superior supervisory level of forestry administration, and was reasonably close to both the Romanian and the Czechoslovak borders.

CONCLUSION

The worsening shortage of timber before and during the Hungarian Soviet Republic triggered state action that had an environmental impact. This study has shown that the resettlement of refugee foresters in positions within state-run programs related to this crisis was a response to the situation rather than the main trigger of the programmes. This does not contradict the finding that the Ministry of Agriculture was willing to extend assistance to refugee foresters, first through direct financial support and then through the provision of various labour-intensive programmes. It is possible to conclude that the influx of forestry officials and the saturation of the professional labour market was one of the major factors encouraging the Ministry of Agriculture to establish centralized offices and launch major infrastructural development projects such as the afforestation programme. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that this was not the context of the new policies and institutions in forestry; the transformation of state forestry policy and the afforestation programme had a much longer history. Moreover, in Hungary, all post-war governments responded to the timber shortage by creating centralised distribution institutions that required the labour of many refugee foresters. As the professional programme of the forest policy concept included the development of timber transport infrastructure and large-scale efforts to increase forest cover in the Great Hungarian Plain, these projects also offered employment opportunities for refugee foresters.

We have highlighted the fact that state-employed refugee foresters who had left their posts in the ceded territories encountered a situation in which the share of state-owned forests in post-Trianon Hungary had shrunk by an order of magnitude compared to the 19th century situation, and that there was a temporary loss of state competences, but also that role and ambition of the state in terms of deciding questions of forestry had been steadily expanding since the later period of the war.

The case of forestry is part of the history of the growing ambition of the state to expand and alter patterns of resource extraction and environmental conditions. We can

⁵² Sándor Oroszi, “Az alföldfásítás a két világháború között Magyarországon”, *Erdészettörténelmi Közlemények* 1. (Budapest: OEE, Nagykunsági Erdő- és Fafeldolgozó Gazdaság, 1990), 12.

⁵³ Dénes Bartha and Sándor Oroszi, “Az alföldfásítási programok története, különös tekintettel a természetvédelem kérdéskörére”, *Erdészettörténelmi Közlemények* 60. (2003): 34–63.

⁵⁴ Károly Kaán, “Az erdőpusztítás közgazdasági következményei”, *Erdészeti Lapok* 59, no. 7-8. (1920): 141-151.

point to elements of continuity between the legal-institutional changes introduced at the turn of the century and the dilemmas of the post-World War I period, redrawing of the legal boundaries between private and public interests. This latter aspect is a worthy subject of future research aimed at identifying the links between post-World War I transformations and environmental history. In summary, this study represents one of the first steps in linking the surviving archival sources of post-war politics, individual choices and professional identities to changes in land use policy.

IV.
CIVIL SERVANTS BETWEEN
DEMOCRACY AND
TOTALITARIANISM

8. The Social Mobility of Civil Servants in Slovakia from 1938/1939 to 1945*

Zuzana Tokárová

INTRODUCTION

The discontinuity in personnel associated with the onset of the regime of the Hlinka Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana, HSLS) in the autumn of 1938 affected both the highest echelons of the power structures and central offices as well as the lower levels of the bureaucratic apparatus. Civil servants perceived as loyal to the old regime were stripped of their positions and replaced by individuals who were considered more amenable to the new regime. As in the case of the country's political leadership, there was also a significant change in personnel at the local level, which was related on the one hand to the forced departure of Czech civil servants and the exclusion of Jewish employees from offices but also to demands for loyalty to the emerging regime. The new regime opened access to higher positions for members of the HSLS and its sympathizers, enabling space for an upward social mobility from the lower layer of the bureaucracy which was strongly bound by political reliability and personal loyalty to the regime. Other groups also used personal contacts, protectionism and corruption to benefit from the nature of the non-democratic regime and, often for opportunistic reasons, to profit both socially and economically from the implementation of anti-Semitic policies in particular.

The aim of this article is adopt a micro-historical approach to examine the social mobility of civil servants¹ by concentrating on a small group of individuals from the town of Prešov who were granted access to greater power at the local level in Slovakia after October 1938. My intention is to identify the degree of vertical social mobility within the social structure of society tied to affiliation and loyalty to the HSLS and the regime. The argument proceeds from the assumption that, regardless of their previous social po-

*This article is a result of the project supported by The Slovak Research and Development Agency under no. APVV-19-0358 History of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party in Domestic and European Dimensions (1905-1945).

¹The term civil servants is used to define officials and official assistants in state offices acting in a public function (i.e., performing tasks related to public service) whose service was regulated by Act no. 103/1926 Sb. z. a. n. and Act no. 104/1926 Sb. z. a. n. and who were not employees in any private legal relationship.

sition, members of the HSLŠ and the Hlinka Guard (Hlinkova Garda, HG) and their followers were given the opportunity for social climbing and, especially as a result of the implementation of anti-Semitic policies and the consequent possibility of acquiring Jewish properties immediately after the establishment of the authoritarian regime in Slovakia, to ensure their ascent into the higher echelons of Slovak society. This applied not only to those involved in the direct management of counties, districts or towns, but also to rank-and-file employees of regional and local authorities. In order to depict the levels of social mobility, a biographical analysis of the careers of selected civil servants will be used to analyse their job positions and social background prior to 1938 and the change in their social status either after the change of regime or in the years after 1939.

The analysis employs the concepts and language of Pitirim A. Sorokin, whose writings on the topic of social mobility offer significant insights into the phenomenon of the transition of individuals or social objects from one social stratum to another within a highly-stratified society through a process which he termed as a form of infiltration.² Sorokin argued that the three forms of social stratification (economical, political and occupational) are intercorrelated with each other; as a result, individuals who appear to owe their position in the upper strata on account of one specific reason, such as ideological orientation, have actually obtained their elite position through a wide range of inter-connected reasons.³

The issue of the social background of the perpetrators of the Holocaust in Slovakia in the years 1938/1939–1945 has received increasing attention in Slovak historiography, a development which is related to the broader shift of attention of historians towards micro-history and the investigation of the Holocaust from a local history perspective and the concept of “research from below”. Also related to these trends is the publication of several high-quality case studies which have reevaluated the relationship between the Jewish minority and the Slovak majority which have identified local aspects of anti-Semitic policies and offered an analysis of their immediate manifestations under specific conditions from the point of view of local actors or from an individual perspective, both in terms of legislative measures and the social dimension (primarily related

to the socio-economic aspects of the Holocaust).⁴ Nonetheless, historians to date have paid relatively little attention to the issue of social mobility itself (with the exception of mobility in terms of the central government). As a result of this shortcoming, any analysis of local changes in social stratification and the power exchange mechanism remains heavily reliant on primary sources, primarily official records produced by the central and regional public institutions of the Slovak state and, to a certain extent, files from post-war criminal courts. Thus, although the behaviour of individuals in the specific geopolitical environment of regions or towns have often been characterized by their own specificities, an understanding of the local processes of social mobility at the lowest level of the municipality is essential for developing a fuller account of the transfer of power from one group to another at different levels of politics and, by extension, of the mechanism of societal transformation, the rise to power of the HSLŠ and the broader character of the new authoritarian regime.

As the strategic centre of the County of Šariš-Zemplín and the seat of the County Office, the town of Prešov held the key position in terms of the political, economic and cultural development of the region.⁵ Prešov also differed from other Slovak towns in the context of the formation of Ludák anti-Semitic politics because of several specific features regarding the local processes and local dynamics of development. The town’s sizeable Jewish minority increased relatively rapidly throughout the interwar years, making up 18–20% of all town inhabitants over the period as a whole.⁶ As in other towns, Jews formed part of the traditional middle class and were a significant element in public life.

⁴ From the point of view of research into the social background of the Holocaust, research into the lower levels have primarily concentrated on individual anti-Jewish legislative regulations, with an almost exclusive focus on Aryanization and deportations and their socio-economic aspects. From the extensive literature that has been published on the issue of Aryanization and deportation over the last few decades, the most significant research in this field is the work of Eduard Nižňanský and Ján Hlavinka, who prepared two collections within the edition *Acta Historica Posoniensia XI and XII (Judaica et Holocaustica 1 and 2) – Arizácie and Arizácie v regiónoch Slovenska* (Bratislava: Stimul, 2010). In addition to these studies, the local aspect of the social background of the Holocaust has been explored in many specific case studies by Ján Hlavinka, Veronika Slnková, Lucia Könözyová, Martina Fiamová, Michala Lónčíková and others. See also the case study on the municipality and individual level in the Slovak-Hungarian border region: László Csósz and Veronika Szeghy-Gayer. “Petitioners of Jewish Property in Košice: A Case Study on the Holocaust and Local Society in a Slovak-Hungarian Border Region.” *The City and History* 10, no. 1 (2021): 75–101; for a more individual perspective: Hana Kubátová, “Being ‘Local’ in Eastern Slovakia: Belonging in a Multiethnic Periphery,” *East European Politics and Societies* 37, no. 1 (2023): 249–271.

⁵ Many key institutions of territorial-administrative, political and cultural significance were moved to Prešov as a result of the border changes after the Vienna Arbitration in the fall of 1938. For more information on the changes in Prešov related to the Vienna Arbitration, see: Martin Pekár, “Evakuácia významných úradov a inštitúcií z Košíc do Prešova v roku 1938,” in *Historické medzníky vo vývoji Košíc v 20. storočí* (Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Filozofická fakulta, 2016), 74–80.

⁶ In 1921 the Jewish population made up 19.8% of the total population of the town of Prešov; out of a total number of 17,577 inhabitants of Prešov, 3477 were inhabitants of the Jewish faith. In 1930 the proportion of the Jewish population was 18.2%; out of the total number of 21,775 inhabitants of Prešov, 3965 were of the Jewish faith. This figure remained at approximately the same level for a later period: in 1938, the number of inhabitants of Prešov claiming to be of Jewish nationality (still on a voluntary basis) had increased to 2134 of the total population of the town of 21,016, but by 1940 this number had increased to 4381, almost 18% of the total population, and by the beginning of 1942 had risen further to 5134. Róbert J. Büchler, *Encyklopédia židovských náboženských obcí Vol. II (L–R)* (Bratislava: SNM – Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2010), 158.

² Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), 133.

³ Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility*, 12.

The leading roles which Jews played in local political parties, their placement on the Municipal Assembly or Council and their decisive positions in state and public administration offices allowed them to participate actively in the political management of the town, and they also held a similarly significant role in the town's economic activities. They gradually and effectively penetrated local business circles, actively participated in the modernization and growth of the town's industry and contributed to its prosperity.⁷ Furthermore, their involvement in local interest societies, Slovak and Jewish support associations or charities and various cultural and charitable organizations represented a substantial contribution to the cultural development of the town and of the wider region.⁸ However, the size of the Jewish population in the county and in the town and the influential political and economic position of many Jews was exploited to strengthen anti-Semitic attitudes which were already latently present in large parts of Slovak society on the basis of deeply rooted linguistic, religious and economic stereotypes.⁹ Paradoxically, not all of the Jews in Slovakia were as rich as the propaganda of the new regime depicted them to be. Above all, it was the initiatives of local institutions and political actors which contributed to the significant intensification of anti-Semitic policy in the region. Many anti-Jewish measures which would later be adopted with increased intensity in the county were instigated in advance and often with a stricter character compared to other parts of Slovakia; indeed, in some cases the anti-Semitism even went beyond the framework of central regulations and the instructions of superior authorities and resulted in a rapid and significant reduction in the social status of members of the Jewish minority in the region. Immediately after the declaration of Slovakia's autonomy in 1938, several legal norms were adopted and locally applied in the county which had a negative impact on the overall collective status of Jews as a minority; in tandem, this period also saw space open up for the upward vertical social mobility of certain elements of the majority population which were able to benefit from the whole range of restrictive measures introduced against the Jewish population.

POSSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL CLIMBING FOR CIVIL SERVANTS AS A RESULT OF ANTI-SEMITIC POLICIES

An initial opportunity for social climbing was made available to civil servants through the personnel changes introduced at all levels of the state bureaucratic apparatus from October 1938 onwards. These changes created space for supporters of the Ľudák regime

to occupy vacant positions after the dismissal of Czech¹⁰ and Jewish employees from the civil service, or to obtain higher positions at their expense.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, after the HSLS came to power, there was a demand to remove all Jews from state services. Government Decree no. 74/1939 Sl. z. was declared in April 1939 which stated that all Jews employed by the state, public, self-governing corporations and public institutions had to be dismissed by January 1st 1940 at the latest.¹² The new regime thus began to build a dedicated power structure in which positions were stripped from politically unreliable and supposedly disloyal non-Slovak members and offered instead to party supporters who could personally benefit from the existence of the new regime. It is crucial to point out that despite these efforts, some Czechs and Jews managed to retain their positions because the knowledge and skills were deemed irreplaceable. Additionally, the ambiguities over the precise definition of the term "Jew" allowed for some degree of reinterpretation and disputation.

No less important in this context were the anti-Jewish economic measures connected with the efforts to exclude the Jewish population from economic and social life, a movement which provided further opportunities for social climbing by the non-Jewish population. A systematic program of eliminating Jews from the economy had been launched as early as March 14th 1939, but the initial steps mainly affected the professions of tradesmen and merchants. In addition to the revocation of trade licenses,¹³ from 1939 government trustees and temporary administrators were appointed to manufacturing

¹⁰ According to the agreement between the Slovak autonomous government and the central government in Prague, expulsions would formally affect all Czech officials and employees in the state administration in Slovakia, as was regulated legislatively by Government Decree no. 382/1938 Sb. z. a n. of December 23rd, 1938. Between Munich and March 14, 1939, 9,000 civil servants of Czech nationality left Slovakia. For more information on this issue, see, for example: Valerián Bystrický, "Vystáňovanie českých štátnych zamestnancov zo Slovenska v rokoch 1938-1939," *Historický časopis* 45, no. 4 (1997): 596-610.

¹¹ The discontinuity in personnel can be observed by comparing the employees of offices at the level of counties, districts or cities before and after 1938 in the List of Employees of the Political and Police Administration in Slovakia from February 1937, from February 1938 and from February 1940. See: *Výkaz zamestnancov politickej a policajnej správy v krajine Slovenskej, február 1937* (Bratislava: [s.n.], 1937), <https://dikda.snk.sk/view/uuid:693b180c-6dcf-4bbd-9af4-84f1002f4da1?page=uuid:e5cc52ab-f0f9-477e-a111-c7e1f7c43d76>. *Výkaz zamestnancov politickej a policajnej správy v krajine Slovenskej, február 1938* ([S.l.]: [s.n.], 1938), accessed April 28, 2024, <https://dikda.snk.sk/view/uuid:c3d36732-13fe-4734-b3c1-991c6249e349?page=uuid:ccadaf89-8554-4046-925c-53e06caa65c7>. *Výkaz zamestnancov verejnej správy vnútornej, február 1940* (Bratislava: [s.n.], 1942), <https://dikda.snk.sk/view/uuid:841ec146-83af-418f-be07-f168ffbda731?page=uuid:b43ecc6f-254f-4c43-b061-2734933dff85>

¹² See: Government Decree no. 74/1939 Sl. z. of April 24, 1939. The exclusion of Jews from public service was subsequently addressed in Decree no. 143/1941 Sl. z. of June 28, 1941. The town of Prešov had fired all contractual employees of Jewish faith, and after August 1939, only a few Jewish employees of the town remained in service, primarily those who temporarily remained in post after having applied to do so. No Jews were employed at public nor private institutions, such as the Slovak Red Cross, the League against Tuberculosis, the District Social Insurance Company, the Office of Health Insurance for Private Employees, the District Savings Bank, the District Public Hospital or the District Trade Union. One Jewish employee was registered by the Professional Association of Merchants for the Prešov District (for example on the Business Committee) – Bernát Bergmann – and The Municipal Savings Bank in Prešov had a regular member, Samuel Schnitzer, on its committee. Štátny archív v Prešove (hereinafter ŠA PO), fund Okresný úrad v Prešove, 1923-1944 (hereinafter OÚ PO), box. 18, inv. no. 208, sign. 224/1940 prez.

¹³ According to Government Decrees no. 40/1939 Sl. z. of March 30, 1939; no. 169/1939 Sl. z. of July 11, 1939, and Law no. 335/1939 Sl. z. of December 22nd, 1939.

⁷ Róbert J. Büchler, *Encyklopédia židovských náboženských obcí*, 166.

⁸ For more information on Jewish associations in Prešov in the interwar period, see: Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, "Fragmenty spolkového života židovskej komunity v Prešove," in *Poklady Židovského múzea v Prešove III*. (Bratislava: Neinvestičný fond židovského kultúrneho dedičstva – Menorah, 2021), 153-175.

⁹ On the issue of autochthonous anti-Semitism, see, for example: Eduard Nižňanský, *Politika antisemitizmu a holo-kaust na Slovensku v rokoch 1938-1945* (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 2016).

and commercial enterprises and shops as a prelude to the privatization of Jewish business properties.¹⁴

This process was naturally accompanied by the selection of non-Jewish nominees for the positions of government trusteeships and temporary administrators who were tasked with administering the confiscated wealth and property. Both of these positions were prestigious and highly lucrative, and the chosen applicants could benefit personally, both socially and, especially, economically. The financial rewards associated with these posts included a regular and generous salary,¹⁵ but they also came with a genuine opportunity for social advancement. The approval process for appointing specific applicants was transferred from the level of the Ministry of Economy to the regional level, with the criteria for the final decision to be based mainly on economic experience and other qualifications. According to Government Decrees no. 19/1939 Sl. z. and no. 137/1939 Sl. z.¹⁶ and later according to the so-called First Aryanization Law,¹⁷ professional education and knowledge were required (as far as possible) from applicants who wished to fill the positions of government trustee and temporary administrator, but in practice the decision-making mechanism was influenced by political criteria. The wording of the above-mentioned government regulations stated that each applicant should be a “morally upstanding citizen”,¹⁸ an assessment which also took the applicant’s political profile into consideration.¹⁹ At the same time, all district chiefs were advised by the management structures of HSLŠ regional branches to consult the party when appointing government trustees to economic enterprises.²⁰ The appointment of government trustees and temporary administrators based on their political profile had therefore become formally integrated into the decision-making process.²¹ The ideological requirement for appointments of these officials, a predictably ambiguous and contested assessment, meant that from the very beginning the decision-making process was subject to delays, threats and, above all, complaints being submitted to the administrative

office and officials of the HSLŠ and HG and the highest state officials.²² As early as October 1939, the District Secretary of the HSLŠ in Prešov was drawing attention to the procrastination over the appointment of government trustees in economic enterprises, to the prioritization and pushing of specific persons and the influence of district chiefs in the appointment of government trustees, which resulted in the appointment of the same individual to several government trustee positions; in extreme cases, trustees were administering five or more Jewish businesses at the same time, a situation which subsequently led to further abuses on the part of these new officials.²³

Political affiliation naturally became part of the subsequent appointment of Aryanizers to Jewish businesses, within which, for example, the County Secretariats of the HSLŠ submitted statements about the “moral, national and political reliability” of individual candidates for Aryanization positions. This fact is also confirmed by Ján Hlavinka, whose research on corruption in the process of Aryanization highlights the influence of the circular of the County Secretariat of the HSLŠ in Prešov issued on May 10th 1940, addressed to all local organizations of the HSLŠ in the Prešov and Sabinov districts, which granted the County Office the authority to appoint Aryanizers directly, with the HSLŠ making the final decision about all applicants. The circular also noted that the County Secretariat of the HSLŠ should be informed in advance about people who were deemed unsuitable for this role due to political, national or moral reasons.²⁴ Although civil servants could not officially become Aryanizers of Jewish trades and businesses,²⁵ Ivan Kamenec concluded that they were able to circumvent the order relatively easily, for example by formally issuing Aryanization decrees in the names of their spouses or other family members.²⁶ The process of Aryanization accelerated in connection with the overall radicalization of the regime from the summer of 1940, following the visit to Slovakia by Dieter Wisliceny, a German adviser for the solution of the Jewish question, and the establishment of the Central Economic Office in Bratislava (Ústredný hospodársky úrad, ÚHÚ).²⁷ With the adoption of the so-called Second Aryanization Law,²⁸ decisions on the registration of Jewish businesses were transferred fully to the competence of the ÚHÚ, more specifically to its chairman, Augustín Morávek, who was authorized

¹⁴ As was mentioned above, the process of systematic excluding the Jewish population from the economic life of the country has been studied extensively, with several publications shifting the focus from the local and individual level. The impact of Aryanization in a small Slovak town was also brilliantly captured in the film *The Shop on Main Street*, was based on a novella by Ladislav Grosman, a native of East Slovakia who also adapted wrote the screenplay for the film.

¹⁵ According to the Decree, the government trustee or temporary administrator was entitled to reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and to a reward, the amount of which was determined by the Ministry of Economy.

¹⁶ Government Decrees no. 19/1939 Sl. z. of March 15, 1939, and no. 137/1939 Sl. z. of June 20, 1939.

¹⁷ Act no. 113/1940 Sl. z. of April 25th, 1940.

¹⁸ In the Slovak original, the term “morálne zachovalý slovenský občan” was used; see paragraph 4 of § 1 in Government Decree no. 19/1939 Sl. z. of March 15th, 1939.

¹⁹ See: Government Decree no. 19/1939 Sl. z. of March 15, 1939, which was valid for three months. Later, Government Decree no. 137/1939 Sl. z. of June 20, 1939, was adopted. In December 1939, the validity of the decree was extended by Decree with the force of Law no. 327/1939 Sl. z. of December 21, 1939. From 1941, the imposition of a temporary administration was governed by the Decree with the force of Act no. 273/1941 Sl. z. of December 15, 1941.

²⁰ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 17, inv. no. 207, sign. 920/1939 prez.

²¹ Ján Hlavinka, “Korupcia v procese arizácie podnikového majetku,” *Forum Historiae* 5, no. 2 (2011): 119, 124.

²² Ivan Kamenec, “Fenomén korupcie v procese tzv. riešenia ‘židovskej otázky’ na Slovensku v rokoch 1938-1945,” *Forum Historiae* 5, no. 2 (2011): 101.

²³ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 17, inv. no. 207, sign. 920/1939 prez.

²⁴ Ján Hlavinka, “Korupcia,” 118-119.

²⁵ According to Act no. 133/1941 Sl. z. of June 26, 1941, the decision on the transfer of a Jewish enterprise could only be granted if the government gave, or the relevant ministry agreed to, their dismissal from the civil service.

²⁶ See: Ivan Kamenec, “Fenomén korupcie,” 103. Spouses of civil servants could only Aryanize if they were financially stable. In such a case, the spouse-civil servant was not allowed to assume any obligations. ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 19, sign. 2386/40 prez.

²⁷ The Central Economic Office was established by Decree no. 222/1940 Sl. z. of September 16, 1940. According to paragraph 1 § 2 of the aforementioned decree, the ÚHÚ was authorized to implement through its decisions all steps necessary for the exclusion of Jews from Slovak economic and social life and for the transfer of Jewish property to the ownership of Christians [“Ústrednému hospodárskemu úradu patrí starostlivosť o to, aby podľa osobitných predpisov vykonal všetko, čo je potrebné pre vylúčenie Židov zo slovenského hospodárskeho a sociálneho života a pre prevedenie majetku Židov do vlastníctva kresťanov”].

²⁸ Decree no. 303/1940 Sl. z. of November 30, 1940.

to determine who could be given the temporary administration of any remaining Jewish businesses and subsequently decide on the permanent Aryanization or liquidation of the company.²⁹ This effectively transferred the entire accompanying process of corruption and patronage to the auspices of the ÚHÚ. It is crucial to point out here that under Morávek's leadership the activities of the office were arbitrary, chaotic and uncontrollable, a situation which led to a wave of corruption and huge economic losses; as a result, Morávek was later forced to resign from his position.³⁰

Other discriminatory anti-Jewish measures, such as those limiting the living conditions of Jews and the subsequent process of the forced expropriation of Jewish household property, provided similar opportunities for financial and material gains and social advancement. The goal of the state's anti-Semitic policy as regards Jewish-owned housing was a gradual ban on Jews living in and renting out real estate in selected areas of the town and the subsequent transfer of their valuable property to non-Jewish owners.³¹ In the first phase of the process, the ÚHÚ was authorized according to Decree no. 257/1940 Sl. z. to impose a temporary administration of Jewish-owned properties, which meant that the so-called temporary administrators occupied Jewish-owned houses and apartments and also business properties. At the same time, the decree allowed the temporary administrator to use rooms in the managed house or apartment with the permission of ÚHÚ and according to the conditions determined by the ÚHÚ, and also allowed the administrator to expel a Jewish resident from the apartment, for example, in the event that a non-Jewish applicant applied for the apartment.³²

In the town of Prešov, the process of imposing temporary administration on Jewish residential properties lasted until the end of 1940 and began overwhelmingly with the Jewish houses located on Hlinkova Street (present-day Hlavná Street), the most prestigious part of the town centre. From 1941, the District Office in Prešov decreed that temporary building administrators would also be appointed in other, less prosperous, locations in the centre of Prešov, and this process was later extended to the suburbs where the poorest Jewish-owned housing was located. In addition to the temporary administrators, the ÚHÚ was also responsible for clearing Jewish apartments, expelling owners, seizing much of the contents, and preventing any other Jews from moving into properties.³³ In addition, all civil servants were prohibited from living in any property still owned

by Jews.³⁴ The measure was the result of a strongly anti-Semitic initiative by local and regional actors, who in several cases enforced strict anti-Jewish measures ahead of the rest of the country. In December, this measure was supplemented by a nationwide regulation, ÚHÚ Regulation no. 267/1940 Úr. nov., which mandated that Jews in all towns and villages of Slovakia were forbidden to live on streets and squares named after Andrej Hlinka or Adolf Hitler (streets in many towns had been renamed as such from 1939 onwards); any Jews living there were obliged to move out of their apartments by March 31st 1941 and relocate to the outskirts of their towns or villages.³⁵ In practice, the eviction of Jews from apartments in a specific part of a town did not apply to Jewish civil servants and doctors who remained in the civil service; this exemption was stated in the ÚHÚ Regulation of March 25th 1941 and district chiefs were not supposed to insist on the eviction of Jewish civil servants under the purview of this legislation.³⁶ However, the restrictions placed on the residency of Jews in Prešov was deemed insufficient by the regional political actors, and in a later period additional measures regarding the eviction and ban on the residence of the Jewish population were required.³⁷ Referring to the fact that the large Jewish apartments that had been the target of the expulsions to date remained beyond the financial means of poorer Slovaks, County Governor Andrej Dudáš demanded the introduction of a measure by which Jewish owners would be obliged to adapt the apartments they were leasing out into several smaller apartment units at their own expense, which would then become available to applicants on lower incomes. This was aimed primarily at the courtyard apartments on Hlinkova Street from which Jews had been prohibited from living by the ÚHÚ Regulation, but there was, in reality, no shortage of Christian applicants or remaining Jewish residents when the District Office in Prešov confiscated these properties.³⁸ Later, after November 1st 1941, Jewish real estate was transferred to the ownership of the state.³⁹

The selection of nominees to temporarily oversee, and often live in, confiscated Jewish properties, (which was the responsibility of the ÚHÚ and carried out through district offices), was just as strongly politicized as the Aryanization of corporate property. According to § 2 of Decree no. 257/1940 Sl. z. any appointee was required to be a "morally upstanding citizen", but, in practice, the ambiguity of this term meant that an important role was played by more political criteria: for example, membership in the HG or past membership in Rodobrana. The HG, as a paramilitary corps of the HSLS, which at one time mainly served to enforce the rapid execution of changes, enjoyed a highly privileged status in Slovak society. Its representatives, seeing themselves in the role of

²⁹ Ján Hlavinka, "Korupcia," 121-122.

³⁰ The character of Augustín Morávek and his period at the ÚHÚ are expertly portrayed in the work by Ján Hlavinka, "Korupcia," 113-134.

³¹ On the restriction of living spaces for Jews, see for example the case study: Michala Lónčíková, "Address Unknown: Reshaping the Jewish Living Space and Social Mobility in the Slovak State (1939-1945)," *The City and History* 9, no. 1 (2020): 112-126.

³² See: Decree no. 257/1940 Sl. z. of October 11, 1940.

³³ See: § 6 of Decree no. 257/1940 Sl. z. of October 11, 1940. That step was introduced with the issuance of ÚHÚ Regulation no. 258/1940 Úr. nov., according to which the ÚHÚ prohibited the renting of new apartments in some parts of Prešov and, pursuant to § 2, ordered the eviction of Jews and non-Jewish spouses of Jews from apartments on Hlinkova Street by December 31st, 1940. See: ÚHÚ Regulation no. 258/1940 Úrad. nov. of November 28, 1940.

³⁴ ŠA PO, fund Policajné riaditeľstvo v Prešove (1938) 1939-1944 (hereinafter PR PO), box 1, inv. no. 8 (1), Kniha prezidiálnych obežníkov, obežník 65 of December 16, 1940.

³⁵ ÚHÚ Regulation no. 267/1940 Úrad. nov. of December 14, 1940.

³⁶ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 91, sign. 10059/1941.

³⁷ The Advisory Board of the Office for the Jewish Accommodation Centre in Prešov consisted of representatives of the main regional bodies of the HSLS, the Police Headquarters, the Notary's Office, the deputy of the Government Commissioner and the local organizations of the HG and DP. ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 97, sign. 912/1942.

³⁸ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 92, sign. 19910/1941.

³⁹ Regulation of the Government of the Slovak Republic no. 238/1941 Sl. z. of October 30, 1941.

an exclusive group and a leading force in political and social life, often referred to the merits of the Guardsmen for the establishment of the state. Consequently, it goes without say that membership in the HG offered a unique benefit in this regard. In the same way, the personal contacts of applicants or the involvement of regional organizations and actors of the HSLŠ and HG, of power structures, state security offices or officials also played a role in the selection of specific applicants, either positively or negatively. In addition, the ÚHÚ had the authority to replace the temporary administrator at any time or to annul the temporary administration completely if individuals were suspected of showing disloyalty to the regime.⁴⁰

Of course, there were also other opportunities for civil servants to improve their financial situation and a consequent increase in their standard of living and social status. The persecution of the Jewish population created suitable conditions for various forms of corruption, and this issue grew to enormous proportions as civil servants, acting as representatives of the state administration, seized the opportunity to abuse their public office and authority for their own enrichment. Corruption in this form most frequently manifested itself when granting exemptions or work permits or in the Aryanization process; in these cases, intervention and corrupt behaviour were linked to the level of higher officials with corresponding competences. However, even at the level of other, lower official positions, there were many opportunities for various types of bribery, as will be shown later in this article. For example, bribes could be used to ensure the official's personal intervention in the Aryanization of a specific business under the conditions that the Jewish owner envisioned (within the scope of so-called voluntary Aryanization, e.g., in a purely fictitious procedure of Aryanization with an agreed Aryanizer) or, on the contrary, to ensure that Aryanization did not occur or imposing a temporary administration on a specific Jewish business or household property.⁴¹

Abuses of office, corruption or material enrichment also appeared in the allocation of confiscated movable property of Jews, such as jewellery, valuables, radios or furs, and movable property that remained in houses and apartments after the deportation of their Jewish owners. The perpetrators in these cases were mainly functionaries and officials who were directly involved in the implementation of the deportation of the Jewish population; these civil servants had ample opportunities for this form of corrupt behaviour and also had arbitrary authority with regard to the movable property of the Jews.⁴² The embezzlement of Jewish property as a result of the removal of Jews from Slovakia often took on enormous proportions. Under the pretext of membership in the HSLŠ, HG and Freiwillige Schutzstaffel (FS), Jewish property was looted or bought at below cost prices often with the intention of private enrichment.⁴³ Even in connection with such practices, a guideline of the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior even issued a guideline on such practices in September 1940 which explicitly dealt with the

relationship of civil servants with members of the Jewish population; the memorandum required the district chiefs to check the property conditions of state officials before October 6th 1938, and, if any increase in property or housing equipment was identified, to request an explanation for this from the employee. Also part of the control of civil servants was also the reporting of all requests from Jews and a list of officials who had sought the company of members of the Jewish population during their working hours or in their free time (for example, visiting Jewish houses, visiting restaurants, bars or banquets with Jews, going hunting or using Jewish cars). Likewise, an overview of the officials approved for the positions of government trustees or as members of the administrative boards of Jewish trades and enterprises was also required, in addition to a list of the rewards resulting from these positions.⁴⁴ However, these guidelines did little to prevent corrupt behaviour, but the overall scope of corruption cannot be comprehensively assessed and any assessment is dependent on specific experiences at an individual level.⁴⁵

CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL STATUS OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN PREŠOV

From a comprehensive overview of the selection processes for nominees for the temporary administration of Jewish businesses and residential properties in Prešov, it is possible to observe how this process was often accompanied by the exploitation of various aspects of anti-Semitic legislation. The lists of government trustees and temporary administrators in Prešov suggest that some applicants were deliberately favoured and were granted several Jewish businesses and houses simultaneously. In May 1941 even the County Secretariat of the HSLŠ in Prešov complained about specific officials accumulating multiple salaried positions, primarily in the form of administering former Jewish enterprises.⁴⁶

The cases of František Očkay and František Samko, both of whom were serving as office assistants (*kancelársky pomocník*) at the District Office of Prešov in 1940, are typical examples of the multiple appointments of civil servants at the district level. František Očkay was appointed temporary administrator of two Jewish houses in 1942, but by 1943 he was temporary administrator of 11 houses at the same time and two parcels of land. In 1942 František Samko was the temporary administrator of two Jewish houses but this has risen to five Jewish houses at the same time by 1943.⁴⁷

At the municipal level too, several civil servants at the Municipal Office in Prešov were appointed to the position of government trustees over Jewish enterprises while simultaneously acting as temporary administrators of several Jewish houses at the same

⁴⁰ See: § 3 Decree no. 257/1940 Sl. z. of October 11, 1940.

⁴¹ Ivan Kamenec, "Fenomén korupcie," 101.

⁴² Ivan Kamenec, "Fenomén korupcie," 101.

⁴³ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box 22, inv. no. 210, sign. 1009/1942.

⁴⁴ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box 19, inv. no. 208, sign. 2087/1940 prez.

⁴⁵ For more on the phenomenon of corruption, see: Ivan Kamenec, "Fenomén korupcie."

⁴⁶ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 92, sign. 17421/1941.

⁴⁷ See: ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 97, sign. 54/1942; box. 98, sign. 6794/1942.

time. For example, František Vaňo, Mikuláš Mochnay⁴⁸ and Štefan Sabol, the latter of whom is a textbook example of how deft adherence to the Ludák regime and membership in the HG opened up the doors to rapid upward social mobility.

Štefan Sabol, the son of a single mother who lacked any political experience, was given a remarkable opportunity by the change of regime, and the introduction of the HSL's anti-Semitic policies was the impetus for the rapid expansion of his career prospects and the improvement of his social and economic status. Sabol was still a student at the Evangelical Collegiate grammar school in Prešov for much of the interwar period,⁴⁹ and he was barely 24 years old when the new regime took power.⁵⁰ In the fall of 1938, he was working as a municipal clerk (referent) and minute-taker (zapisovateľ) at the Municipal Assembly in Prešov.⁵¹ His adherence to the HSL's regime and membership in the HG were undoubtedly key factors in his appointment to the post of head of the First Administrative Department of the Municipal Office in Prešov⁵² over the heads of other older and more experienced town councillors such as Jozef Balázsy or Ferdinand Balassa.⁵³

As a secretary of the town and a active participant in regional politics, Sabol was naturally involved in the creation and implementation of anti-Semitic policies and had no qualms about benefited from the program personally. He himself was among the first officials who were proposed for the position of government trustee in Jewish manufacturing and commercial enterprises in the spring of 1939 when he was appointed to the Bryndza manufacturing enterprise in Prešov belonging to M. Grosswirt and to a Jewish distillery in Demjata, but his participation was soon revoked.⁵⁴ In March 1939, he also appeared on the initial list of HG members proposed for the posts of temporary administrators of Jewish houses.⁵⁵ From March 1941 onwards he was the temporary administrator of the house at 127 Hlinkova Street formerly owned by the Jewish Jordán brothers.⁵⁶ In December 1941 he was also appointed head of the Department for the Jewish Accommodation Centre (Referát pre ubytovacie stredisko Židov) which oversaw the registration of Jewish apartments and Jewish properties, the resettlement

of Jews and, in turn, the looting of their property in Prešov.⁵⁷ His appointment to this position was related to his work as Chief Town Commissioner and was naturally justified by the national interests of the town. He gained this position at the suggestion of the District Chief in Prešov and with the approval of the County Office of Prešov and the County Inspector HG; the position meant not only increased social prestige but also an improvement in his financial situation. Sabol had initially received the salary of a municipal official in the relatively low sixth salary scale to which was added royalties for broadcasting activities and his work as a newspaper contributor.⁵⁸ This was later supplemented by his remuneration of 700 crowns for overseeing the Department for the Jewish Accommodation Centre with a further salary, a sum which the District Chief in Prešov even proposed be increased to 2500 crowns⁵⁹ and also by further income from the administration on a Jewish house.⁶⁰ He continued to strengthen his social status by becoming actively involved in the social life of the town, serving as the chairman and vice-chairman of several associations; he was the chairman of the local branch of Slovakia Tour, an Association for tourism in Prešov, and from 1941 he was the Secretary of the local educational commission in Prešov.⁶¹ He also served as a surrogate on the honorary disciplinary committee at the HG's District Headquarters in Prešov.⁶²

The possibilities for social mobility which were available to civil servants at the municipality level were not restricted to employees of the Municipal Office in Prešov. Similar cases are represented by Bartolomej Andrejko, a civil servant of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Obchodná a priemyselná komora) in Prešov; Bartolomej Germuška, a temporary administrator of the Municipal Hospital in Prešov⁶³ and, above all, the police councilor (policajný radca) of the Police Directorate in Prešov, Štefan Greguška whose rapid climb up the professional, social, and economic ladder thanks to the conditions created by the new regime is reminiscent of that of Štefan Sabol.

Štefan Greguška's roots can be traced back to his Slovak Roman Catholic family from the village of Pruské in the District of Púchov. After completing his legal studies during the interwar period, Greguška started his civil service career as a commissioner of political administration (komisár politickej správy) at the District Office of Vranov nad Topľou and later in Dobšina.⁶⁴ As with the case of Štefan Sabol, the onset of a new

⁴⁸ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 97, sign. 54/1942; box. 98, sign. 6794/1942.

⁴⁹ He graduated from the Evangelical Collegiate grammar school in Prešov in the 1932/1933 school year. *Pamätnica prešovského Kolégia 1667–1967* (Prešov: Mestský národný výbor, 1967), 57.

⁵⁰ See 1930 census, accessed April 28th, 2024, [https://www.slovakiana.sk/scitacie-harky/cair-ko29gg9?url={%22filter%22:%22{%22onlyUnBlackened%22:true,%22categoryKeys%22:\[%22749%22,%229119%22\]}%22,%22page%22:%221%22,%221m%22:%220%22,%22search%22:%22Kov%C3%A1%C4%8Dska%2014%22,%22sort%22:%22rank%22,%22sortDirection%22:%221%22,%22searchByKeywords%22:%22true%22,%22index%22:1,%22total%22:3}&fromPage=cs th](https://www.slovakiana.sk/scitacie-harky/cair-ko29gg9?url={%22filter%22:%22{%22onlyUnBlackened%22:true,%22categoryKeys%22:[%22749%22,%229119%22]}%22,%22page%22:%221%22,%221m%22:%220%22,%22search%22:%22Kov%C3%A1%C4%8Dska%2014%22,%22sort%22:%22rank%22,%22sortDirection%22:%221%22,%22searchByKeywords%22:%22true%22,%22index%22:1,%22total%22:3}&fromPage=cs th)

⁵¹ See, for example, the minutes of the meeting of the Municipal Assembly in Prešov of February 17, 1938: ŠA PO, fund Mestský úrad v Prešove, 1923–1945 (hereinafter MÚ PO), inv. no. 24.

⁵² Artúr Spányi, *Adresár mesta Prešova a prešovského okresu* (Prešov: Minerva, 1931); Martin Pekár and Marcela Došenová, *Pamätná kniha mesta Prešova, diel III (1938–1941)* (Prešov: ŠVK v Prešove, 2011).

⁵³ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 93, sign. 35208/1941.

⁵⁴ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box 17, inv. no. 207, sign. 920/1939 prez.

⁵⁵ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 17, inv. no. 207, sign. 920/1939 prez.; box 97, sign. 54/1942; box 98, sign. 6794/1942.

⁵⁶ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 95, inv. no. 231, Census of Jews in the town of Prešov (total and streets B–H).

⁵⁷ The Department for the Accommodation Centre of Jews in Prešov was established in accordance with the Decree of the Ministry of the Interior of November 28, 1941, no. VI/25/287/1941. It was located in the house at 79 Hlinkova Street. ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 22, inv. no. 210, sign. 744/1942.

⁵⁸ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 93, sign. 35208/1941.

⁵⁹ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 22, inv. no. 210, sign. 744/1942.

⁶⁰ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 98, sign. 6794/1942.

⁶¹ Eugen Servátka, *Praktický adresár mesta Prešova, 1941* (Prešov: Tatran, 1941); "Založenie odbočky Spolku slovenských stenografov v Prešove," *Slovák*, June 15, 1944, 5.

⁶² "Menovania do čestných disciplinárnych výborov pri OV HG," *Gardista*, May 14, 1943, 4.

⁶³ Bartolomej Germuška was a guardsman and an opportunistic supporter of the Ludák regime. Among the first applicants, he was appointed to the position of temporary administrator for Jewish houses in Prešov in 1939 and later became temporary administrator of several Jewish houses.

⁶⁴ ŠA PO, fund Okresný ľudový súd v Prešove, 1945–1948 (hereinafter OLS PO); box. 16, kat. no. 277, sign. Tľud 67/45.

regime and the rise of power of the HSLS opened up potential avenues for Greguška's growth in the professional and economic sphere. He was able to personally benefit from the new policies, and his personal involvement became a catalyst for further upward social progress. Under the auspices of the new regime, Greguška was appointed head of the State Police Office in Michalovce, part of the network of newly created state police offices that emerged from the reorganization of the police force following the territorial changes after the Vienna Award of November 1938. As an ardent supporter of the regime and also likely thanks to his good personal contacts, he was promoted several times over the course of his career. This careerism was evident early on, as he had already been promoted to chief police commissioner (hlavný policajný komisár) by the fall of 1938, and would later be appointed police councilor (policajný radca) in March 1943, promotions by which he advanced two pay scales higher.⁶⁵ In June 1941, upon the request of Štefan Hašík, the County Governor of Šariš-Zemplín County, he was transferred from Michalovce to Prešov, where he was appointed to the position of head of the First Department (Presidium) of the Police Directorate in Prešov, which as a newly established office in the fall of 1938 was the key body of the power-repressive apparatus for the area of Eastern Slovakia. Greguška was later assigned to the personnel and press department,⁶⁶ and his climb up the career ladder continued in 1944, when he succeeded Ladislav Števonka as the head of the Prešov branch of the State Security, the highest internal security office with its headquarters in Bratislava. The Prešov branch provided intelligence on the Tatran and Šariš-Zemplín Counties, and Štefan Greguška headed the office until its closure in 1945. Following the transfer of the then police director Pavel Macháček to Bratislava in January 1945, Greguška was entrusted with the temporary leadership of the Police Directorate in Prešov.⁶⁷

As a member of the HSLS, an adept supporter of the regime and an active enforcer of anti-Semitic measures, Štefan Greguška benefited socially and financially from anti-Semitic policies in which he himself actively participated. Greguška personally considered the Jewish population to be superfluous; during his work in Prešov he personally supervised the implementation of anti-Jewish regulations and emphasized their strict compliance, and during the organization of transportation of the Jewish population, he oversaw their concentration and ensured the collection of items seized from the Jewish population. Greguška was also personally responsible for the apartments that were emptied after their former Jewish inhabitants had been transported.⁶⁸ Greguška's professional position and his framework of competence, combined with the nature of the anti-Semitic measures, gave him the opportunity for the arbitrary manipulation of Jewish property and his own material enrichment, which was further supplemented by the

regular income of 200 crowns per month which he received as the temporary administrator of the Jewish house at 1 Halašová Street.⁶⁹ In his post-war trial, several witnesses accused Štefan Greguška of abusing his position. While carrying out his duties, he was said to have treated the Jewish population rudely and violently, including the use of physical abuse when the luggage of Jews was being searched prior to their deportation. He was also accused of accepting bribes from Jews that influenced his decision-making, for example a bribe of 5,000 crowns from Imrich Stern to waive an arrest and thereby avoid deportation.⁷⁰ Similarly, according to witness statements, Greguška personally intervened in the Aryanization process of Birkenbaum, a Jewish forwarding company in Prešov, in favour of his colleague and friend Štefan Vrchovina and also in the deportation of the former owner of this company, Alexander Löweinstein. Some statements also accused him of involvement in the deportation of the Jewish doctor Aladár Weislovits, the former Jewish owner of the house in which Greguška was already living at that time. In order to occupy Weislovits's apartment on 16 Slovenská Street he was said to have abused his authority by personally intervening in the case of his deportation. In May 1942, Aladár Weislovits and his wife were deported from Prešov on transport no. 28 and later died.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the adjudgement at Greguška's postwar trial ruled that not enough evidence had been presented to prove his guilt sufficiently, and he was acquitted.⁷² Although the nature of the post-war retributive judiciary in Slovakia makes it challenging to establish whether this final verdict was justified and fair, the case of Štefan Greguška is one of the best examples of how the system allowed civil servants to use the process of Aryanization and anti-Semitic policies which lay beyond the scope of their own profession to personally profit from it and climb the social ladder.

CONCLUSION

The regime of the Hlinka Slovak People's Party and its anti-Semitic policies created opportunities for upward social mobility for officials who supported and enacted its policies. One such policy was the establishment of the institutions of government trustees and temporary administrators who were responsible for operating Jewish companies, commercial enterprises and also Jewish residential properties after they had been confiscated from their original owners. These were prestigious and highly beneficial functions, from which the approved applicants were able to benefit personally, both socially and financially. Superficially, technical competence and professional expertise were requirements for those who sought appointments as administrators of Jewish businesses, and the housing needs of the poor were also supposed to be taken into account.

⁶⁵ For comparison, see the list of employees of the political and police administration in Slovakia from February 1938 and February 1940.

⁶⁶ ŠA PO, fund Šariško-zemplínska župa, oddelenie štátno-bezpečnostné 1940–1946 (hereinafter ŠZZ, odd. ŠB), box. 8, inv. no. 435, sign. 2940/40 prez.; prezidiálne spisy 1940–1945, box. 21, inv. no. 905, sign. 1689/41-prez.

⁶⁷ ŠA PO, ŠZZ, prezidiálne spisy, box. 21, inv. no. 905, sign. 1689/41 prez.; box. 85, inv. no. 3329, sign. 31/45-prez.

⁶⁸ ŠA PO, OLS PO; box. 16, kat. no. 277, sign. Tľud 67/45.

⁶⁹ ŠA PO, OÚ PO, box. 97, sign. 54/1942; box. 98, sign. 6794/1942.

⁷⁰ ŠA PO, OLS PO, box. 16, kat. no. 277, sign. Tľud 67/45.

⁷¹ ŠA PO, OLS PO, box. 16, kat. no. 277, sign. Tľud 67/45.

⁷² The main hearing with Štefan Greguška took place on November 29, 1945, at the District People's Court in Prešov. ŠA PO, OLS PO, box. 16, kat. no. 277, sign. Tľud 67/45.

In practice, however, the decision-making mechanism for approving nominees for these posts was influenced more by political criteria and the applicants' political profiles than by their professional and qualification criteria. Nominees obtained these lucrative positions mainly thanks to protectionism, personal contacts and family relationships or their active involvement in the HSL'S and HG. Subsequently, abuses of office, corrupt behaviour, arbitrary manipulation of Jewish property and personal enrichment became commonplace, and the regime did little to prevent this. There are many cases at the district and municipal levels, such as those of Štefan Sabol and Štefan Greguška, which demonstrate that, depending on the degree of cooperation or collaboration with the regime and personal contacts, civil servants and representatives of the bureaucratic apparatus were allowed to benefit personally from the process of Aryanization and climb the social ladder.

9. From Local Policeman to Mass Murderer – A Case Study of the Nyilas Perpetrators of the Holocaust in the Slovak-Hungarian Border Region*

Veronika Szeghy-Gayer

This chapter explores the life trajectory of a police detective, Dénes Várkony (1911–1985), who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of his fellow citizens in Košice in 1944–1945 during the terror of the Hungarian pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party led by Ferenc Szálasi. Born into a prominent burgher family and later dubbed “the bloody murderer of Košice”,¹ Várkony started his career in interwar Czechoslovakia as a talented young jazz pianist. After Košice was ceded to Hungary in the first Vienna Arbitration in November 1938, Várkony joined the political department of the Hungarian Royal Police Captainty. In October 1944, after the takeover of the Arrow Cross Party, he remained in his position and took part in most of the mass executions organized by the Hungarian police and the paramilitary forces of the Nyilas.² Additionally, he was one of the key organizers of the deportations of hundreds of Košice citizens – including but not limited to Jews and Roma – via the Komárno transport route to the German extermination camps at the beginning of November 1944.

After the end of the war, Várkony became one of the most wanted war criminals in Czechoslovakia. In July 1945, repatriates returning to Košice from the German extermination camps spotted him in Welden, the city to which he had fled after the evacuation of Košice on January 18th 1945. As many as 27 people testified against him

* This chapter was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under no. APVV-23-0418 The Holocaust and its Aftermath in the Territory of Southern Slovakia, 1938-1948.

¹ “Pôvodca košických masových vrážd vo Welden?,” *Národná obroda*, July 28, 1945, 3.

² The Arrow Cross Party (in Hungarian Nyilaskeresztes Párt) was the most popular of the right-wing extremist movements in Hungary before and during WWII. Its symbol became the arrow cross, in Hungarian *nyilaskereszt*, based on which party members were colloquially known as Nyilas. In mid-October 1944, the Nyilas forcibly seized power in Hungary, including the territory of present-day southern Slovakia and Košice, introduced terror and renewed deportations to the German concentration camps.

in the subsequent trials conducted by the Czechoslovak authorities.³ According to the communists who had come into contact with him in 1943, Várkoly was a sadistic interrogator whom witnesses described as a monster: “He was not a human being. He was a monstrous creature in a human body;”⁴ “he was the most despicable dog in Košice;”⁵ “the ultimate sadist”.⁶ Dezider Roják, a member of the communist resistance who later became head of the Institute of History of the Communist Party in Slovakia, described Várkoly as a detective “whose appearance resembled that of a rat.”⁷ However, the communists were not the only ones with less than fond memories of Várkoly. Anton Harčar, a Roman-Catholic priest and chairman of the Slovak Catholic Circle who was arrested in November 1944, referred to Várkoly as one of the key organizers of the murders perpetrated shortly before the end of the war.⁸ Jozef Mihók, who worked for the Bauernebls, a local entrepreneurial family, testified as follows: “That flat-footed Nyilas police captain who inflicted martyrdom upon the people of Košice even managed to set foot on Australian soil – the country where he allegedly settled down along with several of his friends. Here’s my point: what a shame his car just missed one of the landmines as he was fleeing our city on January 18th. In my view that would be the appropriate punishment not only for him but also for his comrades after the war.”⁹ Last but not least, even members of Várkoly’s own family also distanced themselves from him. His sister referred to him as a scoundrel who “... had to flee in January [1945] because he worked at the police and was a Nyilas”.¹⁰

Despite the fact that Várkoly undoubtedly played a key role in the Nyilas terror in Košice, little research has been conducted into his biography within the context of modern studies of the Hungarian Arrow Cross movement in the reannexed territories.¹¹ This can be explained by the fact that the history of southern Slovakia, including Košice after the Vienna Arbitration, remains an overlooked aspect of Slovak historiography; the majority of published work on the topic are concerned with the national-territorial principle and therefore tend to focus exclusively on the history of the Slovak state or nation. As a result, little is known about the lives and motivations of the majority of the

key Nyilas followers from the territory. What were their childhoods like? How did their social backgrounds shape their lives? How did they react to the formation of Czechoslovakia? Why did they decide – at a specific moment of their life – to join the ranks of a murderous regime?

The main aim of this investigation is not only to explore the personal trajectory of Dénes Várkoly but also to provide a better understanding of the dramatic transformation from upright burgher to brutal killer within the geographical and political context of the Slovak-Hungarian border region. This chapter argues that the motives of the non-German perpetrators of the Holocaust, such as the members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, can be explained by a variety of circumstances influenced by family background and education, but also by the political and border changes that took place during the lifetime of this particular police detective.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REMARKS AND SOURCES

Slovak Marxist writers who examined the second trial of the leading Nyilas perpetrator in Košice, László Darabos, in 1959 aimed to highlight the “brutality of the Szálasi regime:”¹² and – in line with contemporary interpretations – argued that the Nyilas represented the “concentrated essence of all evil and monstrosity”. Understandably, there was neither an academic nor a political willingness to explore the issue in more detail in this period, but a collection of interviews with twenty imprisoned members of the Arrow Cross Party was published in Hungary in the years after WWII titled *The Fascist Souls (Fasiszta lelkek)* which aimed to find answers to exactly some of those questions that also arise in the research into Várkoly.¹³ Although the interviews are marked by several inconsistencies, with the authors themselves (the journalist Rezső Szirmai and the psychoanalyst Pál Gartner) admitting that in some cases, the words of the prisoners had been stylized “for the sake of readability”,¹⁴ this pioneering work should be regarded as the earliest attempt to gain an understanding of the complexities of the personal characters of the members of the Nyilas movement from a psychoanalytical perspective.

The effort to understand the motivations of ordinary killers is not a new issue in international Holocaust scholarship, and research conducted to date has largely dismissed the thesis that the perpetrators were exceptional pathological killers.¹⁵ Over recent decades, several new publications have addressed the question of the ordinary perpetrators of the Holocaust from the perspective of social psychology, concentrating on the

¹² Ladislav Olexa and Vladimír Vipler, *V tieni šípových krížov* (Košice: Krajský dom osvety, 1959), 7.

¹³ Rezső Szirmai, *Fasiszta lelkek: pszichoanalitikus beszélgetések a háborús főbűnösökkel a börtönben* (Budapest: Faust, 1946).

¹⁴ László Karsai, “Gyilkosok és cinkosok,” in Szirmai, *Fasiszta lelkek*, 284.

¹⁵ See, for example, the summary of on Holocaust historiography provided by Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann: Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, “Perpetrators of the Holocaust: a Historiography,” in *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 25–54.

³ Štátny archív v Košiciach (hereinafter ŠA KE), fund Ludový súd v Košiciach (hereinafter LKE), folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly.

⁴ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 3. Svedok Ján Režucha, Zápisnica o výsluhu svedkov napísaná dňa 29. novembra 1947.

⁵ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 30. Svedok Mikuláš Kovál, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 7. júl 1948.

⁶ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 34. Svedok Michal Vaško, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 7. jún 1948.

⁷ Dezider Roják, *60 rokov prostým vojákom strany* (Košice: Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1981), 69.; See also Dezső Roják, *Akik nem hajtottak fejet. Dél-Szlovákia kommunistáinak illegális harca a Horthy-fasiszmus ellen (1938-1945)*, (Bratislava: Politikai Könyvkiadó, 1963), 121.

⁸ Anton Harčar, *Žil som v Košiciach* (Košice: VIENALA, 2008), 265.

⁹ Jozef Mihók, *Spomienky – Egy család és egy korszak története* (Košice: strojopis, súkromný majetok, 1993), 50–51.

¹⁰ Information provided by Sámuel Papp who was the neighbor of the Várkoly family in the 1990s and who donated the legacy of the Várkoly family to the Košice City Archives (Budapest, March 28th, 2023).

¹¹ Interestingly, Vojtech Kárpát’s 2008 study on the personal background of a group of far-right political organizations active in Košice does not even mention Dénes Várkoly: Vojtech Kárpát, “Strana šípových krížov v Košiciach (1939-1945).” *Pamät národa* 5, no. 3 (2008): 17–32. Moreover, no reference was made to Dénes Várkoly in the case of the war criminal named László Csatóy which resurfaced in 2012–2013.

mentality of national socialists and shifting the focus from the Nazi elite to the perpetrators of ordinary mass murders.¹⁶ This research trend has given scholars the impetus to “explain the social psychological reasons for why these seemingly ordinary Germans turned to Nazism. These ideas appear to contrast the earlier works on the subject which more often attributed Nazi behavior to innate explanations of insanity and psychopathic natures of the individuals.”¹⁷

In this chapter, I intend to reconstruct the life of Dénes Várkoly based on archival records and references from the contemporary press with a special focus on his career as a civil servant in the Hungarian public administration in Košice in the aftermath of the First Vienna Arbitration. Additionally, the study will also draw upon personal documents recovered from the Várkoly family of Košice that were recently donated to the collection of the Košice City Archives. Although we accept that the lack of any surviving autobiographical writings by Várkoly and the insufficiencies of the sources used in this study mean that it is not possible to provide a comprehensive psychological profile of Várkoly and his personality,¹⁸ these newly uncovered documents nonetheless allow us to establish the post-war fate of the former police officer beyond doubt and confirm that he emigrated to Australia in August 1949, where he remained in contact with his relatives living in Budapest until his death decades later.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY CAREER IN THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

Born in Košice on 30th March 1911 as the oldest son of Elek Várkoly and Lívia Krantz, Dénes Várkoly grew up in a respected Lutheran family. Both Várkoly’s grand-grandfather and grandfather belonged to one of the oldest families of the Košice middle-class and made their living as butchers. His mother, Lívia Krantz (1888–1970), was of noble descent, while János Várkoly, the brother of Dénes Várkoly’s grandfather, was an active member of Košice’s business community, operating the fashion store Koch und Várkoly which he co-owned with Lajos Koch (later Kemény) from 1872 onwards.¹⁹ His maternal grandfather Béla Krantz was a teacher at a local burgher school.

Várkoly’s father Elek followed the footsteps of his uncle, running the family business on Košice’s main street,²⁰ but the enterprise fell victim to post-war inflation and was de-

clared bankrupt. He later worked for a company named Vulkán which was based in the premises of his former store. In the meantime, he became one of the founding members and representative of the newly established Land Christian Socialist Party (in Hungarian Országos Keresztényszocialista Párt) and he served as a member of the city’s municipal council from 1920 to 1927. Elek was also an active member of a civic association of veterans of the Great War; he had served as a lieutenant of the 34th Infantry Regiment and had been wounded several times (as had his younger brother Miklós).²¹ It was also a matter of public knowledge that Elek suffered from mental problems,²² and it is not unreasonable to assume that these might have resulted from his wartime injuries; in 1926 he was found unconscious in a forest near Košice having overdosed on pills but fortunately he was transported to a hospital in time to save his life.²³

While Várkoly’s younger siblings attended the Hungarian classes of the Czechoslovak Gymnasium in Košice, Dénes enrolled at the Franz Joseph High School (in Hungarian Ferenc József Nevelőintézet) in Budapest, although he only completed a few academic years there.²⁴ Nonetheless, the stringent atmosphere of the post-Trianon Hungary school system must have had a considerable impact on the personal development of the young boy from Košice. No evidence of Várkoly’s school leaving exam is available, but his limited education would have been no obstacle to his subsequent employment in the police. In general, however, information about his education is also missing in his post-war records which limit themselves to the statement that “he made a living as a musician”,²⁵ and most of the communists who testified against him in 1947 claimed that he was making a living as a pianist in the workers’ choir in Košice during the interwar period. According to their testimonies, the young Dénes was more likely to be seen in communist circles than anywhere else in this period.²⁶ This may seem, at least prima facie, somewhat contradictory given the fact that by 1944 he had emerged as one of the key right-wing extremists in the country. However, some scholars, such as the historian László Borhi, disagree with this interpretation, noting several examples of such ambivalence associated with the period of the Nyilas terror in Budapest: “One could think of many different reasons why people decided to join the Nyilas movement at that time – whether it was the prevailing anti-Semitic atmosphere, the ideology of national socialism, anti-capitalism, hatred against the ‘old regime’, peer pressure, soli-

¹⁶ See the key work of Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solutions in Poland* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

¹⁷ Taylor Pieper, “Perceptions of the Nazi Mind: Psychological Theories, 1940’s – Present” (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2013), 27, accessed January 28, 2024, <https://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/66549/PieperSpring2013.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

¹⁸ Várkoly’s only surviving writings are a short report he wrote about a scout retreat in Nové Zámky in 1940 and one article focusing on the history and activities of the Hungarian scout team named Alvinczi which he co-founded.

¹⁹ György Kerekes, *A kassai kereskedők életéből harmadfélszázad 1867-1913* (Budapest: Országos Iparegyesület, 1913), 234.

²⁰ György Kerekes, *A kassai kereskedők*, 47.

²¹ Elemér Madarász, ed., *Magyar politikai és közigazgatási compass: 1919-1939* (Budapest: Magyar Politikai és Közigazgatási Compass Kiadóvállalat, 1940), 733.

²² Archív mesta Košice (hereinafter AMK), fund Košice mesto s municipiálnym zriadením 1939-1944 (hereinafter KE MMZ), box 126, folder 37509, Osobný spis Antala Hutlasza, B 6800/18 1939.

²³ “Egy kassai kereskedőt mérgezési tünetek között szállítottak be a téhányi mezőről a kórházba,” *Kassai Újság*, August 18, 1926, 4.

²⁴ Alajos Pongrácz, ed., *A Magyar Kir. Ferencz József Nevelőintézet XL. Értésítője az 1928/29. évről* (Budapest: Ferenc József Nevelőintézet Igazgatósága, 1929), 20.

²⁵ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 3. Svedok Ján Režucha, Zápisnica o výsluhu svedkov napísaná dňa 29. novembra 1947.

²⁶ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 3. Svedok Ján Režucha, Zápisnica o výsluhu svedkov napísaná dňa 29. novembra 1947.; ŠA KE, f. LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 5. Svedok František Kotai, Zápisnica o výsluhu svedkov napísaná dňa 29. novembra 1947.

parity, ambition, social mobility, looting, material benefits or the release from military obligations – either individually or all mixed together.”²⁷ Similarly, many scholars who have examined local collaboration in Eastern European countries have revealed similar motivations among perpetrators; for example, Martin Dean pointed out that the different forms of anti-Semitism “were buttressed by more mundane concerns, such as personal greed, careerism, anti-communism, peer pressure and even alcoholism”.²⁸ In fact, almost all of these characteristics can be observed in the case of Dénes Várkoly.

According to the Hungarian psychologist Zsuzsanna Kiss, the destructive nature of the experiences in the early stages of Várkoly’s life (such as his brutal father or his excessive bonds to his long-suffering and benevolent mother) appear to be the dominant drivers behind his affinity toward the extreme savagery of the Nazi regime.²⁹ Little is known about his mother, but his father was known to be 75% disabled; he fought in World War I and suffered from various mental problems, but at the same time he belonged to a well-established class of businessmen and political figures in Košice. It is possible that all of this may have had an impact on the development of Várkoly’s psyche. Anton Harčar also noted that Várkoly had a physical defect and was visibly “limping”,³⁰ and this appears to be corroborated by his personal records from 1947 which state that he was “visibly falling onto his knees” and also that he “sometimes stuttered.”³¹ This may also point to some kind of childhood trauma, and we therefore cannot rule out the possibility that his family background may played a role or even, to some extent, may have predetermined Várkoly’s decision to pursue the career of a police officer. Indeed, his criminal records from 1948 state that he had enrolled for military service as early as the interwar period, during the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic.

Prior to 1939, however, there were few signs that Várkoly was planning a career as a policeman, since he seemed to be driven solely by his ambition to become a musician. The name of the young talented pianist Várkoly appears quite frequently in the interwar local press. He was not only the church cantor in the German and Hungarian Lutheran Church, but in the 1930s he also founded his own jazz band³² which performed regularly performed at various social events.³³ He followed modern musical trends of his time and composed his own songs and other music pieces. In November 1934 he earned considerable acclaim with his melodic tango titled *Letagadom, hogy szeretem (I Deny*

That I Love Her) which featured lyrics written by the Košice poet István Dokupil. According to some sources, the song was also considered for release by a concert agency from Budapest.³⁴ The same year he also performed with his band at a charity event,³⁵ while in the 1930s he played at various church concerts of the Lutheran Circle³⁶ and also at the ball of Hungarian Lutherans in Košice.³⁷

In addition to his student years in Budapest, Várkoly’s worldview was also shaped by his participation in the Scout Movement. In 1926, following his return from Budapest, the young Várkoly founded the Hungarian scout group Alvinczi, which was part of the Lutheran community in Košice and became the leader of a group of youngsters from prominent Lutheran families, including his sister Lívia. The activity of the scout group was banned by the Czechoslovak authorities but this was revoked in the spring of 1938. After the First Vienna Arbitration in November 1938, Várkoly’s scout group was assigned to patrol the building of the police headquarters – the very premises that would later serve as his office. At the solemn ceremony on the occasion of the visit of regent Miklós Horthy to Košice, crowds were cheering on Košice’s Main Street.³⁸ By this time, Várkoly had already been married for two years to Mária Lindtner (1916–2008). Their son was born a year later in 1939, and his daughter in November 1944, amidst the greatest excesses of the Nyilas terror.

AN OFFICER OF THE HUNGARIAN ROYAL POLICE CAPTAINCY

In the months following the Vienna Arbitration, the 28-year old Várkoly continued to perform at various events and was also the organist at Lutheran services which were also broadcast on the radio. In the same period, his father Elek organized civic patrols in Košice which involved up to 1,600 members;³⁹ it seems likely that he perceived the annexation of Košice to Hungary as appropriate compensation for his legitimate and also his subjectively perceived grievances. Elek was an ardent supporter of Horthy’s regime. In 1939, he was designated deputy chairman of the HONSZ association (National Association of War Veterans, Widows and Orphans). In 1941, as a member of the Party of Hungarian Life,⁴⁰ he formulated a successful proposal to banish Beneš from the list

²⁷ László Borhi, *A túlélés stratégiái. Élet és halál a náci és kommunista diktatúrákban 1944–1945* (Budapest: Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2022), 224.; Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, “Perpetrators of the Holocaust: a Historiography.”

²⁸ See, for example, Martin Dean, “Local Collaboration in the Holocaust in Eastern Europe,” in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 128.

²⁹ Zsuzsanna Kiss, “A gonosz nyomában. A náciizmus lélektani magyarázatai,” *BUKSZ* 23, no. 1 (2011): 37–48.

³⁰ ŠA KE, fund Michal Potemra, box 93, folder 171, Zpráva Dr. Antona Harčara o internovaní v novembri r. 1944

³¹ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 6. Popis osoby.

³² “A helybeli ág. hitv. ev,” *Kassai Újság*, December 8, 1933, 4.

³³ For example, he played at the dance events organized by one of the Košice tourist clubs: “A Košicei Turista Kör,” *Kassai Újság*, February 5, 1933, 7.

³⁴ “Várkoly Dénes, a fiatal košicei jazz-karmester,” *Kassai Újság*, November 25, 1934, 13.

³⁵ “A košicei Evangélikus Diakonissza Nőegylet,” *Kassai Újság*, December 1, 1934, 4.

³⁶ “A kassai evangélikus Luther-kör,” *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, November 21, 1937, 11.

³⁷ “A legszebb sikerrel zajlott le a Kassai Evangélikus Bál,” *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, March 3, 1938, 4.

³⁸ Várkoly, Dénes, “16 éves a kassai evangélikus Alvinczi cserkészcsapat,” *Evangélikus Őszi Értesítő*, October 10, 1942, 21–24.

³⁹ Elemér Madarász, ed., *Magyar politikai*, 733.

⁴⁰ The name of the government party that was established on March 7th, 1939 as the legal successor of the Party of National Unity by merging the Hungarian Movement for Life into the government party. In the spring of 1940, the Upper Hungarian Party (Felvidéki Magyar Párt), in which Hungarian politicians from the former Czechoslovakia, including Elek Várkoly, were also involved, merged into the Party of Hungarian Life (Magyar Élet Pártja).

of honorary citizens of Košice.⁴¹ Elek's brother Miklós was also appointed by the Hungarian Minister of Interior as a member of the Košice municipal council in this period.⁴²

Elek Várkony was enjoying considerable personal success on other fronts, too. He founded the Árpád vinegar factory which operated until the end of WWII as part of the Hungarian HANGYA cooperative association.⁴³ The factory employed practically the entire family with the exception of Dénes who had now started to develop his career at the police as a trainee detective in late 1939 and early 1940.⁴⁴ It is difficult to establish the motives which may have led a young free-spirited bohemian to join the police force. Why did he choose to become a police officer? Was it a hunger for power? Or the ambition to attain a higher social status? Did he want to prove something to himself? Was it a question of social mobility or perhaps anger directed at the former Czechoslovak regime? We can only speculate about his actual motives but there is little doubt that the new position allowed him to provide for his family and secured certain social status and, for that matter, power within the authoritarian regime of Miklós Horthy. After settling down in his new position he continued to play at the church and remained involved in the Scout Movement.⁴⁵ In addition to this, he was able to transition smoothly from the bohemian lifestyle of a musician to the stringent daily schedule of a Hungarian state police officer.

After some time Várkony was temporarily transferred to Nové Zámky, where he attended a scout retreat on the occasion of inauguration of the local water station. The event was covered in the local press where he wrote a short report that might give us some idea about Várkony's personality: "I take my uniform from the wardrobe, put it on, jump on the bicycle and never forget to strap my camera around my neck..."⁴⁶ (one report from November 1943 related to compulsory courses for detectives states: "Dénes Várkony has extensive experience with photography and similar activities."⁴⁷) The story continues: "In this scout team, I do not see any party politics at all nor any intention to bring down the commander whatsoever. What I see is Hungarian devotion and unwavering trust in the leader.... Yes, with this kind of Hungarian spirit you can not only build a water station; you can build, expand and preserve your country. Behold my Hungarian brothers and learn comradeship from the scouts of Nové Zámky."⁴⁸ One can hardly overlook the affinity of some of the keywords and slogans he used to those espoused by

contemporary right-wing movements (commander, leader, trust, preserve your country). However, the ideological background of the Scout Movement was certainly not enough to transform him into a mass murderer.

Dénes Várkony returned from Nové Zámky to Košice in April 1941,⁴⁹ and the following year he was appointed as a police detective in his hometown.⁵⁰ Initially he was assigned cases of minor significance such as the investigation of a shoemaker accused of price gouging⁵¹ or the case of Zoltán Glück, a businessman involved in selling stolen tyres.⁵² Later, Várkony became more and more involved in police raids to secure public order which usually started at 9 pm. During those raids, the police had the authority to examine the identity of hundreds of citizens in one fell swoop. By May 1942, Várkony was already in charge of organizing these raids.⁵³ The police usually targeted military desertors, individuals staying in the city under false documentation or foreigners. A strong emphasis was placed on identifying members of the proscribed communist movement, and therefore public places such as transport terminals and their surrounding and hotels received particular attention. In one case, for instance, the police identified a certain Márton Zimmer who was staying at Hotel Bristol; he was then transferred to the 21st Infantry Regiment because he was unable to prove his identity and provide relevant documents to substantiate his release from his compulsory Jewish forced labour unit (munkaszolgálat).⁵⁴ The police raids were often carried out in quarters populated by the Roma minority who were forced to undergo disinfection processes. As is apparent from the presented examples, the Košice police detectives spent much of their duties in the field, spending little time on office work.

In 1943 Várkony was assigned to lead a group of investigators in a case against a Jewish businessman,⁵⁵ but there is some evidence that suggests that this may be one of the rare occasions on which Várkony actually appeared to help someone. Sándor Újváry, a writer of Jewish origin, ran a printing business in Košice during the war and worked closely with the left-wing resistance movement. In his memoirs Újváry mentions that he had concealed his Jewish origins in his personal records.⁵⁶ When Várkony uncovered this, he instructed Újváry "to disappear from Košice to Budapest".

Based on the allegations outlined below, however, it is clear that Várkony was routinely abusing his authority even prior to the period of the Nyilas terror. In autumn 1943, a detachment of the Košice police authorities under Várkony's command arrested 75

⁴¹ "Benest törlik Kassa diszpolgárai sorából," *Függetlenség*, October 22, 1941, 2.

⁴² AMK, KE MMZ, folder 4. Kassa sz. kir. város törvényhatósági bizottságának 1939. évi május hó 4. napján tartott rendes gyűlésében tárgyalt ügyekről.

⁴³ Szilárd Pártos, *A magyar gyáripar évkönyve és címtára* (Budapest: Stúdió Sajtóvállalat, 1941), 248.

⁴⁴ Belügyi Közlöny, January 14, 1940, 118.

⁴⁵ "Tisztújító gyűlést tartott a Cserkészsövetség kassai kerülete," *Felvidéki Újság*, March 11, 1942, 6.; "Sebesült honvédek az evangélikus nőegylet szeretet-asztalánál," *Felvidéki Újság*, October 15, 1942, 3.

⁴⁶ Dénes Várkony, "Az érsekújvári 116. számú Czuczor Gergely cs. csapat viziraja vizitelep-, csónakavatást és ünnepélyes fogadalmótételt tart a Nyitra partján a város által adományozott telepén," *Magyar Cserkész*, August 15, 1940, 20.

⁴⁷ ŠA KE, fund Maďarský kráľovský policajný kapitanát v Košiciach 1938-1944 (hereinafter MKPK KE), box 16, folder 2257, Detektívek kiképzése a kriminalisztikai eszközök használatában.

⁴⁸ Dénes Várkony, "Az érsekújvári," 20.

⁴⁹ "Áthelyezések," *Magyar Rendőr*, April 15, 1941, 109.

⁵⁰ "Főkapitányhelyettesé neveztek ki a felszabadult Kassa rendőrségének első vezetőjét," *Felvidéki Újság*, July 14, 1942, 7.

⁵¹ "Felmentették az árdrágítással vádolt Ungvárszky Márton kassai cipészt," *Felvidéki Újság*, December 19, 1941, 2.

⁵² "Elfogták a sorozatos autógumi lopások tetteseit," *Felvidéki Újság*, January 7, 1942, 2.

⁵³ ŠA KE, MKPK KE, box 9, Policajné razie 1942, Az 1942. évi május hó 30-án 21^h-tól 24^h-ig megtartott általános közbiztonsági razia alkalmával előállították egyének névsora. V. csoport.; ŠA KE, MKPK KE, box 9, Detektívtestület, Jelentés, Kassa, 1942 június 27.

⁵⁴ ŠA KE, MKPK KE, box 12, folder 1280, Jelentés, Kassa, 1943. január hó 28.

⁵⁵ "Még egy bújkáló Rubint fogott el a kassai rendőrség," *Felvidéki Újság*, July 30, 1943, 6.

⁵⁶ Sándor Újváry, *Rövidzárlat Magyarországon. Naplótöredékek 1943-1944* (München: Újváry "Griff", 1980), 22.

members of the illegal communist movement. Several detainees later testified in 1947 that they had been subjected to brutal harassment.⁵⁷ The arrests targeting the communists which took place in autumn 1943 were part of a broader crackdown on the leaders of the illegal communist movement such as Pavol Tonhauser.⁵⁸ As part of the campaign, a similar level of brutality was applied during the interrogation of Dezider Roják⁵⁹ who later documented his experience in his memoirs. The brutality of the Hungarian police was not only reported independently by individual detainees, but it is also supported by testimonies unrelated to Várkoly's trial.⁶⁰ At the end of 1943 Várkoly was awarded the Cross of National Defence, most likely in recognition of his successful investigations.⁶¹

LOCAL POLICEMAN IN THE LOGISTICS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Despite Várkoly's supposed transfer to the Uzhhorod Police Command in 1944 which was reported by the Uzhhorod daily *Kárpáti Magyar Hírlap*,⁶² he probably remained in Košice even after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19th 1944, as he was in charge of the investigation of at least two cases in Košice during that period. One of these cases was an investigation related to food smuggling in the Jewish ghetto (more than 14,000 Jews were concentrated in the two camps of the Brick Factory), while the other concerned issues of "Jewish property".⁶³ Várkoly's presence in Košice during that period is also attested to by Irena Pasternáková who was arrested and interrogated by Várkoly himself in March 1944.⁶⁴ Based on the evidence it can be inferred that Várkoly was actively involved in the deportation of the Košice Jewry. In the meantime, he not only collaborated in the mass killing of local Jews but also profited from the Aryanization of Jewish property. On October 5th 1944, he was appointed guardian of the house of a Jewish woman, the wife of Hermann Pollák, who had been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.⁶⁵ At that time, the process of transfer of approximately 2100 "Jewish flats" and more than 600 business permits with non-Jews had already been underway since April 1944. This also included other properties such

as industrial premises and factories previously owned by Jewish citizens.⁶⁶ The main purpose of introducing the position of guardianship as a form of institutionalized oversight of property was to ensure that the property of the deported Jews was administered and controlled by trusted persons. Therefore, most of the guardians (86%) appointed by the Finance Directorate in Košice were civil servants⁶⁷ who were able to benefit from such appointment. Based on the scheme, 5% of the rental income went to the guardians who were obliged to transfer the remaining percentage to an account held at one of the state-controlled financial institutions, but the account had to be registered in the name of the original owner.⁶⁸ The question remains of to what extent – if at all – civil servants were in a position to refuse such an assignment or whether some of them accepted the task under duress or out of fear. In the case of Várkoly, however, it is difficult to imagine any ideological objection or moral restraint that would have prevented him from taking on such an assignment: the property of the wife of Hermann Pollák was located just a few meters from his own house.

HENCHMAN OF TERROR

As a result of the Nyilas takeover of power on October 15-16 1944, appointed officers began to engage in indiscriminate acts of terror regardless of the threat of the approaching Red Army. These atrocities were also carried out without any official order from a higher-ranked authority in Budapest. The position of the Nyilas government commissioner and county leader (in Hungarian főispán – megyevezető) responsible for the Abov-Turňa County was taken by Gábor Gyarmathy, a former circus performer who had joined the military in 1944 only to return to Košice in October of the same year.⁶⁹ László Darabos, the local party leader of the Nyilas had formerly worked in a factory run by the Poledniak company. Dénes Várkoly joined the party as late as in October 1944, but some testimonies indicate that he may have been a member of the party earlier⁷⁰ or was, at the very least, a silent supporter of Ferenc Szálasi.⁷¹ It is likely, however, that the latter case was true; the activities of the Arrow Cross Party were banned several

⁵⁷ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly.

⁵⁸ Pál Tonhauser (1909-1984) was a member of the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party during WWII. He was arrested in September 1943 and later survived two concentration camps. After the war, he lived in Czechoslovakia and held various party positions.

⁵⁹ Desider Roják, *60 rokov prostým*, 69.

⁶⁰ Vladimír Vipler, *Príspevok k dejinám okupovaného územia juhovýchodného Slovenska, 1938-1944* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1963), 128.

⁶¹ "A Nemzetvédelmi Kereszt új tulajdonosai," *Felvidéki Újság*, January 4, 1944, 3.

⁶² "(A m. kir. Belügyminiszter)," *Kárpáti Magyar Hírlap*, February 22, 1944, 3.

⁶³ ŠA KE, MKPK KE, box 17, folder 4736, Jelentés, Kassa, 1944. június hó 12.-én; ŠA KE, MKPK KE, box 18, folder 4797, Jelentés, Kassa, 1944. május hó 23.-án.

⁶⁴ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 7. júna 1948.

⁶⁵ AMK, KE MMZ, box 201, folder 40743/944, Pollák Hermanné zárgondnok kirendelése.

⁶⁶ See in more detail here: László Csósz and Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, "Petitioners of Jewish Property in Košice: A Case Study on the Holocaust and Local Society in a Slovak-Hungarian Border Region," *Mesto a Dejiny* 10, no. 1 (2021): 75-101.

⁶⁷ So far, 88 such files have been identified, and in 76 cases a public employee was appointed as guardian. In AMK, KE MMZ, boxes 195, 201, 203-210; AMK, fund Národný výbor mesta Košice 1945-1948 (hereinafter Nv KE), boxes 85-88.

⁶⁸ László Csósz and Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, *Mapping the tragedy of the Jews in Košice (1944)* (Košice: Spoločensko-vedný ústav CSPV SAV, v.v.i., 2023), 18.

⁶⁹ Budapest Főváros Levéltára (hereinafter BFL), fund Budapesti Népgyűzség, 81068 – 1949 Gyarmathy Gábor.

⁷⁰ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 35. Svedkovia Alžbeta Koreňová a Arpád Koreň, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 7. júna 1948.

⁷¹ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkoly, 30. Svedok Mikuláš Kovál, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 7. júl 1948.

times (for instance in the summer of 1944), and it would have been imprudent for Várkony to reveal his affinity to the Nyilas movement. There were no such compunctions once the Nyilas party were in power, and it was not uncommon for police officers in other cities to be granted additional powers once they enrolled into the party and swore an oath of loyalty to the Nyilas government.⁷² Unlike his colleagues in the top ranks of the party who were recruited from lower social strata, Várkony came from a prominent and respected family and was a reasonably well-known local figure.

The acts of terror perpetrated in Košice during the three months in which the Arrow Cross Party were in power came to light in the testimonies presented during the court proceedings in 1947 and 1948. Most of the evidence covers the executions which took place on the Main Street in Košice and in the vicinity of the Ťahanovce tunnel, and for the most part, they come from the testimonies of the communists. This material is supplemented by the recollections of other citizens living in Košice at that time such as Anton Harčár, the Roman-Catholic priest mentioned above, who provided the following account of the detective from Košice: “G. Gyarmathy, L. Darabos and Várkony were among the Nyilas leaders who exceeded greatly in acts of intimidation and terrorist crimes”.⁷³ Konrád Glatz, an attorney from Košice who had been Várkony’s schoolmate in Budapest and who had engaged in illegal communist activities during World War II was arrested in October 1944 by followers of Nyilas. In his testimony, he described his encounter with Várkony as follows: “They brought me to the police station where I was picked up, or accepted if you will, by my former schoolmate Dionýz Várkony. He told me he was really sorry but he had had to arrest me because my name was on the blacklist prepared by the Nyilas party which had already been sent to Budapest.”⁷⁴

Based on the information from the file of László Tost, who was assassinated by the Nyilas in the Čermel valley on January 3rd 1945, it can be concluded that Várkony must have been informed about the preparations for the murder of the former mayor of Košice. Štefan Krešňák, an officer of the police directorate from 1941 assigned to the crime reporting department, testified: “... I heard the detectives Várkony, Lipták and Lukáč talking to each other and one of them said, ‘If you shot him then you didn’t shoot well enough, you should have shot him dead’. I can’t tell for sure who exactly said those words but based on the tonality of his voice it must have been Lipták.”⁷⁵

More research is needed to determine how Várkony was perceived by his colleagues in the upper echelons of the police. According to some testimonies, he behaved as if he was omnipotent, and one witness referred to him as the deputy of Gyarmathy, the

county leader.⁷⁶ In contrast, there is sufficient evidence that Várkony and members of his family fled Košice as private individuals and not as part of the official Nyilas evacuation of the city which took place on January 18th 1945.⁷⁷

THE END OF HIS CAREER AND POST-WAR ESCAPE

By as early as July 1945, the whereabouts of Dénes Várkony were known to the Slovak National Council: he had been spotted in Welden, Bavaria by repatriates returning from concentration camps.⁷⁸ According to one source he stayed there until December 28th 1945.⁷⁹ In December 1947, the Košice subsidiary of the state police was only aware that he “...is allegedly staying in Szikszó, Hungary, under a false name and is allegedly running a wood processing business”.⁸⁰ By that time, a prosecution had already been launched in Košice, and four witnesses who had been active in the communist movement during the war had already made statements. In May 1948, the head of the subsidiary of the state police in Košice resumed the investigation “into the matter of treason by Déneš Várkony” based on testimonies of another 23 witnesses who testified against him mainly in respect of the deportation to Komárno in November 1944 and the killings at the Ťahanovce tunnel. The head of the subsidiary also informed the prosecuting attorney that Várkony had been arrested on May 22nd 1948 in Budapest but had later been released by the Hungarian authorities, an event which can be inferred from the note verbale presented to the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs by the Consulate General of the Czechoslovak Republic dated December 9th 1948. Thus, Várkony was released despite having several charges filed against him in Hungary. On June 2nd 1948 the (Czechoslovak) Association of Anti-Fascist Political Prisoners and Illegal Workers telegraphed a request to the Hungarian Ministry of Interior requesting that Várkony be held in custody for longer but the Hungarian authorities responded that the information provided by the Association was incorrect, and as a result, Várkony faced prosecution in Hungary only after being released from custody. Another two witnesses would subsequently testify against him.⁸¹

Várkony had once again managed to escape justice. He fled Europe via Butzbach, Germany and Naples, Italy on August 30th 1949 and set sail for Australia, with his

⁷² ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkony, 34. Svedok Mária Dubská, rod. Vantuchová, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 4. jún 1948.

⁷³ AMK, Nv KE, box 31, folder 6338/945, Nyilaši – evakuácia.

⁷⁴ “Pôvodca košických masových vrážd vo Weldene?” *Národná obroda*, July 28, 1945, 3.

⁷⁵ Denes Várkony in the Free Access: Europe, Registration of Foreigners and German Persecutees, 1939 – 1947, accessed January 28, 2024: https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/5887656:61758?tid=&pid=&query-Id=4d76d97e9ca835755a91455c37f3ce5a&_phsrc=wue1&_phstart=successSource.

⁷⁶ ŠA KE, LKE, folder Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkony, 3. decembra 1947. 662/47 Udanie.

⁷⁷ ŠA KE, LKE, Tk. 372/48 Dionýz Várkony, Odpis, Szóbeli jegyzék, Budapest, 1948. december 9.

⁷² See, for example, Krisztián Varga, ed., *Wayand Tibor fogságában írt visszaemlékezései* (Budapest: Kronosz Kiadó, 2019).

⁷³ Harčár, *Žil som*, 265, 269.

⁷⁴ ŠA KE, fund Okresný ľudový súd v Košiciach (hereinafter OLS), box 35, folder 560/46 Ladislav Darabos, 101. Svedok dr. Konrád Glatz.

⁷⁵ ŠA KE, OLS, folder I. 2982/46, Zápisnica napísaná pred obžalobcom OLS v Košiciach dňa 20. novembra 1946 v trestnej veci proti Ladislavovi Darabošovi.

wife suffering a mental breakdown during the long cruise.⁸² Várkoly's family suffered the consequences of his wartime activities, and his parents and two siblings were expelled from Czechoslovakia in March 1945, firstly moving to the Hungarian part of the Abov region, later to Tiszafüred, and finally settling in Budapest. In July 1945, the Local National Council in Košice imposed national guardianship on their family house which still stands today on Kmetova Street.⁸³ In Czechoslovakia a prosecution was initiated by the People's Court against Várkoly's father and uncle. His father, Elek Várkoly, the former Hungarian captain and World War I veteran, was condemned in absentia in September 1947 and sentenced to one month of forced labor.⁸⁴ However, this was not the end of his father's troubles. In 1948, he was arrested by the Hungarian police and after a one-day stay in Miskolc he was transported to Czechoslovakia and imprisoned in Ilava for 8 years. After his release in October 1956, he was again deported.⁸⁵ Várkoly's younger brother Ödön and his sister Lívia never married, and they lived together until their death having regularly received letters and family photos from their brother showing his happy life in Australia.

CONCLUSION

The brief reign of the Arrow Cross Party in the southern regions of present-day Slovakia remains an almost forgotten chapter of modern Slovak history; the lives of the top officials of the Nyilas movement remain largely unknown (including the post-war fate of the Nyilas county leader Gábor Gyarmathy), and the exact number of victims of the terror has not yet been established. No detailed studies to date have examined the deportations to Komárno, and the records of the post-war judiciary in Košice still remain largely uninvestigated. The primary aim of this chapter was to examine the life of one of the most rapacious war criminals from Košice who not only managed to evade justice for his crimes but who has also managed to disappear from the collective historical memory. His career as a civil servant lasted only a few years, but it poses broader questions over the role which public servants played in the Jewish and Roma Holocaust in the Slovak – Hungarian border region. In addition to his day-to-day duties as a detective, Várkoly was also appointed guardian of the property of the wife of Hermann Pollák who had been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He also organized the Komárno transports to extermination camps in which many of the Roma and Jewish citizens of Košice perished together with politically persecuted and detained communists, conservative politicians or ordinary officers.

We can assume that the personality of the young Várkoly was shaped not only by his family background (especially by the influence of his father who was active in Hungarian right-wing political circles from 1918 onwards with a strong bias against Czechoslovakia) but it is also important to note the impact of his Hungarian education, as well as his membership in the Scout Movement. The key turning point in his career was marked by the border and political changes in 1938. According to testimonies, his anti-Bolshevism and anti-Czechism also played a role, as is implied by reports of Várkoly's verbal insults against Edvard Beneš during interrogations, so there is little doubt that he was ideologically motivated. The story of Dénes Várkoly demonstrates how an ordinary public employee can be transformed into a servant of the Nazi ideology and ultimately become a perpetrator of the Holocaust. Furthermore, Várkoly's biography also reveals how little is known about the events that unfolded during World War II in the region of southern Slovakia.

⁸² Denes Várkoly in the Free Access: Africa, Asia and Europe, Passenger Lists of Displaced Persons, 1946 – 1971., accessed January 28, 2024, https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/801667:61704?tid=&pid=&query-Id=c96045817ba69624fa0e9117f8c6eac&_phsrc=FXg10&_phstart=successSource.

⁸³ AMK, Nv KE, box 80, folder 46012/45, Ján Kohút.

⁸⁴ ŠA KE, fund Obžalobca pri MLS v Košiciach, box 2, folder 196/45 Várkoly Elek.

⁸⁵ AMK, fund Várkoly z Košic, 1861 – 1996, Correspondence of Lívia Várkoly, daughter of Elek Várkoly.

10. Women in the Limelight – The Accountability of State-Employed Actresses at the National Theater of Budapest after the Second World War

Andrea Lőrincz

This study offers a glimpse into the lives of the actresses who were employed at the National Theater in Budapest between 1939 and 1949, providing mosaic-like images from 1945 and 1946, the years of transition following the Second World War, and the subsequent accountability of individuals for their wartime acts (whether actual or perceived) both within the theater, the theatrical world and the wider environment. Within the theatrical community, however, the words of Tamás Major, the young communist who became the director of the National Theater, this process acquired a special significance. The actors and actresses, as the idols of their audience, not only influenced the (cultural) consumption habits of their viewers, but also their values and normative system, particularly in the way in which they turned towards extreme ideologies, their participation in extremist movements, and their behavior towards their fellow citizens in crisis situations. Even today, the history of theater in Hungary is an institutionally male-centered sub-discipline, and it is therefore extremely important to expand the field by exploring the lives and careers of actresses employed by the Theater. The National Theatre of Budapest and the State Opera House were state-managed theatres, and the actresses were considered as civil servants – “the day laborers of the nation”.¹

The research group for this study was primarily defined using *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve*, edited by Ferenc Kerényi, published in 1987, but other control sources were also used (*Hungarian Theater* and the *Hungarian Biography Lexicon*). A final group of 74 actresses who performed in at least one season between 1939 and 1949 were identified

¹ The lawyer and journalist Gereben Vas termed the actors and actresses of the 19th century “the day laborers of the nation”, as before the establishment of the first permanent theaters, troupes toured the country on wagons, performing night by night in an effort to bring the basics of theatrical culture to the more isolated parts of the country. Gereben Vas, *A nemzet napszámósai* (Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1913).

but guest artists and assistant directors were excluded. However, it should be noted that this list is not fixed, as it changes from year to year due to contracts, roles and external and internal events affecting the activities of the Theater. This study uses the primary sources of the Hungarian National Archives and the Budapest Capital Archives, but also integrates ego-documents of the actresses and their contemporaries and colleagues, as well as the political, professional and tabloid press of the era.

This paper focuses on the events of 1945–46, as these were decisive years both on and off the stage. The study also highlights the similarities and differences between the life stories of the featured actresses. We will also address the long two-stage selection process for the actresses of the National Theater: firstly, the verification committee procedures and secondly the B-listing. Over the period under study, the number of members of the group decreased from 48 (during the war) to 33 (after the war) as a result of these screening processes.

Hungary emerged from the Second World War on the losing side, and the country had suffered huge damage during the invasion of the Soviet Red Army. The Communist Party was gradually assuming complete control over political, economic and cultural life in this period, and preparations for the nationalization of the previously profit-oriented theaters were also underway: theaters were placed under the control of new directors who had previously been active in the left-wing movement. The new directors removed the contributors of the previous, right-winged system and reappointed actors and actresses who had been subjected to political and religious persecution.

THE VERIFICATION COMMITTEE PROCEDURES IN HUNGARY

On January 4th 1945, *Magyar Közlöny* announced the Debrecen-based Provisional National Government's Decree no. 15/1945. M. E. according to which every person in active service or person who had been ordered back into service from retirement had to be certified in order to determine whether their behavior after the September 1st 1939 had harmed the interests of the Hungarian people. Each individual was required to prove that they had not been party to any war crimes or acts against humanity.

All civil servants were obliged to submit a verification statement to their direct superior, describing their political activity during the war and their official acts during the implementation of right-wing anti-Semitic laws and decrees. Those who had left office upon the arrival of the Red Army were required to present compelling reasons for their actions; the provision of any false information could result in their immediate dismissal without pension at any time within three years from the date of the declaration. The head of office was obliged to deliver the received verification statements (including his own) to the appointed verification committee. The supreme authority of the verification committees was the Ministry of the Interior Affairs. The verification commissions consisted of seven members: five delegated from the five parties of the Hungarian National Independence Front (the Democratic Citizens Party, the Independent Small Farmers Party, the Hungarian Communist Party, the National Peasant Party and the

Social Democratic Party) with a president being elected from among their number, a legally-qualified individual, and one member who was chosen from the employees, but the latter two members performed only a consultative role and did not have the right to vote. The appointments could not be rejected, but the members of the confirmation committee were considered to be confirmed by virtue of their appointment; the members of the commission were obliged to declare in writing that they had no criminal record and took an oath before commencing their activities. The civil servants who were to be vetted by the verification committee were advised of their obligation to attend by the chairman of the verification committee at least eight days prior to the date of the confirmation hearing. Anyone who may be in possession of relevant information about the vetted civil servant (for example, a right-wing party supporter of an individual who suffered from legal disadvantage) were called to testify. Statements could be provided in writing or orally, and anonymous reports were also deemed acceptable. The committee members were charged with investigating the subjects and their background stories; in order to ensure impartiality, any members with a personal connection to the civil servant under investigation could be excluded from the proceedings.

The verification process was held in private, and although the hearings were led by the chairman, any member could ask questions from the testifying witnesses. Witnesses could swear on the Bible if necessary, and the civil servant being vetted could also communicate with the witnesses during the trial. There were several possible outcomes of the process: the committee could validate the subject of the verification; in the case of less serious crimes, the civil servant could be excluded from their office or from promotion for a certain period of time; and in the most serious cases, the subject could be denied verification. The committee also had the option of transferring cases to the People's Court, but civil servants had no right of appeal against the outcome of the verification procedure.²

The work of the verification committees was suspended by Decree no. 5000/1946. ME. and subsequently cancelled on the September 15th 1946. In this period, the state aimed to balance public finances by reducing the number of state employees, and a decree was issued establishing three-member committees which had the task of preparing the so-called B-list, a roster of civil servants who were to be dismissed. In contrast to the earlier verification committees, these smaller committees did not have to justify their decisions.³

² *Magyar Közlöny* 1, no. 1. (1945): 3–4.

³ Károly Vörös and Beatrix Boreczky, *A magyar állam szervei* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1985), 259.

THE VETTING OF THE THEATRICAL WORLD

On May 4th 1945, the Provisional National Government issued Decree no. 1.146/1945 ME. which obliged free-lance intellectuals, including actors and actresses, to be verified, and as a consequence, members of the theater were also required to undergo the “test”. Unlike the situation faced by other civil servants such as officials or members of the armed forces, actors and actresses were able to take advantage of a loophole which was exploited by many contemporaries. Theater directors were interested in attracting larger audiences, and they therefore tried (and in many cases succeeded) to hire temporarily banned actors and actresses. For example, Ida Turay had failed the verification committee and was forced to endure a period of “enforced silence” at the end of 1945; however, as Zoltán Várkonyi, the director of the Művész Színház, reminded her, “(...) you are not banned from rehearsals, only from performing”. He then gave her the text of the Shakespearean drama *The Taming of the Shrew* for “studying” purposes. The drama was to be premiered in the spring of 1946, barely a month after the scheduled end of Turay’s ban on performing.⁴

Although the city of Budapest was still in ruins, the reorganization of theater life and theater culture began soon after the end of the Soviet siege. On January 28th 1945, a preparatory committee entrusted with the reorganization of the city’s theatrical sector was established in Zugló, one of the city’s largest “workers districts”. The committee published its first attention-grabbing appeal in *Szabadság*, and this article can be considered as an official document of the cultural reformation of post-war Budapest. The article, summarizing the destruction of the war in both material and moral terms, outlined the history of the conceptual and practical development of Hungarian theater at the beginning of the 19th century. The article stated that actors and actresses who wished to perform in the future would be expected to apply voluntarily and participate in the planning, organization and reconstruction of Hungarian theater.⁵ It was these very same actors and actresses, however, who were the first to face the verification committees.

The available primary and secondary sources allow us to gain some idea of the composition of the committees which investigated the members of the National Theatre. The committee investigating the Márta Bakó-case was chaired by Géza Abonyi,⁶ the president of the Free Union of Hungarian Actors;⁷ it also included Lajos Básti,⁸ Mihály

Dávid,⁹ Géza Staud¹⁰ and “an old stage worker named Schiller”.¹¹ While this appears to be in accordance with the terms of the Decree, this was not the case with the committee which vetted Ida Turay’s case – as she later called it, – which included people unknown to the actress. Turay herself was dismissive of the committee, terming it as “bizottságmicsoda”, a composite phrase made up of the words “bizottság” (committee) and “micsoda” (what), which can be translated as “what-a-committee”.¹² The diminutive “micsoda” was often used to belittle and trivialize, and Turay used it here to indicate the lack of seriousness that she perceived in the verification committee. According to her memoir, she only recognized her direct colleagues, Tamás Major¹³ and Magda Olty¹⁴ among them, although Major was also recognized only “by sight”, since Turay was more closely involved with other theaters before and during the war. During the Horthy-era and the Second World War, when Turay was considered a “superstar”, Major had played only minor roles, and they never worked together.¹⁵

It is remarkable that the official documentation of Márta Bakó’s and Ida Turay’s verification committee processes survives, including the minute books of the trials and the certificates containing the final decisions, but equally unusual is the fact that both actresses dedicated a separate chapter to their investigations in their memoirs. By comparing the two types of documents, it is possible to reconstruct the details of the proceedings in both specific and in general terms: the method and course of the summons, the committee and their conduct, the charges, the questions of the charge, the defense speeches, the handling of evidence, and the way in which the decision was made and communicated. The individual cases can be compared with incomplete knowledge obtained from the documentation of other procedures, which can be used to determine (or at least deduce) the processes of the verification procedures of the theatrical community.

⁴ László Párkány, *Turay Ida egyes szám első személyben* (Budapest: Széchenyi Nyomda, 1989), 140-142, 146.

⁵ Tibor Bános, *Újabb regény a pesti színházakról – Újra kezdődik a játék 1945-1949* (Budapest: Magvető, 1983), 23.

⁶ Géza Abonyi (1894-1949): actor and acting teacher. Between 1945 and 1948 he was the president of the Free Union of Hungarian Actors and was actively involved in impeachments in public life.

⁷ The Free Union of Hungarian Actors and Actresses (Magyar Színészek Szabad Szakszervezete) represented the interests of theater workers and was founded on May 6th 1945. It was tasked with conducting post-war verification procedures. In 1950, the organization was merged into the Hungarian Artists’ Union.

⁸ Lajos Básti (1911-1977), actor. In 1935, he graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts. He performed at the Belvárosi and then in the Vígszínház, but anti-semitic legislation later made it impossible for him to work. During his ban he tried to support himself by writing and publishing books, but he also participated in theater and literary events organized by left-wing artists. In the spring of 1945, he joined the Művész Színház, and in the fall of 1945, he joined the National Theater, where he remained a member until his death.

⁹ Mihály Dávid (1898-1965), actor. During the war, he did not have a permanent contract, but he was a member of the National Theater from 1945.

¹⁰ Géza Staud (1906-1988), literary and theatrical scholar. During his career, he worked as an editor, dramaturge, and theater law teacher, but he also completed Sándor Hevesi’s directing course. From 1954 until his retirement, he was a senior employee of the National Theater History Museum and Institute and the Institute of Theater Studies.

¹¹ Likely the stage master József Schiller. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (hereinafter MNL), XXVI-J-8 16. Without registry number (1948/49-es évadra vonatkozó létszámkimutatás és bérstatisztika); Bakó Márta, *Roszkor születünk* (Budapest: Textura, 1991), 123.

¹² László Párkány, *Turay*, 132.

¹³ Tamás Major (1910-1986), actor and director, theater director. During his years at the Academy, he performed at independent performance evenings, and worked closely with the left-wing labor movement. After graduating he immediately signed a contract with the National Theater (1931), of which he was the director between 1945 and 1962.

¹⁴ Magda Olthy, variants Olty, Olti (1912-1983), actress. She is also a member of the study group of the collective biography.

¹⁵ László Párkány, *Turay*, 131.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF THE VERIFICATION COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

Although the statements which were made during the investigations were recorded as a continuous text, they are marked by sudden, sharp changes in content and style which suggests that they were not delivered as monologues but rather as answers to a rapid series of questions. The commission questioned the actresses about their political behavior before and during the war, investigating the place, manner and scope of their activities. The actresses were required to clarify the gray and black spots of their careers: their participation in political and artistic events connected to the right-wing structures, and the backgrounds to their careers which had started or developed during the years of the right-wing administration of the National Theater. Their post-war behavior was also called into question; if the committee learned that they were living in a so-called “Jewish apartment”,¹⁶ they had to give an account of the circumstances by which they had acquired the property. They had to state their favorite cafés, what newspaper they read, who they talked to in the green room between acts. The committee also probed the personal lives of the actresses; they were required to disclose their close and distant relatives, friends, and acquaintances, their political affiliations, their behavior before and during the war, and their current situation.

A husband who was exposed as being “extremely right-wing” could have caused not only political and social, but also professional difficulties for his wife:¹⁷ in relation to Mária Majláth, according to the testimony of the minutes-book, the commission cast doubt upon her reliability because her husband, Samu Balázs,¹⁸ according to unnamed sources, had been a committed right-wing actor. The “burden” of this statement made by an anonymous source despite the Decree stating that anonymous denunciations were not welcome, was not even lightened by the fact that the actress’s sister, Jolán Majláth,¹⁹ was a politician in the Peasant Party, the executive president of the Hungarian Women’s Democratic Association and later a member of its secretariat, and subsequently the Director of the Institute of Cultural Relations. Even the fact that Jolán was the wife of Ferenc Erdei, Minister of the Interior Affairs, was of no avail.²⁰

¹⁶ Decree 1610/1944 ME. was created in response to the housing crisis caused by the bombing of April 13th 1944. The decree enabled the Ministry of Interior Affairs to confiscate, without compensation, any apartment inhabited by residents considered to be Jewish based on the Third Jewish Law if the residents had moved to their residences after September 1942.

¹⁷ Budapest Főváros Levéltára (hereinafter BFL) XVII. 1670, 4071, Majláth Mária igazolóbizottsági eljárásának jegyzőkönyve, Budapesti 365/a. sz. Igazolóbizottság.

¹⁸ Samu Balázs (1906–1981), Transylvanian actor. In 1936 he became an actor at the Budapest National Theater and remained a member of the company until his retirement.

¹⁹ Levente Sipos ed., *Dokumentumok a magyar nőmozgalom történetéből 1944–1948* (Tatabánya: Alfadat-Press Nyomdaipari Kft. 2014), 106.

²⁰ BFL XVII. 1670. 600. Gyarmati Anikó igazolóbizottsági eljárásának jegyzőkönyve, Budapesti 365/a. sz. Igazolóbizottság; BFL XVII. 1670. 4071., Majláth Mária igazolóbizottsági eljárásának jegyzőkönyve, Budapesti 365/a. sz. Igazolóbizottság; BFL XVII. 1670. 992., Mihályi Vilcsi igazolóbizottsági eljárásának jegyzőkönyve, Budapesti 365/a. sz. Igazolóbizottság.

Six women in the group faced difficulties during the trials, but ultimately all were cleared without exception. Having been granted the certificate issued by the Free Union of Actors, the actresses returned to the bloodstream of theatrical life and became active participants in the propaganda events of the Hungarian Communist Party through their artistic appearances; for example, they participated in local party organizations and the Hungarian Democratic Youth Association meetings, featured at events showing of the physical results of the city’s reconstruction, such as bridge consecrations, and they were accepted for new and re-established theaters.²¹ However, the cases of Margit Szathmáry who was suspended or Erzsébet “Erzsi” Ághy who was permanently banned were somewhat more complicated. Szathmáry was found to have right-wing sentiments, having openly voiced pro-German and pro-Arrow-Cross opinions, and she had also volunteered for the evacuation train allowing Arrow Cross officials to flee to advancing Red Army (albeit, she admitted, acting under pressure). Her professional passivity (she did not participate in any right-wing or left-wing public appearances) and social indifference did little to help her; the committee noted her own admission that “She had no friends because she does not like her colleagues”. Based on the protocol of the verification committee procedure, Ághy also chose neutrality; she stated that she was not and is currently not a right-wing supporter, nor was she ever interested in. She also claimed that she had no reaction to the entry of German forces into Hungary in 1944 (“she was not hurt, she was not interested”) and that she had had limited contact with the members of the theater; when asked, she could not even determine the political affiliations of the members of the National Theater who were considered to be the most right-wing, since “they only got together to perform” and therefore she did not know them as private individuals (although she was less reticent when giving a professional assessment of her former colleagues). Ághy’s insistence on neutrality caused resentment among the members of the committees, according to the documents, because it gave the impression that the woman sympathized with the former right-wing elements of the National Theater and was protecting them by intentionally withholding information. Her admission that she was a subscriber and keen reader of *Magyarság*, a popular right-wing magazine, also raised suspicions, while “other information” of an undisclosed nature also corroborated the fact that she had registered for the evacuation train.

²¹ “Talpra, magyar, hí a haza!” *Szabadság*, February 11, 1945.; “Petőfi szellemében,” *Szabadság*, February 14, 1945.; “A „Rákosi Mátyás” első útja a szegedi Tiszán,” *Szabadság*, September 18, 1945.; “A magyar–jugoszláv baráti közeledés jelentős eseménye volt Balázs Béla »Boszorkánytánc«-ának szegedi bemutatója,” *Fényszóró*, February 2, 1946, 15.; ifj. György Kóváry, “A »Boszorkánytánc« ünnepélyes bemutatója Szegeden,” *Szinbáz*, March 1, 1946, 23.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE FEMALE STEREOTYPE OF THE “SUSCEPTIBLE WOMAN”

In several cases, the image of a woman having been influenced by a right-wing male family member, such as a father, brother or husband, partially or completely absolved the woman who stood before the verification committee. From the descriptions below, it seems that the committees were more lenient towards subjects who had maintained a close or friendly relationship with well-known right-wing couples under the supposed pressure of their husbands than towards those who had spent time with right-wing directors, playwrights and writers on their own initiative. Ida Turay was among the first to be issued with a final decision granting “confirmed” status in early March 1945,²² but this was followed two days later on March 16th 1945 by a lengthy protocol attached to the documentation; presumably a petition had been filed against the actress’ certification in the meantime. The petition likely brought up Turay’s stage performances during the war; not only did she fulfil her existing contracts after the German occupation of Hungary, she also took on new roles. Turay denied everything, and even stated in her defense that she had undergone an unnecessary operation which prevented her from standing on stage, although her doctor, Gida Tóth, could not clearly prove that the medical procedure (a curettage) had really only served as a subterfuge. Turay’s off-stage performances and appearances also came to light, for example, her visit to the opening of the right-wing House of Hungarian Artists (Fészek Klub).²³ Turay did not deny her attendance but added that she had come without invitation in order to obtain protection for her Jewish ex-husband, the writer István Békeffy, who was not only mentioned in the proceedings but also summoned as a witness. Turay and Békeffy had been separated for 6 or 7 years, but they had moved in together again as a result of the events of March 1944, hoping that Turay’s reputation as an actress would provide protection for her Jewish spouse. Although the actress offered this information as a mitigating circumstance, the committee considered her meeting with Béla Imrédy as aggravating evidence.

Turay also disregarded the fact that several witnesses had seen her in the Café Negresco²⁴ with, in the words of Major Tamás “an Arrow Cross press brigand”²⁵ –Lajos Dövényi Nagy.²⁶ Turay stated that she did not even know who Dövényi Nagy was,

adding that even if they were seen at the same table in the same café, it was certainly a coincidence, because there were so many people sitting next to her that she could neither distinguish between them nor list them. Nor did she consider her initially close friendship with the right-wing János Vaszary-Lili Muráti couple to be suspicious. In her memoir, she extends this relationship to her husband, and in this interpretation, the basis of the friendship was determined by the good relationship between the two husbands rather than the mutual sympathy of the two wives, which she only depicts as a “collateral loss”, as if she herself had only been a passive spectator of the relationship; as Turay states, “Vaszary and Békeffy were friends, I had no reason to be angry with Lili Muráti”.²⁷ Nonetheless, her public appearances with the married couple led many to believe that she too had harboured right-wing sympathies; indeed, the two women appeared in public together so frequently that they began to be referred to as “Turcsi and Murcsi”.²⁸ In her defense, Turay stated that as the Vaszary’s became more openly right-wing, she began to detach herself from the friendship until their relationship softened into a collegial relationship. In her memoir, she writes about the period as follows: “I was very good friends with Lili Muráti in the thirties. Several people pointed this out to me in 1945, but I didn’t know what to do about the accusations, because when the people of Pest delightfully dubbed us as Turcsi and Murcsi, politics largely eluded us. And when things got heavy, I was busy hiding Pistuka. In any case, I am not one of those people who are able to deny their beautiful and cloudless youth for stupid political reasons.”²⁹

Although all of the witnesses brought by Turay in her mitigation were heard, none of them could absolve the actress of all doubt with their background stories and additions, and the committee suspended the actress with immediate effect:

“The actress Ida Turay, born... maiden name... etc... displayed reactionary behavior even after the fascist German occupation and the Arrow Cross takeover; therefore so we do not justify her continued activity, and we recommend to competent institutions that the named person be banned permanently from performing theatrically...”³⁰

Her husband, who felt competent to act as the voice of his politically naive wife, submitted a lengthy typed appeal on her behalf to the People’s Court, in which he requested the annulment of her sentence and her full moral and financial rehabilitation. The appeal hearing took place on September 15th 1945, and featured the same accusations and witnesses, both for and against the actress, as had appeared during the earlier verification committee investigation. Among the crucial points was her acquaintance with Lajos Dövényi Nagy; in the meantime, the Free Union had obtained photographs that showed Turay and Dövényi Nagy seated together at a table in an unknown place and time. The issue of allegedly false surgery was also addressed, with the Free Union

²² BFL XVII, 5306, Turay Ida igazolóbizottsági eljárásának jegyzőkönyve, Budapesti 365/a. sz. Igazolóbizottság.

²³ Magyar Művészek Ház opened its doors in 1901 at 36 Kertész Street, with the aim of maintaining contact between arts and artists. In 1944, after the Arrow Cross takeover, it was the House of Hungarian Artists, between 1950 and 1958 the House of Art Unions, and from 1959 it was officially called Fészek Klub.

²⁴ The Café Negresco opened in 1931 in the four-story neo-Renaissance Thonet courtyard at 1 Vigadó Square. Rubovszky András and Szigeti Andor and Walkó Miklós, *A magyar vendéglátás és turizmus újkori története* (Budapest: Szaktudás Kiadóház, 2009), 126.

²⁵ László Párkány, *Turay*, 132.

²⁶ Nagy Lajos Dövényi (1906-1964). writer, journalist. He worked as an assistant editor of right-wing newspapers (*Új Magyarország, Esti Újság*), specializing in historical sketches. He published several anti-Semitic works. After 1945 the People’s Court sentenced him to death by hanging for his behavior during the war. He was pardoned by the President of the Republic, and his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

²⁷ László Párkány, *Turay*, 132.

²⁸ László Párkány, *Turay*, 132.

²⁹ László Párkány, *Turay*, 89.

³⁰ László Párkány, *Turay*, 134.

requesting external medical opinions on the necessity of the operation, as was that of Turay's close friendship with Lili Muráti (although János Vaszary appeared only as a "supporting character witness" as her former theatrical director). Given Turay's political naivety and her admirable defense speech ("...how can you prevent someone from being an actor? Acting is a quality. It's like beauty or ugliness. It's born with a person. You can't take it away..."),³¹ the People's Court moderated the verdict of the verification committee; the actress was banned from the stage for one year (until March 15th 1946) on the grounds that she had participated in the grand opening of the House of Hungarian Artists even though she knew that a list of actors and actresses banned because of their religion, "race" and political views would be announced at the event.³² The case of Ida Turay demonstrates the general trend that women who acted of their own free will, who joined the party and performed either public or non-public work for the party were judged differently than those who claimed that they had acted under the influence of their fathers or brothers, but most importantly their husbands or lovers or out of political naivety.³³

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THE FEMALE STEREOTYPE OF THE "SUSCEPTIBLE WOMAN"

The admission of suggestibility in a patriarchal society is a double-edged sword, and as the case of Márta Bakó shows, the female stereotype of passivity and susceptibility did not always lead to exoneration. Indeed, Bakó's family connections, more specifically her father, László Bakó,³⁴ who was said to be an anti-Semite and anti-communist, a right-wing half-brother who held a high military rank and an (alleged) lover who advocated for right-wing titles, not only failed to mitigate her punishment but instead made the sentence more severe. Bakó's case also demonstrates that the verification committees did not necessarily adhere to standardized procedures and methods.

At first, Márta Bakó did not attract the attention of the authorities during the verification committee procedure, but based on the chronological and content of her narrative, police detectives likely arrested the actress shortly after the end of the siege after searching her ruined apartment where they discovered the leather wallet of her deceased father.³⁵

Bakó was initially held in the women's cell of an unnamed police headquarters³⁶ which she shared with a prostitute, a house inspector accused of concealment, and a "charming young woman" detained after blackmailing her soldier husband. She was interrogated several times over her links to her parents and Ferenc Kiss³⁷ and her alleged right-wing connections. These interrogations included a wide range of verbal and physical violence, and the actress, who was pregnant at the time of her arrest, suffered serious injuries. From there, she was transferred to the GPU³⁸ headquarters in Eötvös Street and subsequently to the headquarters of the political police at Andrásy Street 60. It was at this point that the actress learned about the charges being brought against her, when the detective to whom her case was assigned read her the indictment:

- I am the daughter of László Bakó, the well-known fascist actor.
- My mother is of German origin, fascist and strongly Catholic.³⁹
- I was also educated in a nunnery.
- Due to my right-wing sentiments, I was expelled from the Chamber of Actors(?).
- I signed up for the "Culture Train" of the National Theater heading west.
- As the girlfriend of Ferenc Kiss, I made decisions about hiring and firing during the Arrow Cross regime. I was also in contact with the Gestapo!⁴⁰

It is not clear from Bakó's recollections whether the document was written in the first-person singular, which is rhetorically more of a confession than an indictment, or whether the wording and language of the recollection formed the strange quote. The police investigator, who was "an old policeman, had seen him many times as an on-duty officer in the National Theater" whom Bakó had considered as a fan, concluded the case in a perfunctory fashion: he questioned the accused woman, sought out and interrogated the witnesses on her side, and pointed out the inconsistencies in the accusations based on the information he had obtained. Following this process, he closed the investigation while placing Bakó under constant police supervision. He took the injured and pregnant actress to the Kamaraszínház (the present-day Theater of Puppets) just

³⁶ The chapter in which she tells the story of her arrest and detention is entitled "Vendégtéték a Vig utcában" ("Guest performance at Vig Street"). The VIII. district's police station is still located at Vig Street 36.

³⁷ Márta Bakó was rumored to be the lover of Ferenc Kiss with whom she collaborated in the "distribution" of bans during the war. During her detention, the police attempted to force her to testify by saying that Kiss had also been captured and had already confessed; of course this could not be true, since Kiss and his companions were not transported home until October 1945. Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 101–106.

³⁸ The GPU was part of the network of institutions operating in Soviet Russia between 1923–1934 and was responsible for organizing and implementing the correctional and educational work of political prisoners. The OGPU (independently) ceased to exist in the mid-1930s, and so it could not operate a command in Budapest in 1945. Bakó is probably referring to the Soviet military command of the city.

³⁹ Márta Bakó's mother was Hedvig (Hedda) Lenz. After graduating, she was contracted by the Magyar Színház, but she married László Bakó "and gave up her promising acting career".

⁴⁰ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 101–104.

³¹ László Párkány, *Turay*, 138.

³² László Párkány, *Turay*, 136–138.

³³ Zsuzsanna Mattheé and Andrea Pető, "A »kameraadskes« és a »testvérnők«. Nők a holland és a magyar nemzeti szocialista mozgalomban: motiváció és akarat," in *Határtalan nők – Kizártak és befogadottak a női társadalomban*, ed. Eszter Zsófia Tóth and Boglárka Bakó (Budapest: Nyitott Műhely Könyvkiadó, 2008), 293.

³⁴ László Bakó (1872–1928): After graduating from the Academy, in 1895 he was contracted by the National Theater, of which he was a member until his death. From 1920 he was a permanent member of the company.

³⁵ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor születünk* (Budapest: Textura Kiadó Bt., 1991), 101.

across the street, reminding Bakó that she was required to report to the police every morning.⁴¹ Despite her arrest, the vast majority of her colleagues at the Kamaraszínház not only accepted her appearance, but also offered help, with some also bringing her food and medicine. However, the left-wing elements of the theater and the influence of Hilda Gobbi, the never-named but easily identifiable colleague who was referred as the “Great Conspirator” and the “apostle of the new public life” victimized both Bakó and her husband at the time, Lajos Rajczy.⁴²

On August 24th 1945, the actress stood before the verification committee: “They pried into my father, my mother, their family, as I’m used to lately.”⁴³ Her mother, the “radiantly beautiful” German Hedda Lenz, and her father, “the celebrated dramatic hero of the National Theater”,⁴⁴ László Bakó, were of noble origin, and the actress wrote warmly of her father: “Raised in the spirit of the middle-class Hungarian gentry, László Bakó’s patriotism was unshakable; he could not be influenced by the developing international currents of ideas and trends. He considered a person less patriotic than himself to be a traitor to the nation. He was accused of anti-Semitism.”⁴⁵

It is unclear whether the investigation was actually influenced by her family background, but like many others, the actress was also questioned about her political motivations and activities. Bakó declared herself to be a non-party member who did not belong to either the right or the left, even though she declared herself to be democratically minded. This appears to be contradicted by the fact that during her studies in the late thirties and early forties, she often attended right-wing events, although she states that this was done for fun and the joy of music and dance: “Our male classmates had to perform at the different events of the Levente Association, and we girls went with them, so that we could dance a little afterwards”.⁴⁶ She appears to be implying that she did not perceive the weight and significance of the situation.⁴⁷

The war did give her career a major boost: in addition to taking over the roles of actresses who had been proscribed because of their communist beliefs or their Jewish faith, she was invited to play at the Zitás camp theater⁴⁸ that was held in the capital during the siege of Budapest. The Arrow Cross Party had invited the theater group to play in military hospitals and at the party center at Andrásy Street 60 in an effort to boost morale. As a reward for these performances, the Arrow Cross Party suggested that members of the troupe, including the Rajczy couple, would be able to leave the

country in the event of a Soviet attack. It is not clear whether the young couple accepted the offer, because the bus that was supposed to transport them was destroyed before they could get on board.⁴⁹

Bakó admitted that she had not supported the left either in word or deed during the war, because she could not find a way to do so outside of her job. Nonetheless, she played her part in theatrical life, claiming that she always spoke out against the excesses of the regime and was an enthusiastic participant in the youth performances organized by the leftist Major Tamás until its last days. She carefully separated her private life from her professional life and the politics of the theatrical world, and she did not select her circle of friends according to their political affiliation.⁵⁰ With some irony we can say that this seems to be true, as she attempted to ease the burdens of the post-war period by spending time with Fedák Sári who was later convicted by the People’s Court.⁵¹ More damning, however, was her relationship with Ferenc Kiss, the notoriously right-wing actor with whom she had been known since her first days as a theatre college student. Kiss, described as “the country’s foremost actor”,⁵² was a major influence on the young actress during her early years; so close was their relationship that the police queried whether she was the actor’s lover. In this capacity, she held the fate of many actors and actresses in her hands, and she made decisions on contracts and bans at the Actors’ Chamber. When Ferenc Kiss was arrested and incarcerated in Vác, she became a regular visitor on Wednesday afternoons, bringing food packages and hygiene products which she had put together herself. She was also one of the key witnesses in his divorce case.⁵³

The actress offers several smaller, mosaic-like, highly emotional memories of the trial: “An old theatre worker named Schiller mumbled something about my mother’s pride and aloofness (he must have wanted to be inappropriate, and my mother asked him out.) [...] When I responded to a question by asking why they want to make an 8-year-old child responsible for his father’s affairs, a dramatic hero took to the floor: - the Scripture also says that the sins of the fathers must be avenged in the sons! I suddenly answered: In the Old Testament a cruel, vengeful God speaks, in the New Testament an understanding, forgiving one! I read that New Testament!”⁵⁴

The certification committee ultimately decided to certify the actress, but the lack of surviving documentation means that the grounds for this decision remain unknown. Bakó spent a few years involved in theatrical roles (mainly recitations and readings), other work (knitting or helping out in her new husband’s button business) and also political activities (as an instructor in the district party organization), but in 1951 she and

⁴¹ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 105-111.

⁴² Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 117-121.

⁴³ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 123.

⁴⁴ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 11.

⁴⁵ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 14.

⁴⁶ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 62.

⁴⁷ “Bemutakoznak a színinövendékek”, *Esti Ujság*, October 20, 1941, 4.

⁴⁸ The Zitás Camp Theater: Lieutenant-Colonel Bertalan Zitás was an actor and playwright by profession. In 1940, he participated in the organization of the Camp Theater, composed of members of several Budapest theaters, including the National Theater, the Opera House and the Új Színház. On November 17th 1942, the theater went to the front under his leadership, and later he also wrote a history of the theater.

⁴⁹ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 95-97.

⁵⁰ BFL XVII, 90., Bakó Márta igazolóbizottsági eljárásának jegyzőkönyve, Budapesti 365/a. sz. Igazolóbizottság.

⁵¹ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 160.

⁵² Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 45.

⁵³ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 151-160.

⁵⁴ Márta Bakó, *Rosszkor*, 123.

her elderly, ill mother received notification that they were to be exiled from the capital⁵⁵ and transferred to a new address in Hajdúdorog.⁵⁶

Bakó's memoirs describe how she rushed to the party premises to apply for an exemption, trying to disprove her alleged right-winged affiliations, but she met with little success and began packing and saying goodbye to her friends. She mentions one group of friends who "were among the clear-headed ones" who "quickly flip through the pages, open our books, so that we don't leave an unwanted note behind and add to our troubles", which raises the question of what compromising evidence "Márti and Gyszi" might have been destroyed which had escaped the notice of official investigators until that time.⁵⁷ During the years of her exile, she supported herself with agricultural work until she became pregnant again, later supporting herself with knitting for which she received payment in kind.⁵⁸ Released in 1953, after obtaining the establishment and operating license, she took up work in experimental and "border" theaters.⁵⁹

HOW DID THOSE WHO UNDERWENT THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS PERCEIVE THE VERIFICATION COMMITTEE PROCEDURES – REGARDLESS OF THE RESULT?

One of the most interesting side-issues of this topic is the personal, subjective experiences of those who faced the verification committee procedures. Perhaps the best sources for assessing these perceptions are the ego-documents produced by individuals active in the theatrical community in this period. Unlike other diarists and memoirists, Ida Turay gave a detailed account of the procedure, recalling the moment of the announcement of the results (with the hindsight of forty years): "I think the decision of the verification committee did not primarily hurt the actress' sense of self, but those of the individuals who lived in the midst of the trials of the war, as they were allowed to live and hope that peace would bring about their own personal peace."⁶⁰

For both Turay and Bakó, whose memoirs are the most detailed, being forced to abandon their acting careers and become "ordinary" people was not something which they had anticipated before the end of the war, and this is apparent in their writings. Becoming a housewife managing their marital tasks, their children and their household in the difficult post-war conditions allowed Mrs. Békeffy (Békeffyné) or Mrs. Varga (Vargáné),⁶¹ to fill the void. In both of their stories, the sense of loneliness and of phys-

ical and mental isolation are stressed; in their new lives, everyone worked around them, while the "silenced" women spent their days alone, filling their days by tidying up dilapidated apartments, experimenting with wartime gastronomy and doing housework.⁶²

LIFE AFTER CERTIFICATION

The granting of certification did not necessarily mean the conclusion of a contract or employment for actors and actresses. Ilona Titkos, who had been arrested and kept in prison after the October 1944 Arrow Cross coup for making anti-German statements in public, was back in Budapest at the beginning of 1945. She passed the verification committee's examination, but she was unable to find employment. Tibor Bános relates an interview with Titkos from October 1945⁶³ (this would be in or around the period of her certification which took place on October 12th 1945⁶⁴) in which the actress presumed that theaters were unwilling to employ her because rumors had spread that she no longer wanted to appear on stage. She herself sees this as the reason why neither the National Theater nor any other theater approached her with roles in this period.⁶⁵ This is somewhat contradicted by the fact that at the beginning of October, even prior the publication of the interview, newspapers were reporting that the actress would return to the stage, not only as a supporting role but as the lead actress in the latest musical comedy staged by the Új Színház, which was followed by several other plays during the year.⁶⁶

Those who were certified and employed were not necessarily satisfied with their situation. Not everyone was able or willing to adapt to the new democratic guidelines, and with the disappearance of the inequalities of theater life before and during the war, "democratization" became a regular part and mechanism of the everyday theatrical life. Certification granted the right to work but would not ensure the same level of treatment inside and outside the theater. Behind the curtain, in the director's office, the systematic eradication of the "reactionary" remnants of the celebrity cult continued: the system of double and triple castings became more and more widespread,⁶⁷ and a signal demand for the approximation of salaries developed.

⁵⁵ László Párkány, *Turay*, 140-142.; Márta Bakó, *Roszkor*, 99-100.

⁵⁶ For more on Márta Bakó's resettlement, see: Mária Palasik, "The political background and management of the resettlement in Budapest, 1951-1953," *Századok* 149, no 6 (2015).

⁵⁷ Márta Bakó, *Roszkor*, 194.

⁵⁸ Márta Bakó, *Roszkor*, 205-214.

⁵⁹ Márta Bakó, *Roszkor*, 232-233. 247-248.

⁶⁰ László Párkány, *Turay*, 135.

⁶¹ Bakó divorced her first husband, the actor Lajos Rajczy, and married her second husband, the businessman Béla Varga. Márta Bakó, *Roszkor*.

⁶² Hilda Gobbi, *Közben* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1982), 171.

⁶³ The interview is probably a conversation notes by Baba Faragó in which she discussed her captivity in Sopronkőhida as an actress, the perceived or real reasons for her lack of employment, and her future plans. At the end of the interview, somewhat contradicting herself, she mentions that she had received a single request: from the director of the Új Színház for the next Heltai play. This information is also interesting because it took place during the break between the two acts of the play's main rehearsal for conversation. *Színház*, October 10, 1945, 13.

⁶⁴ BFL XVII, 4460., Titkos Ilona igazolóbizottsági eljárásának véghatározata, Budapesti 365/a. sz. Igazolóbizottság.

⁶⁵ Tibor Bános, *Újabb regény a pesti színházokról* (Budapest: Magvető, 1983), 145-146.

⁶⁶ "7 színházi hír," *Demokrácia*, October 7, 1945, 8.

⁶⁷ Hilda Gobbi, *Közben* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1982), 171.

THE B-LISTING(S)

After the Communist Party's losses in the 1945 elections, the government sought an alternative means to the elimination of previously justified "reactionary" elements, and the Government introduced a radical reduction in personnel called "B-listing" which sought to exclude those with bourgeois views from the state apparatus.⁶⁸ On May 1st 1946, Decree no. 5000/1946. M.E. was introduced which mandated the formation of the B-list commissions.⁶⁹ The task of the B-list committees was to examine and categorize civil servants: employees who received B and C ratings were removed from their jobs "in order to stabilize public finances". These commissions operated until August 30th 1947.⁷⁰

Tamás Major, the director of the National Theater in this period, wanted to carry out the staff reductions implied by the B-listing process under his own personal authority. On March 28th 1946, he submitted a list to the Ministry containing the names of workers whose contracts were due to expire at the end of June and whose contracts he did not intend to extend for the following season – he believed that up to 60 people could be dismissed in this way. Major tried to push through his idea that by adding twenty people to the 220 employees (the actual number, however, was 217) remaining after the B-listing, the Ministry should increase the number of the National Theater's troupe to 240, a proposal which he justified as follows: "during the year, I became aware of more and more talented artists whom I would like to see among the members of the National Theater, and I would also like to add a few specialists to the technical staff." On April 2nd 1946, he personally sent out letters of dismissal to the individuals he had added to his list.⁷¹

On the very next day, April 3rd 1946, Major sent two summaries to the Ministry marked "recommended for the B-list" and "recipients of letters of dismissal". The first of these contained the director's proposals, while the second contained the list of those which he had actually dismissed. 41 people (33 men and 8 women) were on both lists. The director placed seven actresses on the B-list (Demeter Hedvig, Kató Eőry, Erzsébet Farkas, Lili Fehér, Frida Gombaszögi, Kató Kornis and Blanka Péchy), but in the end three more actresses, Irén Szöllősy, Anna Rápolthy and Margit Vándory received letters dismissal.

The press received the entire roster only a day after the resignation letters had been sent out. Since Major's arbitrary dismissals had been decided long before the establishment of the official B-list committees, the press were unable to formulate an adequate

explanation or justification for the reductions, but journalists were soon able to translate the decisions into the language of ideology and propaganda. Frida Gombaszögi, for example, was mentioned in articles a few days later in connection with her ownership of the Az Est Syndicate, implying that the actress, representing "the old system", had capitalist interests in mind relating to "supposed tax abuses and treasury claims".⁷²

Pursuant to the decree published on May 1st 1946, Major was required to submit a list of persons whom he wanted to add to the "official" B-listing conducted by the Ministry. By June 28th 1946, Major had sent the names of workers whose contracts would expire that month, specially indicating that contract cancellations were already in progress.⁷³

Committee no. 8 was formed to plan and execute the reduction in staff at the National Theatre, but the Major-led institution distanced itself from the B-listing organized by the Ministry to such an extent that it refused to accept the members appointed by the Prime Minister through the Free Union as chairpersons of the B-list committee. At the insistence of the Prime Minister's office, however, they were forced to agree to the reductions, although the tug of war delayed the start of the commission's work to such an extent that the commission had not even met by August 1946, despite the fact that it was only a month until the opening of the 1946/1947 theatrical season.⁷⁴ The three-member committee finally sat down together on August 14th and 15th 1946. Major was also invited to their meetings because the commission struggled to handle the large amount of paperwork relating to the large numbers of individuals who were being assessed (a total of 279 employees); among the problems the commission faced was the inability to determine which workers had joined the theater prior to or after the "liberation" of Hungary. This perhaps raises the question of what kind of paperwork the director – who was openly against this intrusion of state authority into his local fiefdom – was willing to make available to the committee. A total of 36 people were planned to be dismissed, seven of whom were to be from the new members⁷⁵ as a preliminary defense against the predictable public tendency to turn against anybody who had been involved in the previous regimes. In this context, Major's approach broadcasted equality and budget-based rationalization.

However, the final version of the list included 39 names; or theoretically, at least, as one person was missing. These named individuals included artists, cultural and technical managers and members of the technical staff: 28 men (a non-commissioned officer, a librarian, a janitor, a prompter, two persons working in an unspecified position – one of whom was a prisoner of war, registered as missing, two actors and twenty people from the technical staff) and ten women (two office clerks, two prompters, three technical

⁶⁸ János Botos et al. eds., *Magyar hétköznapok Rákos Mátyás két emigrációja között (1945-1956)*, (Budapest: Minerva, 1988), 118–120.

⁶⁹ "A magyar köztársaság kormányának 5000/1946. M.E. számú rendelete az államháztartás egyensúlyának helyreállítása érdekében szükséges egyes rendelkezések tárgyában," *Magyar Közlöny*, May 19, 1946, 1.

⁷⁰ Péter Sipos and István Ravasz eds., *Magyarország a második világháborúban. Lexikon A-Zs* (Budapest: Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság – Petit Real Könyvkiadó, 1996), 32.

⁷¹ MNL, Országos Levéltár, Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium, Művészeti és Szabadművelődési Osztály, box 68, Major Tamás felirata a Vallás-és Közoktatásügyi Minisztériumnak, 44.173/46.

⁷² "Az Athenaeum ügyében", *Szabad Nép*, April 7, 1946, 7.

⁷³ MNL, Országos Levéltár, Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium, Művészeti és Szabadművelődési Osztály, box 67, Komáromy Pál személyi kartonja. 136-1. – 136.

⁷⁴ "Lesz-e B-lista a Nemzeti Színházban?", *Kossuth Népe*, March 20, 1946, 2.; "Nem tudja megkezdeni a működését a B-lista bizottság a Nemzeti Színházban", *Világ*, August 14, 1946, 2.

⁷⁵ MNL, Országos Levéltár, Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium, Művészeti és Szabadművelődési Osztály, box 68, Major Tamás felirata a Vallás-és Közoktatásügyi Minisztériumnak, 44.173/46.

staff and three actresses). The three actresses were Éva B. Földes, Erzsébet Farkas and Frida Gombaszögi; Farkas and Gombaszögi had been notified in April that the Theater did not intend to renew their contracts for the next season although they were still expected to perform their existing roles for the remainder of the current season.

The magazine *Színház* tried to conduct a short interview with those who were on the B-list, but many did not wish to comment. The two main questions were, of course, how they were coping with the situation and what they believed to be the reason for the dismissal. Kató Eöry was surprised by the sudden decision without any precedent; unlike her there were those who had expected such a possibility due to the quantity and quality of the roles they received during the season (Frida Gombaszögi and Kató Kornis); meanwhile, Anna Rápolthy named a failed drama as the reason for her forced departure. Only two people suggested a personal or political reason; Margit Vándory blamed the direction of theater politics for her dismissal.⁷⁶

However, the background of the National Theatre's B-listing lies in the political, economic and social problems which existed or arose before, during and after the war but also in the 1944 persecution of Jews which escalated in 1945, as the demand for the creation of a Soviet-type person who arose in 1945. Lili Fehér and Frida Gombaszögi, the stars of the prewar Budapest stage, were granted company membership in 1945 in consequence of their suffering as persecuted Jews. However, as with certification by the verification committee, this membership did not necessarily guarantee that holders would be offered roles. The B-listing within the ranks of the National Theater was closely related to the program policy changes required by the new communist era. The Theater's program was transformed by replacing the older "bourgeois" plays with new "democratic" or Soviet-type works, and this required the company to "adapt" to the new requirements. The range of roles was gradually decreasing, and as Major indicated, the members of the older generation of actresses in their thirties and forties, who were too old to play young women but too young to play old matrons, had to make way for younger, newly discovered talents, even by force if necessary.

THOSE WHO "STUMBLED"

The certification procedures of freelance intellectuals, such as performing artists, began at the beginning of March 1945, since the resumption of cultural life was considered of high importance after the start of reconstruction and the organization of provisioning. The verification procedures were organized and carried out by the Free Union of Hungarian Performing Artists rather than by the individual theaters themselves; by this time, the Union had taken over full and total control of the theatrical world and enjoyed the support of the Hungarian Communist Party. Based on the available documents, it seems that members of state-owned or municipal, i.e. non-private theater

companies, such as the employees of the Budapest National Theater or the Opera State House, also faced the committees.

If we examine the cases of the actresses of the National Theater, it is clear that the committees operated in a somewhat random manner; it is difficult to discern any pre-determined order of procedure or fixed investigative aspects when comparing the individual cases. The background checks affected not only the career of the individual under investigation but also their private lives: engagement in right-wing activities (extreme or otherwise) under the influence of a male relative was a more forgivable crime than voluntarily accepting a role in a work of propaganda or to cooperating with writers of propaganda pieces. Perceived female roles and female stereotypes, for example those connected to political naivety, often obscured the actual events in several cases. Professional and personal neutrality, as a form of community-destructive behavior, worsened the chances of being verified in every case. In the case of actresses, probation procedures generally favored shorter, lighter sentences. The perceived or real crime and the resultant punishment were not always in proportion; for example, a poem recited at an inappropriate time or in the wrong place was reprimanded, while in other cases the repetition of the same activity resulted in no punishment.

After the verification committee procedures, two other challenges awaited the theatrical community during 1946: firstly, the aptitude tests for those who had diplomas which were not recognized by the Free Union, and later the B-listings which affected all members of the community. The aptitude tests did not affect the study group to any great degree, but the B-listings did affect several actresses who were rehired after the war but were given few roles. The purpose of the three-stage selection was nothing more than the restructuring of theatrical troupes in accordance with the cultural policy guidelines introduced after 1945: the reactionaries and the compromisers who were unqualified by according to the regulations of the Free Union, who were unable to let relinquish the celebrity system – with the gradual but consistent elimination of those who were no longer marketable.

The results of the verification committee procedures were not related to the aptitude tests nor to the B-listings that took place within the National Theater in two rounds, first under the authority of the director and then under the auspices of the Ministry, because there is no overlap between the two groups. Most of the woman who fell victim to B-listing remained in the theater environment, often finding work at other institutions or with different responsibilities.

Another question relates to the opportunities which were available to those women who had been proscribed or dismissed and who were forced to abandon their highly specialized profession. Little is known about the life of Erzsébet Ághy after her ban; the only mentions of the former actress in the press after 1945 discuss her illness and her hospitalization, followed by the announcement of her death.⁷⁷ Her obituaries do not mention her proscription from stage acting, instead describing her break with the Na-

⁷⁶ Péter Halász, "Nyilatkozik 10 bé-listás Nemzeti Színházi színész," *Színház*, April 13, 1945, 4.

⁷⁷ *A Reggel*, May 24, 1948, 8; "Ághy Erzsébet meghalt," *Magyar Nap*, June 25, 1948.

tional Theater (and all other theaters) as her “retirement” and emphasizing her versatility and colorful stage persona.⁷⁸ In reality, however, there were few who were forced to bid farewell to the theater and its flagship, the National Theater of Budapest, over the course of 1945–1946; reprimands, bans or dismissals under the slogan of rationalization affected a small part of the researched group, and those who had to leave for longer or shorter periods of time generally remained within the field, either finding positions in less popular or less known companies or appearing on radio or television.

CONCLUSION

The verification procedures to which actors and actresses were subjected in the years following the end of WWII were conducted by the Free Union of Actors and Actresses with the support of the Hungarian Communist Party. In the cases of the actresses of the National Theater, the committees functioned in a random manner; there was neither a predetermined procedure nor any pre-defined examination criteria. During the various impeachment proceedings, women were rarely considered as citizens with independent principles; their behavior was mostly attributed to the influence of their male relatives. While this approach can be interpreted as a kind of “relief” given that it mitigated against more rigorous penalties, it was possible that actress’ entire careers could be undermined by the corrupt actions of their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers. The stereotypes of women’s roles and the female character, for example the perception of political naivety, often overshadowed the actual events investigated by the committees. Professional and personal neutrality as community-destructive behavior could also reduce an individual’s chances of being certified. The verification procedures favored shorter, lighter sentences, though the purported crimes were often not in proportion to the penalties which were handed down. The B-listing process in 1946 mostly affected underemployed actresses. Overall, the two-stage selections formed part of the process of developing a new system of culture politics. Reprimands or dismissals did not last forever, and the majority of actresses eventually returned to the stage.

⁷⁸ “Meghalt Uray Tivadarné Ághy Erzsi,” *Hírlap*, June 24, 1948, 2; “Színházi és film hírek,” *Világ*, June 25, 1948, 5.

V.

THE BUILDING OF
THE STATE APPARATUS
FOLLOWING THE END OF
THE WAR

11. Mapping Human Resources at the Regional Level in Post-WWI Slovakia

Étienne Boisserie

On June 12th 1919, as the threat of the Hungarian spring offensive loomed over Bratislava, the Secretary of the Office of the Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia (Ministerstvo s plnou mocou pre správu Slovenska, MPS) reported to the Interior Ministry in Prague on the meeting that had taken place in Bratislava on April 13th and 14th between Slovak deputies, ministers and the župans,¹ the highest administrative authority of each county. The head of the MPS, Vavro Šrobár, had apparently spoken firmly; the Office Secretary quoted him as saying that “concerning the part of the population that still does not want to accept the new conditions and is causing all sorts of difficulties for the new government, a sort of second period of administration starts today. Thus far, there has been moderation. Everybody has been given sufficient time to submit to the conditions laid down or to take heed and leave our territory. Any moderation now would be seen as weakness, and therefore a vigorous effort will be undertaken to clean the country of subversive elements.”² The threat also extended to the civil service, which was ordered to “accomplish its duties as desired by the government”³ and swear an oath of loyalty to the Czechoslovak State. Yet even beyond April, the head of the MPS and his administration would have a long wait ahead of them before their ambitions for control of their administration would be fulfilled. It took almost a year for the regional political administration to gain full control and to function effectively across the territory.

The majority of historical studies on this topic to date have focused on military control and the action of the Office of the MPS in Slovakia and have explored the major types of difficulty encountered by the Czechoslovak authorities in Slovakia. As Attila Simon recently underlined, “there is a long list of themes worthy of more in-depth study”.⁴

¹ “Župan” is the administrative title which relates to “ispán” in Hungarian administrative terminology. Given the lack of a clear and commonly accepted English translation for this term, we will use the term “župan” in this chapter.

² Slovenský národný archív (hereinafter SNA), fund Minister s plnou mocou pre správu Slovenska (hereinafter MPS), box 255, inv. no. Prez. Adm. 663/1919. Porada županů a poslanců ve dnech 11.-13./4 1919.

³ SNA, MPS, box 255, inv. no. Prez. Adm. 663/1919.

⁴ Attila Simon, “Internácie z južného Slovenska v roku 1919. Dodatok k charakteru dobového československého štátu,” *Historický časopis* 68, no. 2 (2020): 271-290, 272.

These include the situation of the administration in various counties, an issue which has been largely overlooked.⁵ Recently, however, several studies have addressed this issue by discussing categories of civil servants,⁶ examining the evolution of specific counties,⁷ and analysing the particular role of certain župans in building the administration.⁸

These developments in Slovak historiography echo the renewal of interest in Habsburg and post-Habsburg studies over the last decade. Although studies of public administration in the period of regime change are still few and far between, a number of features have recently emerged that cast new light on the paradigm of the rupture and allow us to observe different configurations of administrative transition. Examinations of the administrative transition in the Cisleithanian territories has highlighted contrasting situations. In the Czechoslovak context, which was characterized by rapid homogenization and solid political control over the territory, Martin Klečáček has demonstrated the contrast between strong continuity at the top of the local administrative hierarchy in Bohemia and a more pronounced rupture in Moravia.⁹ By contrast, in Carniola, a regional context marked by a longer period of uncertainty about the authorities' seizure of power and a limited pool of potential civil servants, the initial idea of purging the administration and appointing "native officials" came up against the reality of a lack of qualified personnel to replace them.¹⁰ Lastly, Eastern Galicia offers a third scenario, that of a territory that remained permanently embroiled in a conflict of a military nature over political legitimacy. The Western Ukrainian People's Republic's capacity for administrative action is therefore more nuanced, with local organiza-

tion being partly established and organized outside the impetus of the central administration and the position of former Polish civil servants varying in time and space.¹¹ In the other part of the Dual Monarchy, the region to which the Slovak territory belonged, the most in-depth recent studies of changes in the administration of territories of the Kingdom of Hungary claimed by Romania or Yugoslavia focus on Transylvania, where the replacement of the upper echelons of the local administrative hierarchy was rapid and substantial.¹² The same phenomenon occurred in Prekmurje where, after a short period of conflict between competing authorities, the replacement of top local officials was "quick and clinical"¹³ from August 1919 onwards when the military occupation by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes occurred. In the cases of both Transylvania and Prekmurje, these changes were the result of voluntary departures and dismissals by the new authorities. The Slovak experience could have taken a similar form even if, as we shall see, the extent of change at the top of the local administrative apparatus differs somewhat despite the rapid appointment of župans to the heads of administrations.

Most studies to date have focused on prosopographical analyses¹⁴ and the question of competing authorities,¹⁵ with some also addressing the violence associated with the process of taking control in a militarily and/or politically unstable context.¹⁶ These studies have highlighted a series of converging difficulties, albeit of varying intensity depending on the individual circumstances, including the difficulty of replacing civil servants who have left voluntarily or have been dismissed from their posts, issues over the reliability

⁵ The following general studies are however very useful: Xénia Šuchová, "Problémy organizácie politickej správy na Slovensku v predmníchovskej republiky," in: *Slovensko v Československu (1918-1939)*, eds. Milan Zemko and Valerián Bystrický (Bratislava: Veda, 2004), 95-122, especially 95-102; Natália Krajčovičová, "K otázke personálneho obsadzovania orgánov štátnej a verejnej správy na Slovensku v prvých rokoch po vzniku ČSR," in *Slovensko na ceste k demokracii*, ed. Natália Krajčovičová (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2009), 113-129.

⁶ Veronika Szeghy-Gayer, "Mešťanostovia na rázcestí. Stratégie, rozhodnutia a adaptácie navyšších predstaviteľov miest na nové politické pomery po roku 1918," in *Elity a kontraelity na Slovensku v 19. a 20. storočí. Kontinuity a diskontinuity*, eds. Adam Hudek, Peter Šoltés et al. (Bratislava: Veda, 2019), 334-360; Martin Furmanik, "Administratíva spišských obcí v prvých rokoch ČSR," in *Obce za Prevratu. Mocenské, etnické a hospodárske zvráty na vidieku 1914-1925*, ed. Ondrej Ficeri (Spišská Nová Ves-Košice: Múzeum Spiša v spišskej Novej Vsi - Štátna vedecká knižnica v Košiciach, 2019), 125-134.

⁷ Martin Furmanik, "Etablovanie československej moci v Spišskej župe v roku 1919," *Acta Historica Neosoliensia* 19, no. 1 (2016): 34-62.

⁸ Martin Furmanik, "Činnosť spišského župana Jána Rumanna v prevratnom roku 1919," *Z minulosti Spiša* 25, (2017), 77-93; Angelika Šrámková, *Ludovít Bazovský. Nezломný rodák slovenský?* (Prešov: Universum, 2014); Angelika Dončová, "Ludovít Bazovský – prvý slovenský novohradský župan v ČSR," *Annales Historici Prešovenses* 6, (2006): 362-372. For an original perspective, see Peter Macho, "Nahliadnutie do života rodiny zvolenského župana, Udalosti z roku 1919 v zrkadle súkromnej korešpondencie Viery Markovičovej," in *Elity a kontraelity na Slovensku v 19. a 20. storočí. Kontinuity a diskontinuity*, eds. Adam Hudek, Peter Šoltés et al. (Bratislava: Veda, 2019), 361-390.

⁹ Martin Klečáček, "Přezvěti moci. Státní správa v počátcích Československé republiky 1918-1920 na příkladu Čech," *Český časopis historický* 116, no. 3 (2018): 693-732; Martin Klečáček, "Im Dienste des Neuen Staates? Beamtenkarriere im Prozess des Aufbaus der tschechoslowakischen Staatsverwaltung 1918-1920," in *Hofratsdämmerung? Verwaltung und ihr Personal in den Nachfolgestaaten der Habsburgermonarchie 1918 bis 1920*, Peter Becker et al. eds. (Wien: Böhlau, 2020), 137-153.

¹⁰ Rok Stergar, "Continuity, Pragmatism, and Ethnolinguistic Nationalism. Public Administration in Slovenia during the Early Years of Yugoslavia," in Peter Becker et al. eds., *Hofratsdämmerung?*, 179-191.

¹¹ Stephen Velychenko, *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine: A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917-1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 210-219.

¹² Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, "The Transformation of Mid-Level Civil Servants' Corps in Transylvania in the Aftermath of the First World War: The High Sheriffs between 1918 and 1925," *Hofratsdämmerung? Verwaltung und ihr Personal in den Nachfolgestaaten der Habsburgermonarchie 1918 bis 1920*, Peter Becker et al. eds. (Wien: Böhlau, 2020), 165. For a prosopographical analysis of the new prefects, see also Judit Pál, "Főispánok és prefektusok 1918-1919-ben. A közigazgatási átmenet kérdése Erdélyben," *Századok* 152, no. 6 (2018): 179-1214, especially 1204-1208.

¹³ Jernej Kosi, "Summer of 1919: A Radical, Irreversible, Liberating Kreak in Prekmurje/Muravidék?" *Hungarian Historical Review* 9, no. 1 (2020): 51-68.

¹⁴ Martin Klečáček, "Přezvěti moci"; Judit Pál, "Főispánok és prefektusok"; Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, "The Transformation"; Étienne Boisserie, "The Formation of a New Administrative and Polical Apparatus in Slovakia, 1918-1920: Backgrounds and Networks," in *Postwar Continuity and New Challenges in Central Europe, 1918-1923. The War that Never Ended*, Tomasz Pudłocki and Kamil Ruszała eds. (New York - London: Routledge, 2022), 257-289. From a long-term perspective and combining prosopography and structural analysis, see also Andrei Florin Sora, *Servir l'État roumain. Le corps préfectoral 1866-1940* (Bucharest: editura universităţii din Bucureşti, 2011); Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, "Representatives of the Central Authority and County Administration in Transylvania (1867-1925)," *Journal of Modern European History* 31, no. 4 (2023): 458-473; for more on the Czech Lands, see: Martin Klečáček, *Poslušný vládce okresu: Okresní hejtmán a proměny státní moci v Čechách v letech 1868-1938* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2021).

¹⁵ Rok Stergar, "Continuity"; Kosi, "Summer"; Velychenko, *State Building*.

¹⁶ This is a frequent occurrence in the post-Habsburg Adriatic region. See Marco Bresciani, "The Battle for Post-Habsburg Trieste/Trst: State Transition, Social Unrest, and Political Radicalism (1918-1923)," *Austrian History Yearbook* 52 (2021): 182-200; Borut Klabjan, "Borders in Arms: Political Violence in the North-Eastern Adriatic After the Great War," *Acta Histriae*, Vol. 26, no. 4 (2018): 995-1002. The Italian military takeover of some areas of the former Habsburg empire belongs to another case study; see in particular the first two chapters of Andrea Di Michele, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta. L'amministrazione pubblica dell'Alto Adige tra Italia liberale e fascismo* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orsa, 2011).

of the civil servants who remain in post and the ability to support them with new, reliable and technically competent staff and secure their loyalty.¹⁷ For these reasons, the influx of human resources from outside the region (from the former Kingdom in the case of Transylvania, from Carniola or elsewhere in the case of Prekmurje, and possibly from the Czech Republic in the case of Slovakia) is a recurring debate that underlines the weakness of local resources.

Our perspective is slightly different, focusing instead mainly on the development of the organization of administrative resources in the period leading up to the spring of 1920. Established literature on the administrative organization of Slovakia identifies three stages in its development, from the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 through to its destruction in 1939.¹⁸ The first stage runs from the proclamation on October 28th through to December 31st 1922, the day before the reform of the counties took effect and which led to the next stage. However, upon closer examination, this first stage includes distinct periods during which the provisional legal order evolved, notwithstanding the practical difficulties involved in applying it across the territory, through to the adoption of a series of acts in the spring of 1920 that established a provisional order which stabilized the administration until 1922.

This study addresses the issue of personnel in the political administration at the county level and examines the administrative responsibilities under the authority of the župans, who were given the task of (re)building the country's administration and enforcing both order and the authority of the new State over this period. They acted under the direct authority of the head of the MPS as the highest executive authority in Slovakia were in direct contact with the government in Prague.¹⁹ Correspondence between the župans and the Office of the MPS in Bratislava is an interesting source with which to explore the issues raised, their nature, and the responses received – or indeed not received – from the Office. While these sources are somewhat partial, they also offer a means of observing the difficulties that varied in magnitude from one county to the next.²⁰ Insofar as we are looking primarily at the counties from where the most

worrying signals were sent, the account which follows could give the impression that the regional administration in Slovakia was totally dysfunctional, but this was not the case. Approximately one third of counties (including Trenčín, Turiec, Orava, Liptov Zvolen and the northern part of Nitra) appear rarely if at all among the reports of major problems in terms of administrative staff or the assertion of Czechoslovak political authority. Other counties, however, especially those along the southern border and in the eastern part of the country, reported human and material difficulties to the Office of the MPS in Bratislava that illustrate the scale of the task faced by the Czechoslovak authorities in Slovakia in building a stable and functional administrative apparatus covering the whole territory.

THE REGULATORY AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK PRIOR TO THE SPRING OF 1919

The legislative and regulatory framework introduced in the spring of 1919 offered no effective solutions which would facilitate effective administration before the military offensive of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The first Act (receptná norma) of October 28th 1918 (no. 11/1918) established the principle of the continuity of the legal order of each part of the former Dualist Monarchy, thereby leaving the Hungarian administrative organization in place, at least initially and in principle. This framework swiftly evolved, however, with the adoption of the Act on Extraordinary Provisional Measures (no. 64/1918) on December 10th 1918²¹ and Decree (nariadenie) no. 555/1919. This Act provided for the appointment of a Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia (MPS) who was assisted in this by 14 delegates (referenti), sometimes referred to as “ministers”, who were competent across the territory of Slovakia in their respective sectors but reported to the head of the MPS and their relevant Ministry in Prague.²² Act no. 64/1918 also significantly amended the administrative organization of Slovakia, annulling, for example, the Hungarian laws on municipality and commune councils, the prerogatives of which were transferred to governmental authorities (poverenci and komisári). It stated moreover that if civil servants who had served under the Kingdom of Hungary were to be retained, then they must swear loyalty to Czechoslovakia and recognize its government. The prerogatives of the MPS were defined in rather vague terms, but the Minister was responsible for managing administration in the country

¹⁷ In the case that interests us here, the implications of swearing an oath were amplified by the Hungarian government's decision in December 1918 to refuse to reinstate civil servants who would have sworn an oath or served in the administration of a successor state. See Julia Bavouzet, “The Hungarian Ministry of Interior and its Civil Servants in the Post-war Turmoil,” in Peter Becker et al. eds., *Hofratsdämmerung?*, 113–136, especially 119.

¹⁸ Ladislav Lipscher, *K vývinu politickej správy na Slovensku v rokoch 1918–1938* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1966), 5; Pavol Vaník, *Okresné zriadenie na Slovensku v rokoch 1918–1939* (Bratislava: Ministerstvo Vnútra Slovenskej Republiky, 2021), 4; Pavol Tišliar, *Okresné zriadenie na Slovensku v rokoch 1918–1945* (Krakow: Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku, 2013), 7–8.

¹⁹ At around the same time, institutions with the same type of administrative prerogatives were created in the territories of the former Kingdom of Hungary that had come under Romanian or Yugoslavian control. This was also the case with the Ruling Council (Consiliul dirigent) from December 1918 in Transylvania and the Civil Commissioner after August 1919 in Prekmurje. See Jernej Kosi, “The Imagined Slovene Nation and Local Categories of Identification: « Slovenes » in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Postwar Prekmurje,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 49 (2018): 87–102, especially 94.

²⁰ The territory under the responsibility of the MPS comprised 15 former Hungarian counties, 6 of which – along the southern border of Slovakia – were cut in two parts, with the southern part remaining under the control of the Hungarian government.

²¹ Sbírnka zákonů a nařízení státu československého, Ročník 1918, částka XIII, 16. prosince 1918, 55–56. SNA, BA, fund Československá dočasná vláda na Slovensku, 6–14.11.1918, box 1, sign. B2, inv. no. 4. For more on the process leading to this act, see Étienne Boisserie, “Autumn 1918–Spring 1919: Six Months of Postwar Material and Political Uncertainty in Slovakia,” *Hungarian Historical Review* 9, no. 1 (2020): 26–50, especially 27–30.

²² Xénia Šuchová, “Šrobárovi muži’: vymenovanie prvých československých županov ministrom s plnou mocou pre Slovensko Vavrom Šrobárom,” in *Dr Vavro Šrobár politik, publicista a národnoosvetový pracovník*, Miroslav Pekník et al. eds. (Bratislava: Veda, 2012), 319–343.

and ensuring its effective operation, as well as maintaining order and consolidating the situation in Slovakia.

A few weeks later, Decree no 555 of March 5th 1919 (never published) dissolved the county committees (*župné výbory*) and the administrative councils of the Kingdom of Hungary, and changed the position of the *župans* appointed between late December 1918 and February 1919.²³ They were appointed and dismissed by the head of the MPS and now had the right to appoint the staff of their administrations, as well as to dissolve municipality councils and administrative committees (*administratívne výbory*). In order to avoid losing their jobs, civil servants at central and regional levels were once again required to swear loyalty to Czechoslovakia but, as we will see later, the actual implementation of this aspect of the text varied.

Counties were divided into districts (*služnovské okresy*) led by a district chief (equivalent to the title of *főszolgabíró* in Hungarian administrative terminology) heading the district chief's office (*služnovský úrad*) and assisted locally by deputy district chiefs (*szolgabírók*) and a wide range of officials such as district physicians and veterinary surgeons. The historic prerogatives of the *župans* were left unchanged, but they were now appointed by the state rather than elected.²⁴ One last group would have a major role to play in local administration: the notaries (*közjegyzők*, *notári*). Like district chiefs, notaries had been elected under the old regime.²⁵ Notaries in Slovakia operated either within a commune or within a canton (*obvod*) that consisted of several communes. There were around 1000 of them, and they were placed between the commune and the district in the administrative hierarchy. The legal regime applicable to notaries was changed with the adoption of Act no. 155/1919 of March 18th 1919.²⁶ It was unified with the abolition of the role of chief notary (*hlavný notár*), and notaries were required to swear loyalty within one month of the Act taking effect if they wanted to retain their positions. The reorganization of the notary system was hampered by the period of partial occupation of the territory by Hungary; in early November 1919, Act no. 599/1919 authorized a one-year postponement of the deadline for notaries to swear loyalty in certain cantons.

Until the end of spring 1919, efforts to assume political and administrative control were difficult. Following the Šrobár government's move from Žilina to Bratislava in January 1919, the government met for the first time with the *župans* and the members of the Club of Slovak Deputies in March in a meeting which was seen as an opportunity to gain an overview of the material and political difficulties encountered. Judging

from the minutes of the event, few truly administrative questions were addressed.²⁷ The same could not be said of the second meeting in this format one month later.²⁸ During discussions focused on administration, the referent for Internal Affairs, Milan Ivanka, acknowledged that “the organization of the political administration [had not yet] progressed as [they] would have wanted”. He did, however, stress that the political administration was fully functional in the counties of Bratislava, Trenčín, Šariš, Liptov and Turiec, that is to say, in a large swathe of the west and northwest of the country and along the northeastern border. Conversely, the situation in the counties of Zemplín, Užhorod, Hont and Gemer was described as “simply dreadful”, partly a result of the lack of civil servants who were deemed suitably loyal to the new state and the flagrant lack of means of travel and communication for *župans* which left them unable to take genuine control of large swathes of their regions. Moreover, in two of these counties, the *župan* himself had either been replaced (Gustáv Lehotský by Vendelín Sahulčík in Hont county in late March)²⁹ or was about to be replaced (Samuel Daxner by Ján Jeseňský in Gemer-Malohont).³⁰ Sahulčík had indeed inherited a very serious situation in Hont. The administrative report submitted in late 1919 underlined that the first *župan* appointed, Gustáv Lehotský, had encountered the problem of the total “insufficiency of Slovaks in the administrative centre” and had “not been able to occupy the county, which former Hungarian officials had thus continued to administrate”.³¹ In a bitter letter to the Office of the MPS that turned out to be among his final correspondence as *župan* of Gemer-Malohont,³² Daxner painted a highly concerning picture of the situation in his county, noting the unanimous refusal of the entire regional office to swear loyalty and the impossibility of replacing them,³³ Bratislava's failure to reply to his proposed appointments, the total lack of transportation, the impossibility of genuinely dissolving the municipality councils of the county's main towns, and, at the same time, the lack of senior administrative officials in districts, with more than two thirds of notary positions remaining unfilled.³⁴

Colonel Ernest Raischl of the Czechoslovak Gendarmerie spent several weeks in March touring Zemplín and Užhorod during which he drew up a precise picture of

²⁷ SNA, osobný fond Vavro Šrobár, 1867-1950 (hereinafter VS), box 9, inv. no. 602.

²⁸ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 663/1919, Porada županů a poslanců ve dnech 11-13/4. 1919. See also the transcription of the meeting, in SNA, VS, box 9, inv. no. 603.

²⁹ Literárny archív Slovenskej národnej knižnice v Martine (hereinafter LA SNK), fund Slovenská národná rada 1918-1919, Sign. 94 S 15, Založenie administrácie v župe hontianskej.

³⁰ On the context and Daxner's administration, see LA SNK, fund Daxnerovci, sign. 80 H 12, Župa Gemer-Malohontská v dobe štátneho prevratu v r. 1918-1919.

³¹ SNA, MPS, box 5, Záležitosti verejnej správy, Sign. Prez. II/2, inv. no. 328, Zpráva župana o politickej a administratívnej situácii župy Hontianskej koncom roku 1919.

³² SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 242/1919. Tisovce župan. Vymenování župana a úředníků. Župan of Gemer-Malohont to Office of MPS, Tisovec, April 12, 1919.

³³ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 144/1919. Úřednictvo pro Slovensko zjištění neobsazených míst. Župan of Gemer-Malohont to Milan Ivanka, Tisovec, April 5, 1919.

³⁴ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 242/1919. Tisovce župan. Vymenování župana a úředníků. Župan of Gemer-Malohont to Office of MPS, Tisovec, April 12, 1919.

²³ Étienne Boisserie, “The Formation of a New Administrative and Political Apparatus in Slovakia, 1918-1920. Backgrounds and Networks,” in Tomasz Pudłocki and Kamil Ruszała eds., *Postwar Continuity and New Challenges in Central Europe, 1918-1923*, 257-289.

²⁴ Prerogatives expanded by Acts nos. 210 and 211/1920 (and Decree no. 361/1920). (For details on pre-1918 situation, see Judit Pál and Vlad Popovici, “The Transformation of Mid-Level Civil Servants' Corps in Transylvania,” 157-159.

²⁵ Marián Mikl, “Vývoj inštitúcie notárstva na území dnešného Slovenska v období rokov 1874 až 1993,” in *Notárstvo a iné právnické profesie v historickom vývoji*, Róbert Brtko et al. eds. (Prague: Leges, 2017), 134-160.

²⁶ Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého, ročník 1919, částka XXXII, 26. března 1919, 198.

the situation of the administration in each district of the two counties.³⁵ He stated that the situation was mixed and in some respects less chaotic than in Hont or Gemer, but Czechoslovak authority over the region remained tenuous.

Similarly, the situation in certain counties not mentioned by Ivanka was not always positive. In a report to Ivanka in April, Ludevít Bazovský, the župan of Novohrad county, said he was not able to form a regional administrative committee in the absence of regional officials. In an overemotional letter in which he appears to be suffering either great exhaustion or serious irritation, he suggested that he be dismissed from his role and that his region be incorporated into the neighbouring counties of Hont or Gemer.³⁶

As Xénia Šuchová notes, almost six months after the creation of Czechoslovakia “the provisional measures had not resolved the original and fundamental failing of the Czechoslovak administration in Slovakia: a flagrant lack of qualified and experienced officials capable of handling both Hungarian law and Slovak conditions”.³⁷ To a certain degree, this is as true for the first half of 1919 as it is for the second. In several regions, the radical ambitions expressed by Vavro Šrobár in mid-April during the meeting between Slovak deputies, ministers and župans continued to come up against situations requiring great pragmatism, to which the Office of the MPS in Bratislava, under pressure from the župans, gradually had to resign itself.

REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE HUNGARIAN ARMY

The withdrawal of the forces of the Hungarian Bolsheviks did not bring an end to the difficulties faced by the Slovak authorities in terms of the shortage of human resources and in the context of persistent resistance and opposition to their authority.³⁸ In the regions with the greatest ethnic diversity, the recourse to Czech civil servants remained limited due to the absence of the required language skills, but this handicap was also compounded by a more general lack of proficiency in the Hungarian legal framework which was still largely in force. These two major reasons account for the fact that Czechs were more typically deployed in the instruction, police and railroad services than in local political administration. From the summer of 1919, the question of wheth-

er or not older officials from the Hungarian administration should be retained where necessary remained unresolved. The MPS had less difficulty in finding reliable human resources, however modest, to organize the new administrative network and to integrate the territory down to district or commune level in the regions which were historically most dynamic in terms of patriotism, more specifically the vast west-north-west strip of territory stretching from the Bratislava region to the central county of Liptov. Conversely, the resources identified, deemed reliable and available were particularly limited along a wide southern strip of the country and throughout its eastern part, regions which had played a non-existent, or at best marginal, role in the various structures and networks of the patriotic movement before WWI; in many cases, the number of reliable potential officials consisted of a few men or a few families per county. An internal report from the early summer showed that this was the case, offering an approximate picture of the resources available to the new state.

In June 1919, General Hennocque, the Eastern Army Commander, had asked the Office of the MPS to send him lists of all civil servants and administrative officials of the counties “immediately”, requesting that the lists also include the names and functions of the persons concerned, their nationality and their language skills. He also requested that the Office specify whether the personnel had sworn loyalty and, if possible, to provide information on how they had behaved during the Hungarian Bolshevik invasion.³⁹ This request was sent to the župans, along with some additional precise questions: each župan was asked to “personally” (underlined) give information on the individual behaviour of each person and to vouch for them.⁴⁰ The partial but nonetheless interesting information found in this rather bulky file offers considerable insight into the structure of local administration approximately nine months into the “Šrobár government” and following several weeks of war with Bolshevik Hungary.⁴¹ While the situation differs from county to county, some common points do emerge. Firstly, most civil servants still in office in the counties behaved in a matter that was at least passive during the Hungarian invasion (however, the answers are less positive for some districts and communes). Secondly, in the counties where the župans provided full lists of the members of the political administration, we can see that it was still made up to a very large extent (often more than 90%) of officials who had been recruited during the Hungarian period. Moreover, in certain counties with a large Hungarian-speaking population, a sometimes very high proportion of civil servants in district political ad-

³⁵ SNA, MPS, box 271, inv. no. 1470/ 1919 adm. ref. Hlásenie o pomeroch v užhorodskej a zemplínskej župe, May 16, 1919.

³⁶ Minister ČSR s plnou mocou (prednosta Langer) to Ivanka, Časť zprávy župana novohradského, Bratislava, 26 April 1919. (SNA, MPS, box 271, inv. no. 1536 adm. ref.). On the situation in the county at the time, see Roman Holec. *Trianon. Triumf a katastrofa* (Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2020), 128-140.

³⁷ Xénia Šuchová, “Organizácia verejnej správy na Slovensku v medzivojnovom období – Problém integrácie Slovenska do demokratickej československej republiky,” in *Idea československého štátu na Slovensku 1918–1939*, Xénia Šuchová ed. (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2011), 118.

³⁸ Several aspects are addressed in Marián Hronský, “K problémom konsolidácie a bezpečnosti Slovenska v novom štáte v prvom období po vojenskom konflikte s Maďarskou republikou rád,” in *Fragmenty dejín. Sborník prací k šedesátinám Jana Gebbarta*, Jan Hájek, Jiří Kocian and Milan Zitko eds. (Prague: Historický ústav AV ČR – ÚSD AV ČR, 2006), 103-118.

³⁹ SNA, MPS, box 256, 1354/1919, General Hennocque, Eastern Army Commander, to MPS, Nová Ves/Igló, June 20, 1919 (in Prez. Adm. 1346/1919).

⁴⁰ SNA, MPS, box 256, 1354/1919, MPS (signed Ivanka for Office of MPS) to all župans (Dôverné), 1 July 1919 (in Prez. Adm. 1346/1919). See also Margita Bandolová et al. eds., *Od Uhorského kráľovstva k Československej republike. Dokumenty z fondov slovenských regionálnych archívov k udalostiam v rokoch 1918–1919* (Bratislava-Košice: Ministerstvo Vnútra SR, Štátny archív v Bratislave, Štátny archív v Košiciach, 2018), doc. 198, 365.

⁴¹ SNA, MPS, box 256, Prez. Adm. 1346/1919, Chování se úředníků a vojska za vpádu maďarského. The file contains information for ten counties: Orava, Turiec, Liptov, Nitra, Abauj-Turňa, Zemplín, Hont, Nitra, Gemer-Malohont and Komárno.

ministrations did not speak Slovak.⁴² Conversely, in several districts, the departure of old Hungarian-era civil servants led to a glaring lack of administrative staff, making it difficult for župans and district chiefs to administer the area. The issue of Hungarian language skills was acute, as shown by several requests from župans who wanted bilingual staff or, as in Komárno, more translators.⁴³ Lastly, in the vast majority of cases, the župans did not draw a link between failure to swear loyalty and a lack of Slovak proficiency on the one hand, and a lack of reliability justifying the removal of officials on the other. The local situation on the ground contradicts the radical position described by the Office of the MPS during the meeting with deputies and župans in April 1919.

Although they are interesting, the lists and reports received by the Office of the MPS provide only patchy information on the situation, for several reasons. Firstly, they contain no direct information on some of the counties most known for their administrative difficulties, such as Užhorod and Šariš. Secondly, several župans and district chiefs, responded that they were unable to provide all or some of the requested lists, as they did not have the information themselves, an issue which can be attributed to the fact that they often had no direct contact with parts of the territories under their authority; this was certainly the case in Komárno⁴⁴ but also in Abauj-Turňa where the župan Sekáč could only send lists of civil servants at the county level itself.⁴⁵ Moreover, an examination of the reports and letters which some župans had sent to the Office of the MPS in the same weeks of July draws a less positive picture. For example, Ján Jesenský, the župan of Gemer-Malohont, a county in which issues regarding the inability of the state to enforce its mandate had been continuing for months, reported difficulties in the summer that he was not alone in facing, such as the impossibility of applying decisions to remove civil servants as it was impossible to replace them⁴⁶ and considerable legal and political uncertainty resulting from excessively long response times in confirming appointments.⁴⁷ This letter, like others, highlights one of the blind spots when it comes to administrative difficulties: the delays on the part of the Office of the MPS in Bratislava in formalizing the status of staff.

A report from a political assistant named Rohrbacher on the situation in Užhorod in the summer of 1919 reveals that the situation was more chaotic in the eastern

and southern counties.⁴⁸ Rohrbacher described (and this was not contradicted by the župan's reply a few days later)⁴⁹ an administration that was partly out of control, where circuits for administrative sign-offs were erratic and arbitrary, large sums of money circulated without any checks, and some funds were diverted for personal use. He feared that some Czech civil servants posted to the county office were "very unhappy and considering leaving their positions rather than continuing to administer in such conditions". In conclusion, he suggested "a serious audit of the whole administration" and the posting of personnel "based on qualifications and experience, and not on some official's whim as has been the case to date."⁵⁰

RECURRENT PROBLEMS IN THE POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION

Despite these persistent difficulties, the autumn of 1919 did see a general stabilization of the administrative situation at higher levels (i.e., the offices of the deputy district chiefs and district chiefs). Several counties, however, did remain understaffed in terms of political administration personnel.

This can be seen in the administrative report produced by the župan of Hont in late December 1919. Hont was one of the most complicated counties to restructure administratively. Even by the end of the year, only a few positions had been filled within the administrations of districts and communes, and some parts of the county had no notary and no civil servants whatsoever.⁵¹ The župan's staff themselves had to report to the MPS that they were unable to implement the instructions received from Bratislava. Similarly, the quarterly administrative report of January 1920 on the administrative situation in Abauj-Turňa county stated that while positions at the county level were mostly filled, several vacancies remained in administrative services in districts and communes.⁵² This situation raised difficulties due to the fact that most of the everyday work of the administration concerning the local population required the involvement of these lower levels of county officials.

In addition to the material difficulties encountered in the establishment and everyday tasks of regional administration, such as unsuitable premises, insufficient resources and issues around travel, the specific problem of the pay conditions of civil servants very

⁴² SNA, MPS, box 256, 1878/1919, Župan of Nitra to Ivanka, July 17, 1919 (in Prez. Adm. 1346/1919). Župa Nitra – Okres Nové Zámky. Soznam slovenského neb českého jazika neovládajúcich uradnikov a zamestnancov (sic), July 9, 1919; Ibid., Seznam uradnikov mesta Nových Zámkov s poznamenaním jakého držania boli pri vpadnutí bolševikov do mesta (sic), s.d. (probably July 8 1919). See also: Ibid., 9176/1919, Župan Office of Ráb-Komárno-Ostrihom and the town of Komárno to MPS, December 1, 1919 (in Prez. Adm. 1346/1919).

⁴³ SNA, MPS, box 304, inv. no. 4818. Župan Jamnický to MPS, Komárno, September 17, 1919.

⁴⁴ SNA, MPS, box 256, inv. no. 1791/1919. Župan Office counsellor, on behalf of the Župan, to the delegate for administration of the Office of the MPS in Bratislava, Komárno, July 15, 1919 (in Prez. Adm. 1346/1919).

⁴⁵ SNA, MPS, box 256, inv. no. 1546/1919. Župan Sekáč of the city of Košice and Abauj-Turňa to MPS, July 4, 1919 (in Prez. Adm. 1346/1919).

⁴⁶ SNA, MPS, box 256, 2132/1919 (in Prez. Adm. 1346/1919). Župan of Gemer-Malohont to Office of MPS, July 24, 1919.

⁴⁷ SNA, MPS, box 256, Prez. Adm. 867/1919, Rim. Sobota. Oznam o propuštění... Župan of Gemer-Malohont to MPS, Rim. Sobota, July 30, 1919.

⁴⁸ SNA, MPS, box 257, Prez. Adm. 1922/1919, Užhorod – neutěšené poměry. Dopis Dra Rohrbacher (political assistant, 2nd class) to Office of MPS, July 21, 1919.

⁴⁹ SNA, MPS, box 257, Prez. Adm. 1922/1919, Užhorod – neutěšené poměry. Župan Moys to Office of MPS, Užhorod, August 18, 1919.

⁵⁰ SNA, MPS, box 257, Prez. Adm. 1922/1919, Užhorod – neutěšené poměry. Dopis Dra Rohrbacher (political assistant, 2nd class, polit. adjunkt II. třídy) to Office of MPS, July 21, 1919.

⁵¹ SNA, MPS, box 5, Zálezitosti verejnej správy, Sign. Prez. II/2, inv. no. 328, Zpráva župana o politickej a administratívnej situácii župy Hontianskej koncom roku 1919. Report submitted to the administrative committee of the county on December 30, 1919.

⁵² SNA, MPS, box 5, Sign. Prez. II/2, inv. no. 328. Zálezitosti verejnej správy. Štvrťročná zpráva o administratívnom položení župy Abauj-Turňanskej (January 30, 1920).

soon became an acute issue.⁵³ This was thrown into greater relief from the summer, as the overall regional administrative structure stabilized. At least two issues were involved here: the pay gap between personnel from the Czech Lands and those from Slovakia and Ruthenia, and the generally insufficient pay within the context of high inflation.

The pay disparity between Czechs and Slovaks became a critical issue as increasing numbers of civil servants from the Czech Lands were brought in⁵⁴ and deployed from the first weeks after the establishment of Czechoslovakia as a result of the lack of reliable local personnel.⁵⁵ These civil servants were encouraged to relocate to Slovakia through a daily bonus that was not granted to other personnel working there, whether they were existing officials who had been in service since the days of the Monarchy or those who had been directly recruited by the administration of the new state. The downsides of this solution which led to a significant pay gap between staff members, irrespective of experience, began to emerge in the spring of 1919 and escalated after the departure of the Bolshevik Hungarian army.⁵⁶ The documents available in the archives of the Office of the MPS show the attention paid to this issue by župans for their counties and in certain towns where the issue appears to have become particularly acute by the autumn of 1919. The fact that the authorities were aware of the potential of these difficulties is apparent in the request sent by the Club of Slovak Deputies to the Office of the MPS in mid-August for an immediate report on the subject and for the competent authorities to be instructed to put an end to these injustices and apply an equal pay system to all civil servants.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, there appears to have been a lack of progress on the issue, as the subject was again broached by the Club of Slovak Deputies in its Memorandum of November 6th 1919 which highlighted the “rozkoľ” (schism) between Czechs and other civil servants.⁵⁸ The situation was now of sufficient concern for Counsellor Eisenmann, a leading figure in the Office of the MPS in Bratislava, to ask the župans to immediately inform Bratislava of any conflicts.⁵⁹

Even disregarding the gap with their colleagues from the Czech lands, civil servants in Slovakia were in an unenviable position. Persistent issues with inflation meant that low salaries were required to be offset through bonuses. In March 1919, for example, a provisional cost of living bonus corresponding to 50% of the basic salary was intro-

duced.⁶⁰ These bonuses sought to limit the pay gap, but they proved insufficient, particularly in the case of lower-level personnel.

While the problem appeared most urgent in the counties where the political situation was more complicated, not even the most stable counties were entirely immune to the worsening material circumstances of their staff. In Liptov county, the experienced župan Jozef Kállay, who had been in office since December 1918, reported serious difficulties in mid-September in running his administration because of the mediocre salaries offered to low- and middle-ranking personnel.⁶¹ However, these difficulties were not limited to the lower ranks of the administrative hierarchy. The župan of Bratislava was not the first to draw attention to this when he passed on a memorandum in early January 1920 that municipality notaries, district notaries and sub-notaries in Trnava had adopted in November. He warned that “the material circumstances of the notaries is pathetic and their legal position is unclear, a fact which is arousing a certain bitterness among them and leading to a general sense of disaffection with their work that is growing every day”.⁶² The župan suggested that while it was impossible to offer these civil servants better salaries, it was crucial to take action of some kind “so that they can see that the government is interested in them”.⁶³ This was also the case in the southern county of Komárno where, as the župan reminded the Office of the MPS on several occasions, even worse conditions had prevailed for months. On November 1st 1919, he sent the Office of the MPS a letter from the county’s civil servants which expressed a sentiment of personal shame but also a profound anger at the degradation of their role and position. Their complaints underlined the material difficulties linked to the problem of pay and mentioned the long and fruitless wait for the promised pay adjustment (no doubt from the summer), before continuing: “We are now completely exhausted materially and in a situation such that we have to sell our clothes to get by”.⁶⁴

In tandem with the growing concerns over salaries, housing was also becoming a major concern.⁶⁵ This issue was not unrelated to that of pay and bonuses due to the transfers of some officials to regions far from their homes. As these new arrivals could not be housed by their administration, many of them were forced to pay for both personal and professional lodgings.⁶⁶ The lists that provide information on the origins of civil servants suggest that the problem was most frequent in the county administrations and at the higher levels of district administrations, where recruitment was less localized, than at

⁵³ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 663/1919. Porada županů a poslanců ve dnech 11.-13.4.1919.

⁵⁴ Ladislav Lipscher, *K vývoju politickej správy na Slovensku*, 74-77; Natália Krajčovičová, “Českí zamestnanci v štátnych službách na Slovensku v prvých rokoch po vzniku Československa,” in *Československo 1918-1938. Osudy demokracie ve střední Evropě (I)*, Jaroslav Valenta, Emil Voráček and Josef Harna eds. (Prague: Historický ústav AV ČR, 1999), 179-183.

⁵⁵ See SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 36/1919, Zem. konc. úřed. České národnosti. Jednatel klubu koncepčního úřednictva zemského výboru království českého to the Health Minister Vavro Šrobár, Prague, December 15, 1918. See also SNA, osobný fond Pavol Blaho, box 40.

⁵⁶ Natália Krajčovičová, “K otázke personálneho obsadzovania orgánov štátnej a verejnej správy,” 118.

⁵⁷ SNA, fund Klub slovenských poslancov (hereinafter KSP), box 4, inv. no. 3, 1919, no. 142, 13.8.1919. Club of Slovak Deputies to Office of MPS, Prague, August 13, 1919.

⁵⁸ SNA, KSP, box 5, inv. no. 3, 1919, no. 306. November 14, 1919.

⁵⁹ SNA, MPS, box 262, no. 8768/1919 prez. Adm. styk českých a slovenských úradníkov na Slovensku, Bratislava, November 28, 1919.

⁶⁰ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 156/1919, Opatření politického úřednictva koncepčního a kancelářského pro zemskou správou Slovenskou. Interior Minister to MPS, Prague, March 22, 1919.

⁶¹ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 271/1919, Lipt. Sv. Mikuláš. Prošba o zašatenie pre úradníkov a zamestnancov verejnej správy. Letter from the Župan of Liptov to MPS, Lipt. Sv. Mikuláš, September 16, 1919.

⁶² SNA, MPS, box 328, Prez. adm. XIV, 210, 658/1920.

⁶³ SNA, MPS, box 328, Prez. adm. XIV, 210, 658/1920.

⁶⁴ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 640/1919, Komárno – náhlá výpomoc žup.

⁶⁵ SNA, MPS, box 299, no. 9691. Memorandum Klubu slovenských poslancov, November 6, 1919.

⁶⁶ See for example SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 516/1919, Košice – žádosti úř. k jmenování. Župan of Ráb-Komárom-Ostrihom and the town of Komárno to MPS, Košice, 10 May 1919; SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 237/1919. Župan of the city of Košice and Abauj-Turňa County to the Office of MPS. Mimoriadné prídavky štátnych stoličných úradníkov na slovensku, Košice, July 27, 1919.

the lower levels of district administrations, as the vast majority of these personnel were recruited from near their places of residence. Abauj-Turňa county was a good example of this trend; insufficient pay for staff members who had to maintain two homes had already been highlighted by the župan in May,⁶⁷ but the local župan Sekáč pressed his case more firmly in July by sending the Office of the MPS a list of 26 civil servants under his authority who had requested special compensation in light of the exceptional costs which they were forced to bear. Eighteen of these state employees were from Orava, with most holding significant responsibilities in the county or district offices.⁶⁸ The problem persisted in certain regions until the end of the year.⁶⁹

THE ISSUE OF THE CONFIRMATION OF APPOINTMENTS

Although the situation gradually began to stabilize and steps were taken to improve the general functioning of the administration, problems remained, including that of the ongoing lack of qualified personnel for Bratislava's evolving central administration; other issues included the requirement for geographical transfers and the specific conditions for confirming admission of individuals into the civil service. The shortage of qualified staff was clearly felt, including within the administration of the Office of the MPS in Bratislava. On January 24th 1920, the Office of the MPS gave all župans a week to produce a list of the names of "good Slovak officials of ranks 6 or 7" (the middle ranks in the nomenclature of the period) who would be eligible for transfer to the political section of the office of the MPS, which was currently suffering from a severe lack of personnel.⁷⁰ In the space of three days, the Office received negative replies from 13 župans reporting that they had no such personnel in their own administrations. In terms of both form and content, several of these responses echo the complaints which had been voiced regularly over recent months. While several župans adopted a more measured tone, others seem to have decided to use this request from the Office of the MPS to reiterate their earlier complaints over the persistent shortfalls which their own administrations faced. The župan of Bratislava took the opportunity to underline the "serious shortage" of political officials in his county,⁷¹ while the župan of Novohrad stated that he had "barely

enough totally reliable staff and [that he needed], on the contrary, such civil servants himself".⁷² Other respondents simply stated that they had only "the absolutely essential number" of "capable" political staff,⁷³ while some responses consisted of curt statements such as the following: "In the Gemer-Malohont County there is no civil servant such as described in the request;"⁷⁴ "there are no such civil servants in the county of Spiš;"⁷⁵ "there are no such civil servants in our county;"⁷⁶ (Zemplín) or "the county possesses no such Slovak political personnel member as described in the request that I could do without" (Orava).⁷⁷

The Czechoslovak Ministry of the Interior had drawn up a framework for civil servant recruitment in Slovakia in late March 1919⁷⁸ which stated that existing staff would have priority. The issue of the confirmation of civil servants had been raised in April-May 1919 and re-emerged during the autumn. From the point of view of the župans, the requested confirmations were essential for the stability and engagement of staff members in their work, particularly given the requirements that had been set (such as the willingness to take an oath of loyalty and to possess some knowledge of the Slovak language), which not all current civil servants met. On several occasions, župans warned the Office of the MPS in Bratislava of the damaging effects of delaying or refusing to offer these confirmations.⁷⁹ On this point, it is not easy to untangle what was caused by the backlog at of the Office of the MPS in Bratislava, but it may have been a result of an overly rigorous vetting of candidates' pedigrees and qualifications or some sort of administrative inertia.

The legislative framework was amended by Act no. 126/1920⁸⁰ of February 29th, Act no. 210/1920 on provisional amendments to the political administration in Slovakia from March 22nd and Act no. 211/1920 on commune and canton notaries⁸¹ which es-

⁶⁷ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 516/1919, Košice – žádosti úř. k jmenování. Župan Sekáč of the city of Košice and Abauj-Turňa County to MPS, Košice, May 10, 1919.

⁶⁸ This concerned 16 of the 18 staff members: the county counselor and secretary, a county sub-notary, the head of the Orphans' Authority (Sirotska vrchnost), four districts chiefs and four deputy district chiefs, and two district accountants. (SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 237/1919. Župan of the city of Košice and of Abauj-Turňa County to the Office of MPS. Mimoriadné prídavky štátnych stoličných úradníkov na slovensku, Košice, July 27, 1919).

⁶⁹ See for example SNA, MPS, box 262, no. 10403. Komárno úř. jmenování a o diety. Župan of Ráb-Komárno-Ostřihom and the town of Komárno to MPS, Komárno, December 18, 1919; Ibid., no. 10723. Prešov – Zaloha měst. zaměst. Župan Fabry of Šariš, Predmet: Preddavok pre zamestnancov župných úradníkov, Prešov, December 20, 1919.

⁷⁰ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1160, Politická správa Slovenska – přidelení slovenských úředníků administrativním oddělení, prez. Adm. 1160, January 24, 1920.

⁷¹ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1160. Župan of the county and city of Bratislava to the Office of MPS, Bratislava, January 31, 1920.

⁷² SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1160, Župan Bazovský of Novohrad to Office of MPS, Lučec, January 27, 1920.

⁷³ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1160, Župan Fábry of Šariš to Office of MPS, Prešov, January 28, 1920.

⁷⁴ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1160, Župan Jesenský of Gemer-Malohont to Office of MPS, Rim. Sobota, January 27, 1920.

⁷⁵ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1160, Župan of Spiš to Office of MPS, Levoča, February 20, 1920.

⁷⁶ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1160, Župan of Zemplín to Office of MPS, Michalovce, February 26, 1920.

⁷⁷ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1160, Župan of Orava to Office of MPS, Dolný Kubín, January 28, 1920.

⁷⁸ SNA, MPS, box 255, Prez. Adm. 156/1919, Opatření politického úřednictva konceptního a kancelářského pro zemskou správou Slovenskou. Interior Minister to MPS, Prague, March 22, 1919.

⁷⁹ SNA, MPS, box 256, Prez. Adm. 867/1919, Rim. Sobota. Oznám o propuštění... Letter from župan Jesenský of Gemer-Malohont to Office of MPS, Rim. Sobota, July 30, 1919; For Šariš, see župan of Šariš to delegate for administrative affairs of the Office of MPS, Prešov, September 27, 1919 (SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 5099).

⁸⁰ Zákon o zřízení župních a okresních úřadů v republice Československé. Sbírnka zákonů a nařízení státu československého, ročník 1920, částka XXIX, 11. března 1920, 291-306.

⁸¹ Sbírnka zákonů a nařízení státu československého, ročník 1920, částka XLIV, 15. dubna 1920, 503-504 and 504-506, respectively.

tablished the new framework for civil servant status and the conditions for confirmation of admission into public service in Slovakia. Act no. 210/1920 brought the whole administration of county and župan's offices under state control and set out the principle of the hierarchical authority of the župan over them. While fixing the conditions for the final confirmation of applicants, it also introduced a series of exemptions. All civil servants who had served under the old Hungarian regime were required to request confirmation by the public administration before resuming their positions, with the MPS ultimately determining whether they were capable and sufficiently reliable to serve in the public administration. If they were deemed unsuitable, they would be sent into early retirement. The aim was to not only unify but above all complete the eradication of unreliable elements from the old Hungarian apparatus from the Slovak administration.

In February 1920, the župans were asked to send a list of current civil servants from the political administration who had not yet been confirmed. These documents shed light on the persistent issues of reliability revolving around part of the political administration, as well as the frequent failure to fulfil the legal conditions of language skills and the oath of loyalty. Moreover, these documents demonstrate the proportion of old-regime civil servants in certain counties.

The case of Šariš is particularly revealing in this respect. The documents sent to Bratislava in April 1920 for the confirmation of 73 notaries and sub-notaries from the county were annotated by the župan. He listed 23 examples of civil servants whom he deemed the most reliable of all the county's notaries, recommending a favorable outcome for them by stating that "even if they did not speak out for our republic, at least they undertook nothing against it; they have managed to survive under the set conditions and have fulfilled their service willingly."⁸² For 42 others, however, he wrote that "even if the candidates are not overt adversaries of our State, it can be concluded from their behaviour as a whole that they hope for the return of the Hungarian regime. I cannot therefore propose a favourable outcome" (implying tenure). However, in order to avoid depriving the administration of valuable administrative assets, the župan suggested transferring them to western Slovakia rather than insisting on early retirement.⁸³

The request for confirmation of personnel not meeting the loyalty and language requirements that had theoretically been mandatory for more than a year was not limited to the easternmost counties. In his March 1920 request to confirm the appointment of eleven civil servants from the Gemer-Malohont county office, župan Jesenský noted that five of them had not "mastered the Slovak language" and that four others were not "good Slovaks"; nonetheless he requested their confirmation for "moral and political

reasons", providing no further explanation for this demand.⁸⁴ We can only speculate that they had not disappointed in their work and were deemed potentially useful locally in smoothing the administration of a Hungarian-speaking local political environment that remained sensitive.

The lists of civil servants which the župans sent for confirmation in the first half of the year do give several indications as to the profiles of individuals in the political administration at the time. While the information which they contain is of variable quality, it does highlight a few characteristics of the staff members whose confirmation was requested, thereby suggesting that a distinction should be made between the situations at the county level and the district level. In terms of the administration of county offices, some of these lists concern counties to which we have paid little attention thus far. In Zvolen county, for example, the request for confirmation of county office staff members dated May 1919, included 14 people, only two of whom had been recruited after November 1918. They were all experienced civil servants who had been recruited between 1875 and 1913, with half of them commencing their careers in the 1890s.⁸⁵ A similar situation is found in the case of the Komárno county office; of the 33 candidates, only one had taken office after the establishment of the Czechoslovak state.⁸⁶ In Spiš, requests for confirmation at county level all concerned staff members who had been employed before the end of October 1918, with the exceptions of the county counsellor (župný radca) and a sub-notary.⁸⁷ Conversely, the list for the Liptov county office contained only staff members who had been recruited in 1919 and 1920.⁸⁸

The situation was more problematic in district administrations and less favorable in terms of the occupation of posts. In several counties, important posts remained vacant or were occupied by persons deemed unreliable.

Concerning vacant posts, the district official of Veľké Kapušany (in the county of Užhorod) had still not taken the oath of loyalty by January 1920, nor had the notaries of the five neighbouring districts.⁸⁹ In the county of Komárno, the few employees of the districts (between 6 and 8) had all taken office before October 1918,⁹⁰ while in Nitra county, the transfer of several district officials was requested in Nitra, Šaľa and Skalica.⁹¹

⁸⁴ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1788. Rimavská Sobota. Jmenování úředníků. Župan Jesenský of Gemer-Malohont to MPS, Rim. Sobota, March 16, 1920.

⁸⁵ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Župan of Zvolen to MPS, Banská Bystrica, June 10, 1920.

⁸⁶ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Zoznam úradníctva a pomocného personálu župy komárenskej. (S.d.).

⁸⁷ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Župan of Spiš to MPS, Levoča, February 12, 1920.

⁸⁸ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Župan Liptovský. Zoznam konceptných úradníkov v župe Liptovskej, May 20, 1920.

⁸⁹ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1774. Užhorod. Seznam úř. nesloživši slib. Župan Moyš to Office of MPS, Užhorod, January 27, 1920.

⁹⁰ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Zoznam úradníctva a pomocného personálu župy komárenskej. (S.d.).

⁹¹ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Menoslov úradníkov a zamestnancov v politickej správe župy nitrianskej. (S.d.).

⁸² SNA, BA, f. MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 8101. Prosby notárov župy šarišskej ohľadom provzatia do štátnej služby. Župan of Šariš to delegate for administrative affairs of Office of MPS, Prešov, April 29, 1920.

⁸³ SNA, BA, f. MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 8101. Prosby notárov župy šarišskej ohľadom provzatia do štátnej služby. Župan of Šariš to delegate for administrative affairs of Office of MPS, Prešov, April 29, 1920. Concerning the eight remaining candidates, meanwhile, he requested early retirement.

In Spiš, no district chiefs had been confirmed by the end of February 1920, and the same was true for district physicians in seven of the eight districts.⁹² In Hont, a long list of 110 civil servant positions remained unconfirmed as of February, including managerial positions in the Šahy and Pastúchov districts, chiefs in three other districts, and 39 notaries for the county as a whole.⁹³ The same problems with confirming appointments arose in Zemplín county where the župan was only able to provide lists for six of the nine districts in February.⁹⁴ The missing appointments comprised most of the district chief and his deputies, as well as four district physicians and two accountants. Further details on the situation in the county can be obtained from the information sent by the Government Commissioner for Veľké Kapušany; the list of 33 district officials from mid-January 1920 shows that more than half of them had not yet sworn loyalty, including the district chief, eight notaries, several sub-notaries, and all district physicians and veterinary surgeons. A similar situation was found in all of the county's districts.⁹⁵

Between their appointment at the beginning of the winter of 1918-19 and the spring of 1920, the political and administrative authorities in Slovakia had to adapt constantly to the shortage of human resources in a political context that remained unstable until July 1919 following the stabilization of regulations during the winter of 1919-1920. During this period, the requirements imposed by the MPS (a knowledge of the Slovak language and the administering of an oath of loyalty in particular) remained formally unchanged, but the practical realities of day-to-day administrative life forced it to adapt and retain whole sections of the pre-October 1918 administration. This departure from the initial objectives, which were still being reiterated at the meeting with the deputies and župans in April 1919, consisted either in setting additional deadlines for fulfilling the conditions for taking the oath and knowing the Slovak language or the *de facto* acceptance of derogations based on local specificities, provided that the župans were able to guarantee a minimum operational level of their administration. In addition to these structural difficulties, there were also material problems, primarily issues concerning the low incomes of staff and the inequity of pay scales, as well as the administration's inability to provide them with accommodation at their place of work when necessary. These problems appear to have had an impact on the administrative dynamic.

However, the severity of the lack of resources and the material deterioration in the living and working conditions of the staff varied from one county to another. Through-

out the western part of the country and in the three counties that were most active in the patriotic movement before 1918 (Turiec, Liptov and Orava), the new Czechoslovak authorities were rapidly able to staff the administration with reliable resources and without any major skill or language problems. In other counties, the few dozen new civil servants who were relocated from other counties allowed the state to cover the administrative and political needs of the župan's office and a few district chief posts, but the district administrations fared less well, with several prefects openly and repeatedly admitting that their offices remained understaffed and administered in unsatisfactory conditions. The use of Czech volunteers in the local administration seems to have been marginal and did not necessarily have a decisive impact on the functioning of administrations. In some cases, it was even counter-productive due to the Czechs' lack of knowledge about the terrain and local population. Different reports drawn up, especially in the summer of 1919, highlight the main weaknesses of the regional administration, but these would not be fully resolved until the process for confirming the appointment of civil servants was stepped up in spring 1920. Regional administration remained nevertheless hampered by the limited pool of potential recruits. The Office of the MPS continually had to deal with civil servants who did not fulfil the criteria set by the law, and the process of confirming regional political officials often dragged on throughout the year; the extent to which this was a result of the slow decision-making process of the Office in Bratislava is an issue which deserves further examination.

In this heterogeneous administrative landscape, administrative stability varied according to the category of office held; as in Transylvania, the former *ispáns* were all replaced very quickly. The new appointees were all reliable figures, degree and/or had been active in the Slovak patriotic movement for many years.⁹⁶ Replacement was much less systematic much less systematic as for the districts chiefs, particularly in the southern and eastern regions. However, this was not because the former civil servants from the Hungarian period had remained in post but because the new authorities had been unable to replace them. The same applies on a larger scale to certain key administrative functions, in particular notaries, who appear to be the administrative function with the greatest deficit more than a year after the formation of the administrative apparatus in Slovakia. More granular case studies of individual counties could provide a more precise overview of the persistence of old Hungarian-era civil servants and their position in the local administrative hierarchy of the new State. Similarly, such studies could provide a fuller analysis of the solutions found for certain administrative functions with persistent issues, such as notaries and district physicians and veterinary surgeons, as well as the *modus vivendi* found to address the respective use of Slovak and Hungarian in everyday administration and in the relations between regional administrations and the Office of the MPS in Bratislava.

⁹⁶ Étienne Boisserie, "The Formation." For more on Transylvania, see Judit Pál, "Főispánok és prefektusok."

⁹² SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Župan of Spiš to MPS, Levoča, February 12, 1920.

⁹³ SNA, MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, no. 1956. Župan Bellai of Hont to MPS, Šahy, 10 February 1920. Zoznam župných, okresných a obecných administratívnych úradníkov, ktoré sú od ministerstva vnútra ešte nevyzmenovaní.

⁹⁴ SNA, BA, F. MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1956. Župan of Zemplín to MPS, Michalovce, 24 April 1920. The lists concerned the districts of Humenné, Stropkov, Snina, Kráľovský Chlmec, Michalovce and Medzilaborce. The župan was unable to provide lists for Vranov, Sobrance or Kapušany.

⁹⁵ SNA, BA, F. MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 2820. Government Commissioner for Užhorod County to Office of MPS, 6 February 1920. On the issue of the oath of loyalty of the main civil servants in the districts of Kapušany and Sobrance, see SNA, BA, F. MPS, box 318, MPS-1920, Prez. Adm. I, 6/a5, č. 1774. Užhorod. Seznam úř. nesloživší slib. Župan Moyš to Office of MPS, Užhorod, January 27, 1920.

12. The Formation of Czechoslovak Security Offices in Carpathian Ruthenia and Their Leading Cadres

David Hubený

INTRODUCTION

Carpathian Ruthenia unexpectedly became part of the Czechoslovak Republic after the First World War. Considering the difficulties which the newly formed Czechoslovak Republic faced in enforcing its authority over the Sudeten German separatist provinces and in many regions of Slovakia in addition to the need to provide functional supplies of food and other necessities, it is understandable that the plans for the formation of the new Czechoslovak state apparatus in Carpathian Ruthenia could not be prepared in detail, nor could reliable and professional cadres be found for all of the required positions.

As a result, the government was forced to use the existing organizational structures that required stronger and more plentiful staff to deal with the extraordinary circumstances of the nascent state. The new Czechoslovak government relied primarily on the army, which was tasked not only with defending the state from its neighbours but also enforcing the Prague government's authority over the local population. Therefore, it was only natural that people from the Czech lands occupied the leading positions as well as the executive bodies in the easternmost province of Carpathian Ruthenia. Their requirements were simple: state responsibility, language proficiency, and especially knowledge of the processes and regulations overseeing integration.

The Czechoslovak territory that was named Carpathian Ruthenia had been a neglected and marginalized territory under the former Dual Monarchy. By late 1917, the Hungarian administration was being confronted with local unrest.¹ A year later, the state administration fell apart; in the autumn of 1918, local inhabitants looted the gendarmerie stations which resulted in the army being summoned.² In addition, attacks on the private property of wealthy citizens occurred, and Hungarian national guards

¹ П. К. Сміян, *Жовтнева революція і Закарпаття (1917-1919)*. Львів: Видавництво Львівського університету, 1972, р. 20.

² П. К. СМІЯН, *Жовтнева революція і Закарпаття*, 1972, 23.

were dispatched by Budapest to gradually re-establish order at the end of October.³ Following the establishment of the Hungarian Republic in November 1919, gendarmerie stations were assaulted and eighty officers disarmed near Berehove.⁴ Under the rule of the Republic, the police and gendarmerie were dissolved and a portion of the staff was transferred to the security bodies of the Republic's government.⁵

The subsequent collapse of the Hungarian Republic and the arrival of the Czechoslovak and Romanian armies only sealed the general distrust in the administrative and security authorities that had been subject to changes or were incapable of ensuring general security in the long term. In this situation, the Czechoslovak state was forced to rely on various national guards that the regular army did not see as competitors. For example, Dominik Aykler, a Hungarian agent who would later be involved in sabotage activities in September 1938, had been a "commanding officer of the gendarmerie in Maramureş and Ugocsa" but "gained recognition from Czechoslovak military offices".⁶ This example of a Hungarian patriot being retained as a provisional local security commander highlights the need for the fledgling state to develop a genuinely loyal and trustworthy apparatus to ensure internal security.

The Ministry of the Interior guaranteed internal security through the various security forces at its disposal. The gendarmerie, working in the countryside and small towns, was more numerous, while the state police force was active in the larger cities and significant border towns. Furthermore, there were comparable formations under the purview of the Ministry of National Defence that also worked towards ensuring domestic security such as the "field gendarmerie" which had a larger impact because it served on the front or in its immediate vicinity. The military police were mostly active in the hinterland, overseeing military discipline, but because of the shortage of civilian security bodies, they also assumed some regular policing duties.

THE GENDARMERIE

The Czechoslovak Gendarmerie⁷ first appeared in Uzhhorod on March 7th 1919 when the district gendarmerie inspector Václav Rendl arrived with a force of six men. On March 21st, the reserve lieutenant Karel Hajdóczy arrived to take over command the Uzhhorod gendarmerie on the orders of the Slovak Gendarmerie Headquarters which

³ Jan Rychlík and Magdaléna Rychlíková, *Podkarpatská Rus v dějinách Československa 1918–1946* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2016), 38.

⁴ П. К. Сміян, Жовтнева революція і Закарпаття, 94.

⁵ П. К. Сміян, Жовтнева революція і Закарпаття, 139–140.

⁶ *Reprezentatívny lexikon Slovenska a Podkarpatské Rusi* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Reprezenačného lexikona Slovenska a Podkarpatskej Rusi Academia, 1936), 14.

⁷ On the beginnings of Czechoslovak gendarmerie in Carpathian Ruthenia see David Hubený, "The Formation of the Czechoslovak Gendarmerie in Carpathian Ruthenia," in *Central and Eastern Europe and the World in the 20th Century. Continuities and Discontinuities*, eds. Lukáš Novotný, Jaroslav Valkoun and Csilla Dömök (Wien – Hamburg: New Academic Press, 2023), 104–117.



Fig. 12.1: Czechoslovak gendarmerie uniform from 1919 (NA, PMV, k. 241, sign. VI/O/9, manipulační období 1925–1930)

was responsible for the region of Carpathian Ruthenia. Along with Hajdóczy, several other gendarmes arrived to fill the posts at gendarmerie stations in the newly formed department in Velykyi Bereznyi, just over the border from Slovakia.⁸

The proposal for the establishment of an autonomous gendarmerie headquarters emerged in the summer of 1919, but it was opposed by the Slovak Gendarmerie Headquarters since parts of Carpathian Ruthenia were still occupied by Romanians. As a result, only a body titled the Office of the Exposed Gendarmerie Officers for East Slovakia (Maramureş, Ugocsa, and Bereg counties)⁹ was to be formed.¹⁰

At the end of June 1919, the Ministry for the Administration of Slovakia notified the Ministry of the Interior via the gendarmerie general commander that Carpathian Ruthenia should be granted special autonomy, meaning it would be provided its own gendarmerie headquarters. Accordingly, it

required a sufficient number of officers with a command of Russian, the language which was believed to be close to the local Ruthenian dialect. The Ministry with Special Power to Administer Slovakia mentioned that the middle cadres, i.e. district officers, could be comprised of both Czechs and Slovaks who would have to learn the language within two years. The remainder of the staff was to be supplied from within Carpathian Ruthenia itself or alternatively from East Slovakia, where many Ruthenian and Ukrainian speakers lived.¹¹

On September 30th 1919, the prominent gendarmerie officer Alois Jirka received an order to cooperate with Jan Brejcha, the head of the Civil Administration of Carpathian Ruthenia, to develop a proposal for the establishment of an independent gendarmerie headquarters. The completed proposal suggested that the headquarters consist of several hundred gendarmes but there was a huge shortage of interested parties, and the only officer to have shown interest in joining the Carpathian Ruthenia staff was Tomáš

⁸ Národní archiv (hereinafter NA), fund Generální velitel četnictva (hereinafter GVČ), box 26, ref. no. 121dův/1928. ⁹ In original: Úřad exponovaného četnického štábního důstojníka pro východní části Slovenska (župa Marmarošská, Ugočská a Berežská).

¹⁰ NA, GVČ, box 2, ref. no. 354dův/1919. These counties were not part of Eastern Slovakia, but they belonged under Carpathian Ruthenia which was administered by the Ministry with Special Power to Administer Slovakia.

¹¹ NA, GVČ, box 48, ref. no. 2206/1919.



Fig. 12.2: Czechoslovak gendarmerie uniform from 1920 (NA, PMV, k. 241, sign. VI/O/9, manipulační období 1925–1930.

Švojgr, the previous field gendarmerie commander of the Czechoslovak army in Eastern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. Jirka expected that the appointed Czech and Slovak men would learn the local language within two years and that the future staff would mainly be drawn from the local population which would improve the language skills of the gendarmerie and also meet the requirements for the autonomy of Carpathian Ruthenia.¹²

It was not, however, until 4 December 1919 that the Gendarmerie Headquarters for Carpathian Ruthenia¹³ was established in Uzhhorod based on the order of the Ministry of the Interior. The primary reason for not establishing a regular gendarmerie headquarters immediately was that the constitutional position of Carpathian Ruthenia within Czechoslovakia, and the extent of its autonomy still remained unresolved in this period.¹⁴ In this period, the Slovak Gendarmerie Headquarters provid-

ed administrative support to the facilities in Carpathian Ruthenia but this resulted in considerable delays due to the 500km distance between Bratislava and Uzhhorod.¹⁵ The need to establish a regular local gendarmerie headquarters was first raised in March 1920, and the Gendarmerie Headquarters for Carpathian Ruthenia would be transformed into a standard local gendarmerie headquarters with its own staff and equipment. This requirement was promptly accepted, and at the meeting of the board of ministers on July 6th 1920 “the proposition to establish an independent gendarmerie headquarters for Carpathian Ruthenia was approved” by the central government in Prague.¹⁶ As of January 1st 1921, the Gendarmerie Headquarters for Carpathian Ruth-

nia was renamed the Provincial Gendarmerie Headquarters for Carpathian Ruthenia in Uzhhorod.¹⁷

The gendarmerie of Carpathian Ruthenia¹⁸ was headed by the exceptionally vigorous but also irritable Alois Jirka (born June 12th 1871). In 1891–1892, Jirka had worked as an assistant teacher in elementary schools in Chotěborky and Doubravice in Bohemia; however, these years were not included in his service because they were not equivalent to the education and service of an administration officer.¹⁹

Prior to his appointment to the gendarmerie in Carpathian Ruthenia, Jirka had been accused of poor conduct during the war, including anonymous accusations that he had bullied Czech gendarmes.²⁰ Nonetheless, it appears that these complaints were not taken seriously by the gendarmerie administration because prior to being sent to Carpathian Ruthenia, Jirka had been a deputy commander for Colonel Josef Lang, a German national, at the Gendarmerie Headquarters in Moravia. Although Lang was regarded as loyal, precautions were taken in case he turned against the government, and Jirka was given an explicit order by the gendarmerie general commander that, in such an event, he should demand Lang’s resignation and assume his position.²¹ Coincidentally, Lang had previously been the gendarmerie commander in eastern Galicia, now Ukraine, where Jirka oversaw the department in Kolomyia.²² Officer Jirka, who was a Czech national, was thus the most suitable person to supervise the German national Lang. In March 1920, Jirka was valued as “having taken the full position of the local gendarmerie commander under extremely difficult conditions, proving his best abilities in every respect”.²³ A similar evaluation was made after he applied for promotion to colonel.²⁴

Regardless of how rigorous, brisk, strict, hot-tempered, and choleric Jirka was, including an apparent enthusiasm for crackdowns on any kind of law-breaking and the draconian enforcement of all laws, he was skilled enough to provide logical and well-reasoned statements on various proposals and suggest his own initiatives related to the training and organization of the gendarmerie.²⁵ Regarding the conduct and training of the gendarmerie, he advocated a hard line approach, yet he also declared that “the

¹² NA, GVČ, box 48, ref. no. 2206/1919.

¹³ In original: Četnické velitelství pro Podkarpatskou Rus.

¹⁴ NA, GVČ, box 48, ref. no. 2206/1919 and Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv (hereinafter VÚA – VHA), fund Zemské vojenské velitelství Užhorod (hereinafter ZVV Užhorod), box 5, ref. no. 3547.

¹⁵ NA, fund Ministerstvo vnitra I. – stará registratura (hereinafter MV-SR), manipulační období 1918–1924, box 481, sign. 19/1/44.

¹⁶ NA, fund Předsednictvo ministerské rady (hereinafter PMR), k. 4039, the government meeting on July 6, 1920, fol. 520.

¹⁷ In original: Zemské četnické velitelství pro Podkarpatskou Rus v Užhorodě. Věstník četnictva státu československého, 1920, no. 21, 31 Dec 1920, Regulation no. 37.

¹⁸ For further details see David Hubený, “Personální záležitosti z počátků československé správy Podkarpatské Rusi – obsazování četnických postů,” in Аркасівські читання: історико-археологічні та етнологічні дослідження у контексті гуманітарного розвитку європейського суспільства. МАТЕРІАЛИ VI МІЖНАРОДНОЇ НАУКОВОЇ КОНФЕРЕНЦІЇ. Миколаїв 15–16 квітня 2016 (Миколаїв: 2016), 54–57.

¹⁹ NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitra I. – prezidium (PMV), k. 61b, sign. V/Č/12

²⁰ NA, GVČ, k. 1, ref. no. 262dův/1919.

²¹ Jaroslava Kacetlová, *Četnictvo na cestě od monarchie k republice. Budování četnického sboru v Československu v letech 1918–1925. Disertační práce* (Brno: Masaryk University, 2013), 33.

²² Boh Mladý ed., *Úsvit čs. vykonného četnictva. Stavovská čítanka* (Prague: 1925), 90.

²³ NA, GVČ, k. 3, ref. no. 68dův/1920.

²⁴ Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky (hereinafter AKPR), Praha, fund Kancelář prezidenta republiky (hereinafter KPR), Protokol P, sign. P I 537/20.

²⁵ NA, GVČ, k. 10, ref. no. 589 and 640dův/1922.

first task of a gendarme must be [...] to win the absolute trust of the local inhabitants through his high morals and correct living, to learn about the region and people, their character, life, and customs, about every single individual, to be able to see even the greatest secrets of their lives. Then his true role comes forward, i.e. to use a piece of advice, reprimand, learning or any suitable means to ensure that the material as well as psychological prerequisites of criminality lose influence.”²⁶ This humane and preventive approach was most likely related to Jirka’s studies at the pedagogy institute which also contributed to his strong leadership, teaching skills and his emphasis on the education of his subordinates.

Jirka eventually achieved his long-standing ambition of being promoted to the rank of general on December 31st 1923²⁷ while serving in Moravia.²⁸ The reasoning, inter alia, included the following statement: “He earned great merit for his organisation of the gendarmerie in Carpathian Ruthenia. Similarly, he demonstrates his best in every respect in Moravia. The president of the local political administration in Brno especially highlights his organisational skills and energy that led to the increased performance of the gendarmerie in Moravia and to strengthened discipline”.²⁹

However, the hot-tempered Jirka had been the subject of various complaints even after his relocation from Carpathian Ruthenia to Moravia where he reputedly hectorated the gendarmes so heavily that some even ended up in prison.³⁰ During 1923–1924, several complaints were filed on his behaviour and language, yet following yet another review, it was pronounced that Jirka was a disciplined and order-abiding officer; nonetheless, he was encouraged to lower his use of irony and sarcasm which had aroused needless exasperation and subsequent complaints.³¹ Moreover, the unofficial gendarmerie newspaper *Četnický obzor* regularly published negative reports about Jirka in this period, repeatedly accusing him of nepotism as regards his nephew who had been appointed district commanding officer³² after only five years of service. *Četnický obzor* recommended that Jirka visit a sanatorium where he could ease his nerves.³³ It even dedicated a sarcastic poem to Jirka:

‘To Lojza’
Our dear Lojza, such a good boy,
He keeps discipline within gendarmerie,
And loves gendarmes – after all!³⁴

It is therefore not surprising that in the spring of 1923 Jirka suggested that gendarmerie publish their own official magazine³⁵ which would reduce the influence of *Četnický obzor*.³⁶

Jirka never seems to have aspired to the post of commanding officer of the gendarmerie in the whole republic; however, when the General Commander Jan Mrázek fell ill in January 1921 and it became clear that he would not return, it was stated in the search of a successor that Jirka (along with Karel Skorkovský and Jindřich Jedlička) was one of three colonels of a senior rank most suitable to replace him. Ultimately, however, a more junior officer, Karel Vyčítal, assumed the general commanding officer’s post regardless of the other candidates’ seniority. Although he had only been appointed colonel on May 7th 1920 and general as early as February 1st 1921, Vyčítal was found to be “more competent”, and he had certainly proved successful as the Silesian gendarmerie commander during the Cieszyn Silesia referendum which granted the majority of that district to Czechoslovakia rather than Poland, and he had also been deemed “an extremely skilled staff officer” as a deputy of the gendarmerie general commander.³⁷ More significantly, perhaps, he was regarded as a tactful officer, and tact, a crucial quality in such a high position, was not one of Jirka’s strongest points. Unsurprisingly, Vyčítal and Jirka did not have a particularly warm relationship.³⁸

Jirka retired from the gendarmerie on January 1st 1927³⁹ with a complimentary recognition for his successful service.⁴⁰ He caused a stir once again in 1937 when he was investigated for making allegedly insulting statements about President Tomáš G. Masaryk and the political system. Once again, he was defended by his former colleagues, with Gendarmerie General Commander Josef Šustr insisting that that Jirka “was a sincere fearless Czech [even] in the time of the Austria-Hungarian Empire”.⁴¹ A retired gendarme with a history of alcohol problems also reported Jirka at the gendarmerie station in Dolní Bludovice. In connection with this, Šustr promptly added that he had most recently seen Jirka in the mid-1920s when he “was physically and mentally very decrepit. He said he would most likely not live much longer because he had tuberculosis. It was not possible to exclude the possibility that he was suffering from *dementia senilis*”.⁴²

The case of Alois Jirka highlights the significant lack of reliable gendarmerie officers after the establishment of the Republic; in this situation, even officers who had been the subject of numerous complaints could achieve positions of considerable authority and rank. Moreover, the events of 1937 reveal that the gendarmerie officer corps continued

²⁶ NA, GVČ, k. 9, ref. no. 368dův/1922.

²⁷ Věstník četnictva státu československého, 1924, no. 5, 29 Mar 1924, p. 21.

²⁸ NA, GVČ, k. 124.

²⁹ AKPR, KPR, Protokol P, sign. P I 331/24.

³⁰ NA, PMV, k. 61d, sign. V/C/12.

³¹ NA, PMV, sign. 225-218-17, fols. 2-15v.

³² “Je anebo není tohle protekce?” *Četnický obzor* II, no. 4, Jun 15, 1921, 32.

³³ “Šprochy,” *Četnický obzor* VI, no. 7, Apr 1, 1925, 60.

³⁴ “Lojzovi,” *Četnický obzor* VII, no. 14, Jul 15, 1926, p. 112.

³⁵ Ondřej Kolář, *Státní pořádkové složky na Chebsku v době první Československé republiky* (Prague: Academia, 2016), 108–109.

³⁶ “Protekcce pokrevní,” *Četnický obzor* II, no. 15, Dec 1, 1921, 130.

³⁷ NA, PMR, k. 679.

³⁸ Ivana Kolářová and Ondřej Kolář, *Generál četnictva Karel Vyčítal* (Prague: Academia, 2018), 64.

³⁹ NA, GVČ, k. 124.

⁴⁰ Věstník četnictva státu československého, 1926, VIII, no. 14, Dec 31, 1926, 51.

⁴¹ Ivana Kolářová and Ondřej Kolář, *Generál četnictva Karel Vyčítal*, 64, fn 141; NA, GVČ, k. 35, ref. no. 177dův/1937.

⁴² NA, GVČ, k. 35, ref. no. 177dův/1937.

in the spirit of army officer camaraderie, with officers willing to protect each other, as the case of 1937 shows. On the other hand, it should be stressed that Carpathian Ruthenia was not considered a bad posting; for some time all efficient members of the corps had to serve there.

THE FIELD GENDARMERIE

Czechoslovak armed forces deployed in the east of the state⁴³ had raised the issue of establishing a local field gendarmerie in the spring of 1919. That May, the local military headquarters asked General Edmond Hennocque, the commander of the eastern group of the Czechoslovak Army which was also known from sources as the Rusyn Army, what type of forces he required. The inquiry differentiated between provincial and field gendarmerie, although both groups of gendarmes would be subordinated to the army rather than the civilian administration. Hennocque was also asked to determine a place where the gendarmes should be stationed and what weapons and other equipment they required. Accordingly, the query also examined whether the Bratislava Gendarmerie Headquarters,⁴⁴ the body which had originally been formed to oversee the security forces in Carpathian Ruthenia, could provide any further assistance.

The role of the Field Gendarmerie⁴⁵ was limited by the fact that it lacked the personnel to fulfil even the most basic of tasks. For example, in May 1919, the Rusyn Army Headquarters ordered that all subordinate units tasked with policing should stop passing on suspected wrongdoers because their guilt could seldom be proved and suspects were usually being released without charge; as a result, the task of enforcing the law only added to the existing burden of the overworked staff without offering any positive outcomes. The headquarters pointed out that it had no field gendarmerie at its disposal, only the military police which, however, was only located in towns where they were tasked with assisting other officials. The lack of a field gendarmerie further exasperated the Rusyn Army Headquarters because the field units repeatedly arrested and sent back civilians who were attempting to cross the demarcation line between Czechoslovakia and Hungary on their way to work in the fields.⁴⁶ It was generally believed that the existing field gendarmerie was the only institution that could solve this issue effectively using the existing regulations.

As a consequence, the Field Gendarmerie was established in the summer of 1919 based on an agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and General Maurice Pellé to assign fifty-six experienced gendarmes as well as 160 new recruits, and a further

sixty soldiers from the regular army on June 2nd 1919. The urgency of this assignment was emphasized in the dispatch which requested the following: “Let these men be dispatched to their destination as soon as possible;” the assigned men were immediately dispatched to their new post in Ruthenia two days later on June 4th 1919.⁴⁷ Prior to the arrival of the local field gendarmerie commander, the men were under the direct command of the military police.⁴⁸ In addition to guarding the forecourt and the new border between the armies, they were entrusted with manning the border crossings that prevented people and goods from crossing illegally, but the performance of this duty led to occasional clashes with the Hungarian border guards, albeit without loss of life.⁴⁹ In contrast, the borders with Poland and Romania were quiet in this regard.

As a result of the gradual stabilization of the situation and the formation and expansion of additional internal security forces, the formal dissolution of the Field Gendarmerie was expected in September 1920. Yet, it was briefly postponed by the protests of the Civil Administration of Carpathian Ruthenia that pointed out the impotence of Carpathian Ruthenia’s local gendarmerie and local border guards as well as the benefits of the support which the field gendarmerie offered to the regular police,⁵⁰ not least because all of these branches were still understaffed.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the dissolution of the Field Gendarmerie was postponed by only one month, with its final dissolution being rescheduled for October 1920.⁵² The dispute between the Carpathian Ruthenia Gendarmerie Headquarters and the Ministry of the Interior about the necessity of this dissolution was echoed in a clash between Commander Tomáš Švojgr and the provincial gendarmerie headquarters which had urging the earliest possible dissolution of the force. According to one cynical report, Švojgr was accused of having drawn out the force’s cancellation in order “to gain time to process his application for the position of a police officer submitted to the civil administration for Carpathian Ruthenia”.⁵³ Disbanding the Field Gendarmerie was seen as a means of strengthening gendarmerie units in historical countries. Besides, the Field Gendarmerie had no role in peacetime; indeed, the law stipulated that the force was only supposed to operate in wartime.

Tomáš Švojgr (October 15th 1880 – March 26th 1937) initially embarked on a military career in the regular army and rose to the rank of sergeant before transferring to the gendarmerie on October 22nd 1905. He was posted to the command of General Hennocque as the field gendarmerie commander for eastern Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia on June 4th 1919.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ VÚA – VHA, fund Ministerstvo národní obrany – Hlavní štáb – operační oddělení, k. 4, sign. 11/1/1/4.

⁴⁸ VÚA – VHA, fund ZVV Užhorod, k. 18, Kronika, fol. 67.

⁴⁹ See: Ondřej Kolář, “Přepadení stanice polního četnictva v Kolbaši,” *Vojenská historie* 17, no. 2 (2013): 113–119.

⁵⁰ AKPR, KPR, Protokol PR, k. 2, inv. no. 138, sign. 645; NA, PMV, sign. 225-204-2, fols. 36–43; sign. 225-176-2, fols. 15, 18, 21.

⁵¹ NA, PMV, sign. 225-177-2, fol. 22.

⁵² VÚA – VHA, ZVV Užhorod, k. 19, Confidential Order no. 26 from 20 Oct 1920.

⁵³ NA, GVČ, k. 52, ref. no. 3028 and 3174/1920.

⁵⁴ VÚA – VHA, fund Kmenové a kvalifikační listiny – Tomáš Švojgr.

⁴³ For more on the conflict with the Hungarians, see Zdeněk Ježek. *Boj o Slovensko v letech 1918–1919* (Prague: 1928).

⁴⁴ VÚA – VHA, fund Ministerstvo národní obrany – Hlavní štáb – operační oddělení, k. 4, sign. 11/1/1/5.

⁴⁵ For more, see David Hubený, “Polní četnictvo na Podkarpatské Rusi v letech 1919–1920,” in *Československo 1918–1938/2018*, eds. Petr A. Bílek, Bohumil Jiroušek and Lukáš Novotný (České Budějovice: Nakladatelství Jihočeské univerzity, 2018) 154–169.

⁴⁶ VÚA – VHA, fund Boje na Slovensku, k. 1.

Švojgr tended to avoid direct confrontations, but most of his superiors regarded him as “a skilled executive officer” with an “ambitious nature and very strong skills”. In their eyes, he “was very diligent, fully reliable, and a great instructor towards his superiors in compliance with service seniority, communicative [towards] his peers, very kind towards his subordinates, very tactful towards the local populace”. This qualified him as an officer capable of independent commandment who was valued as “highly qualified” for ensuring the education, leadership and assessment of his subordinates. Nevertheless, in spite of the high regard in which he was held, he was transferred to Domažlice in Bohemia on November 1st 1920, where he assumed the position of a district gendarmerie commanding officer probably as a consequence of a poor assessment by Alois Jirka. He suffered several injuries while carrying out skiing training and left the gendarmerie shortly afterwards, on April 1st 1924.⁵⁵

Prior to this, Švojgr’s promotion to the rank of captain had been deferred because his name had been associated with a criminal case.⁵⁶ However, it was later proved that this accusation did not relate to Švojgr but rather to Police Officer Adolf Havránek who had been accused of insubordination, breaches of duty and embezzlement.⁵⁷ After his retirement, Švojgr worked for the municipal government in Domažlice and was involved in various clubs, especially the Sokol association. Following his death, his former colleagues in the gendarmerie celebrated his merits, especially his calm behaviour during the critical events that presaged the end of the Dual Monarchy in October 1918, but they also recalled that his forward thinking approach meant that he was not on good terms with the gendarmerie headquarters.⁵⁸

THE MUNICIPAL AND STATE POLICE FORCES

Municipal police departments, also known as municipal captaincies, were part of the municipal administration rather than the army. The position of the police captain and his office, the captaincy, had been established by legislation passed in 1870 and was regulated by the organisational statutes of specific municipalities.⁵⁹ The captain, a member of the municipal government with the right to vote, oversaw the tasks of the captaincy which although primarily focused on maintaining security, also included the handling of building permits, the monitoring and controlling of contagious diseases and ensuring food hygiene. Furthermore, he oversaw the removal of snow and the issue of stray

dogs. The captaincy was also expected to be constantly on duty, and they demanded the respect and compliance of the local citizenry. The Hungarian Ministry of the Interior ultimately oversaw the municipal police organisation in the territories that later became Slovakia and Ruthenia.⁶⁰

The development of municipal police offices (naturally limited by municipal budgets) ended with the First World War, when the military administration enlisted policemen and sometimes the entire staff of the office. As a result, their tasks were gradually taken over by other organs of law and order, even though the police captaincy partially continued its operations with the assistance of retired policemen. Civil guards also aided captaincies, yet most were soon dispatched to the front, and the weakened power and status of the force resulted in the dissolution of the civil guards.⁶¹ As a result, the assistance of the gendarmerie and later the military police to maintain order was unavoidable as the Austro-Hungarian system began to fall apart.

Even while still under Hungarian administration, there were calls for the centralization of the municipal police offices, but local municipalities resisted this by refusing to yield their buildings to a national police force; given the vast number of problems facing the Hungarian authorities in this period, reform of the municipal police fell by the wayside.⁶²

Predictably, the police forces in Carpathian Ruthenia followed the previous Hungarian municipal model even after their integration into Czechoslovakia. Since the Hungarian administration had chosen only loyal persons for its security forces even at the local level, the Czechoslovak authorities questioned the reliability and loyalty of the police captaincies. In an effort to overcome this drawback, the Minister for the Administration in Slovakia exerted pressure to adopt Act no. 165/1920 Coll. which facilitated the formation of reliable police forces in large cities like Bratislava and Košice but which was also applied in the Czech lands and in Carpathian Ruthenia too. However, there were combined police captaincies in Carpathian Ruthenia in which policemen arriving from the Czech lands were appointed as captains and junior policemen: in Uzhhorod until 1921, in Berehove, Khust and Mukachevo until 1922. Nevertheless, this was a provisional solution which was intended to help preserve order until sufficient finances could be deployed and the administration related to the implementation of a new state police force was introduced. Along with this change, the police force was decentralised because the Commissariat of the Uzhhorod Police Headquarters had incorporated the previously independent police captaincies in other Carpathian Ruthenia

⁵⁵ NA, MV-SR, k. 6136, sign. 13/129/15, manipulační období 1936-1940; GVČ, k. 171; Věstník četnictva státu československého, 1924, no. 3, 25 Feb 1924, p. 13 about 1 Mar 1924.

⁵⁶ Although their complaints about the behavior and cases of officers Jirka and Švojgr are mentioned, few members of the corps were ever the subject of an investigation.

⁵⁷ NA, PMV, k. 61b, sign. IV/C/12.

⁵⁸ “Kapitán Švojgr zemřel,” *Četnické listy* XI, no. 9, May 5, 1937, 74-75.

⁵⁹ Gabriel Szeghy, “Od hlavného mestského kapitána po policajný kapitanát v Košiciach,” *Vojenská história* 18, no. 2 (2014): 28.

⁶⁰ Lýdia Zemandlová and Marcela Varšová, “Miesto a úloha policajno-bezpečnostných zložiek pri zabezpečení verejného poriadku vo vývoji miest a obcí.” in *Kriminalita, bezpečnosť a súdnictvo v minulosti miest a obcí na Slovensku*, ed. Leon Sokolovský (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2007), 325-328.

⁶¹ Ladislav Gergely, “Verejný poriadok v meste Košice v období prvej svetovej vojny,” *Mesto a dejiny* 2, no. 2, (2013): 80-81; Gabriel Szeghy, “Od hlavného mestského kapitána po policajný kapitanát v Košiciach,” 41-42.

⁶² Gabriel Szeghy, “Od hlavného mestského kapitána po policajný kapitanát v Košiciach,” 43.

towns that were now controlled by the Civil Administration of Carpathian Ruthenia.⁶³ Thus, unlike the rest of Czechoslovakia, Carpathian Ruthenia had a united police force in the early 1920s that was centrally controlled from Uzhhorod. This solution, considered progressive in the Czechoslovak context, was a result of the unsettled political situation, the ongoing security issues and the expected granting of autonomy.

The establishment of the Czechoslovak police forces in Carpathian Ruthenia was primarily the work of Jaroslav Huber (born March 19th 1882), who had been working for the state administration since 1919. The Police Headquarters in Brno delegated him to the Civil Administration of Carpathian Ruthenia as a police referent to organise the police service, and he also assumed responsibility for supervising the existing police captaincies.⁶⁴ A report by the authorities on Huber's service noted that "he *via facti* held the position of the police prefect in Carpathian Ruthenia" from October 11th 1919 to September 17th 1920, adding that "Huber was an officer showing remarkable diligence, tact, conscientiousness, and experience who achieved good results in accomplishing his duties; he was conversant in all fields of police work". Given these accolades, it is not unsurprising that he was appointed as first as interim and later as permanent police director in Uzhhorod. The Ministry of the Interior also preferred police officers, especially those in positions of command, to take up various posts throughout the country, and Huber accordingly served in Plzeň in the second half of the 1930s.⁶⁵

THE MILITARY POLICE

The reason behind the establishment of the military police during the First World War was simple: following the reduction in the number of trained members of the security forces, substitute security corps were founded which rapidly evolved into established organs. During the coup of October 1918, the military police played a positive role across the Czech lands, as some security corps could not be trusted in some regions due to their ethnic composition or doubts over their constitutional allegiance (i.e., some forces remained loyal to the former emperor rather than the new republic). The flexible response of the military police, formed exclusively by Czechs and Slovaks, positively influenced the approach towards civil security offices with many members of German nationality.⁶⁶ As it was a substitute unit, members of the military police did not receive proper training, and this inevitably resulted in many missteps,⁶⁷ some of which were

⁶³ For more on the Uzhhorod Police Headquarters see David Hubený, "Počátky československé státní policie v Užhorodě v letech 1919-1922," *Paginae historiae* 30, no. 1 (2022): 591-606; on selected police headquarters see also David Hubený, "Krizové momenty z dějin československé policie v Berehově," *Paginae historiae* 31, no. 1 (2023): 397-422.

⁶⁴ *Ročenka svazu civilní stráže bezpečnosti v ČSR. Sídlem v Praze*. 1924 (Prague: Svaz civilní stráže bezpečnosti, 1923), 260-261.

⁶⁵ NA, PMR, k. 692.

⁶⁶ NA, PMV, sign. 225-282-10, fol. 50-51, 54.

⁶⁷ For example, impersonating the powers of other authorities or conducting unauthorized house searches.



Fig. 12.3: A uniformed security officer of the Police Directorate in Uzhhorod patrolling the Malé Galago administrative district under construction, 1924 (NA, PMV, sign. 225-195-9, fol. 43.)

partially offset by their enthusiasm. In this connection, the Council of Ministers Board pronounced in the summer of 1919 that "military police members often work very skilfully and with verve, but they are not always sufficiently acquainted with the legal rules to avoid mistakes which are looked at with increasing disfavour in line with the increasing urgency of achieving normality, i.e., the full dominion of law". The Ministry of National Defence had made efforts to formalize the units since the summer of 1919,⁶⁸ and the Ministry of the Interior worked towards the same end. The N Department (Civil Counter-Intelligence Service) of the Ministry of the Interior greatly appreciated the military police's efforts: "The military police's mistakes cannot counterweigh its meritorious agency in the interest of the republic".⁶⁹ The N Department acknowledged that the greatest drawback of the military police was the legislative vacuum which was predictably used to

criticize its entire operations,⁷⁰ although in the post-war period the state administration "could not and refused to forego the valuable service of the military police", especially in a situation where no adequate alternative existed.⁷¹ Although the military police appeared redundant in the predominantly Czech-speaking areas as early as the summer of 1919, it was confronted with a different situation in the frontier regions of Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia.⁷² Additionally, the Ministry of the Interior worked towards increasing the number of its security bodies and the centralization of communal police offices,⁷³ relying on former legionaries and military policemen when expanding their personnel.⁷⁴

When discussing the military police tasks in the National Assembly, the Ministry of National Defence highlighted the positive experiences of the military police in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia, including their various activities in support of the railway ad-

⁶⁸ NA, PMR, k. 3436, sign. 797/2.

⁶⁹ NA, PMV, sign. 225-282-10, fol. 51.

⁷⁰ NA, PMV, sign. 225-282-10, fol. 51.

⁷¹ NA, PMV, sign. 225-282-10, fol. 52.

⁷² NA, PMV, sign. 225-282-10, fol. 52-53.

⁷³ NA, PMV, sign. 225-282-10, fol. 57.

⁷⁴ NA, PMV, sign. 225-282-10, fol. 58.

ministration such the provision of guards at the stations in Uzhhorod and Mukachevo and the successful investigation of thefts.⁷⁵

In July 1922, the Ministry of National Defence suggested the dissolution of the military police to reduce costs on the grounds that it was only needed in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. The Civil Administration of Carpathian Ruthenia made no objections to this proposal, and the military police was dissolved in the region during 1921; nonetheless, noting the increasing numbers of gendarmerie, they requested if in the last sixty military policemen are Rusyns⁷⁶ in order to improve the national composition of the gendarmerie.

In addition to the unit in Uzhhorod, the military police operated in other towns in Carpathian Ruthenia, including Solotvyno, Berehovo, Khust, Yasinia, Mukachevo, and Vynohradiv. In large cities, military police units were first subordinated to the intelligence service of the General Staff and later to the local military headquarters. A close examination of one of these local commanders in Khust would offer a deeper understanding of the conditions in which the military police worked.

Melichar Houžvic (January 5th 1883 – May 24th 1929) had dedicated himself to military service in the First World War. In 1912 he moved from Prague to the Kingdom of Serbia where he owned a bakery. Nonetheless, on August 1st 1914, he deliberately joined the Serbian Army and fought throughout the entire war despite incurring four injuries, one of which left him with a paralyzed arm. This disability prevented his plan of joining the Czechoslovak legions in France, although it was speculated that the Serbs refused to release him from military service due to his martial qualities. After making repeated requests, he was cleared for active duty with various Serbian units and headquarters on the front before being discharged for health reasons while remaining part of the Serbian Army. Houžvic received several Czechoslovak and Serbian awards for his wartime deeds.⁷⁷

At the end of February 1919, he returned to Czechoslovakia on a medical train. Arriving in his homeland in April 1919, he was assigned to the Second Department of the Prague military police as a reporter on April 3rd and later posted to Khust on June 10th 1920. He held the position of the military police commander between June 15th 1920 and July 31st 1921 when he was appointed as garrison commander of the 45th Infantry Regiment.⁷⁸ His quick temper caused him problems as the head of the military police in Khust, and he received a written warning from the disciplinary committee stating that “he jeopardised the good reputation of the Czechoslovak Army because of his liberal approach to the prescription of fees for passport registering and he used violence towards a citizen of the republic during his duty”. The six-month disciplinary investigation was not included in his career advancement.⁷⁹

He preferred direct action to administration and related cultural manners, as is apparent in the chronicle of the Uzhhorod Military Commandment: “Based on the order of ZVV,⁸⁰ the commander of the 23rd brigade granted a 14-day leave to lieutenant Haužvic [from] the 45th Infantry Regiment to pursue the legendary bandit Šuhaj who had shot and killed a gendarmerie guard from Velká Koločava near Volovoj on May 17th. Lieutenant Haužvic undertook a private search [for the suspect] [...]. The ZVV ordered that lieutenant Hažvic be given all possible support to catch the gang. The search members searched the area between Khust – Volovets and Mukachevo but did not engage with the bandits.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, he excelled shortly afterwards during the intervention against the village of Vyshkovo that had mutinied during the mobilization in the autumn of 1921.⁸²

Houžvic remained with the 45th Infantry Regiment until May 10th 1922 when he was posted back to the Czech lands at his own request. In 1920, he was granted the status of legionary based on his service in the Serbian Army.⁸³ In the first half of the 1920s, Houžvic was instrumental in promoting and spreading knowledge about the Serbian Legion's operations.⁸⁴ He served in the military until 1928 when he was released with the rank of First lieutenant rank and the evaluation “incapable of service”.⁸⁵

Houžvic's relatively low military rank upon his discharge from service was most likely related to the evaluation of his service; a 1922 report described him as possessing a “somewhat unsteady, restless, and ill-judged nature” and specified his qualities as below average. These descriptions are repeated throughout his active service (“lively, short-tempered nature, somewhat ill-judged” or “lively, abnormally short-tempered, confident even when wrong, and of a boastful character”), but contrast sharply with the reports from 1920 when his service in Khust was characterised as “strong and vigorous” with good military traits referring to his ability to require strict discipline from his crew. General Mikuláš Antonín Číla expressed it the best in 1926: “An old, battle-proven warrior; a vigorous and invaluable soldier for turbulent times; unfavourably endowed for service during peace – is inflammable and incapable of getting on with some in the staff. Otherwise, he is a very valuable officer and suitable for the most difficult undertakings during the war”.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ ZVV: Zemské vojenské velitelství, Provincial Military Command.

⁸¹ VÚA – VHA, ZVV Užhorod, k. 18, Kronika ZVV Užhorod, fol. 201a.

⁸² VÚA – VHA, ZVV Užhorod, k. 23, Order no. 130 from Dec 20, 1921.

⁸³ VÚA – VHA, Poslužný spis legionáře, kmenové a kvalifikační listiny Melichara Houžvice.

⁸⁴ NA, f. Archiv Huberta Ripky, sign. 1-1-256-53a/14 and 1-1-256/55a/22.

⁸⁵ VÚA – VHA, Poslužný spis legionáře, kmenové a kvalifikační listiny Melichara Houžvice.

⁸⁶ VÚA – VHA, Poslužný spis legionáře, kmenové a kvalifikační listiny Melichara Houžvice.

⁷⁵ VÚA – VHA, Ministerstvo národní obrany – prezídium, k. 54, sign. 2/14.

⁷⁶ DAZO, fund 29, copy 1, file 348, fol. 16-20.

⁷⁷ VÚA – VHA, Poslužný spis legionáře, kmenové a kvalifikační listiny Melichara Houžvice.

⁷⁸ VÚA – VHA, Poslužný spis legionáře, kmenové a kvalifikační listiny Melichara Houžvice.

⁷⁹ VÚA – VHA, Poslužný spis legionáře, kmenové a kvalifikační listiny Melichara Houžvice.

CONCLUSION

Public security in Carpathian Ruthenia was enforced by several armed corps units during the first years of its incorporation into Czechoslovakia. In addition to the regular army and border guards, the gendarmerie, military police and regular police all played a role in ensuring order and the authority of the new state. These security corps largely relied on Czech cadres from the Czech lands, only sporadically accepting recruits of other ethnicities, a decision that was derived from the presumed need for total loyalty and a knowledge of the service regulations based on Czech practices. Although local inhabitants were eventually accepted into these forces, this only happened after the territory had been fully integrated; even under these conditions, candidates were vetted to identify those who lacked a grasp of the Czech language, those who were insufficiently educated or who had been accused of collaborating with the former Hungarian regime. The police forces were spearheaded by figures with unshakeable loyalty towards the newly established state such as the former legionaries who had fought for the liberation of Czechoslovakia during the war as well as participants in the anti-Habsburg Prague uprising of October 28th 1918. However, some officers were recruited even though they had previously served in the Austro-Hungarian state administration, primarily those who had indispensable professional skills. These men were dispatched to Ruthenia, generally for a brief period of time, where they would lay the foundations for the security corps that successfully resisted all of the pitfalls of the post-war and interwar periods, and successfully maintained public order in Carpathian Ruthenia until the Munich Agreement and the First Vienna Award of 1938–1939.

13. Career Paths in Changing Times – the Transition of the Apparatus of Food Provisioning in Hungary after WWII

Eszter Tarnai

INTRODUCTION

The topic of civil servants has been the subject of increasing academic attention in recent years, with many researchers applying multi-faceted analyses of the composition of groups of officials (for example, their family background or religion) to provide new perspectives and more detailed information on events such as transitions of power or historical turning points. A deeper understanding of state officials can allow us to examine the practical executors of the political power, and by mapping their motivations, we can learn more about the driving forces of state bureaucracies. The topic is still somewhat underrepresented in Hungarian academic literature, but many studies have been published to date which examine the early modern period and the 19th century.¹ In terms of the history of 20th century Hungary, several works had been published on the influx of refugees to the truncated state in the wake of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 (which included a large number of civil servants), the functioning of the state apparatus during the Second World War in the annexed territories of Northern Transylvania, Upper Hungary, Carpatho-Ukraine, Bačka, Baranja and the Međimurje and Prekmurje regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in addition to its role in the organization

¹ István Fazekas, *A Magyar Udvari Kancellária és hivatalnokai 1527-1690 között* (Budapest: BTK TTI-ELKH, 2021); Éva Somogyi, *Magyarok a bécsi hivatalnokvilágban* (Budapest: BTK TTI, 2017)

and implementation of the Holocaust.² The political transformations which Hungary underwent following the Second World War have been primarily studied within the framework of discussions on the issue of continuity vs discontinuity.

This study aims to compare the career histories of two individuals who might appear to be very different people at first glance, but whose common point of intersection is their participation in the management of the public supply crisis caused by the Second World War. Dr. Béla Gámenczy worked mainly in Budapest, the capital of Hungary, while András Szobek spent most of his life in the county of Békés in the southern of the country, but both came to play key roles in national policy on food issues. Although there are many memoirs from the politicians of the era, such as the communist Mátyás Rákosi or Zoltán Vas, there are relatively few personal accounts from those who were active at the lower levels of the state apparatus. In this study, the careers of two men who played important roles in the management of public food supply are reviewed in an effort to identify patterns within the civil service as a whole. What forms of continuity and discontinuity can be observed in the period after the Second World War with regard to civil servants? On what basis were individual public servants seen as reliable and professional under different political systems? What might have motivated these people and how did their family background and youth affect their careers? These conclusions can help to develop a better understanding of the changes in the management of public food supply, a field which was often accompanied by the transformation of the apparatus.

An account of the family backgrounds of the two individuals and the experiences of their youth, will allow us to examine what might have drawn them to their profession and to identify the skills which they acquired that would later prove useful to them. What difficulties did they face at the outset of their careers? How did they come to the forefront of public food provision after the Second World War? How did the new powers treat them after 1945? Were there any gaps in their careers and what changes took place during them?

Since the careers of both individuals were closely interlinked with the state of public food provision at the time and by changes in the administrative apparatus, the situation of public food provision is also addressed in some parts of the study to offer some con-

text. This study relies primarily on the unpublished memoirs of Béla Gámenczy and the memoirs of András Szobek, in addition to archival sources and press articles.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND YOUTH

The family backgrounds of the two individuals could not possibly be more different, yet in the case of both, deprivation was a defining childhood experience. Béla Gámenczy was born on September 15th 1904 in Budapest. His father, Béla Gámenczy, was an Armenian merchant from Transylvania and his mother, Mária Pados, came from a small peasant family in Vas County in the north-west of Hungary. His father had briefly ran a mixed retail store in Dés (present-day Dej, Romania), northeast of Cluj, before moving to Budapest,³ where the couple married in 1903.⁴ There is little doubt that the dramatic growth of Budapest from the 1890s onwards and its emerging large-scale industry and financial sectors played an important role in the decision to move to the big city, as the city gradually absorbed the workforce from the countryside.⁵

Gámenczy's father died in 1911 when he was seven years old, and his widowed mother raised him under difficult financial circumstances. Working as a seamstress, the widow visited wealthy families in the capital, but despite the deprivation in which they lived, she considered the education of her son as crucial.⁶

András Szobek was born seven years earlier, on December 18th 1894, on land owned by Count Apponyi Albert in Vadhát (now part of Békéscsaba) where his father worked as a manorial farm labourer. His mother's name was Mária Slimbarszky, and his parent's names suggest that Szobek had Slovak roots, possibly from peasants who had settled in Békéscsaba in the 18th century but who had quickly assimilated. As Szobek stated in his memoirs: "My childhood was not joyful".⁷ Even among the manor servants, they lived in the most miserable conditions, since the manorial farm workers always signed up for one year and were thus completely at the mercy of the manor.⁸ Even a married couple found it difficult to survive on such low wages, and the Szobeks also had to raise seven children, with the entire family sharing a single room with another family. Survival required ingenuity: his mother cultivated vegetables in the garden and wove clothes for her family from the thin hemp.⁹ At the beginning of the

² Balázs Ablonczy, "Budapest nem tud méltó elhelyezést biztosítani – Első világháború utáni menekült tisztviselők Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun vármegyében," *Történelmi Szemle* 65, no. 2 (2023): 275-290; Béni L. Balogh, *Trianon és a magyar közigazgatás* (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 2020); Gábor Egry, *Zárványok, hagyományok, szakemberek. A magyar közigazgatás és Nagy-Románia működése* (Budapest: Magyar Kormánytisztviselői Kar – Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, 2020); Edit Csilléry, "Közalkalmazottak és köztisztviselők Észak-Erdélyben a második bécsi döntést követően," *Limes*, no. 2 (2006): 73-90; Judit Molnár, "Csendőrök, rendőrök, hivatalnokok a Soá idején," in *Magyar megfontolások a Soáról*, eds. Gábor Hamp, Özséb Horányi and László Rábai (Budapest: Balassi, 1999) 124-133.; György Gyarmati, "A közigazgatás újjászervezése az „ideiglenesség” korszakában," *Történelmi Szemle* 38, no. 1. (1996): 63-98; György Gyarmati, "Harc a közigazgatás birtoklásáért. A koalícion belüli pártküzdelmek az 1946. évi hatalmi dualizmus időszakában," *Századok* 130, no. 3 (1996): 490-570.

³ Budapest Főváros Levéltára (hereinafter BFL), XIV.52.1. Gámenczy Béla jogász, székesfővárosi képviselő iratai. Személyes iratok. Önéletrajz.

⁴ BFL, XIV.52.2. Gámenczy Béla jogász, székesfővárosi képviselő iratai. Hivatali iratok. Gámenczy Béla 1940-es években készült családfája.

⁵ Mariann Nagy, "Budapest »nemzetközi város« gazdasága a 19-20. század fordulóján" in *A 'világváros' Budapest – két századfordulón*, eds. Györgyi Barta, Krisztina Keresztély and András Sipos (Budapest: Napvilág, 2010), 61.

⁶ BFL, XIV.52.2. Gámenczy Béla jogász, székesfővárosi képviselő iratai. Hivatali iratok. Életrajz.

⁷ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet emlékei* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1986), 9.

⁸ György Kövér and Gábor Gyáni, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a második világháborúig* (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 91-92.

⁹ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 9-10.

1900s, his father had started to work as a construction worker, and the family decided to move to Békéscsaba.¹⁰

In terms of educational opportunities, Gámenczy had the better position of the two, but both boys were expected to start working as soon as possible and help their families financially. Gámenczy began his high school studies in the 1914/15 school year¹¹ and graduated in 1922; although he immediately started working, he later completed his studies at the Faculty of Law and Political Science of Péter Pázmány University.¹²

András Szobek's opportunities were much more limited, and his chances of social mobility were unlikely. He completed six grades of elementary school in Békéscsaba, but the rural schools of the period were relatively rudimentary and taught only basic competencies, such as reading and writing, and perhaps some arithmetic.¹³ In 1906, his father suffered internal bleeding from heavy physical work and died soon after. At that time, Szobek was in his first year as an apprentice carpenter, but the family still lived in extreme poverty.¹⁴ In the cases of both Gámenczy and Szobek, it was their mothers' survival instincts and self-sacrifice that enabled the families to survive after the death of the breadwinner. Supporting education and vocational training was also an important step on the part of the mothers, as it gave the children the opportunity for social mobility; Gámenczy could theoretically reach the desired middle-class standard of living as a lawyer or civil servant, while Szobek could break out of the community of manorial servants through his status as a skilled worker.

IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Szobek initially worked on agricultural construction sites, and in his spare time he educated himself through reading. In this period, he became acquainted with the workers' movement, and in 1907–1908 he was elected president of the youth workers' organization of the Békéscsaba workers' home.¹⁵ He took part in several actions and got into trouble with the police many times. In 1910 he joined the construction workers' union, and he was barely 16 years old when he joined the Social Democratic Party of Hungary and became part of the illegal organizing committee of the National Association of Hungarian Construction Workers (Építőipari Munkások Országos Szövetsége).¹⁶ The Social Democratic Party of Hungary (1890) was one of the earliest parties which attempted to represent the interests of workers in Hungary. Among their objectives

were the eradication of the capitalist system, the introduction of public ownership of the means of production and universal suffrage, the establishment of trade unions, and the adoption of labor protection laws. In the interwar years, the Party was able to function within strict limits, but the leftist Hungarian Communist Party was banned. In 1948, the party was merged with the Hungarian Communist Party under the control of the Communist-sympathizing wing of the Social Democrats.

Szobek saw the task of the secret organizing committee as that of arranging political assemblies and ensuring discipline among members, but the outbreak of the First World War presented new difficulties. He tried to excuse himself from military service on family grounds, but this was unsuccessful. He was drafted in October 1914 and sent to fight on the Russian (1914–1916) and then the Italian (1916–1918) fronts. During the increasingly desperate winter fighting at the beginning of 1917, he and some of his comrades produced anti-war leaflets demanding peace for which he was demoted. During the Aster Revolution in Hungary at the end of October 1918, he deserted and returned home. He first applied to the Workers' Council in Békéscsaba, where he was tasked with organizing the workers' guard. During the Károlyi government, he was a member of the local national council. After the proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, he became the commander of a squadron of the Red Guard (Vörös Őrség), but after the Republic fell, he and his men were demobilized and interned in Újszász: "We almost died of hunger, the ones who weren't taken by dysentery, typhus or the cold".¹⁷ After the camp was closed in December 1919, he was taken to Cegléd and then to Nyíregyháza and then released in February 1921.¹⁸ The fact that Szobek came into contact with the labor movement at a very early age was crucial in the later course of his life. The horrors which he experienced on the front of the First World War and the police excesses of the Dualism era, the right-wing counter-revolution associated with Miklós Horthy and also his internment only turned him even more against the reigning government.

He only moved home to Békéscsaba in 1923 after the amnesty, but until then he worked at the Borsod coal mines in order to avoid constant police surveillance. On his return, he worked on local construction sites but was still involved with the Social Democratic Party and was thus subject to further harassment by the authorities. On April 7th 1932 he organized a silent protest in Gyula which was part of the national movement of the Social Democratic Party. All over the country, memorandums were submitted to the representatives of the counties demanding, among other things, universal and secret suffrage.¹⁹

He was the city secretary (városi titkár) of Békéscsaba, a position he would hold until 1944, and in 1925 he was elected to the city representative body (városi képviselő-

¹⁰ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 13.

¹¹ BFL, XIV.52.1. Gámenczy Béla jogász, székesfővárosi képviselő iratai. Személyes iratok. Gimnáziumi bizonyítványok.

¹² BFL, XIV.52.1. Igazolványok-iratok.

¹³ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 10.; Tamás Dobszay, "Magyarország kulturális élete a dualizmus idején" in *Magyarország története a 19. században*, ed. András Gergely (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), 465.

¹⁴ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 14.

¹⁵ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 16–17.

¹⁶ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 20.

¹⁷ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 46.

¹⁸ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 22–47.

¹⁹ Gábor Tóth, "Az MszDP falusi szervező munkája és tevékenysége Hajdú megyében a gazdasági válság éveiben," *Történelmi Szemle* 9, no. 3–4 (1966): 11.

testület), and in 1929 to the county legislative authority committee (megyei törvényhatósági bizottság).²⁰ In each of his positions, he represented the workers' faction and was able to gain political experience that he was able to apply in his future career.

Gámenczy was still young during the First World War and the subsequent changes in power, and his first appointment came on November 23rd 1922 when he was employed by the capital as a public service employee (díjnok) in the Third District Tax Office. Minor clerks (napidíjas hivatalnok) like him were paid daily and worked in administrative offices. In 1926, he was awarded a doctorate in jurisprudence and became a temporary assistant draftsman (ideiglenes segédfogalmazó), a promotion which also came with financial benefits. After a year and a half, he was transferred to the Central Audit Office (Központi Számvevőség), and was then transferred to the Eighth District's Registry Office.²¹ Although he remained a temporary clerk (ideiglenes hivatalnok), he was transferred to the eighth salary class, and therefore theoretically he had left the ranks of the "petite bourgeoisie", but in reality, however, his salary was only 74 korona per month (the currency in use between 1918 and 1927, equivalent to approximately 31 pengő); although this was supplemented by a small amount of housing allowance,²² his salary remained well below the middle-class income band of 400 pengő per month, and he could not expect to see a significant increase in his standard of living.²³

In 1933, he was transferred several times from one district to another.²⁴ Finally, in April 1934, he started work in the public provisioning department (közélemezési ügyosztály), a move which, in retrospect, was a breakthrough in his career.²⁵ The main responsibilities of the department consisted primarily of issues related to the distribution of food, as well as cases related to the management of public catering institutions maintained by the city authorities (for example, the Municipal Bread Factory – Községi Kenyérgyár). In 1936, Gámenczy became a draftsman (fogalmazó).²⁶

WORLD WAR II: CHALLENGES AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES

The centrally planned economy introduced during the Second World War required an extensive, multi-level apparatus that could manage and control the compulsory delivery system and the distribution and consumption of goods. At the national level, issues relating to the public food supply were the concern of the Minister without Portfolio, under whom the National Public Supply Office (Országos Közellátási Hivatal) was

established in 1940. In the following year, the Minister of Public Supply was authorized to appoint government commissioners for public supply (közélemezési kormánybiztos). From 1943, the head of each county was also a government commissioner who was responsible for organizing the distribution of food, clothing and other materials.²⁷

In the case of Budapest, the interaction between the mayor, the public supply department of Budapest (közélemezési ügyosztály) and the Minister of Public Supply determined the management of food provisioning. In 1942, Budapest – including the towns and villages which were connected to the capital (Nagy-Budapest) were transferred to the authority of the mayor of Budapest, who was given the authority of a government commissioner with a scope similar to that of the county government commissioner. His task was to supply the population with goods, especially food, to ensure price controls, to manage and control the implementation of government measures, to check the management and equipment and to supervise the distribution of available stocks.²⁸ In this process, the provisioning affairs department, which actually carried out the control function, maintained the statistical records necessary for the operation of the rationing system and also coordinated catering establishments owned by the municipality.²⁹ Another important institution was the Food Rationing Center (Élelmiszerjegy Központ) set up in 1941, which dealt with the distribution of food, the registration and supply of goods to centrally appointed traders and industries, and the accounting and control of rations.³⁰

András Szobek spent the first three years of the war in relative peace, but in 1942 he was once again called up for military service.³¹ In contrast, the war had a positive effect on Gámenczy's career right from the start. The city's departments were assigned more and more tasks within the framework of the centrally planned economy, so in 1941 Gámenczy was given the authority to sign minor documents. The following year, the mayor appointed him head of the Food Rationing Center, and from then on, Gámenczy became more and more deeply immersed in the theoretical background of the organization of the public food supply system. Although public life in this period was more oriented towards the extreme right, Gámenczy did not openly associate with the regime. At the turn of 1942 and 43, the then Minister of Public Supply, Lajos Szász, mandated that food rationing could only be redeemed in specific shops. Lajos Szász held office between 1942 and 1944, serving in both right-wing and far-right governments, and he was executed as a war criminal after the Second World War for, among other deeds, his fascist and anti-semitic policies.

The geographic limitations of access to central food supplies served to ensure that those who changed their place of residence (for example, those who had moved to

²⁰ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

²¹ Fővárosi Évkönyv az 1926. évre. (Budapest: Székesfőváros Házinyomdája, 1926), 279.

²² BFL XIV.52.2. Gámenczy Béla jogász, székesfővárosi képviselő iratai. Hivatali iratok. dr. Gámenczy Béla személyi iratai. 48762/1925.I. sz.

²³ György Kövér and Gábor Gyáni, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete*, 263.

²⁴ "Áthelyezések a városházán," *Magyarország* 14, no. 88 (1933): 7.; "Áthelyezések," *Nemzeti Újság*, 15, no. 97 (1933): 17; "Áthelyezések," *Pesti Hírlap*, 56, no. 48 (1934): 11.

²⁵ "Áthelyezések," *Pesti Hírlap*, 56, no. 96 (1934): 13.

²⁶ 19.100/1936-I. sz. Tisztviselői kinevezések, *Fővárosi Közlöny* 47, no. 74 (1936).

²⁷ Gyula Erdmann, *Begyűjtés, beszolgáltatás Magyarországon 1945–1956* (Békéscsaba: Tevan, 1992), 12–13.

²⁸ Gyula Erdmann, *Begyűjtés*, 12.

²⁹ Községi Élelmiszerárúzó Üzem, Kenyérgyár, Nagytétényi Sertéshizláló és Lóhúsüzem.

³⁰ Károly Buziássy, "Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatalának háromnegyedszázados fejlődése," *Budapesti Statisztikai Közlemények*, no. 100 (1946): 78.

³¹ BFL XIV.52.3. 74–75.

Budapest from the countryside due to the war) did not consume the supplies of the capital's population. However, this measure also led to discrimination against the Jewish population, and the assignment of these laws to the population was intended to exclude religious and political persecuted people. Gámenczy agreed to implement the process and promised to complete the assignment as quickly as possible, but he stated that he could only manage to carry it out within a few days without any discrimination.

It is unclear whether the partial execution of the task played a role in his dismissal in early 1943 because the surviving archival records are fragmentary. In his memoirs, Gámenczy assumed that his approach in this case together with his social democratic connections and his disagreements with the general manager of the Food Distribution Factory of the Capital (Községi Élelmiszerüzem) also contributed to his dismissal.³²

In July 1943, Gámenczy too was required to register for military service. He completed an economic office ensign training course and between October and November 1944 he was appointed food sergeant of Red Cross Military Hospital No. 202.³³

The German occupation of Hungary on March 19th 1944 had a more negative impact on Szobek's life. After he began organizing social democratic workers in Békéscsaba, he was soon taken to the collective prison in Budapest as a political prisoner, from where he was later relocated to the internment camp in Nagykanizsa due to his activities in the labor movement.³⁴ His time in the camp, however, gave him the opportunity to make connections with other social democrats, such as György Marosán.³⁵ From Nagykanizsa he was transported to Iharosberény at the southwestern tip of the country where prisoners were employed in agricultural work.³⁶

When Governor Miklós Horthy appointed Colonel-General Géza Lakatos as Prime Minister after the far-right Döme Sztójay (originally Dimitrije Sztojakovics), secret preparations for a Hungarian exit from the war began; simultaneously, far-right politicians began to be removed from the government. Szobek himself was released as part of this political shift. On October 15th 1944, Horthy made an unsuccessful attempt to end Hungarian involvement in the war, and this led instead to the rise of the far-right Ferenc Szálasi and his Arrow Cross party. The Soviet Army was fast approaching Hungarian territory, and as soon as Szobek arrived home in Békéscsaba, he was once again dragged away and assigned to penal squadron No. 462, a group of prisoners who were engaged in forced labor near Debrecen.³⁷ On October 6th 1944, they received the news that Soviet troops had reached Békéscsaba, so Szobek and his companions decided to

escape.³⁸ The Jews had been deported from the city during the summer, but since the Soviets quickly occupied it, large-scale far-right repressions could not take place.

Szobek and his companions managed to reach home on October 10th: the mayor of Békéscsaba, Gyula Jánossy, who was a personal enemy of Szobek, had abandoned his position in fear of the impending arrival of the Soviet troops, and in the power vacuum the local national committee took over the most important tasks. The local Soviet military command described Szobek as an "old, reliable comrade", so they asked him to help restore the public administration.³⁹ Public order had to be restored, the remaining food stocks had to be collected and people had to be persuaded to carry out the necessary agricultural work. From November 1944 to March 1945, Szobek carried out these tasks as the county secretary of Békés of the Hungarian Communist Party.⁴⁰

While Szobek was assisting the Soviets by carrying out a variety of new tasks in his hometown, Gámenczy's unit at the military hospital began their preparations to flee to the West, however he himself was unwilling to leave with them. He had a "tactical" appendectomy performed on him and was then forced to go into hiding.⁴¹ He was almost captured as a military deserter during the Siege of Budapest in the first weeks of 1945, but he managed to survive until the arrival of the Soviet forces.⁴²

In the case of András Szobek, it was his network of connections that proved crucial during the Second World War; it was not only the "comrades" from Békéscsaba who came to his aid, but also the representatives of the newly founded "democratic" parties. His network of contacts also proved to be useful later in his career. During the war, Gámenczy became an experienced civil servant, even though he did not share the ideological beliefs of the regime. However, his willingness to remain in post allowed him to be categorised as a reliable public servant even after the war.⁴³

RESOLVING FOOD PROVISIONING CRISES

In 1944-45, hunger was ravaging almost the entire territory which had been occupied by the Germans, and mortality and malnutrition increased dramatically.⁴⁴ The main cause of the food crisis lay in the economic division of labor between Eastern and Western Europe. Thanks to the destruction of the front and the dry weather, not only were the large Central and Eastern European grain producers incapable of meeting the needs of the West, but they were even unable to feed their own populations.⁴⁵ While

³⁸ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 91.

³⁹ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 99.

⁴⁰ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

⁴¹ BFL XIV.52.3. 58.

⁴² BFL XIV.52.3. 61-62.

⁴³ György Gyarmati, "A közigazgatás újjászervezése az 'ideiglenesség' korszakában," *Történelmi Szemle* 38, no. 1 (1996): 64.

⁴⁴ Elisabeth M. Collingham, *Taste of War. World War II and the Battle for Food*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2012) 37.

⁴⁵ Tony Judt, *Postwar* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 86.

³² BFL XIV.52.3. 43.

³³ BFL XIV.52.3. 47.

³⁴ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

³⁵ György Marosán (1908-1992): He started as a baker's apprentice, then joined the labor movement as a young man. After the war, in 1948 he became a member of the Hungarian Communist party, and later served as Minister of Light Industry, then as Minister of State.

³⁶ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 78-79.

³⁷ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 83-84, 88.

the rural population was largely able to feed themselves, the urban population was on the verge of starvation.

The impact of the Soviet offensive through Hungary is often demonstrated by statistics, such as the fact that livestock numbers had decreased by 39.38% and that 35.9% of the country's crops had been destroyed.⁴⁶ The national infrastructure was paralyzed, agricultural production had ground to a halt, and by the end of 1945, inflation was running wild. Food supplies were further hindered by the fact that Hungary had to feed the occupying Soviet armies in addition to its own population and was also forced to pay reparations to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.⁴⁷

At the end of 1945, the Hungarian population suffered from the lowest average ration in terms of calories not only in Central and Eastern Europe but in the entire continent, Hungary managed to ensure one of the smallest calorie intakes through the ticket system. While the standard ration designated by the League of Nations stood at ~3000 kcal, the average per capita ration in Hungary in 1945 was only 1500 kcal, and fell even further in October to only 556. The authorities of neighbouring countries were also unable to ensure the standard ration through the rationing system, but still provided more than in Hungary; while a Czechoslovakian worker received 38.89% less nutrients than that stated in the regulation, a Budapest worker's supply was 62.5% lower.⁴⁸

Due to the paralysis of telecommunications networks and transport, until April 1945 the new Ministry of Public Supply, which, like the rest of the Provisional National Government, was temporarily based in Debrecen, had little influence on the country's food supply, and individual settlements – including the capital – were forced to act independently. The urban population, and the population of Budapest in particular, endured the most acute levels of starvation. The peasantry, as before, was considered self-sufficient, and it was seen as their duty to supply the urban population. However, the poor harvest of 1945 could only provide 60% of pre-war consumption levels, and due to the burden of provisioning the Red Army, only 45% of this reached the population at all.⁴⁹ In this situation, it was the duty of the reconstituted public administration to provide food, and in order to do so they were forced to rely on the expertise of officials of the previous regimes.

The Budapest National Committee (BNC – Budapesti Nemzeti Bizottság) was established in the capital on January 21st 1945 amid the power vacuum which followed the siege of Budapest, with the body consisting of representatives of the newly formed coalition parties and trade unions. Due to the great distance between Budapest and the seat of the Provisional National Government in Debrecen, the ongoing battles and the lack of communication, the BNC took the initiative in solving the most important tasks necessary to restart life and to reorganize administration. On January 22nd 1945,

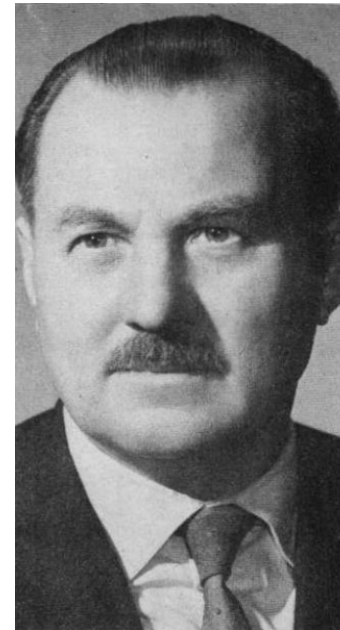


Fig. 13.1: Photography of András Szobek, published by Magyarország (1975)

Gámenczy received an “invitation” to a shelter from Móric Reisz⁵⁰ to take part in the formation of the capital's new leadership.⁵¹ The tasks facing the city after the siege seemed almost endless; the majority of the buildings had been damaged and as there was no connection between the two banks of the Danube, the two parts of the city were cut off from each other. The first priority was to clear away the animal and human carcasses as soon as possible and restart production. One of the most pressing issues facing the city was that of food; the capital had been left without supplies, and a new rationing system had to be introduced. At the end of January 1945, Mayor of Budapest, János Csorba, and the BNC entrusted Gámenczy with the management of public administration affairs.⁵²

On February 12th 1945, the BNC resolved to send a delegation to the Provisional National Government in Debrecen to find a solution to Budapest's hopeless food situation. Based on an agreement made at an inter-party meeting on February 15th, the Provisional National Government appointed the communist Zoltán Vas as Budapest's government commissioner for provisioning (Budapest közellátási kormánybiztosa) and granted him extensive authority to achieve his task. Vas also entrusted the administrative aspect of the scheme to Gámenczy, and within a short time, Vas and Gámenczy had “developed a mutually rewarding and lasting good cooperation”.⁵³ The Government Commission for Provisioning operated between February and August 1945; in the first months of its existence it prevented a famine in Budapest. Gámenczy assessed the re-introduction of the rationing system on the Pest side of the city in March 1945 as a huge success; the introduction of this system required not only a census of the population but also ensuring that as many supplies as possible could be brought to the city from the rural areas.⁵⁴

At the end of 1944, András Szobek began to purchase non-perishable food in the countryside and participated in the collection of the first aid shipments for the capital.⁵⁵ After participating in the election campaign, he was elected as a member of the Provisional National Assembly on December 17th, 1944.⁵⁶ The communists attempted

⁵⁰ Móric Reisz (1876–1952): Butcher, a Social Democrat who played a leading role in the meat industry union. Between the two world wars, he developed a good friendship with Gámenczy.

⁵¹ BFL XIV.52.3. 63.

⁵² BFL XIV.52.3. 64, 70–71.

⁵³ BFL XIV.52.3. 91.

⁵⁴ BFL XIV.52.3. 108–123.

⁵⁵ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 113.

⁵⁶ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

⁴⁶ József Bálint, *Magyarország nemzeti vagyonvesztése 1941–1947* (Budapest: Agroinform, 2013), 179.

⁴⁷ Margit Földesi, *A megszállók szabadsága* (Pécs: Kairosz, 2009), 109.

⁴⁸ József Kővágó, *Budapest küzdelme az új életért* (Budapest: KSH, 1946), 39.

⁴⁹ BFL XIV.52.3. 200–201.

to seize the most important economic positions from the beginning, and thus they appointed Szobek as the state secretary of food provisioning (közellátási államtitkár) in order to keep the processes in their hands.⁵⁷ However, he was unwilling to accept the position because he did not want to move from his home county to Budapest. The Communist Party continued its drive for control by appointing government commissioners, and so from January 4th 1945, András Szobek served as the government commissioner of Békés county, a position from which he presided over the organization of the county's food supply.⁵⁸ As a commissioned expert of the Communist Party, he participated in the negotiations developing the new compulsory distribution system which combined free circulation and compulsory delivery by theoretically paying for the harvest with manufactured goods.⁵⁹ Throughout the country, a "barter" economy continued to flourish, with the urban population exchanging clothes, manufactured goods and other property with the peasantry for food. Support given by the Soviets also helped to bolster the food supply.⁶⁰

Szobek gained valuable experience in organizing food provisioning in Békés county. The Soviet command donated 13,600 tons of livestock, all of which had to be accommodated and cared for, while the state apparatus had to be expanded to cope with the ever-expanding tasks. A separate department for crops, meat, poultry and milk was created within the county which mirrored the national apparatus.⁶¹ In the meantime, Szobek was constantly involved in meetings of the provisioning committee, where he constantly confronted the Minister of Public Supply, who was eventually replaced in the summer of 1945.⁶²

Meanwhile, in the capital, the position of mayor between May 17th and October 7th 1945 was held by the communist Zoltán Vas after he was appointed to the post by the temporary capital legislative authority committee following the resignation of László Csorba, a representative of the Smallholders' Party. The government commission was dissolved into the public provisioning department, and Vas exercised his powers through Gámenczy. From the winter of 1945/46 until the introduction of the new currency, the forint, in the summer of 1946, the main government's goal was to curb inflation, and Gámenczy, by this time acting as provisioning councilor (közélelmezési tanácsnok), was placed in increasingly influential positions. At the end of 1945, the General Assembly of the Legal Authority Committee (törvényhatósági bizottság) as-

signed a new 15-member specialist committee from the delegates of the parties to each case department, but this arrangement proved to be overly slow and inefficient in terms of decision-making. In an effort to speed up the proceedings, Gámenczy, Péter Bechtler⁶³ and József Móric, all members of the specialist committee, created a sub-committee on provisioning, to which the parties could also delegate one member each.⁶⁴

Zoltán Vas stepped down as mayor after the poor performance of the Hungarian Communist Party in the parliamentary elections, although the Party continued to assign key economic positions to him, including that of secretary general of the Economic Council (Gazdasági Főtanács) established in November 1945. In September 1945, András Szobek was appointed State Secretary of Food Supply (közellátási államtitkár), and he could no longer postpone his inevitable move to Budapest. He failed to find common ground with the Minister of Public Supply of the new government, Károly Bárányos, and the two figures argued repeatedly.⁶⁵ In contrast, Gámenczy had known Bárányos from his time as state secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture prior to 1945. In the summer of 1946, a so-called "triple committee" was formed with the participation of Zoltán Vas, Béla Gámenczy and Károly Bárányos which was charged with create a stable food supply that could serve as the prerequisite for economic stabilization.⁶⁶ As with the previous government commission for public services in Budapest, the new committee was given broad powers, and the fact that the members knew each other personally increased the efficiency of the committee: "the cooperation between them was extremely good; they understood each other well and each of them trusted the expertise and competence of the others".⁶⁷

After the introduction of the new currency, the economic situation seemed to improve temporarily, but food shortages persisted. As the only communist at the Ministry, Szobek was under constant pressure. The bad harvest made it difficult to ensure the compulsory delivery targets, and there was a danger that they would not even be able to provide the basic ration: "I tried to make them understand that what we had should be distributed in such a way to ensure an adequate food supply until the harvest".⁶⁸ He tried to negotiate with the mill owners and personally visited the countryside to seek help from the peasantry.⁶⁹

The poor harvest of the previous autumn meant that another food crisis was brewing at the beginning of 1947; quite simply, there was just not enough grain. At that time, Jenő Jilek Szabó⁷⁰ was appointed as ministerial government commissioner for bread supply (kenyérellátási miniszteri kormánybiztos), but similar powers were also granted

⁵⁷ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 120.

⁵⁸ Julianna Horváth, Éva Szabó, László Szűcs and Katalin Zalai, *Pártközi értekezletek. Politikai érdekegyeztetés, politikai konfrontáció 1944-1948* (Budapest: Napvilág, 2003), 17.

⁵⁹ Gyula Erdmann, *Begyűjtés*, 17.

⁶⁰ Békés county received 3400 wagonloads of wheat some of which was sent to the capital, while a total of 400 tons of grain was delivered to Budapest in February 1945, followed in March by 21,000 tons of flour and grain, 2000 tons of sugar, 755 tons of canned meat, 240 tons of cheese, pulses and live cattle. All of these deliveries granted as loans. Ferenc Gáspár, *Források Budapest történetéhez 1945-1950* (Budapest: Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 1973), 14/a, 14/b.

⁶¹ In 1943, and then again in 1945, Distributional Centers were established for the central supplies on a national level. 107,500/1943. K.M. no. decree; 11,850/1945. K.M. no. decree.

⁶² András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 134.

⁶³ Péter Bechtler (1891-1964): a Social Democratic who served as deputy mayor of Budapest between 1945-48.

⁶⁴ BFL XIV.52.3. 219.

⁶⁵ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 146.

⁶⁶ BFL XIV.52.3. 269. "A Gazdasági Főtanács megállapította a stabilizációs szénárakat," *Dunántúli Népszava* 2, no. 148 (1946): 2.

⁶⁷ BFL XIV.52.3. 245.

⁶⁸ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 148.

⁶⁹ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 154.

⁷⁰ Jenő Szabó Jilek (1896-1982): lawyer, organized the Public Service Inspectorates from 1940.



Fig. 13.2: Photography of Béla Gámenczy, published by *Képes Figyelő* (1947)

to Gámenczy as a personal representative of the Economic Council. As Gámenczy said, to “cooperate was a personal responsibility in the performance of ministerial commissioner duties.”⁷¹ The Communist Party was keen to ensure that it retained supervision of provisioning. The public supply crisis was finally saved by foreign grain shipments, but thanks to his effective services, Zoltán Vas assigned Gámenczy to the Economic Council in March 1947 while allowing him to retain his position in the provisioning department of the capital, a step which greatly accelerated the resolution of the crisis.⁷² This dual position lasted until the middle of 1948, after which it was permanently transferred to the Economic Council.⁷³ Meanwhile, Szobek had been political state secretary of the Ministry of

Agriculture (Földművelésügyi Minisztérium politikai államtitkára) since September 1947 and was mainly responsible for managing the compulsory distribution system at the national level.⁷⁴

Gámenczy described the period between 1947–1949 as “laying the foundations of socialist economy”.⁷⁵ The possibilities of food provisioning were still limited, but he considered the fact that the rationing system worked satisfactorily as a big step forward.⁷⁶ On December 31st, 1947, the Ministry of Public Supply (Közellátási Minisztérium) was abolished and its duties absorbed into the newly-established National Provisioning Office (Országos Közellátási Hivatal), with András Szobek appointed as head.⁷⁷ In January 1948, at the suggestion of Gámenczy, the National Rationing System Center (Országos Közellátási Jegyközpont) was established to create a nationwide unified management of centrally planned economy and food supply.⁷⁸ Between 1947 and 1948, the Communist takeover of provisioning and economic activities was cemented in place, as both the National Provisioning Office and the National Rationing System

Center fell under the purview of the Main Economic Council.⁷⁹ However, the economic recovery was slower than expected. Szobek discussed his work in the postwar period in his unpublished memoirs “We fought a hard fight for the optimal provision of food. My work seemed more and more burdensome to. It seemed like I was tilting at windmills. We couldn’t give anything because we had nothing to give, yet they constantly demanded that we improve provisioning.”⁸⁰

Although the Three-year Plan (1947–1949) was built around the need for reconstruction, there was little doubt that Hungary was about to undergo a period of planned economics. The transformation is also well illustrated by the fact that in 1949 all food supply measures that were linked to the centrally planned economy ceased to exist: the Provisioning Office was abolished on October 4th followed by the General Economic Council in November. At the end of the year, the rationing system was also cancelled.

Gámenczy played a major role in the resolving the series of food supply crises that followed the Second World War in Budapest, while Szobek was deeply involved at the rural and national levels. Szobek had many confrontations with the politicians of the Independent Smallholders Party, but Gámenczy’s friendship with Zoltán Vas proved to be decisive, and he was able to move into higher and higher echelons of the administrative apparatus.

THE PATHS DIVIDE

The vetting of the public administration apparatus had begun immediately after the Second World War, and the verification committee procedures established in 1945 and 1946 allowed the government to rid itself of undesirable persons who retained sympathies with the previous political establishment. The second step was the B-list of 1946, which mandated a 10% reduction in the number of state and public administration officials.⁸¹ After the communist takeover in Hungary in 1949, the training of new cadres loyal to the new regime started, as well as the filling of individual positions with ideologically reliable people. In this transformation process the former civil servants and intellectuals faced two options: either they could deny their previous positions in society, their network of relationships, and perhaps even their origins to join the ranks of the new regime, or they could give up their profession.⁸² Gámenczy would clearly would have been categorized as an “indispensable reactionary specialist”, but his career prospects were also helped by his good relationships with some social democrat politicians prior to 1945 and the years he had spent as a colleague of Zoltán Vas; indeed,

⁷¹ BFL XIV.52.3. 286.

⁷² BFL XIV.52.3. 291.

⁷³ “A közigazgatási bizottság ülése 1948. április 12-én,” *Fővárosi Közlöny* 59, no. 18 (1948), 2; “Gámenczy tanácsnok a GF-nél magasabb beosztást kapott,” *Világ* no. 834 (1948), 5.

⁷⁴ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

⁷⁵ BFL XIV.52.3. 280.

⁷⁶ BFL XIV.52.3. 281.

⁷⁷ 1947. évi XXXV. tc.; Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 161.

⁷⁸ BFL XIV.52.3. 299.

⁷⁹ BFL XIV.52.3. 301.

⁸⁰ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 163.

⁸¹ György Gyarmati, “Harc a közigazgatás birtoklásáért. A koalícion belüli pártküzdelmek az 1946. évi hatalmi dualizmus időszakában,” *Századok* 130, no. 3 (1996).

⁸² Tibor Valuch, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a XX. század második felében* (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 150.

after the cancellation of the Economic Council, Gámenczy “followed” Zoltán Vas to the National Planning Office (Országos Tervhivatal).

At the same time, András Szobek received a diplomatic assignment: after Gyula Szekefű, he became Hungary’s ambassador to Moscow. According to his memoirs, the party leader Rákosi Mátyás personally offered him the position because he considered him to be a strong-arm politician, and according to the records of the Council of Ministers (Minisztertanács), there was no objection to the proposal.⁸³ His main task as ambassador was to resolve conflicts between Hungarian and Romanian students who had been awarded scholarships. Hungarian students had “stirred up nationalist emotions” caused by the territorial annexations of 1920, an issue which was seen as unacceptable within the internationalist framework of communism.

As in his previous duties, Szobek strove for perfection: at the age of 55, he began to learn Russian and he consulted the Deputy Foreign Minister Endre Sik in order to deepen his skills in diplomacy.⁸⁴ It therefore came as a surprise when he was appointed Minister of Foreign Trade at the end of May 1950. Here, too, he was tasked with “cleaning things up”, because the old professionals were already in the crosshairs of the Party: “Rákosi called me in, [...] he said that there are a lot of old professionals in foreign trade, who have to be kept under control with a firm hand, they have to be disciplined, and led to the socialist way”.⁸⁵ Szobek struggled to grasp the bigger picture of the country’s economic situation, and it seemed that he only got the position because of his reliability since he lacked the necessary expertise. The forced industrialization which the communists aimed to introduce would have required enormous amounts of raw materials but these were difficult to obtain. It is also apparent from his memoirs that he did not have a good relationship with Zoltán Vas either: “We never had a warm relationship, we couldn’t really work together, but from October 1944 we were assigned next to or under each other. I think this apathy was mutual”.⁸⁶ In the darkest days of the Rákosi era, Szobek himself became confused; he could never be sure that he had done his job properly, and due to the internal purges, many of those working around him began to disappear one by one. Like Gámenczy, Szobek also had to work in a completely different atmosphere and the proceedings were more delicate and slower.

The Stalinist economic policy seriously endangered the food supply, and in 1950, less than a year after the introduction of forced industrialization, rationing was reintroduced. This was a divisive measure, mainly because of its political implications, and the Party perceived the step as a loss of prestige. As part of the proposal to reintroduce the rationing system, Gámenczy prepared a preliminary economic analysis which Zoltán Vas and József Bognár, the Minister of Internal Trade, were able to forward to the Party leadership. In December 1950, Gámenczy had been taken to Bognár’s office in a black

car where he was informed that the rationing system would be reintroduced on January 1st 1951, and that he was being entrusted with its development. Everything would be planned under conditions of strictest secrecy, and so he and the ministry staff were taken to Balatonalmádi where they were given accommodation in an isolated resort. Finally, in the last days of the year, they awaited the decision of the Cabinet Council in Bognár’s office.⁸⁷

Gámenczy and Bognár consulted each other continually on the reintroduction of the rationing system; the two enjoyed a good working relationship, since they had known each other since Bognár’s period as mayor of Budapest between 1947 and 1949. In June 1951, Gámenczy was sent to Érdliget to work in isolation on the organization of a nationally unified rationing system.⁸⁸ In contrast to the period after 1945, the new ration book system was not a great success; the Party leadership decided that it could be phased out due to the better harvest of 1951, and they believed that problems would be addressed more effectively by adjusting prices and wages. A 60-member working committee was sent to Hollóháza in November 1951 to prepare the necessary measures.⁸⁹

After presenting the draft proposal at the first meeting, Zoltán Vas asked Gámenczy to give his opinion, but he tried to avoid answering because he did not agree with the predicted consequences of the decisions of the Party. The next day, however, he was unable to hold back and strongly criticized the draft in his speech. Vas responded with public criticism: “Comrade Gámenczy is fundamentally pessimistic and cautious, so it is not advisable to take his comments into account in the present case”.⁹⁰ However, he did all this for the sake of Gámenczy, so that he would not find himself in trouble in front of the prominent people sitting on the committee. However, it was clear that Gámenczy had crossed the line; Vas’s position weakened in the “turnout of five (*Ötös fogat*)” formed by the Muscovites, because he himself did not support the increasingly unrealistic economic ideas, and by 1953 he had been stripped of all his party and state positions. At the same time, Gámenczy also fell out of favor: “Finally, I would like to record here that not long ago, in May 1952, I was transferred from the National Planning Office to a much lower position. I myself did not see the possibility in the conditions at that time to further utilize my proven abilities in public service and my significant practical experience for the benefit of our national economy after the Liberation. After that I only took legal jobs – at state farms, etc. as a legal adviser and lawyer – and I worked like this until 1968, when I retired at the age of 64”.⁹¹

As early as 1952, he was transferred to the post of deputy head of department at the Capital Vegetable and Fruit Wholesale Company. From then on, he was forced to change jobs several times a year and also take on additional work. The companies he joined were usually involved in the food industry and trade, but he also worked with

⁸³ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, MNL-OL-XIX-A-83-a. Minisztertanács. Jegyzőkönyvek és mellékleteik. 307/8.

⁸⁴ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 169.

⁸⁵ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 169.

⁸⁶ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 172.

⁸⁷ BFL XIV.52.3. 352-353.

⁸⁸ BFL XIV.52.3. 365.

⁸⁹ BFL XIV.52.3. 383.

⁹⁰ BFL XIV.52.3. 384-385

⁹¹ BFL XIV.52.3. 386.

state farms. Between 1953 and 1955, he also worked at several commercial mushroom farms: the Horticultural and Mushroom Production Trust of the Ministry of Internal Trade (1953), the Forest Mushroom Purchase and Sales Company (1953–1954) and the Mushroom Production Company (1953–1955). All of these companies fell under the purview of the Production Trusts of the State Farms of the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade, and he was employed as commissioned prosecutor or legal presenter. He was also responsible for the legal activities of several state farms between 1953 and 1957, in particular at Érd (1953–1955), Szigebecse (1954), Törökbálint (1955), Taksony (1955) and Nagymiskolc (1953–1955). As he had to act personally on a case-by-case basis, he could also work in the capital.

In the meantime, Szobek fell victim to the political battles which broke out after the death of Stalin and the continuous reorganizations of the 1950s. In July 1953, he was appointed Deputy Minister of Internal and Foreign Trade, a new Ministry which had been created by merging two ministries. At that time, the moderate Imre Nagy became the head of the government in Hungary. He replaced many of the politicians involved in the operation of the Stalinist system, including Szobek, who had played a major role in the maintenance of the compulsory distribution system in the agricultural sector. At the end of the year, he received a diplomatic assignment again, this time as ambassador to Beijing, but this only lasted half a year.⁹² In July 1954, he was appointed Minister of Collections, an extremely challenging position in the current political climate. One year before the second collectivization campaign, the propaganda campaign against the kulaks and the terrorization of the peasantry was already in full swing, while agricultural productivity was constantly falling due to its lower priority in comparison to the industrial sector. According to the Ministry's data, the backlog of the compulsory distribution project was so great that 51% of those obliged to submit would have had to be dealt with aggressively, hence Szobek himself knew that he had to do "execution work".⁹³ He did not turn away from the Party even during the 1956 Revolution, but on October 27th he was removed from the government and was forced to retire. He joined the party guard, but eventually he was only able to escape from the capital with the intercession of the Soviet ambassador Andropov.⁹⁴

OUTLOOKS

After the suppression of the Revolution and the struggle for freedom, Szobek took part in the formation of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in the Second district, but he was deemed an undesirable person during the Kádár era.⁹⁵ When his retirement

became certain at the end of November 1956, he stated that "I felt deceived, exposed and humiliated".⁹⁶ He retained his parliamentary mandate until 1967 and was a member of the Presidential Council from May 1957 to April 1967. In addition, he was a consultant to the Agricultural Construction and Planning Company (Mezőgazdasági Építő-és Tervezővállalat) and was also involved in the work of the Central People's Control Committee (Központi Népi Ellenőrző Bizottság).⁹⁷ He died in 1986 at the age of 92.

Gámenczy played no role during the Revolution, and even after 1957 he worked for economic companies and state farms (Mezőhegyes State Farm, Vegetable and Fruit Marketing National Cooperative Center). In the last ten years of his career, he worked with catering companies. He retired on January 1st 1969, but he was forced to continue working because of his low pension. Due to his serious illness, he became later unable to work, and he hoped for some income from the publication of his memoirs. We have no information about his last years, but he died in 1982 at the age of 78.

CONCLUSION

Both Dr. Béla Gámenczy and András Szobek experienced extreme deprivation in their childhoods, and we can assume that the struggle for food and the tenacity of their mothers greatly influenced their mentality. Many psychoanalysts believe that career choice is the result of conscious and unconscious decisions in which the quality of an individual's childhood plays a large role. According to this theory, individuals often find themselves setting out on career paths that reflect their childhood experiences.⁹⁸ Both men lost their fathers at a young age, and they were forced to start working early as a result. Both, seemingly by accident, found themselves working amid the challenges of public food supply crises, yet they were able to stand their ground; Gámenczy exploited his lack of dogmatism and strong organizational skills, while Szobek became a reliable, experienced cadre through his blunt manners and work ethic. Both men developed a wide network, but Gámenczy's room for maneuver narrowed as he became increasingly associated with the career of Zoltán Vas. In contrast, Szobek was also politically active and served the Party throughout his career, even when he was aware of its shortcomings. As an experienced professional, Gámenczy's expertise was still needed after the Second World War, but due to the new cadres who were more loyal to the Party, it was only a matter of time until he fell redundant in the Rákosi era. Although Szobek survived the 1950s, albeit in less influential positions, he too eventually found himself cast off by the Party as an undesirable.

⁹² András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 173.

⁹³ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 177, 180.

⁹⁴ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

⁹⁵ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

⁹⁶ András Szobek, *Egy munkásélet*, 184.

⁹⁷ Szobek András, accessed July 24, 2024, <https://neb.hu/hu/szobek-andras>.

⁹⁸ Ayala Malach-Pines and Oreiya Yafe-Yanai, "Unconscious determinants of career choice and burnout: Theoretical model and counseling strategy," *Journal of Employment Counseling* 38, no. 4 (2001): 170-184.

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