

## 4 Black Markets, Green Expeditions

### Food Shortages and Growing Divisions

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A caricature in a Prague satirical newspaper in 1917 showed a man at the picture gallery admiring Luděk Marold's painting *Egg market in Prague* (1888) with its crowded rows of sellers and its abundance of realistically drawn eggs, poultry, and milk cans. He remarked to another visitor: "Marold was just an idealist! Do you think that it ever looked like that in Prague?"<sup>1</sup> The contrast between the opulence of the past and the dire aspect of markets in the present was on many minds in wartime Prague. As the war progressed, the conflict created unsustainable levels of food shortages in Austria–Hungary. Food became the defining wartime issue in Central European cities.<sup>2</sup> The absence of food shaped the streetscape and the search for food structured the hours of Prague residents. It disappeared from its usual locations – marketplaces, shops, or restaurants – and reemerged in hidden form in cellars or at train stations. For ordinary city dwellers, finding food entailed understanding the new regulations, queuing for hours in front of the right shop, obtaining information on selling points, accepting changes in diet and modes of cooking, adopting new customs of growing vegetables or rearing animals, or knowing someone in the countryside. More than in other areas of wartime life, a tension existed between the conspicuous spectacle of endless queues, emaciated shoppers, announced restrictions, and the unseen world of black markets, illegal sales, and trips to the countryside.

This tension exacerbated preexisting divisions within the urban community along social, religious, or national lines. As Josef Čihák remarked in 1917, profiteering created growing antagonisms within the population: "Townsppeople envy people from the country, telling themselves wonderful stories about their affluence [...] People from the country complain about unbearable requisitions [...] Artisans and workers are either deprived of work or suffer from shortage of money [...] In a word:

<sup>1</sup> *Humoristické listy*, 60, no. 37, September 7, 1917, 480. Painting accessible: [https://sbirky.ngprague.cz/dielo/CZE:NG.O\\_586](https://sbirky.ngprague.cz/dielo/CZE:NG.O_586) (accessed November 26, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Healy, *Vienna and the Fall*; Kučera, *Rationed Life*; on Western Europe, see Thierry Bonzon, Belinda Davis, "Feeding the Cities," in *Capital Cities at War*, I, 305–341.

everyone complains about high prices, injustice, disaffection and profiteering but nobody wants to be the profiteer.”<sup>3</sup> The general dissatisfaction with the official system of food supply meant that everyone needed to rely on alternatives. The shortages distorted existing social hierarchies and relations between groups. Access to food became the primary factor in determining one’s status within the urban community.

This chapter explores the profound disruptions in the Prague landscape – seen and unseen – provoked by this major food crisis. It first explains the management of the growing scarcity by the municipality and central authorities and describes the material reality of the new food labyrinth. A second section analyzes the many tangible consequences of the restrictions and food shortages on the diminishment of urban life: the changes in food quality, the cold, the dark, and the dirtiness. The third section depicts in more detail the underground circuits of food trafficking within the city. The next section is devoted to Prague’s changing relationship to the countryside through the war and the growing resentment between town and country. The last section focuses on welfare provision through an examination of association *The Czech Heart*, which supplied hungry Prague inhabitants with food from the Czech countryside. Food is thus key to understanding the shift of legitimacy from the imperial state – who failed in securing essential goods for its population – to the Czech nation – who took on the role of welfare provider.

### A “Paper Pyramid”: Regulations and Managing Scarcity

In August 1918, *Právo lidu* published news of a man in Berlin who collected all the official announcements issued during the war in Germany and Austria–Hungary. They commented: “God may help him! Only a diligent Reich German could come up with the idea of collecting all the regulations and decrees in our country [...]. How much misery lies in this paper pyramid!”<sup>4</sup> The war years saw the proliferation of measures taken by the state and the municipalities to manage the increased shortages of common goods, including restrictions on sale, price ceilings, and rationing. For Prague residents, this translated into a dizzying number of new rules advertised on the city’s walls, whose actual effect on the level of supply in the city was unclear. These posters give an idea of the abundance of restrictions on city life that attempted to moderate the impact of the severe food crisis.

<sup>3</sup> Josef Čihák, *Lichva na soudu dějin a mravního zákona* (Prague: Čs. akc. tiskárna, 1917), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Večerník Práva lidu*, August 14, 1918, 2.

The monarchy was not prepared to fight a war of this length and faced a drastic reduction of its food supply, both for military use and, even more so, for the civilian population. The labor shortage caused by army mobilization and the lack of fertilizers meant reduced harvests in a context where army requisitions put further strains on the system and military needs always came before civilian ones. The main causes of the shortages in the Austrian half of the Empire were the suspension of imports from more rural Hungary, the loss of food production through warfare and occupation in agricultural Galicia, and the Allied blockade, which prevented Austria from compensating these losses by diversifying its imports.<sup>5</sup> Under these circumstances, state management was only able to play a relative role in alleviating the shortages and distributing food more fairly within a structurally unfavorable situation.

The measures implemented by the Austrian government to ensure better food provision were, on the whole, too slow and uneven. Price ceilings for cereal products were introduced in December 1914, but were not unified on the whole Austrian territory.<sup>6</sup> They were also only progressively extended to the different types of foodstuffs, which further distorted the production and sale of those items still sold freely as farmers moved to more profitable crops. Reluctance to intervene in the economy meant that regulation was piecemeal and that food still followed market prices despite being rationed. Cereals, flour, and bread were the first goods to be regulated. The War Grain Control Agency, created in February 1915, administered the state monopoly for these products. For other foodstuffs, there gradually emerged a system of “central agencies” (*Zentralen/ústředny*) devoted to specific commodities. These bodies functioned like government-sponsored cartels run by private businesses; they tended to accentuate the competition for scarce resources between the different municipalities or consumption groups rather than provide equal distribution.<sup>7</sup> No concerted policy on the food situation emerged at the highest level until the creation of the Office for Public Food Supply (*Amt für Volksernährung*) on November 13, 1916. However, this ministerial agency only had competence for Austria and its powers were limited. As Ottokar Landwehr von Pragenau, who was in charge of the Joint Committee for Food until the end of the war, points out: “when an attempt was made in the year 1917 to unite in one hand the provision of food for the whole monarchy, it was already much too late.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Healy, *Vienna and the Fall*, 49–51.

<sup>6</sup> *Aprovisace obce pražské za války a po válce 1914–1922* (Prague: Aprovisační ústav hlavního města Prahy, 1923), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Redlich, *Austrian War Government*, 117–119; Healy, *Vienna and the Fall*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Ottokar Landwehr von Pragenau, *Hunger: die Erschöpfungsjahre der Mittelmächte 1917/1918* (Zürich: Almathea-Verlag, 1931), 6.

As a result, much of the practical organization of food provisioning happened at the local level. Municipalities were responsible for the supply to their inhabitants. This situation produced many variations in the management of the crisis from one town to another, with differences even between Prague and its suburbs. In Prague, a supply commission was created at the start of the war, followed in 1915 by supply agencies (*aprovisační ústavy*).<sup>9</sup> In February, an inventory of all flour stocks in the city was undertaken. The Prague municipality tried to ensure the maintenance of satisfactory levels and was authorized by the governor to seize private stocks. Most of the time, however, they purchased their own stocks and sold them to the population at a loss.<sup>10</sup> They even traveled to Hungary in the hope of buying flour, but were unsuccessful everywhere. They still managed to buy meat from Denmark in 1915 and Dutch potatoes in 1916.<sup>11</sup> Starting in 1915, the municipality also milled flour and baked bread, sold in public selling points for the poorest sections of the population. There were three or four of these selling points per neighborhood, located either in an existing shop or in a school and, of course, in the municipal mill on Kampa Island.<sup>12</sup> As an increasing number of goods fell under state monopoly, the municipality lost some flexibility in constituting stocks. They also increasingly encountered difficulties in getting the allocated contingent from the central agencies.

The Bohemian authorities introduced the first rationing tickets for bread (*chlebenka/Brotkarte*) in April 1915.<sup>13</sup> The Prague municipality was in charge of distributing them through the institution of “bread commissions” located in schools and headed by teachers. There were twenty-five such commissions in Prague (and separate commissions in the suburbs). Every commission was in charge of the houses of a small neighborhood and distributed cards to the home owner. In practice, this not only meant that heads of household received the ration cards for their families and lodgers, but also that landlords registered their tenants on the list of the bread commission.<sup>14</sup> The “bread commissions” also distributed the

<sup>9</sup> Pavel Scheufler, “Zásobování potravinami v Praze v letech 1. světové války,” *Etnografie dělnictva*, 9 (1977), 143–197; Barbora Lašťovková, “Zásobování Prahy za první světové války,” in Václav Ledvinka, and Jiří Pešek (eds.), *Mezi liberalismem a totalitou: komunální politika ve středoevropských zemích 1848–1948* (Prague: Scriptorium, 1997), 111–116.

<sup>10</sup> See report by the supply agencies, April 4, 1917, AHMP, MHMP I, Presidium, sig. 83/214, inv. č. 2349.

<sup>11</sup> *Aprovisace obce pražské*, 18; *Domov za války*, II, 423–429; *Domov za války*, III, 426.

<sup>12</sup> List of municipal selling points, September 23, 1915, NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

<sup>13</sup> *Sborník dokumentů*, II, 67; these cards had to be bilingual after 1916, *Aprovisace obce pražské*, 100.

<sup>14</sup> List of bread commissions, “Vyhláška ... chlebové komise,” April 8, 1915; Announcement, April 1, 1915, NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

ration cards for the other goods that were progressively rationed (sugar, milk for infants and breastfeeding mothers, coffee and fat in 1916, potatoes, coal and fuel later on...). The use of the tickets at times brought confusion to customers who thought they could be used as currency (in fact, customers still needed to pay for the merchandise).<sup>15</sup> In February 1916, the rationing tickets became territorially restricted; they were only valid in the town where they had been issued and bore the municipality's stamp. Tickets issued in Prague were not valid in the suburbs and vice versa to privilege local consumers.<sup>16</sup> However, inhabitants found ways to circumvent these rules. In Smíchov, a former municipal employee was caught forging coupons to make them usable in other districts.<sup>17</sup>

Other restrictive measures aimed at reducing affluence in shops: two separate tickets existed, bearing a mark indicating whether they were to be used on even-numbered days or uneven-numbered days.<sup>18</sup> Attempts were also made to assign customers to one single shop or district (*Rayonierung/rayonování*). Sugar rationing cards, for example, bore the name of a specific shop and a day when the customer was allowed to go.<sup>19</sup> In April 1916, Prague was divided into ten sections and customers were only allowed to buy their bread in the bakeries of the specific section they belonged to.<sup>20</sup> A similar division took place in Smíchov the following month.<sup>21</sup> The bakeries had to display on a sign visible from the street "selling point for the ... section" and whether they still had stocks of flour. They were also supposed not to give preferential treatment to their usual customers (which, in practice, many did to manage the flow of customers).<sup>22</sup> Shopping for everyday items became a more complicated task requiring having the right ticket, coming to the right place at the right time, and hoping to be able to get served.

To help residents navigate the new food labyrinth, posters on shop windows and in market halls detailed the regulations. Prices of indispensable

<sup>15</sup> See, in the village of Modřany near Prague, *Pamětní kniha obce Modřany: Rok 1914–1918 – Modřany za svě tové války*, 11. [www.praha12.cz/assets/File.ashx?id\\_org=80112&id\\_dokumenty=3353](http://www.praha12.cz/assets/File.ashx?id_org=80112&id_dokumenty=3353) (accessed September 9, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> *Domov za války*, III, 421.

<sup>17</sup> Phonogram, Police Headquarters, NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 4971, sig. 8/1/16/7, no. 6786, March 2, 1917.

<sup>18</sup> *Domov za války*, III, 421.

<sup>19</sup> *Aprovisační věstník král. hlav. města Prahy*, no. 11 (November 1917), 6.

<sup>20</sup> "Kundmachung betreffend die Erzeugung und den Vertrieb von Brot in bestimmten Rayons/Bezirken der königlichen Hauptstadt Prag," April 20, 1916, NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

<sup>21</sup> "Vyhláška o rayonování prodeje chleba na Smíchově," May 9, 1916, NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

<sup>22</sup> Announcement, Smíchov municipality, August 30, 1916, AHMP, KPSS, ka 10, inv. č. 187.

foodstuffs had to be clearly displayed in shop windows or near a market stand in readable numbers on a fixed plate. The prices for the most common items listed outside should correspond to the actual selling price inside.<sup>23</sup> Posters everywhere advertised the officially mandated price ceilings for the most common goods, for example, a liter of milk, an egg, cabbages, plums, and sugar in all its forms.<sup>24</sup> All these announcements aimed at informing the customer and ensuring respect of fair prices within the city, although they were often ignored.

Regulations also affected what could and could not be sold or eaten in certain places and at certain times. From shops and streets to the private kitchen, the consumption habits of Prague residents were regimented. Meatless days introduced in May 1915 in Bohemia fell on Fridays and Wednesdays to coincide with Catholic fasting days.<sup>25</sup> As a French report noted, this measure meant not only that consumers could not buy meat or order it at a restaurant on those days, but also that they were forbidden from eating it inside their homes, thereby canceling "the inviolability of the private home."<sup>26</sup> After September 1916, beer sale was restricted between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. on weekdays and 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. on weekends, and the consumption was limited to one liter per person.<sup>27</sup> Many street sellers were forbidden from selling their wares. From the beginning of the war, for health reasons, fruit and vegetables could not be sold on the street or from door to door in Prague and all the suburbs.<sup>28</sup> This measure concentrated the trade in fruit and vegetables around the main markets, such as Old Town Square and Rytířská Street. In the same vein, a measure was introduced to prevent street hawkers from selling geese from door to door.<sup>29</sup> Other goods were simply banned from production. Bakeries had to progressively limit many peacetime indulgences, such as small pastries or individual bread rolls. The rich window displays full of appetizing products, a

<sup>23</sup> Announcement, August 24, 1915, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

<sup>24</sup> "Vyhláška směrné ceny hlávkového zelí," October 6, 1916, "Vyhláška ... tyto směrné ceny pro dodávky syrových švestek," October 10, 1916, "Vyhláška o nejvyšších cenách spotřebního cukru v drobném prodeji," October 19, 1916, "Vyhláška ... za jeden litr cenu 44 haléře," April 13, 1916, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1; "Vyhláška ... ceny vajec," August 29, 1916, AHMP, KPSS, ka 10, inv. č. 201.

<sup>25</sup> *Domov za války*, II, 428.

<sup>26</sup> "L'inquisition alimentaire," July 28, 1916, BDIC, BEPE, Cartons verts Autriche-Hongrie, FOD801/42.03.

<sup>27</sup> "Vyhláška o omezení výčepu piva," September 30, 1916, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

<sup>28</sup> "Vyhláška. Zákaz podomovního a pouličního prodeje ovoce," July 1, 1916, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

<sup>29</sup> "Kundmachung. Verkehr mit Magergänsen," October 19, 1916, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

source of pleasure in prewar times, disappeared. Other pastries could not be made using wheat flour and could only be produced two days a week. The presentation of food in restaurants was regulated as well. First, bread products could not be set on plates for self-service and had to remain available only upon request from the client.<sup>30</sup> A year later, at the end of 1916, restaurants and delis were simply forced to stop selling bread products and pastries.<sup>31</sup> From 1917 onward, sugar could neither be used to make lemonade and liquors, nor be served with coffee or tea in cafés and restaurants.<sup>32</sup>

The Prague municipality was not only active in regulating access to food, it also organized new systems of collective feeding at a reasonable price. The “war kitchens” started at the beginning of the war as collective meals served to the unemployed. By 1916, the kitchens had expanded and provided, on average, 3,818 lunches daily for workers and their dependents.<sup>33</sup> But even when, in March 1917, the number of lunches served reached 9,000 a day, the kitchens only provided for less than a quarter of the people classified as “poor” by the municipality.<sup>34</sup> In addition, many workers who worked in Prague lived in the suburbs and as nonresidents did not necessarily have access to the Prague kitchens. The suburbs slowly organized their own networks of “people’s kitchens.” Král. Vinohrady opened one in the summer of 1916 in a disused Sokol practice hall furnished with restaurant tables and chairs and even decorated with flower centerpieces. *Právo lidu* praised the quality of the food and observed the diverse clientele of this establishment, mixing dancers and teachers, artisans, apprentices, journeymen, and factory workers as well as the “careworn women with pale faces” who waited outside with cups and plates.<sup>35</sup> One year later, however, another newspaper complained of the “inhumane dirtiness” of the same kitchen, reporting that the soup was filled with potato peels.<sup>36</sup>

The meals in the war kitchens were basic staple dishes which, if they did contain meat, were usually prepared with the cheapest cuts.

<sup>30</sup> “Nové ministerské nařízení z 20. prosince 1915 o výrobě a prodeji chleba a pečiva,” NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M 34/2.

<sup>31</sup> *Domov za války*, III, 425.

<sup>32</sup> “Vyhláška o soupisu zásob cukru a jeho používání v živnostenských podnicích v Praze,” May 24, 1917, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1.

<sup>33</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3157, sig. W 51/5, Commission for Feeding of the Poor to Police Headquarters, January 30, 1917; On the war kitchens, see Kučera, *Rationed Life*, 38-45.

<sup>34</sup> Scheufler, “Zásobování potravinami v Praze,” 147.

<sup>35</sup> *Právo lidu*, August 24, 1916, 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> *Čech*, August 1, 1917, 6.

The menu of the first Smíchov war kitchen opened in November 1916 included soups, goulash, pork lungs with dumplings, and liver sausage with potatoes.<sup>37</sup> By 1918, the quality of food distributed in war kitchens had sunk further. In April of that year, the Žižkov war kitchens were the site of demonstrations by unhappy patrons who threw stones through the windows to complain about the food served.<sup>38</sup> Poor quality was not the only aspect which prevented the development of war kitchens: the shame associated with reliance on collective feeding needed to be overcome. “The war kitchen was regarded as a kitchen for paupers to be avoided by anyone a little better off.”<sup>39</sup> To encourage the more efficient supply of meals on a large scale at a time when it was increasingly difficult for households to procure food and cook it, new establishments were created that maintained middle-class propriety.

The so-called “middle-class kitchens” reflected both the fact that food issues impacted ever-widening sections of the population and the will to preserve certain social hierarchies. A few private initiatives aimed at the middle classes had already preceded the municipal kitchens, such as the Club of German women artists who had been serving a hundred “tasty and copious” lunches since 1915.<sup>40</sup> The “committee for collective feeding” created by the municipality in 1916 organized a network of establishments for the employees, civil servants, or artisans increasingly hit by the rising prices.<sup>41</sup> These new “kitchens” were located in actual restaurants and the meals served were more expensive. A civil servant even complained in the *Prager Tagblatt* that the price of two crowns per meal at such a kitchen in Malá Strana made it completely unaffordable on a regular employee’s salary, providing for a family of four.<sup>42</sup> The impulse behind the first middle-class kitchen in Král. Vinohrady was to offer white-collar workers a “meal that corresponds to their former mode of living.” One of the main differences was the quality of the food – “more appetizing and selectively prepared” than in the peoples’ kitchens and “exemplifying all the merits of the Prague cuisine.”<sup>43</sup> The meals could also be taken home for more privacy.

<sup>37</sup> Announcement, Smíchov municipality, October 28, 1916, AHMP, KPSS, ka 10, inv. č. 205.

<sup>38</sup> *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 2590, 338 (April 3, 1918).

<sup>39</sup> *Národní listy*, May 18, 1917 (evg ed.), 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Prager Tagblatt*, May 2, 1915, 10.

<sup>41</sup> See the file, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3095, sig. S 11/2/117.

<sup>42</sup> *Prager Tagblatt*, January 26, 1917, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Právo lidu*, December 22, 1917, 5.



### **Middle-class Kitchens in Král. Vinohrady**

As the district housed many white-collar workers and petit bourgeois households, it was a prime spot for the development of kitchens aimed at the middle classes. The success of these establishments can be gauged from the rapid spread of this model: five middle-class kitchens had opened in various restaurants in Král. Vinohrady by the end of 1918, including one in the National House on Purkyně Square.<sup>44</sup>

Despite their growth, the kitchens struggled to meet the demand. In February 1918, 17,000 people used both popular and middle-class kitchens in Prague (without the suburbs), roughly 10 percent of the population, less than in Vienna, for example, where a quarter of the population used public kitchens, and also less than in the Prague suburbs (15 to 25 percent).<sup>45</sup> One of the reasons for this relatively low number was the frequent disruption in supplies, which threatened their continued operation; in September 1918, the kitchens had to stop their activity altogether for lack of food.<sup>46</sup>

The city's official food supply indeed experienced a progressive decline, sharply accentuated in the spring of 1917 and culminating in the total lack of provision of many goods through the municipal agencies by the summer of 1918. In his memoirs, a physician from Prague summed up the evolving situation:

In the first two years, there was enough of everything, and then everything slowly disappeared. In 1916 the shortages were already substantial. By 1917 it was already hunger. Money was no use. You had to know ways to get goods. Those who haven't lived through 1917 and 1918 don't know what hunger is.<sup>47</sup>

Up until 1916, the situation was more one of intermittent shortages, and rising cost of living, than full penury: the growing lack of food-stuffs implied an increase in prices, which made many items unaffordable for poorer sections of the population. The report from the Military Command for the end of 1916 underlined that it was still possible to obtain everything in Bohemia "if only one pay[ed] the corresponding

<sup>44</sup> *Venkov*, October 19, 1918, 6.

<sup>45</sup> See report from the City of Prague, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K151, no. 21689, February 11, 1918; On Vienna, see Jenny Sprenger-Seyffarth, "Öffentliche Massenverpflegung und private Familienmahlzeit in Wien und Berlin im und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg (1914–1924)," (PhD dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 2021), 300; 317; on the Prague suburbs, *Prager Tagblatt*, September 19, 1918, 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Právo lidu*, September 5, 1918, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Vladimír Vondráček, *Lékař vzpomíná (1895–1920)* (Prague: Avicenum, 1978), 274.

extortionate prices!” – while praising the abnegation of the working classes who “fe[lt] very hard” the lack of food and “also of beer, tobacco, and coffee.”<sup>48</sup> A letter from September 1916 confirmed that by then the shortages were still manageable for some: “I don’t suffer from any penury here, things are indeed expensive but you can eat as far as your pockets reach. It is impossible to get a table at [beer hall] *U Fleků*, every day it is full.”<sup>49</sup> Conditions markedly worsened in the winter and spring of 1917, although the progression was not linear. New harvests brought temporary respites in the early autumn, improving the supply for a few weeks or months. The weekly reports from the poor working-class suburb of Žižkov indicate the evolution from supply difficulties to a durable lack of provisioning: in March 1916, the officer noted difficulties in supply, the absence of some type of flour, or uncertainty as to how long the delivery of potatoes would last.<sup>50</sup> A year later, the shortages had become chronic: “The poorest sections of the population in the whole district, but particularly in [the town of] Žižkov, suffer bitterly from the lack of food.”<sup>51</sup>

By the last year of the war, official provisioning had all but collapsed. It remains difficult to compare the situation in Prague with hunger levels elsewhere in Austria–Hungary or in Europe.<sup>52</sup> Within Cisleithania, Vienna concentrated the largest urban population and probably suffered from shortages earlier than other regions. In 1916, the Prague municipality proudly compared its good results in the domain of food supply to those of the capital city.<sup>53</sup> The Bohemian lands were probably better shielded from significant shortages at first. However, the representation of the region as fertile agricultural land was a disadvantage toward the end of the war, when supplying Vienna and the army were considered a priority while Bohemia and Moravia were viewed as self-sufficient.<sup>54</sup> Cities and industrial regions, and Prague above all, were particularly neglected by this system. As a result, by 1918, the food provision in Prague was, according to the Prague Grain Central Agency, worse than

<sup>48</sup> Mood report, NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 5094, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 1115/17, December 31, 1916.

<sup>49</sup> NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 5089, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 31490, September 30, 1916.

<sup>50</sup> Weekly report, district officer Žižkov, NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 5082, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 37401/14, March 25, 1916.

<sup>51</sup> Weekly report, district officer Žižkov, NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 5094, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 37401/14, February 3, 1917.

<sup>52</sup> On Germany, see Mary E. Cox, *Hunger in War and Peace: Women and Children in Germany, 1914–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>53</sup> *Aprovísační věstník královského hlavního města Prahy*, I, no. 2, November 1, 1916, 6.

<sup>54</sup> The level of requisitions for the army and Vienna was higher than in other crownlands see Šedivý, *Češi, české země a Velká válka*, 259.

in Vienna. The Prague municipal council attributed these difficulties to the overestimation of “self-supporters” in Bohemia.<sup>55</sup>

This did not necessarily mean that people suffered more from hunger in Prague, but rather that the central supply agencies considered that Prague was able to take care of its own supply better than other territories. In a report from July 1918, the Prague supply agencies detailed the deficiencies in the food supply and conveyed the feeling that Prague had been abandoned to its own devices by the Austrian state. The flour cards were not honored and even the weekly half ration of flour products of 250 g per person was not delivered. Over a nine-week span, from May 1 to June 30, the half ration (hardly sufficient for anyone to survive on) was only delivered for two weeks. The half-bread ration, introduced in Vienna in June, had existed in Prague since April. The distribution of fat (butter, margarine, pork fat) was minimal: only 90 g per person for the month of March, 50 g in April, and 70 g in May. Milk did not fare much better with a total provision of 20,810 liters in May 1917, which went down to 7,877 liters a year later.<sup>56</sup>

These catastrophic conditions could not be improved from one day to the next with the regime change in 1918. The Czechoslovak state continued to strongly regulate the trade and distribution of food. The same system of central agencies created under Austrian rule remained in place with few changes. The Office for Grain went on subsidizing the market for cereals until 1921, paying a higher price for bread, which was then sold to the population at a lower price.<sup>57</sup> Despite new conditions and foreign aid, the recovery was slow and food shortages still characterized the first postwar years. Average crop yields in the Bohemian lands in 1918 were much lower than their prewar levels (less than half for wheat, for example) and they only came back to comparable levels by 1921.<sup>58</sup> When the American Relief Administration arrived in Prague in February 1919, they found that “there [was] undoubtedly privation and probably a large percentage of the population [was] undernourished,” although on average the situation seemed better to them than in other parts of Europe, such as Poland or Belgium. American imports

<sup>55</sup> Report from the centre of the Greater Prague municipalities, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K151, no. 34711, February 1, 1918; Municipal Council to Office for Public Food Supply, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K151, no. 21689, February 11, 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Prague Supply Agencies to Office for Public Food Supply, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K151, no. 115718, July 18, 1918.

<sup>57</sup> Alois Rašín, *Les finances de la Tchécoslovaquie jusqu'à la fin de 1921* (Paris: Editions Bossard, 1923), 152–153.

<sup>58</sup> Up to 1919, see *Manuel statistique de la République tchécoslovaque* (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1920), 46–48, 103; for later years, see *Manuel statistique de la République tchécoslovaque* (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1925), 42–45.

did not reach Czechoslovakia immediately in the confusion of postwar Europe; shipments were stopped in Trieste and encountered transportation difficulties. More regular shipments of American food only started reaching Prague in the spring.<sup>59</sup> Shortages remained an important issue throughout 1919 and 1920 to the extent that the government launched an “inquiry to determine and eliminate the causes of the high prices and profiteering” in late March 1920.<sup>60</sup> Prague municipal middle-class kitchens were still serving 2,500 meals a day in March 1920, and many of the other war kitchens in the city and suburbs continued to provide food to those in need in the first two years after the war.<sup>61</sup> Bread tickets in Prague were only phased out in 1921.<sup>62</sup>

Prague inhabitants spent the war and postwar years trying to navigate the complex network of food rules and rationing to obtain enough to feed themselves and their families. The numerous restrictions had a profound impact on a streetscape where abundance and temptations disappeared, and were replaced with ordinances, set prices, and rationing tickets. Street sellers’ activity was curtailed; bakeries could not display pastries in their windows; restaurants morphed into canteens. This was not a static picture; it progressively became worse, reaching a point in 1918 when official supply was of little use. Conditions only improved slowly after the war and the same regulations (with a few adjustments) remained in place for another three years.

### **Queues, Cold, and Hunger: The Urban Experience of Deprivation**

Beyond government and municipal decisions, the consequences of scarcity profoundly shaped everyday experience in the city. Language reflected the new conditions: the technical Czech word “aprovísace,” referring to the official supply system and then any form of supply, became part of daily use to describe the new difficulties in securing necessary food items.<sup>63</sup> Vašek Kaňa, in his autobiographical novel about his childhood on the streets during the war, mentions the ubiquitous use of the new term at the time.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>59</sup> HILA, ARA, EOR, Box 342, Folder 5, “Report on Prague mission,” August 15, 1919, 13.

<sup>60</sup> NA, MZL, ka 505, sig. IV/28/21/6, no. 21918/20.

<sup>61</sup> Record from the committee for collective feeding, NA, StOÚ, ka 89, sig. 78, March 18, 1920.

<sup>62</sup> *Národní listy*, May 5, 1921, 3.

<sup>63</sup> “Sbírejme válečná slova,” *Naše řeč*, 4 (1920), 17.

<sup>64</sup> Kaňa, *Válkou narušení*, 65.

Indeed, finding food became a primary occupation for many women and men. The long queues in front of shops and municipal selling points became the defining characteristic of Prague's streets during the war years. The word "front" (*fronta* in Czech, *Front* in German) gained particular currency in Prague during the First World War: newspapers were of course full of reports on the different military "fronts," but the word also took on a civilian meaning as it became increasingly used to designate the long queues that formed in front of every shop and marked the city landscape like lines on a map. "Fronta" appeared as part of the specific wartime vocabulary and in German, "Front" was considered as a "praguism" to refer to what was commonly known as "Anstellen."<sup>65</sup> An interwar testimony on the resilience of women during the war linked the two types of "fronts": women's duty had been "to not run away from the hinterland battlefield where near-battles occurred in the lines (*fronty*) for work, for food coupons and various wartime rations."<sup>66</sup>

Women and children sometimes had to queue all night in the hope of receiving some food in the morning. Standing in line came to take over the days and nights of working-class inhabitants. Jaroslav Knotek-Domě, who was seven or eight at the time, recalled the toll that queuing took on their daily life in the working-class neighborhood of Libeň:

Children often even smaller than me, their mums, grannies and granddads would seat on the ground maybe several times a week during the whole night in the very quiet street [...], in winter wrapped in blankets and various shawls. Seating and lying on the pavement in front of the bakery so that they would not miss their turn in the morning, when they opened the shop. My mother of course also went to the queue in the night [...]. I often came to replace her for two or three hours so that she could get some sleep. [...] In the morning when the baker pulled up his roller shutter, he would sell for maybe just one hour or not even and the roller shutter would fall back to the ground and we were told that there was no more bread.<sup>67</sup>

This activity was physically draining for those who did not receive proper nourishment: in March 1917, for example, a sixty-five-year-old woman fell unconscious to the ground at the train station in Smíchov after hours of waiting in line for coal and died shortly thereafter.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>65</sup> See "Sbírejme válečná slova," 17; "Front" is presented in an overheard dialogue full of "praguisms": *Prager Tagblatt*, August 31, 1917, 5; "Fronten, nichts als Fronten!" ("Queues, nothing but queues!"), *Prager Tagblatt*, November 3, 1917, 3. A police report also uses the German word: NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/23, no. 29164, Police Headquarters to Governor's Office, September 7, 1917.

<sup>66</sup> *Duch české ženy za války* (Prague: Ženský obzor, 1928), 105.

<sup>67</sup> Knotek-Domě, "V libeňském zázemí," 226.

<sup>68</sup> Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5096, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 10180/17, March 31, 1917.

The high degree of frustration generated by the endless queuing transpires in a threatening letter sent to the Král. Vinohrady police station, which commented on the latest imperial birth: “It is not surprising, they don’t have anything to do all day. [...] Let’s throw this rabble on the street to freeze and wait whole hours for a little piece of bread.”<sup>69</sup>

The first queues in front of bread and flour shops appeared in 1915, taking over the streets. In March, *Národní listy* described the scene in front of a bakery on Žižkov’s main street Husova: “the line of customers occupied in the last days not only the pavement, but also the road and the opposite pavement and significantly obstructed traffic. Besides, several arguments and skirmishes arose in the tumult.” Only a few people were allowed in at each time.<sup>70</sup> The overall number of operating bakeries was also reduced, as not all of them had enough flour supplies to bake bread. An inspection undertaken in over 200 bakeries in March 1916 revealed that many had no flour stocks at all and were only able to sell goods bought elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> The police soon played an important role in managing the queues in front of the main shops and municipal selling points. They regulated the crowds and organized the use of urban space; their attempts to rationalize the flows of customers were hampered by the limited supplies and also by the customers’ will to purchase in the location of their choice. The police were the first point of contact for the many shoppers who queued for hours, sometimes leaving empty-handed. As hundreds failed to receive bread at the municipal selling points in the Old Town and the New Town in April 1916, a few women provoked “painful scenes” as they begged in tears for bread for their children.<sup>72</sup> A few weeks later, the distribution of bread by district (*Rayonierung*) had produced good results to limit queues, although customers still queued up in front of the dozen Odkolek shops of the city, sometimes for two hours, waiting for the arrival of the bread cart because “apparently the Odkolek bread is of better quality and more copious.” The police’s efforts to direct them to other shops remained unsuccessful.<sup>73</sup>

The queues for other goods also grew as they became scarcer. In August 1916, as the lack of fat started to be substantially felt in the city, the police noticed a large queue of about 1,500 people in front of a Smíchov shop which had received foreign butter, “exceeding the

<sup>69</sup> Anonymous letter in Czech to the Král. Vinohrady police station, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5107, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 10506/18, no date [March 1918].

<sup>70</sup> *Národní listy*, March 12, 1915, 4.

<sup>71</sup> See all the individual reports, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M 34/2, March 13, 1916.

<sup>72</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M34/2, Approvisionnementbericht, April 6, 1916.

<sup>73</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M34/2, Approvisionnementbericht, April 27, 1916.

now usual number of clients gathering for bread sale,” and “including housewives from the better classes.”<sup>74</sup> The public selling points of potatoes generated large queues as the distribution was slow because of lack of personnel and inadequate scales to weigh the merchandise. People had to wait for hours because of this cumbersome process. Those who did not reach the counter worried that their weekly ration would expire if they came the next day.<sup>75</sup> Strategies were developed to mitigate the anger of unserved customers. On March 28, 1917, the potato selling point in Holešovice had to close early because they had no potatoes left. The 800 people who were left without anything received a ticket, saving their order in the queue for the next days.<sup>76</sup> On another day in March 1917, as stocks ran low early, the selling point in Hopfenštokova/Hopfenstockgasse (nowadays Navrátilova), in the New Town, witnessed such a stampede at 4 p.m. that the officers monitoring the queue required back up. By 7 p.m., people did not want to leave and the sale of potatoes continued exceptionally until 8.30 p.m. In the Peter neighborhood (New Town), with the sale starting at 9 a.m. instead of 7 a.m., people who had started queuing at 8 a.m. were only served at 1 p.m., and 200 ended up not served.<sup>77</sup>

The different police strategies to minimize waiting times, arguments, and space taken up by the queues had mixed results. The attempt to avoid queues for sugar in February 1917 by transferring all four main sugar retailers in the Old Town covered market was a resounding failure, for example. As this measure was advertised in the newspapers the day before, women from all over Prague, the suburbs, and even nearby villages came to stand in line before the opening at 7 a.m. “They filled the market spaces to such an extent that the regular traffic in the covered market was completely hindered.” The market needed to be shut down by the police so they could organize the sugar queues with hundreds of customers still waiting in the streets.<sup>78</sup>

The large crowds barely moving for long stretches of time and the tensions caused by the uncertain outcome regularly led to violent behavior. Self-appointed “front masters,” usually older men with a loud voice, helped maintain order in the crowds despite insults and complaints. They

<sup>74</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M34/2, Approvisionnementungsbericht, August 1, 1916.

<sup>75</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M34/2, Approvisionnementungsbericht, April 27, 1916 and April 28, 1916.

<sup>76</sup> Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5096, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 10180/17, March 29, 1917.

<sup>77</sup> Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5096, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 10180/17, March 30, 1917.

<sup>78</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, 3026, sig. M34/2, Approvisionnementungsbericht, no date [February 8, 1917?].

were rewarded in kind by the shop owner for their services.<sup>79</sup> A small incident could easily degenerate and the police control over the crowds was tenuous. In Žižkov on March 30, 1917, for example, an infantryman aggressively asked for entry into a 1000-strong queue in front of a coal selling point. He was promptly arrested and as the police was busy with him, the crowd stormed into the shop's courtyard to seize the coal.<sup>80</sup> A few months later, it was a queue in front of a soap shop in the Old Town that generated a stampede. The police intervened to prevent the women customers from storming into the shop and closed it.<sup>81</sup> Smaller and larger queues thus formed part of the landscape of the city, both in the center and in the suburbs. Municipal selling points for essential goods gathered the largest crowds but every shop, selling anything from beer to soap, had customers spilling over into the streets waiting for their turn. The news that a certain good might be available somewhere in the city acted like "an electric spark" which sent people rushing to the next shop.<sup>82</sup>

Queues were one prominent feature of the wartime scarcity street-scene, while beggars became another. The newspaper *Právo lidu* commented on the increased numbers of beggars on the streets of Prague: "on average ten to fifteen people come to knock on the door every day; a number that previously was not even reached on Fridays, day of beggars." Children were overrepresented among those having to beg for food. The number of children arrested for begging in the streets went from fifty in the whole of 1914 to 253 in the first nine months of 1917.<sup>83</sup> With fathers away at the front and mothers queuing for food, many more children lived on the street, begging or trying to earn a crown by carrying suitcases or selling matches.<sup>84</sup> A Bulgarian journalist traveling to Prague in the summer of 1918 reported that the streets gave a good indication of the deplorable food supply situation. Even the garrison troops were so poorly fed that one would regularly meet in the streets of Prague Hungarian-speaking soldiers who begged for bread.<sup>85</sup>

The war did not only affect food quantity, it also profoundly affected its quality. Substitutes for everything soon invaded shops' shelves and

<sup>79</sup> *Národní listy*, May 1, 1917, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5096, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 10180/17, March 31, 1917.

<sup>81</sup> Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5098, sig. 8/1/92/19, no number, June 9, 1917.

<sup>82</sup> *Národní listy*, March 12, 1915, 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Právo lidu*, March 3, 1917 (supplement), 4; Scheufler, "Zásobování potravinami v Praze," 186.

<sup>84</sup> AHMP, Marie Schäferová, ka 1, inv. č. 5, 34.

<sup>85</sup> Attached report "Die Lage in Mähren und Böhmen," NAL, GFM 6/45, Ö101 Böhmen, 42, German Embassy in Vienna, August 20, 1918.



households. Hygiene control of foodstuffs showed a marked increase in unsafe products: in 1918, 43.3 percent of the flour examined was considered bad (compared to 5 percent in 1913) and 77 percent of the milk (22.5 percent in 1913).<sup>86</sup> As early as 1915, it was no longer allowed to bake bread from pure wheat flour. It had to be mixed with flour from other cereals like barley, oats, or corn. Other substitutes included malt products or potato starch. By 1916, bread already contained 60 percent of substitutes.<sup>87</sup> The poor quality of the bread was a frequent cause for complaints. An anonymous writer explained to the Bohemian governor: "In Nusle we receive as supply (*aprovísace*) completely black flour that is not even [fit] for cattle."<sup>88</sup>

The revision of bakeries in March 1916 showed that most of them baked bread and pastries using a mix of various substitute flours (including maize, tapioca, potato, but also bean flour), trying to maintain some semblance of normality by baking, for example, traditional babovkas with potato flour. A bakery in Žižkov was reduced to exclusively baking so-called "Neapolitan" cakes with tapioca flour and apple marmalade.<sup>89</sup> Using these unfamiliar flours created difficulties in private households as well. A report indicated: "the population is not used to dishes made of pure maize flour and cannot navigate their preparation."<sup>90</sup> The American aid workers who visited poor Prague neighborhoods in 1919 saw the same difficulties in cooking with the obtained rations: a woman "exhibited the first fat which she had obtained in about a year [...]. It was of exceedingly poor quality, evidently of vegetable base." On corn meal, the report mentioned: "the people do not know how to bake it. She said that she baked it with yeast, in answer to our question, but had never heard of baking powder. As a consequence, her bread did not rise well and was soggy and difficult to digest."<sup>91</sup> In 1919, denunciations of poor bread quality still required the Ministry for Public Supply to conduct inspections in bakeries.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *Statistická zpráva hlavního města Prahy, spojených obcí, Karlína, Smíchova, Vinohrad, Vršovic a Žižkova a 16 sousedních obcí Velké Prahy za léta 1915–1918* (Prague: Nákladem hlavního města Prahy, 1921), 202.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Franc, "Bread from Wood: Natural Food Substitutes in the Czech Lands during the First World War," in Iva Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Rachel Duffett, and Alain Drouart (eds.), *Food and War in Twentieth Century Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 73–83.

<sup>88</sup> NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 2891, sig. A 15/1, no. 6534, received February 25, 1918.

<sup>89</sup> See report no. 296 and all the other reports listing the flour stocks and the type of goods baked in every bakery, NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3026, sig. M 34/2, March 13, 1916.

<sup>90</sup> NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 5086, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 37401/14, weekly report Žižkov, July 22, 1916.

<sup>91</sup> "Account of trip through poorer district of Prague," March 10, 1919, HILA, ARA, EOR, Box 343, Folder 6, 2.

<sup>92</sup> See report on a bakery on Myslíkova street, NA, MZL, ka 506, sig. V/4/9, no. 57520, July 10, 1919.

Diet and sociability habits that formed part of daily life were disrupted. Usual food staples disappeared and were replaced by less-prized items. A report noted that Prague workers had to adapt to these changes: “Potatoes, one of the main foodstuffs, are absolutely not obtainable, legumes and pastas lack completely and all the items on the free market are so expensive that they cannot be obtained. Swedes, an otherwise strongly avoided item for workers, are completely sold out.”<sup>93</sup> Coffee, the “most popular drink of all classes,” was only affordable for the most well-off, while others resorted to substitutes made of plants and fruits, such as oak apples. The “war coffee” sold in Prague shops was “a mockery of the old coffee in terms of taste and nutritional value.”<sup>94</sup> As milk was rationed, coffee with milk became a special treat that could only be enjoyed at certain hours in coffeehouses. At home, in restaurants, cafés, and pubs, the substitute goods shaped practices around food that markedly differed from peacetime.

Shortages of other commodities came to reinforce the experience of deprivation among Prague residents. Coal, especially, became very scarce in the last two years of the conflict. Industrial cities at the time were shaped by the use of coal for domestic and business needs: the fog it created, its distinctive smell. It was central to the way people cooked and heated themselves, and its storage and burning affected the use of space in private homes.<sup>95</sup> Coal shortages therefore had a huge impact on the type of meals people prepared and where they ate. Already in 1916, a woman shared her difficulties with a friend: “here there is a great penury of coal, so that for example we had to cook with gas today, a chance that we still have it, I really don’t know how long this can go on.”<sup>96</sup> One of the reasons of the success of public kitchens was that they provided a hot meal without having to find the coal to cook it. Eating out also meant leaving one’s cold flat for a heated public place. As an angry letter to the police underlined, the rationing of coal meant that families had to make choices: “Does the government think that when a family now [in the summer] consumes 20 kg of coal daily to cook, it will be sufficient for cooking and heating in the winter to receive coupons for 25 kg a week?”<sup>97</sup> In early 1917, the lack of coal combined with freezing weather

<sup>93</sup> Mood report, Military Command, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5096, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 5172/1714, March 1917.

<sup>94</sup> *Právo lidu*, March 15, 1917, supplement, 3.

<sup>95</sup> On the culture of coal, see Charles-François Mathis, *La Civilisation du Charbon: En Angleterre, du règne de Victoria à la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2021).

<sup>96</sup> Letter sent by Miloslava P, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3076, sig. P 56/1, no number, deposition on March 24, 1916.

<sup>97</sup> Anonymous letter in Czech to the Chief of Police, August 15, 1917 [postmark], NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5101, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 30112/17.

became a “calamity,” according to official reports.<sup>98</sup> That winter was especially cold with temperatures reaching  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  in February 1917 (an average 5 degrees below normal values for that month).<sup>99</sup> In mid-March, the Vltava river was frozen and a “piercing cold” still prevailed in Prague.<sup>100</sup> By September 1917, some factory workers were reported to have burnt their entire furniture to be able to cook.<sup>101</sup> A telegram from the Žižkov administration asked for petroleum as not even candles were available and detailed the impact of energy shortages: “The coal shortage is terrible. The school children freeze in the schools. The inhabitants cannot cook food.”<sup>102</sup> During the next winter, schools had to close for lack of coal. As the American Red Cross arrived in Prague in April 1919, it found that homes in the poorest districts had no fuel, “very little furniture because it had been burned for fuel, even to the picture frames in many instances,” and an “unpleasant odor because the lack of fuel did not permit the opening of windows.”<sup>103</sup>

The lack of coal in Prague was particularly acute for private households. As the Bohemian governor explained, the coal delivered to the city was reserved in priority for military use and army industries. Coal merchants tended to then favor larger industrial interests while municipalities (needing coal for water works, electricity works, food supply, bakeries) and populations came last.<sup>104</sup> A report noted that in the suburbs, “the house coal must be got with a basket from far away as coal is not available in retail anymore.”<sup>105</sup> The theft of coal at train stations and on train wagons became a regular offense. Bands of homeless teenagers specialized in this activity and were nicknamed “coal barons” (*uhlobarony*). Vašek Kaňa described his life as one of them, watching trains during the night and sleeping in the streets during the day. Another “coal baron” recalls the dangers involved in running on train tracks in search of coal.<sup>106</sup> In January 1918, a thirteen-year boy was killed by a soldier while stealing coal on a train in Libeň.<sup>107</sup> By 1919, the coal-stealing

<sup>98</sup> NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5094, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 37401/14, February 3, 1917.

<sup>99</sup> *Statistická zpráva 1915–1918*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from Kral. Vinohrady, March 19, 1917, ÖStA, KA, FA, AOK, Evb/NA, K3749, no. 4576.

<sup>101</sup> Mood report, Military Command, NA, PMV/R, ka 193, 22 Böhmen, no. 20491, September 30, 1917.

<sup>102</sup> Telegram to the Prime Minister, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K147, October 31, 1917.

<sup>103</sup> HILA, ANRC, Commission for Czechoslovakia, Box 68, Folder 2, 5.

<sup>104</sup> Governor to Minister President, February 18, 1917, NA, PM, Korespondence hr. Coudenhova, ka 5.

<sup>105</sup> Mood report, Military Command, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5096, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 5172/17, March 14, 1917.

<sup>106</sup> Kaňa, *Válkou narušení*, 82; Knotek-Domč, “V libeňském zázemí za první vojny,” 230.

<sup>107</sup> NA, MRP/R, ka 82, no. 7861, May 26, 1918.

gangs were well-organized operations, jumping on running trains to get coal. Armed military patrols were required to keep them away from the train tracks.<sup>108</sup>

Lack of coal meant that the city was not only colder, but also darker. Municipal gas works and electricity works were not sufficiently supplied, and the energy use needed to be curbed. Since the beginning of the war, some public lighting was turned off after 9 p.m.<sup>109</sup> By 1917, however, the restrictions went much further: lighted street signs for advertising, hotels, restaurants, and theaters were completely forbidden, while only one lamp per shop window was authorized until closing time. Streets thus lost much of their dazzling big city appeal. Many activities were curtailed to save on both lighting and fuel: shops had to close at 7 p.m., restaurants at 10 p.m., and cafés and bars at 11 p.m. In the winter months, schools and public offices only opened at 9 a.m. Recommendations for private homes also limited the number of rooms lighted, as well as the number of light bulbs used and their voltage, for electricity users. No electricity could be used after 11 p.m.<sup>110</sup> Further restrictions followed in 1918 and mandatory savings on lighting and fuel continued in 1919.<sup>111</sup> Beyond these official guidelines, many households spent by necessity the winter in darkness and cold to reduce their consumption of gas, petroleum, and coal – savings which robbed them of many of the comforts urban dwellers had grown accustomed to.

It was also harder to fight the cold when prices for clothing had become unaffordable and new fabric was out of reach (as well as rationed) for many Prague residents. “For the price paid for a waistcoat today, a knight from the Middle Ages would have bought a steel armor,” mocked *Právo lidu*.<sup>112</sup> By 1918, workers in a Prague factory had to come to work in their Sunday clothes and their children went barefoot and half naked despite the cold.<sup>113</sup> American aid workers upon their arrival commented on the lack of clothing in Prague: “Outer garments of shoddy appearance seem to be available but at extremely high prices, but underclothing in

<sup>108</sup> On this “plague,” see gendarmerie report from the Prague outskirts to Karlín district officer, April 15, 1919, NA, PMV, ka 165, č. 2959/N.

<sup>109</sup> Prague municipality to Police Headquarters, September 30, 1914, NA, PP 1908-1915, ka 2233, sig. L 18/29, no. 23647.

<sup>110</sup> *Národní listy*, October 22, 1917 (evg ed.), 2; see AHMP, KPSS, ka 10, inv. č. 191.

<sup>111</sup> NA, MV I SR, ka 278, 12/373/23, no. 52908, Police decree, October 17, 1919; for 1918, see *Večer*, October 21, 1918, 4.

<sup>112</sup> *Právo lidu*, February 4, 1917, 2nd supplement, 1.

<sup>113</sup> From the report of a factory leader, Mood report, Military Command, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5107, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 8985/18, March 14, 1918.

many districts is so scarce that the working classes are obliged to get along with none or next to none.”<sup>114</sup>

Another commodity that had progressively disappeared from markets was soap. Bad “war soap” was introduced in 1916 and sold against coupons by the end of the war.<sup>115</sup> As the police seized an illegal stock of “prewar soap” in 1918, the newspaper report insisted on the long since unknown “sweet smell” that the policemen had found in the room.<sup>116</sup> American relief workers noted “the almost total lack of soap” in Prague in 1919.<sup>117</sup> Another report concurred: “The most urgent medical need at Prague is soap. It is the great need of the patients in the hospitals and a certain portion of the civilian population who are suffering from the scabies and associated skin diseases.”<sup>118</sup> The lack of washing and clothing material lowered the general hygiene standards everywhere in the city. A policeman complained about the terrible conditions he experienced at the hospital in Král. Vinohrady as he was sick with dysentery in 1917. As the hospital had little clothing and soap, bed clothes were rarely changed and clothing never disinfected: “pillows were so dirty that I had to put a handkerchief under my head.” Patients with dysentery, typhus, or tuberculosis had to send their own potentially contagious laundry home to be washed.<sup>119</sup>

The combination of all these factors had disastrous consequences on the health of Prague’s inhabitants. Malnutrition made people more vulnerable to infectious diseases, which were more transmittable in poor hygiene conditions. Tuberculosis, which had started to decrease in the prewar years, went up again in the last war years. As summarized in a postwar health survey: “[tuberculosis] was always significant, but the wartime penury and undernourishment augmented it prodigiously.”<sup>120</sup> Hunger oedema, a sickness linked to low levels of protein and characterized by a swelling of the skin, surfaced in Prague (although it was not as prevalent as in other regions of the monarchy). Inmates in psychiatric asylums were particularly affected by this illness because, as one report

<sup>114</sup> “Exaggerated reports of Czecho-Slovak economic conditions and estimate of absolute need of food imports,” April 15, 1919, HILA, ARA, EOR, Box 341, Folder 1.

<sup>115</sup> *Večer*, October 30, 1916, 3; *Právo lidu*, July 31, 1918, 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Večer*, August 14, 1918, 3.

<sup>117</sup> “Report Children’s relief – Czecho-Slovakia,” April 7, 1919, HILA, ARA, EOR, Box 341, Folder 1.

<sup>118</sup> “Memorandum for Colonel Taylor,” April 16, 1919, HILA, ANRC, Box 68, Folder 1.

<sup>119</sup> Letter from Adolf Z, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3100, sig. 13/14, October 22, 1917.

<sup>120</sup> Philip Skinner Platt, *Přehled veřejného zdravotnictví Velké Prahy* (Prague: Ministerstvo sociální péče, 1920), 33; the yearly death toll from tuberculosis had fluctuated from 1,734 to 1,907 deaths from 1902 to 1912 and went up to 2,400, 2,616, and 2,765 in 1916, 1917 and 1918 respectively, *Statistická zpráva 1915–1918*, 150.

noted: “[they were] the only people in the monarchy who actually had to live on the rations which the state had established, and who could not procure for themselves anything more.”<sup>121</sup> Old people who were not able to queue for long hours to get food were excluded from the food supply and more susceptible to undernourishment. An old woman, for example, was found lying unconscious in one of the city parks, exhausted from undernourishment.<sup>122</sup> The municipality reported that of the 334 old isolated persons who came into the care of the Office for the poor from January to August 1916, 161 died shortly after their arrival.<sup>123</sup>

Although it is difficult to determine the role played by shortages in death rates, mortality in Prague clearly increased during the period (only partially due to the Spanish flu epidemic): 6,777 civilians died in the city in 1915 and 8,486 by 1918.<sup>124</sup> The main cemetery at Olšany started to run out of space in 1917 and manpower shortages meant that burials were delayed.<sup>125</sup> In a letter to her husband in autumn 1917, a woman described: “As a result of undernourishment, dysentery and hunger typhus grow frighteningly, as well as lung disease. [...] In Olšany they cannot keep up with the burials, with the digging of graves, the dead are buried after eight days instead of three.”<sup>126</sup> In this context, the Spanish flu pandemic struck bodies previously weakened by years of poor provisioning: 893 people died of the disease in Prague in 1918 (with a peak of deaths in the month of October).<sup>127</sup> The pandemic provoked a sudden shortage of coffins in the city and the military commander had to lend soldiers to the municipality to help bury the dead.<sup>128</sup>

Food shortages were not a hardship to endure in isolation. Other privations were visible in the pale faces of the queuing crowds, in the empty

<sup>121</sup> Governor’s Office to Ministry of Health, NA, MZd/R, ka 5, no. 2374, August 29, 1918; overmortality in psychiatric asylums happened throughout Europe; on Belgium, see Benoît Majérus, Anne Roekens, “Deadly Vulnerabilities. The Provisioning of Psychiatric Asylums in Occupied Belgium (1914–1918),” *Journal of Belgian History*, 47, 4 (2017), 18–48.

<sup>122</sup> *Právo lidu*, September 5, 1917, 3; on similar effects of food scarcity in WWII France, see Isabelle von Bueltinger (ed.), “*Morts d’inanition*”: *Famine et exclusions en France sous l’Occupation* (Rennes: PUR, 2005).

<sup>123</sup> *Věstník obecní královského hlavního města Prahy*, XXIV, no. 18, September 27, 1917, 271.

<sup>124</sup> *Statistická zpráva 1915–1918*, 99.

<sup>125</sup> AHMP, MHMP I, Presidium, sig. 55/4, letter from the burial section, May 31, 1917 and sig. 55/6, note from the presidium, October 15, 1918.

<sup>126</sup> Letter from A. R. (Prague VII) to Johann R, October 9, 1917, ÖStA, KA, FA, AOK, Evb/NA, K 3797, no. 2457.

<sup>127</sup> 1,176 including military personnel and “foreigners,” *Statistická zpráva 1915–1918*, 156.

<sup>128</sup> NA, MZd/R, ka 11, sig. 20, no. 4836, October 14/15, 1918; Zanantoni, “Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben ...,” 423.

apartments where food could not be cooked, in the dark streets robbed of animation, in the ragged appearance of everyone, and in the smelly, stuffy, and yet cold interiors. Diseases prospered in such an environment. In May 1918, the municipal physician reported the prevalence of tuberculosis in poor working-class households, including among children. He also explained how inflation had an impact on living conditions as families had to move to a smaller flat or even a cellar to match the growing prices for foodstuffs. His concluding paragraph gives a vivid picture of despair at the end of the war:

The awful worries about the securing of the most necessary food items, the worries of mothers, about how to cook without the most essential ingredients mainly without fat, when to cook when it is necessary to spend most of the day and night on food lines, what to cook on when it is impossible to get coal or even wood, the lack of sleep [...], the sight of hungry children and their lament, all of that has a deleterious effect on the nerves [...] and certainly causes either an awful outburst of despair or a spread of mental illnesses [...].<sup>129</sup>

### **Imagined and Real Food Circuits within the City**

The state rationing system, municipal selling points, and large queues only reveal one side of the reality of food supply. As the quantities obtained were not sufficient, many people, especially in Prague, had to rely on alternative modes of provision. The geography of food in the city was not just made of official restrictions and allowances but also of hidden transactions and illicit dealings. The importance of this shadow economy in provisioning the city led to many inequalities of access. For those left out of these unofficial channels, it also led to flourishing rumors of unseen abundance. This section explores the alternative ways in which food circulated within the city through black market operations, the new social hierarchies it produced, the information flows on food supplies, and the battle against profiteering.

Resorting to illegal forms of food provisioning was rendered necessary by the shortcomings of the official rationing system. Firstly, the rations were insufficient to survive on. An angry city dweller remarked: “We would like to know here in Prague what dim head managed to calculate that half a loaf of bread made of 50 percent corn flour and 50 percent wood can suffice for a person for a whole week.”<sup>130</sup> Secondly, the rations

<sup>129</sup> Report, Health commission to City Council, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K112, no. 103303, May 28, 1918.

<sup>130</sup> Anonymous letter to the Bohemian Governor in Czech, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2891, sig. A 15/1, no. 8370, Postmark July 6, 1918.

to which one was entitled on paper were often unobtainable. The population therefore tended to adopt an ambivalent stance toward the black market, perceived as the origin of the problem but also as a way to palliate shortages.

Food became a highly sought-after commodity with an increased value. It lost its humble character. Even the most common items became luxuries to exhibit or exchange as gifts. For her new show in the wooden Arena in Smíchov, operetta singer Zieglerová received not only flowers in homage but also a salami and half a bag of flour.<sup>131</sup> At Charles University, the distribution of a calf every week to the faculty was received with enthusiasm: “This weekly meat ration became an important faculty event,” remembered one professor.<sup>132</sup>

As social hierarchies were no longer based on education and tradition but on access to food, the sense of social degradation was strong among the middle classes. The teacher Marie Schäferová recalls her reaction when one of her students, the son of a painter, expressed the wish to become a grocer when he grew up, revealing the new prestige of this profession: “That is how the tragedy of the family, of the period and of everybody shone through.”<sup>133</sup> Bank employees in a meeting at the Municipal House complained that “the situation has deteriorated so much that intellectual work is put on par with manual work.”<sup>134</sup> Food shortages were not only difficult to survive physically, they undermined the certainties on which bourgeois societies had been resting. The widow of an imperial tax officer wrote to the Bohemian Governor, exposing her reduced circumstances: she insisted on their demeaning aspect for her, having to stand in line “in the crowd.” She considered that it was more difficult for her than for working-class women to get coal as they “were used to carrying burdens.” She, on the other hand, could neither carry a basket on her back nor get a maid.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, less people were able to afford domestic servants in Prague and their number decreased by 18.2 percent over a decade.<sup>136</sup> Old markers of social status disappeared in the general quest for food that created social humiliation.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Prague, March 7, 1916, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3076, sig. P 56/1, no. 8601; See also, *Národní listy*, February 23, 1916, 4.

<sup>132</sup> Jan Kapras quoted in Havránek, “Politische Repression und Versorgungsengpässe,” 64.

<sup>133</sup> AHMP, Marie Schäferová, ka 1, inv. č. 5, 13.

<sup>134</sup> ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K113, no. 123010, August 24, 1918.

<sup>135</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3157, sig. W 50/8, February 12, 1917.

<sup>136</sup> Between 1911 and 1921, Antonín Boháč, *Hlavní město Praha: Studie o obyvatelstvu* (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1923), 142.



### Everyday Corruption

The Král. Vinohrady town hall was the center of accusations of undue favors in food provision. In April 1920, *Právo lidu* named several personalities with close ties to the mayor who had received large quantities of flour and other goods during the war.

Complaints of irregularities also targeted the Král. Vinohrady police station itself, located a few streets away. An anonymous letter addressed to the Vinohrady policemen castigated their behavior: “we can see every day how you go with suitcases in which you take away from the people that for which the hungry ones must wait for hours in the cold while you shout at them.”<sup>137</sup>

Though it leveled social relations, the food penury did not bring a new form of equality. On the contrary, it further excluded people on the margins of society. For example, those who were not able to rely on connections to better-provisioned areas or institutions for their supply were greatly disadvantaged. In Prague in 1918, when many weeks went by without any distribution of bread or potatoes in shops, not having access to an alternative mode of supply meant going hungry. The situation was aggravated by a distribution system reliant on corporations or institutions, which received allowances from the central agencies for their employees. The correspondence of the local office for fruit and vegetables shows many examples of such requests.<sup>138</sup> Military factory managers, for example, directly lobbied public offices to get food for their workers. A report mentioned these efforts: “the management tries to buy food in large quantities but encounters difficulties because the authorities either don’t have stocks or refuse a direct purchase from the factories.”<sup>139</sup> A journalist in Žižkov commented on this process: “everyone, whether director, physician, or factory owner, looks for an influential acquaintance to have patronage and get food (*aprovisace*) more easily, without queues.”<sup>140</sup> Informal networks and protections played an important role in one’s ability to survive in wartime.

Information about how to get food became another much-coveted good. Newspapers published special sections on supply as well as private advertisements. But they were heavily censored and suppressed any news on severe

<sup>137</sup> *Večerník Práva lidu*, April 16, 1920, NA, PMV, ka 86, sig. V/V/8, no. 7475; anonymous letter in Czech denouncing police corruption, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2923, sig. D 18/13, no. 3004, February 21, 1918 [Poststamp].

<sup>138</sup> NA, Zemská úřadovna pro ovoce a zeleninu, ka 1.

<sup>139</sup> Mood report, Military Command, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5090, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 33519/16, October 31, 1916; See also, Kučera, *Rationed life*, 44.

<sup>140</sup> *Žižkovské zájmy*, April 29, 1917, 2.

shortages or their consequences. The Bohemian governor asked authorities to use their influence on newspaper publishers to avoid “depicting the emergency in the darkest colors” as the press was read abroad and such reports potentially damaged the war effort.<sup>141</sup> Postal censorship also controlled the flow of information between the home front and soldiers. Slips of paper containing alarming reports of hunger and of the true conditions were hidden in the most diverse objects: in hollowed-out nuts and baked goods, behind bottle labels or the address labels of packages, inside cigarette sleeves, or in the lining of clothes.<sup>142</sup> One such letter seized by censorship from a woman in the Prague outskirts to her husband in Russia painted a vivid picture of her everyday struggles: “What a miserable life we lead, you can imagine; without coal, without money, without food, only left to our own devices in this cold and this hunger. I have already sold everything that was superfluous; now I am standing here helpless.”<sup>143</sup>

In the absence of reliable information, rumors of available goods or further restrictions spread among neighbors or in the long queues. The rumor mill started early in the conflict. As one contemporary recalled, “the beginning of the war was not yet a period of real penury but it was a period of expected penury. We remember the alarming news that this or that good would be missing.”<sup>144</sup> Later in the war, one of the most persistent rumors in Prague was that food was being shipped from Bohemia to Germany. The Military Command denounced the ubiquitous use of the “catchphrase ‘export to Germany’” in all social circles.<sup>145</sup> One letter signed by “Prague Social Democratic workers” from several factories accused the governor of being bribed to send food abroad: “he received 6 million crowns for food supply (*aprovísace*) and we die of hunger here.”<sup>146</sup> Another even revealed “food fantasies” on the conditions in the neighboring country: “Food and coal are requisitioned in Bohemia and the Viennese central agency gives it to Germany. In Prague there is not even a kilo of potatoes on the market, no fruit, the smoker gets two

<sup>141</sup> Memorandum Bohemian Governor, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5104, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 40346-50/17, December 8, 1917; Police Headquarters to Governor’s Office, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5102, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 33764/17, October 20, 1917.

<sup>142</sup> Military Command to Governor’s Office, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5091, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 39410/16, December 27, 1916; see also, NA, PP HSt, ka 28, sig. H 1/11, no. 4777, October 10, 1916.

<sup>143</sup> Excerpt from a letter from November 23, 1917 sent by the Censorship section, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5104, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 41112/17.

<sup>144</sup> Vladimír Solnař, *Zločinost v zemích Českých v letech 1914–1922 z hlediska kriminální etiologie a reformy trestního práva* (Prague: Nákladem Knihovny sborníku věd právních a státních, 1931), 112–113.

<sup>145</sup> Mood report, Military Command, NA, PMV/R, ka 195, 22 Böhmen, no. 3438, January 16, 1918.

<sup>146</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2923, sig. D 18/7, no. 16359, received August 20, 1917.

puffs of cigarette, in Germany there are wagons of Czech potatoes, full of fruits, full packs of Austrian cigarettes.”<sup>147</sup>

The Bohemian authorities saw the potential danger of these rumors and tried to avert them. The local branch of the War Grain Agency offered a special prize to anyone who would be able to give proof of shipments going to Germany.<sup>148</sup> The Regional Office for fruit and vegetables sent *Právo lidu* a refutation of an article which blamed them for sending fruit to Germany.<sup>149</sup> A memorandum insisted resolutely that no grain was sent to Germany and that the mistake may have stemmed from people spotting trains transporting stocks from Romania to Germany through Bohemia.<sup>150</sup> Trains bringing food from Linz to Germany were indeed escorted by the military through Prague and Bohemia to avoid theft and plunder.<sup>151</sup> The German consul in Prague confirmed that a very small amount of food was still exported to the Reich, but that there were actually more German imports coming into Bohemia.<sup>152</sup>

Rumors identified easy culprits for the complex causes of the food shortages. Anyone who was perceived as better fed or with better access to food was easily labeled a profiteer. The term (*lichvář/Wucherer*) was in wide use during the war: it implied a lack of participation in the common relations of wartime sacrifice and characterized anyone seen as taking advantage of the general misery.<sup>153</sup> The resentment against profiteers drew on preexisting divisions in society. For example, a growing anti-semitism during the war fueled a discourse that blamed Jews for high prices. However, the reality of small-scale deals to get food in the city did not necessarily correspond to the simplifying anger at a few “profiteers.”

Black market and food trafficking became an important component of access to commodities and, more generally, of life in the city. Illegal traffics transformed the usual channels of food provisioning into the city. In Smíchov, for example, the fruit destined for the marketplace did not always reach it as it was bought up at the port, on the train, or in the street.<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, regular fruit sellers at markets were

<sup>147</sup> Anonymous letter in Czech to Police Chief, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2891, sig. A 15/1, no. 14604, August 14, 1917; on “food fantasies” see Healy, *Vienna and the Fall*, 69.

<sup>148</sup> *Prager Tagblatt*, August 21, 1917, 3.

<sup>149</sup> Regional office for fruit and vegetables to *Právo lidu*, August 10, 1917, NA, Zemská úřadovna pro ovoce a zeleninu, ka 1.

<sup>150</sup> NA, CV II, ka 71, Instructions for various offices, no date; on the exploitation of Romania, see David Hamlin, “‘Dummes Geld’: Money, Grain, and the Occupation of Romania in WWI.” *Central European History* 42, no. 03 (2009): 451–71.

<sup>151</sup> VHA, 8. sborové velitelství, Presidium, ka 1?, sig. 14 ¾ 51, no. 15320, August 22, 1918.

<sup>152</sup> NAL, GFM 6/45, Ö101 Böhmen, 39, August 27, 1917.

<sup>153</sup> Jean-Louis Robert, “The Image of the Profiteer,” in *Capital Cities at War*, I, 104–132.

<sup>154</sup> Announcement, Smíchov municipality, July 30, 1915, AHMP, KPSS, ka 10, inv. č. 195.

sometimes cut from their usual sources because of the new regulations and either could not continue selling or had to find new suppliers.<sup>155</sup> As a result, marketplaces became mere shadows of their former selves. A chronicler commented on their sad aspect in the spring of 1917: “The Prague markets, which usually at this time of the year abound in colors, vegetables, and poultry, are now empty. Where usually reigns a hustle and bustle, now whole areas remain deserted; only a few primitive shops can be found with some cabbage or swede exposed, or a bit of celery at ‘wartime’ prices.”<sup>156</sup> As official markets and stores emptied out, food had to be found at other locations in the city. The published confessions of a black marketeer reveal cafés and train stations as the converging points for various types of trafficking. According to him, café waiters, as hubs of information, were playing an important role in the development of this trade.<sup>157</sup> This corresponded to the more classic black-market situation where two people who did not know each other previously met in a relatively public place (café or station) to seal a deal.

However, many more food exchanges in Prague took place among acquaintances who sold each other goods acquired in larger quantities. This type of “gray market” relied on preexisting professional or neighborhood networks.<sup>158</sup> An investigation in 1916 into a case of illegal provisioning at the Czech National Theatre highlights the typical mechanism of alternative food supply in the city. A singer, who became known as “flour worm” by the other members of the theater, had offered to provide food to acquaintances he met in various cafés. He had contacts in the town of Brandýs/Brandeis, where he would get his supply and then sell it back in Prague.<sup>159</sup> The smaller scale dealings often rode that tenuous line between self-provisioning and black market. A woman, for example, was accused of profiteering by her tenant because she obtained lard from military stocks through her brother stationed in Hungary and sold it to neighbors and friends.<sup>160</sup> Everyone condemned larger traffics, but many relied on acquaintances with better access to get by.

<sup>155</sup> Regional office for fruit to Prague municipality, August 14, 1917 and August 18, 1917, NA, Zemská úřadovna pro ovoce a zeleninu, ka 1.

<sup>156</sup> Vožický, *Kronika světové války I*, 359.

<sup>157</sup> Kamil Gollin, *Keřasová zpověď: autentické líčení života, zákulisí a tajů řetězového obchodu po dobu pěti měsíců ve válce od 1. srpna 1917 až do ledna 1918* (Prague: A. Svěcený, 1918).

<sup>158</sup> On the distinction between black and grey market, see Fabrice Grenard, *La France Du Marché Noir (1940–1949)* (Paris: Payot, 2008).

<sup>159</sup> He was also accused of providing exemptions from military service see his file in NA, PMV/R, ka 189, 22 Böhmen, no. 27602, November 28, 1916.

<sup>160</sup> Deposition by Amalia B, September 24, 1916 and report on the house search, October 13, 1916, NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 5090, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 32594/16.

The numerous denunciations and investigations into food profiteering necessitated the creation of a specific police department at the Prague Police Headquarters in May 1916: the Department for the prevention of food profiteering (*ústředna pro potírání lichvy potravinami/Dienststelle für die Bekämpfung des Lebensmittelwuchers*).<sup>161</sup> The officers in charge tracked price gouging, food reselling, and black marketeering. They controlled bucket shops for speculation as well as markets and stores to see if they complied with the price required for essential goods. They inspected warehouses to avoid speculative stockpiling and checked newspapers for inappropriate business ads.<sup>162</sup>

The inspections and subsequent seizures of illegal stocks were often based on tip-offs. A weekly report from May 1916 recorded the discovery of two wagons of beans stored in the warehouse of the Anglobank on Rohansky Island, of 1,250 kg of millet in a closed shop in Karlín, and of coffee and millet in the former Bernhard factory in Karlín. All of these confiscations were based on denunciations. An inspection in a Smíchov paint and ink store revealed huge hidden stocks of chocolate, wax, and dozens of boxes of soap. Controls at the train station also uncovered many illegal transactions. A wagon of butter from Holland was seized as well as 1,200 eggs aimed for the famous pastry shop Myšák. The store, located on Vodičkova Street near Wenceslas Square, was one of the most renowned in the city for sweets and baked goods (Figure 4.1). The police followed up on that lead and found 25,200 eggs stored in the back shop for the preparation of their pastries. In a similar way, they found 108,270 eggs in a cellar of the Klementinum stored for the famous baker Balvín on Celetná Street.<sup>163</sup> At a time when eggs were fully missing from Prague markets or sold individually at extremely high prices, hoarding them for pastries embodied the excesses of businesses' alternative provisioning. To limit this misuse, the new Czechoslovak republic would, in 1919, ban the use of eggs in pastry shops altogether.<sup>164</sup>

In a context of particularly acute shortage of fat, the reports for seized butter and pork fat in Prague from August 1917 to the end of 1919 also show how integrated these traffics were in urban daily life. Most cases involved small quantities of butter (less than 10 kg). The locations where the products were seized revealed the geography of black market in the city. In 1917, short of a third of the confiscations took place at

<sup>161</sup> *Domov za války*, III, 422.

<sup>162</sup> "Instruktion betreffend den Wirkungskreis der Dienststelle für die Bekämpfung des Lebensmittelwuchers in Böhmen," NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, M 34/2, no. 101766/17.

<sup>163</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, M 34/2, Approvisionnementbericht, May 21, 1916.

<sup>164</sup> Press clipping, December 9, 1919, AHMP, KPSS, ka 10, inv. č. 201.



Figure 4.1 Myšák's store front in 1915

Source: AHMP, *Marie Schäferová*, inv.č. 6, "Děti metropole," ka. 2

the various train stations in the city. A hotel porter, for example, transported butter in suitcases from the station for his boss.<sup>165</sup> The other key locations were market halls and private shops. Some owners sold the forbidden stocks from their cellars and others directly on the main shop floor.<sup>166</sup> The fine paid was not always enough of a deterrent. The local office for fat recommended to the police an exemplary punishment in the case of a repeat offender at the main market hall who, despite her losses, had continued to sell black market butter after being caught.<sup>167</sup>

To keep their operation running, many businesses circumvented the rules. The rare restaurants or stores that managed to continue selling good fare had to rely on black market networks. A few places in the center were able to maintain their standards in this way. The famous delicatessen

<sup>165</sup> NA, SÚTOM, ka 6, no. 9763, December 2, 1917.

<sup>166</sup> "Seznam maximálních částek za zabavené tuky, složených u Státního ústavu pro tuky v Praze," NA, SÚTOM, ka 6.

<sup>167</sup> Local Office for Fat to Governor's Office, NA, SÚTOM, ka 6, no. 11133, November 8, 1917.

store Lippert on na Příkopě Street was named by an American Relief Administration (ARA) worker as the “only place where we can find good food in Prague.”<sup>168</sup> In Král. Vinohrady, a more upscale suburb, many of the main food merchants (and renowned cured meat makers) were regularly accused of illegal provisioning and enriching themselves while other residents went hungry. An anonymous letter denounced a butcher on King George Square for illegally bringing in pigs from the countryside using connections with his brother, a village mayor in Central Bohemia. He also bought meat from the countryside, “paying awful profiteering prices, which is not allowed.”<sup>169</sup> Successful Král. Vinohrady merchants were also accused of avoiding the common sacrifices through exemption from military service.<sup>170</sup> One of the main cured meat makers in the district, Maceška, owner of a shop on Jungmannova and another one near Purkyně Square, was stopped by the police as he was trying to transport some of his illegal fat stock to the countryside in a car to avoid being caught. The inspection revealed the greatest stock of fat found in the city at this stage, 70 q.<sup>171</sup>

### Shops and Illegal Stocks

Many shops all around Purkyně Square were regularly caught by the police or the surveillance organs for contravening the food regulations. On February 9, 1918, an inspection carried out by an officer from the department against profiteering and a representative of the regional agency for fat caught illegal stocks of butter in several stores near the square. Next to the theater, they found almost a kilo of fresh butter in a delicatessen store and in the shop next door, 2 kg and a half of fresh butter and 2 kg and a half of tallow. On the opposite side of the square at the start of Vávrova Street, a merchant had 280 g of butter and 1.75 kg of tallow. The controls did not frighten shop owners too much. At a soap shop at the beginning of Palacký Street, the police seized stocks of soap and 2 kg of butter in January 1918. The same shop had been caught a few months earlier with 19 kg of butter. Two numbers down on that street, a delicatessen store was caught with 3 kg of butter on February 7 and then for selling overpriced bacon four days later. A restaurant owner at the beginning of Crown Street who was caught selling and exposing salami on a meatless day in 1919 simply tried to deny any wrongdoing. He explained:

<sup>168</sup> Diary entry, October 3, 1919, HILA, Charles N. Leach papers, Box 1.

<sup>169</sup> Anonymous letter in Czech, NA, MV I SR, ka 279, sig. 12/427/1, no. 2625, January 24, 1919.

<sup>170</sup> Letter in German, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2890, sig. A 15/1, no. 13856, June 23, 1916.

<sup>171</sup> NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, M 34/2, Approvisionierungsbericht, May 18, 1916. In the interwar period, Maceška, famous for his “macešky” sausages, built a great building complex in Vinohrady that included a cinema.

“today is not a meatless day. Anyway, a policeman bought salami here and didn’t say anything.” As the policeman was leaving, he asked the other customers to testify that he was not selling salami. The police presence was not much of a deterrent, even though the offense here was double: selling meat on a forbidden day and exposing it to public view.<sup>172</sup>

The enterprising Josef Beránek, also a cured meat maker, whose shop on Týl Square had expanded into a market hall selling a variety of products, was also caught in a black-market inquiry. In October 1920, he bought a wagon of American army bacon intended for factory workers.<sup>173</sup> Beránek’s market had opened a dining hall during the war where they served soups and meat dishes.<sup>174</sup> An ad published in the newspapers vaunted the merits of the operation: “Beránek market hall is a real benefactor of Greater Prague,” where you can find a relatively cheap full meal “even on meatless days.” The article praised Mister Beránek’s industriousness; he “must make substantial travels and approaches to corporations and authorities to get the quantity of food needed, especially meat and fat, to Prague.”<sup>175</sup> The ad encapsulated the whole ambivalence of Prague’s population toward these well-stocked shops, which on the one hand helped provide food to a city where the official system was inadequate, but whose aggressive purchasing practices in the countryside contributed to the general rise in prices.

It is no coincidence if the most obvious cases of open black market concerned upscale pastry shops, delicatessen stores, and cured meat shops. The number of these stores particularly rose between 1910 and 1924, as they symbolized the modernization and specialization of food supply in the city. They occupied the most frequented arteries in the center of the city and suburbs. Even if their ware was not affordable for many or only occasionally before the war, their display windows symbolized the big city status of Prague.<sup>176</sup> The delicatessen stores of Ferdinand

<sup>172</sup> Reports on butter, no. 1210, no. 1205, no. 1204, February 22, 1918; no. 86666, October 19, 1917, no. 231, January 30, 1918, no. 1002, February 16, 1918, no. 1293, February 25, 1918 NA, SÚTOM, ka 6; on the salami, Report from the surveillance organ of the Ministry of Food Supply, July 7, 1919, NA, MZL, ka 506, sig. V/4/9.

<sup>173</sup> Report, Department for the prevention of food profiteering, 5 October 1920, NA, MZL, ka 369, sig. III/29/4/2, no. 89638.

<sup>174</sup> Advertisement in *Národní politika*, January 5, 1916, 1.

<sup>175</sup> Same advertisement in *Venkov*, November 12, 1916, 11; *Národní listy*, November 12, 1916, 7; *Právo lidu*, November 12, 1916, 2nd supplement, 7.

<sup>176</sup> Marcela Starcová, “Zásobování a ochod s potravinami v Praze v meziválečném období,” (Phd dissertation, Charles University Prague, 2012), 36, 80, 129–132; on consumption culture and urban modernity in the interwar, see Ines Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen*, 275.



Avenue and na Příkopě, as opposed to the traditional market, sold specialties for immediate consumption such as the small open sandwiches (*chlebiček*). A German visitor in Prague in 1920 was surprised to see that black-market products were publicly visible in these stores: “In contrast to the German Reich, where black market is practiced as well, which must however take place in darkness, here bakers and butchers constitute public outlets of the black-market ware.”<sup>177</sup> The fact that the food items were by now unaffordable for most heightened the anger at profiteering practices.

The displays revealed a degree of tolerance for black-market operations by the police authorities. A butter merchant in Král. Vinohrady was selling butter acquired above the maximum price in Moravia, but against fat tickets and with the knowledge of the district office, in queues supervised by the police.<sup>178</sup> Such toleration might explain some of the criticism from the population on the efficiency of the control organs and of the department against profiteering especially. An article published in the German-speaking newspaper *Bohemia* reported on a reader who had twice attempted in vain to alert nearby policemen about illegal prices at fruit stands. In the second instance, on the marketplace in Tyl Square, he was even arrested by the police for causing a stir.<sup>179</sup> More lenient commentators pointed to the staff shortage which rendered the Department for the prevention of food profiteering “completely powerless” and meant that “the biggest profiteering escapes justice.”<sup>180</sup> Others accused the police of corruption. “The police accept bribes and palm-greasing, and close their eyes for a box of sugar,” explained one anonymous letter.<sup>181</sup> Overall, the action of the police in this field was deemed insufficient.<sup>182</sup> The department against profiteering also suffered from a lack of space inside the overcrowded police Headquarters in the Old Town. An article in *Právo lidu* described a visit to their offices where there were only three desks for four employees, which explained why the department was overwhelmed and took time to investigate cases.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Letter from the *Deutscher Schutzbund* enclosing the report, March 3, 1920, PA AA, Ö101, R9105.

<sup>178</sup> See report August 14, 1917, NA, SÚTOM, ka 6.

<sup>179</sup> *Deutsche Zeitung Bohemia*, August 2, 1918, 4.

<sup>180</sup> From a meeting of the political club “Rovnost” on August 12, 1918, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K113, no. 123857, August 28, 1918.

<sup>181</sup> Anonymous letter to the Bohemian Governor, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2891, sig. A 15/1, no. 4789, received February 11, 1917.

<sup>182</sup> *Prager Tagblatt*, January 9, 1919, 4.

<sup>183</sup> Newspaper cutting, Ministry of Food Supply to Police Headquarters, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, M 34/2, May 30, 1919.

Black-market operations relied on the difference in prices between the city and countryside, but also within the city. As the food situation worsened in Austria–Hungary, the division of Prague into different municipalities became a liability. Every municipality was responsible for its own food provisioning and distribution. The inhabitants sometimes took advantage of these discrepancies and traveled from one neighborhood to another to obtain food. In March 1917, for example, the bread left over in the municipal selling points in Žižkov was sold without rationing tickets. The police noted that this attracted many shoppers from around the Prague area. Moreover, women in Libeň demanded to be sold bread without coupons invoking the Žižkov example.<sup>184</sup> As the penury intensified in the last years of the conflict, the suburbs tried to preserve their supply for their own inhabitants. In June 1918, the municipality in Smíchov simply banned merchants and shoppers from other districts from its market hall.<sup>185</sup> The division augmented trafficking, making calls for the unification of Prague more pressing. A workers' conference on food supply issues in February 1917 explicitly demanded the creation of a common committee on these questions for all the municipalities of Greater Prague.<sup>186</sup>

The border between the inner city and the suburbs was materialized by the levy of a tax on food products for anyone who entered Prague. Guards at little booths on all the major entry points into the central districts carried out checks for anyone coming by foot, car, or public transportation. The price of foodstuff was higher in the inner city, which explains why the suburbs, before the war, were reluctant to be joined with Prague. It was not only food items that were taxed, but also coal and soap. The traffic from one part of the city to another in wartime had to contend with this additional difficulty. A contemporary joke presents a man buying a baby carriage to hide his purchases from the officials at the tollhouse.<sup>187</sup> In 1918, shortly before the regime change, the Czech–Jewish movement's newspaper *Rozvoj* criticized the toll at the entrance of Prague and called for its removal: "One of the first taxes that must be abolished in the Czech state is the hideous tax on food in Prague. [...] it generates many inconveniences, for example on the tramway rides. It's a purely Austrian tax. No metropolis abroad has a similar anomaly."<sup>188</sup> This tax was not abolished during the First Republic, but the

<sup>184</sup> Report, Police Headquarters, NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 4971, sig. 8/1/16/7, no. 6785, March 2, 1917.

<sup>185</sup> Announcement, Smíchov municipality, AHMP, KPSS, ka 10, June 27, 1918.

<sup>186</sup> *Prager Tagblatt*, February 20, 1917, 4.

<sup>187</sup> *Humoristické listy*, August 23, 1918, 343.

<sup>188</sup> *Rozvoj*, October 26, 1918, 7.

zone covered was extended to include Prague's suburbs in January 1921, moving the barriers further away from the center.

The baroque system of food distribution within Prague and the suburbs favored underground traffic that took place both in public spaces (train stations, market halls) or in private houses or shops. Illegal food circulated in parallel to the official supply system, reinforcing social inequalities. While some shops had to close for lack of goods, others prospered as they had found sources of rarefied goods at high prices in the countryside. The relationship between the city and its hinterland was also profoundly transformed through the shortages.

### **To and from Prague: Upside-down Town and Country Relations**

In a time of deserted market stands and empty shop windows, the appeal of the countryside and its well-stocked attics grew for city dwellers. While the city was perceived as a place of easy access to all sorts of goods and riches in prewar times, its sad wartime displays enhanced the value of direct proximity to food production. The heightened significance of humble food meant a change in the city's appearance and a temporary or permanent flight to the countryside for those who could. City parks and gardens were no longer sites of leisure and pleasant flower arrangements, but planted with useful vegetables that contributed to the general food supply. Residents used every small plot or outside space to grow food or rear small animals. Many of the interior courtyards and balconies typical of working-class Central European apartment buildings were now filled with rabbits, geese, or vegetables. In the three main train stations as well as the smaller suburban ones, entire families thronged with heavy luggage on excursions to the countryside to find food. As Prague became more rural, the war brought on an inversion of social hierarchies between city and country.

The increasing food shortages reshaped the urbanity of the city. The unavailability of food in the usual selling places encouraged a different use of urban space for growing food, the development of green spaces, and the increased presence of animals. The war thus gave a more rural aspect to urban life, provoking a "ruralization" of the city.<sup>189</sup> This impression was reinforced by the loss of some urban features: rationed lighting made a large city like Prague seem darker and more village-like; dazzling shop windows, colorful street displays, and noisy sellers had now disappeared. In public parks, municipalities organized the planting

<sup>189</sup> Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life*, 181.

of vegetables to provide supply for the city's inhabitants. In the suburb of Karlín, in the year 1915, 6,800 lettuces, 11,560 kohlrabis, 3,840 celery, and other vegetables were cultivated in public parks and sold at the local market.<sup>190</sup> The custom of keeping a small vegetable garden was not as widespread in Bohemia as in other parts of Europe, and vegetables themselves (except for a few staples such as cabbages) were not a usual part of the local diet. The official and private encouragements to grow vegetables therefore came as a double novelty for Prague inhabitants.<sup>191</sup> Urban dwellers needed to learn or relearn farming techniques to produce their own sustenance. Looking at the titles of books published during the war in Prague, it is striking to notice the sheer number of handbooks explaining how to rear and cook small poultry or rabbits in a city setting, or how to dry vegetables.<sup>192</sup> They recommended, for example, that rabbits should be kept on the inner balcony (asking the neighbors' permission first) and that all sorts of waste should be saved to feed them. Contemporary satire also referenced hidden geese found in the neighbor's apartment.<sup>193</sup> The sudden rising interest in home food growing changed both public outdoor spaces and the inside of residential buildings.

For the many inhabitants who did not have enough space to supplement their supply with their own production, going to the countryside to purchase directly from producers was the only option. These trips outside the city, also called rucksack traffic (*Rucksackverkehr/bat'ohové zásobování*), were often physically demanding for the city dwellers who had to bring home all the goods they could get. The development of this self-provisioning method started in 1916 and intensified in the summers of 1917 and 1918. As so many intermediaries intervened before food reached the city, the goal was to get the products in the fields as early as possible before new potatoes or wheat ears were harvested by farmers. A memoirist even credited the "rucksackers" with having saved the potato harvest as they went directly into the fields to gather new potatoes.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>190</sup> AHMP, Archiv města Karlín, ka 390, sig. 8/2, no. 3557/16, April 17, 1916.

<sup>191</sup> On growing vegetables as an expanding phenomenon, *Právo lidu*, February 16, 1918, 7; on official encouragements, see *Právo lidu*, April 8, 1917, 7.

<sup>192</sup> Alois Josef Kulišan, *Praktické tabulky pro pěstitelé zelenin a semen v malém i ve velkém* (Prague: A. Neubert, 1918); František Odložilík, *Domáci zelinář: stručný návod ku pěstování, ošetřování, sklizení a přezimování všech druhů zelenin a koření v domácí zahradce* (Prague: A. Neubert, 1918); Josef Kafka, *Levní dodavatelé masa, sádla, másla, mléka, sýra a vaječ: praktické rady pro chovatele králíků, morčat, koz, vepřů a drůbeže* (Prague: F. Šimáček, 1916).

<sup>193</sup> Josef Skružný, *Bubnová palba. Humoresky z válečné doby* (Prague: J. Vilímeček, 1918), 183.

<sup>194</sup> *Domov za války*, III, 326.

Summer excursions to the countryside stood in some continuity with prewar practices of taking fresh air in the outskirts of the city. War and necessity transformed weekend or holiday leisure activities into more grueling trips further and further away and without guarantee of success. A Prague police report already noted in 1916 that “some circles of the local population, who cannot find the necessary merchandise here, instead of the usual excursions to the nearby leisure places, now undertake them in the most remote villages to get butter and eggs.”<sup>195</sup> The carefree day trips on local trains were replaced by luggage searches at train stations to avoid underhand trade and prevent any supply from leaving Prague. In 1919, the Prague municipality asked for a search exemption for middle-class travelers going on their “summer residence,” which was however declined.<sup>196</sup>

The “summer residence” (*letní pobyt/Sommerfrische*) was another tradition that took on a new significance during the war. Urban middle classes had in prewar decades developed the habit of leaving the city for several weeks in the summer months to a village cottage they rented or, for the better-offs, owned.<sup>197</sup> The “summer guests” who had previously enjoyed picking fruit in the countryside now came much more purposefully to get food and flee the poorly supplied city, for those lucky enough to find a place.<sup>198</sup> In times of food scarcity, however, the villages were less welcoming: some municipalities such as Roztoky u Prahy, just north of Prague, explained that they did not have supply for the “summer guests.”<sup>199</sup> For those having spent the summer away from the city, there was not much incentive to come back. An article in September 1917 gently mocked the Prager “summer guests” who had not yet returned and were driven out by local officials in provincial towns and villages. It described the new scenes they would witness at train stations: “At the state train station, the Franz Joseph station, the North Western station, everywhere where the country residence ends and Prague starts. [...] You will soon see among these crowds hundreds and hundreds of people with huge bundles on their backs, baskets and suitcases recalling the emigrants to America: it is only the food supply processions [of people] who went to beg outside for a bit of potato or fruit.”<sup>200</sup>

<sup>195</sup> NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3026, sig. M34/2, Approvisionnementbericht, June 2, 1916.

<sup>196</sup> NA, MZL, ka 506, sig. V/4/9, no. 52198/19, July 19, 1919.

<sup>197</sup> On the “Sommerfrische,” see Hanns Haas, “Die Sommerfrische: Ort der Bürgerlichkeit” in Hannes Stekl, Peter Urbanitsch, Ernst Bruckmüller und Hans Heiss (eds.), *Durch Arbeit, Besitz, Wissen und Gerechtigkeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1992), 364–377; Deborah Coen, “Liberal Reason and the Culture of the *Sommerfrische*” *Austrian History Yearbook* 38 (2007): 145–159.

<sup>198</sup> *Národní listy*, April 18, 1917, 1.

<sup>199</sup> *Venkov*, April 5, 1917, 6.

<sup>200</sup> *Národní listy*, September 8, 1917, 2–3.



Figure 4.2 People returning from the countryside with potatoes, 1917  
Source: *Muzeum města Prahy, HNN 19002/001*

All the Prague train stations in the last two war years were crowded with day travelers leaving the city in search of food (see Figure 4.2). According to a provincial newspaper, the rush at the main train station in August 1917 was such that a crowd of people remained behind, not able to board any trains, and the window of the counter was crushed in the process.<sup>201</sup> A chronicle described in that same month the “thousands of women who leave on every train from Prague for the countryside.” They would bring back up to 50 kg in large bags, which were often seized by the police upon their return.<sup>202</sup> A year later, the same chronicle noted the “awful crushing crowds at all train stations among the travelers for new potatoes.”<sup>203</sup> Marie Schäferová also recorded the train stations full of women coming back from these trips to the countryside: “Daily at the train station you could see cans of milk or empty milk cans. Empty, they were traveling to the countryside and they came back full. They had a little lock so that no one unauthorized could open them.”<sup>204</sup> The police posted themselves at the train stations to arrest the travelers on their return and seize the hard-won food without compensation. On February 19, 1918, for instance, at the train station in Libeň, they

<sup>201</sup> *Teplitz-Schönauer Anzeiger*, August 12, 1917, 2.

<sup>202</sup> Vožický, *Kronika*, 428.

<sup>203</sup> Vožický, *Kronika*, 524.

<sup>204</sup> AHMP, Marie Schäferová, ka 1, inv. č. 5, 17.

arrested a fifty-year-old working-class widow who was carrying two baskets full of butter at 7.30 p.m. She had been traveling all day to three or four villages in North eastern Bohemia (about 100 km away from Prague) to collect 17 kg of butter and eggs.<sup>205</sup>

The police's stance toward this type of self-provisioning remained ambivalent. Officially, it was, of course, forbidden and considered as black market, but in practice, a certain leniency existed, changing throughout the course of the war. The direct purchase of potatoes from the producer, for example, was forbidden in July 1917 because it was endangering the overall supply and seriously threatened the normal distribution channels. As people continued to travel to the countryside in massive numbers regardless, the Bohemian governor published a new announcement in August to reiterate the ban.<sup>206</sup> Its enforcement, however, was not always coherent and varied throughout the conflict. A newspaper article from July 1918 complained about the renewed interdiction to transport potatoes in backpacks when, a few weeks earlier, the Office for Public Food Supply had promised to allow food transport for self-supply.<sup>207</sup> A report from the Military Command in September mentions the "draconian prohibition" of the *Rucksackverkehr* which generated "a certain agitation among the civilian population."<sup>208</sup> In a report two weeks later, the situation is described as slightly improved through the "alleviated application of the rucksack interdiction."<sup>209</sup> As public supply systems failed to provide the most basic goods, citizens were forced to break the law just to get by. This situation rendered controls more difficult because of how widespread rucksack traffic was.

The rush of urban dwellers to the countryside made farmers distrustful of the travelers from the city who were ready to buy at any price. A man from Prague who moved to the countryside during the war denounced, in a letter to the governor, the rumors circulating among the rural population on the losing value of paper money. He complained that the villagers refused to sell their houses or land against money.<sup>210</sup> The fear (justified in an inflationary context) that money would soon be worth

<sup>205</sup> Report, Department for the prevention of food profiteering, NA, SÚTOM, ka 6, no. 1666, March 13, 1918.

<sup>206</sup> "Vyhláška týkající se nákupu bramborů soukromými stranami," NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3019, sig. M34/1, no. 221591/1917.

<sup>207</sup> *Večer*, July 3, 1918, 3.

<sup>208</sup> Mood report, Military Command, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K151, no. 134865, September 14, 1918.

<sup>209</sup> Mood report, Military Command, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K151, no. 144153, September 30, 1918.

<sup>210</sup> Letter from František L. to the governor, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3018, M 34/1, no. 19535, January 2, 1918.

less led to common forms of barter between peasants and city dwellers: clothes, tobacco, jewels; every object that Prague inhabitants still possessed could be bargained against food. A woman farmer living in the countryside near Prague explained in a letter to her husband that she would not accept money: "There are a lot of people, who bring everything that we might need."<sup>211</sup> Reportedly, some men returning from war went on revenge expeditions in villages to retrieve the items ceded by their wives against food.<sup>212</sup>

Other Prague residents would reactivate their social links in villages outside the city to receive food. A woman from Prague in a letter to her husband commiserates with those with limited social connections: "The one who doesn't have anybody in the countryside, he is unhappy."<sup>213</sup> "They dug up and connected again with old family relations," as one memoirist recalled.<sup>214</sup> These rural acquaintances also appear in contemporary satire. A cabaret play shown at the Rokoko on Wenceslas Square and entitled "Wanderings through Prague" features the character of an "uncle" coming from the countryside to visit Prague, and who discovers the extent of the black market in the city.<sup>215</sup>

The war brought an inversion of traditional social hierarchies between town and country, which was particularly difficult to accept for the city dwellers. Having to beg peasants for food during their trips to the countryside and being sometimes turned down constituted a humiliation for the urban workers and petit bourgeois who, before the war, had felt superior to their rural counterparts. Caricatures mocking or criticizing the peasants who had become rich by selling their products at a high price to hungry urban dwellers were common in Prague's satirical papers. The following caricature, from the time of the regime change, mocks the new reverence for peasants in urban households. A bourgeois family welcomes, like a high dignitary (carpet, flowers, music) the woman who provides them with food. "How we celebrated the namesake day of Terezie Homolková, who brings us butter, eggs and milk from the countryside ...," the caption reads (Figure 4.3). Prague inhabitants, who had developed a sense of pride in their city as a modern metropolis at the turn of the century, saw their status reduced compared to the villagers around them.

<sup>211</sup> Letter from Marie K. in Lhota to her POW husband, July 10, 1918, ÖStA, KA, FA, AOK, Evb/NA, K 3800, no. 3216.

<sup>212</sup> *Domov za války*, IV, 230.

<sup>213</sup> Letter from A. R. (Prague VII) to Johann R, October 9, 1917, ÖStA, KA, FA, AOK, Evb/NA, K 3797, no. 2457.

<sup>214</sup> Vondráček, *Lékař vzpomíná*, 274.

<sup>215</sup> AHMP, Divadélko Rokoko, ka 1, i.č. 3, "Potulky Prahou" by Charley Linge, 1918.





Jak jsme oslavovali svátek Terezie Homolkové, která nám nosí z venkova máslo, vajíčka a mléko...

Figure 4.3 Caricature “How we celebrated the namesake day of Terezie Homolková”

Source: *Humoristické listy*, November 1, 1918, 1; provided by the Digital Archive of Journals operated as part of Czech Digital Bibliography research infrastructure by the Institute for Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences, P.R.I. – <https://clb.ucl.cas.cz/> (ORJ Code: 90136)

Accusations of selfishness and profiteering against peasants from hungry workers and housewives created a major social rift between city and countryside during the war. Cabaret artist Eduard Bass wrote a little piece entitled *The song of the Czech peasants of 1918*: “I am the Czech peasant; today I am a big master. [...] I give to whoever pays. At my house I accumulate whole piles of banknotes. [...] Who wants a bit of grain, takes off at least his shirt, I already have here full stocks and I want more.”<sup>216</sup> Workers in factories in the Prague suburbs compared their fate with that of farm workers, pointing out that the latter were at least able to get food. They also denounced the military service exemptions received for work in the fields.<sup>217</sup> The Social Democratic Workers’ Committee in Prague wrote to the War Ministry to complain about the unequal sacrifice of workers and peasants, as this issue was raised by many in their meetings.<sup>218</sup> City dwellers felt that farmers were profiteering at their expense and refusing to share their abundance of food. In the last months of the war, attacks against supplies in the countryside multiplied. Mills were especially targeted. In the district of Smíchov (west of Prague), military patrols protected the mills, housed and fed by the millers or villages.<sup>219</sup> In an incident dated May 1918, a miller whose black-market flour was being seized by a state agent called to the crowd for help, but the crowd instead turned against him.<sup>220</sup>

The hatred toward rich farmers who sometimes refused to sell their food products was reciprocated by the rural populations, who did not always sympathize with the urban inhabitants coming to their villages and looked upon them as potential trouble. Farmers considered the real profiteers to be in the cities. A March 1917 report from the censor mentions this animosity against town people: “The divide between town and countryside is sharp and the people from the country look with envious eyes at the life of the town dwellers. In the countryside there are many complaints about hunger, illness and death by starvation.”<sup>221</sup> This circle of mutual envy was born from the illusion that another group was living a much better life, sheltered from supply problems. In reality, both in the countryside and in the city, the profits were the preserve of a minority

<sup>216</sup> Eduard Bass, *Letáky, satiry, verše, písmičky*, ed., Adolf Branald and Jarmila Višková (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1958), 130–133.

<sup>217</sup> Mood report, Military Command, NA, PMV/R, 22 Böhmen, ka 190, no. 5172, March 14, 1917.

<sup>218</sup> Social Democratic Workers’ Committee in Prague to War Ministry, NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3032, sig. M 34/11, no. 10202, August 31, 1917.

<sup>219</sup> District office Smíchov to Military Command, NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 4950, sig. 8/1/1/8, no. 19925, May 23, 1918.

<sup>220</sup> ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, no. 67149.

<sup>221</sup> ÖStA, KA, ZSt, KM, KÜA, 1917, K186, no. 101692.

while the lower classes struggled. The Bohemian Governor explained the situation in the countryside: “It is a known fact, made even more acute by the sharp separation in Bohemia between the agriculturally rich and the agriculturally poor part of the population, that the agricultural sector in wartime makes a profit selling food that very significantly exceeds its peacetime profits.”<sup>222</sup>

The increased relevance of food implied new dynamics in the relationship between city and country. Rural arrangements (small vegetable gardens, farm animals) sprang up in the unlikeliest of residential settings. The middle classes in a position to afford it left Prague for temporary countryside accommodation, while the main train stations were filled with travelers who scoured Bohemia (sometimes going quite far) in search of potatoes or butter. The war thus struck at the core of what made a city urban, it not only lost its charm, but also its value. Busy streets became less attractive than fertile fields, exacerbating the antagonism between newly hungry city residents and increasingly valued farmers.

### **Salvation through the Nation: The Czech Heart and Welfare Provision**

In March 1918, Emperor Charles visited the emergency regions (*Notstandgebiete*) of Northern Bohemia, which were particularly hit by the food crisis and were to receive special state help. The Mayor of Prague made the trip to meet the monarch and plead help for the hungry children of Prague. A journalist ten years later assessed: “Even the Emperor’s benevolent assurances were only a spark in water – the salvation of the population of Czech cities came from the Czech countryside.”<sup>223</sup> How did rural inhabitants turn from profiteers into saviors of Prague and what role did welfare provision play in state legitimacy?

The wartime anger against farmers was sharply monitored by politicians who perceived it as a threat to national unity. The Czech Agrarian Party, aware of the resentment against peasants in the urban population, tried to defuse this hatred by emphasizing the peasants’ role in the national community. The Czech nineteenth-century national narrative had relied on an idealization of the countryside as unaltered source of the national language and customs, reinforced by the absence of a national nobility. The urban–rural divide was thus a rift that undermined the

<sup>222</sup> Report, Bohemian governor, ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K110, no. 1952, August 29, 1916.

<sup>223</sup> *Domov za války*, V, 473.

entire self-representation of the Czech nation.<sup>224</sup> The Agrarians instead shifted the blame for the poor food provision elsewhere. From 1917 onward, in an attempt to “canalize the hatred nationally,” they spread the rumor that the supply difficulties originated in the export of food outside the Bohemian lands to Germany and German Austria.<sup>225</sup> A police report explained: “The [Agrarians] assert that not only the main but the only cause for the food penury lies in the export to the German Reich and the German regions of Austria.”<sup>226</sup> It also accused them of having a hidden agenda: to protect large Bohemian landowners from military requisitioning. The German consul concurred that “when the Agrarians lay the exclusive blame for the grievances on the governor, it is to divert the attention of the public from themselves.”<sup>227</sup> Loans and deposits in Agrarian credit institutes in the course of the war reflected increased profits, which probably favored the already richest fraction of farmers. Loans fell from 229,709,000 to 173,894,000 crowns by 1918, while deposits rose from 245,392,000 to 720,592,000 crowns.<sup>228</sup> The Agrarians complained in their newspaper *Večer* about the “terror” launched against the rural population by the Czech Social-Democrats, accusing them of undue profits. *Večer* pointed out that this “terror” was threatening to divide the nation, thus emphasizing the argument that these recriminations were detrimental to the Czech nation as a whole.<sup>229</sup>

In addition to this campaign about the source of the shortages, the Agrarians gave their support to a new association created at the end of October 1917 with the aim of helping Prague’s hungry children. This association was called *České srdce* (The Czech Heart) and had as its emblem a red heart surrounded by a crown of thorns, which recalled the symbolism of the Sacred Heart.<sup>230</sup> Moved by the sight of the misery of Prague children suffering from hunger during the war, the founders held the notion that the

<sup>224</sup> On the peasantry as embodiment of the nation, see Hugh LeCaine Agnew, “Noble Nation and Modern Nation: the Czech case,” *Austrian History Yearbook*, 23 (1992): 50–71; Jiří Rak, *Bývalí Čechové: české historické mýty a stereotypy* (Jinočany: H&H, 1994), 85–96.

<sup>225</sup> Peter Heumos, “‘Kartoffeln her oder es gibt eine Revolution’: Hungerkrawalle, Streiks und Massenproteste in den böhmischen Ländern, 1914–1918,” in *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, 263.

<sup>226</sup> Police report, August 8, 1917, *Sborník dokumentů*, IV 1917 (1994), 146.

<sup>227</sup> Report, German consul, NAL, GFM 6/46, Österreich 101, 39, August 24, 1917.

<sup>228</sup> Bernard Wheaton, *Radical Socialism in Czechoslovakia: Bohumír Šmeral, the Czech Road to Socialism and the Origins of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (1917–1921)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 136–137.

<sup>229</sup> *Večer*, July 2, 1918, 2.

<sup>230</sup> On the heart symbol in Czech culture, see Robert Pynsent, “‘The Heart of Europe’: The Origins and Fate of a Czech Nationalist Cliché,” *Central Europe*, 11, no. 1 (2013): 1–23.

Czech countryside could help take care of them.<sup>231</sup> Its implicit goal was the recreation of a form of solidarity among the Czech nation. To do this, they decided to help the poor inhabitants of Prague by linking a family from the city to a family from the Czech countryside, the latter sending bread to the former once a week.<sup>232</sup> The Prague Police Headquarters monitored this activity with suspicion: “[Their] main goal seems to be to divert the anger of the population away from the Czech Agrarians. They want to induce a direct connection between the country districts and the cities. This way the good will of the Agrarians would be demonstrated.”<sup>233</sup> The activity of the association substantially grew over the year 1918 in the following years. Their many branches and feeding stations slowly populated urban space in the inner city and the suburbs (see Figure 4.4): they provided food, as well as clothes and fuel to poor families, but also delivered free hot meals. In late 1917 and early 1918, the Prague suburbs of Smíchov and Král. Vinohrady already had their own branches.<sup>234</sup> Within the year, thirty-three local groups were created in Prague, with about 70,000 families registered for support. The activity of the Nusle branch, for example, included the distribution of free lunches, a partnership with a wood seller to supply free fuel, and the creation of a meeting hall.<sup>235</sup> In addition, twenty-four “hearths” (public kitchens), opened all over Greater Prague, directly supplying families and especially children with meals.<sup>236</sup>

*České srdce* not only acted efficiently to give food to hungry city dwellers, it also produced leaflets, posters, and articles about its own achievements in order to raise more funds in Prague and other towns in Bohemia. The Military Command remarked on the “conspicuous” collections in Prague in August 1918.<sup>237</sup> Street collections appealed once again to the generosity of Prague’s inhabitants. Volunteers went from door to door. Those who had given would wear the badge of the association to display their support, as they had done previously for the Red Cross or other war charities.<sup>238</sup> On Saint Wenceslas Day in September 1918, the Czech public was invited to demonstrate its “national sense of sacrifice” through participation in the collections.<sup>239</sup> They both resembled other war relief

<sup>231</sup> For various testimonies, see AHMP, Marie Schäferová, ka 1, inv. č. 5, 32–33.

<sup>232</sup> *Domov za války*, V, 419.

<sup>233</sup> NA, PM 1911–1920, ka 5102, no. 6088, November 6, 1917.

<sup>234</sup> AHMP, MHMP II, SK, II/384, II/390, II/388, II/455.

<sup>235</sup> AHMP, *České srdce*, místní skupina Nusle, inv. č. 1, kn 1.

<sup>236</sup> *Domov za války*, V, 423.

<sup>237</sup> Mood report, Military Command, ŮStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K112, no. 11209, August 1, 1918.

<sup>238</sup> *Národní politika*, April 7, 1918, 4.

<sup>239</sup> *Prager Tagblatt*, September 25, 1918, 3 (quoting *Večer*); See also, NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3074, sig. P 55/35, no. 11897, September 26, 1918.



Figure 4.4 A “hearth” of the association *České srdce*

Source: *Muzeum města Prahy, 1428/2022* by *František Dvořák (1857–1942)*

causes in the support of war victims and yet differed from them because they were not integrated anymore into the support of a broader Austro–Hungarian war effort. Collections for soldiers had implicitly helped the monarchy fight its war. *České srdce*’s goal was specifically national: the war was a cause of the suffering, but the horizon was the nation.

### Wartime Collections Again ... But for the Nation

In continuity with other wartime collections, the Czech Heart committee in Král. Vinohrady organized street collections for the “Day of the Czech Heart” from May 5 to May 12, 1918. “Ladies from the Vinohrady society” sold a little badge with a red heart and the text “*Král. Vinohrady – 1918.*” On Purkyně Square, they stood at the National House, at the entrance of the Café Hlavova, next to the town hall, and at the intersection across from the café Royal. The police saw no objection to the collections as they served “war relief goals.” National self-help as relief for the civilian population could still be considered part of war relief.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>240</sup> NA, PP 1916–1920, ka 3095, sig. S 11/2/137, no. 4615, April 18, 1918.

*České srdce* also advertised in newspapers in November 1917 to convince Czech peasants to welcome one or several “national guests,” children from the cities, into their homes. A play entitled “Czech heart,” whose profits went to the association, showcases the positive effect of being taken to the countryside for two pale Prague orphans who discover the kindness of the rural inhabitants.<sup>241</sup> The appearance of the mythical figure “Čechie” at the end of the play, taking the children into her protection, confirms the national dimension of this charity enterprise. In a letter to the association, one of the peasant women who took such a child into her home confirms that being a hostess was a way to display her Czechness: “We aren’t all profiteers and black-marketeers (*lichváři a keřasové*), as they have berated us, we have a Czech heart and Czech feeling and we share [...] with the poor children and they finally realise how virtuous the Czech villager is.”<sup>242</sup> Although throughout the period it was easier to find children candidates than hosting families, the Agrarian Party’s support in April 1918 gave a new impulse to this initiative.<sup>243</sup> In the following three months, 7,857 children were sent to the countryside compared to 1,350 in the first three months of the action.<sup>244</sup> By July, 12,000 children had been taken to the countryside by the *Czech Heart* or other welfare organizations.

In its numerous publications, *České srdce* presented this program and its results in an overwhelmingly positive light.<sup>245</sup> The relationships between urban children and rural families, however, were at times tense. Vašek Kaňa gives a more nuanced account of his time as a “national guest”: he describes the impression of opulence when they arrived but also how he missed his family, and the various ill treatments that children received in the countryside.<sup>246</sup> More general criticisms of the association came from both German-speaking circles and Social Democratic voices. In both cases, they considered that *České srdce*’s generosity masked unearned profits and that the association was a way to dress up as charity the redistribution of the wealth accumulated during the war.<sup>247</sup> Communist

<sup>241</sup> Vojtěška Baldessari Plumlovská, *České srdce: časový obrázek z nynější doby o 3 jednáních s dohrou* (Prague: Ústřední nakladatelství, knihkupectví a papírnictví učitelstva, 1918).

<sup>242</sup> *Pět let českého srdce 1917–1922* (Prague: České srdce, [1922]), 40.

<sup>243</sup> This would coincide with the moment when the Agrarian Party Chairman seemed to have given up on the monarchy, see Daniel E. Miller, *Forging Political Compromise: Antonín Švehla and the Czechoslovak Republican Party, 1918–1933* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 40.

<sup>244</sup> *Pět let českého srdce*, 30.

<sup>245</sup> See, for example, Jan Pávek, *České srdce aneb národní hosté* (Prague: Státní knihosklad, 1919).

<sup>246</sup> Kaňa, *Válkou narušení*, 36–51.

<sup>247</sup> *Deutsche Zeitung Bohemia*, June 14, 1918, 3.

writer Helena Malířová who had volunteered for a few weeks with the association called it a “mockery of human feeling: rip off your fellowman and then, out of what he has been cheated of, make a charitable gift.”<sup>248</sup>

The children to the countryside program epitomized how the reliance of the imperial state on civil society and national associations in particular slowly worked to consolidate their legitimacy as para-state actors. As part of his “social offensive on the home front,” Emperor Charles had promoted an imperial welfare system to get poor urban children into other regions of Austria–Hungary.<sup>249</sup> For example, German-speaking children from industrial Northern Bohemia were sent to Hungary. There was also a project to send destitute German-speaking and Czech-speaking children from Prague to imperial castles in Bohemia.<sup>250</sup> During the Emperor’s aforementioned visit to Northern Bohemia in March 1918, the Mayor of Prague asked him to accommodate some children from Prague in the former refugee camp in Německý Brod/Deutschbrod.<sup>251</sup> This action was then carried out, organized by the Prague City Council, with the help of the imperial administration and financial help from *České srdce*: 2,000 children had traveled to Německý Brod/Deutschbrod by July 1918. Interestingly, the fact that imperial organizations cooperated with *České srdce* meant that credit for these actions was attributed to the Czech association in the Czech-speaking press. Describing the departure of 836 children to Německý Brod/Deutschbrod from the Prague North-Western train station, *Národní politika* called it “one of the most beautiful moments in our national life.”<sup>252</sup> The action was framed here in Czech national terms and not understood as an act of imperial charity.

The case of *České srdce* supports Tara Zahra’s thesis that by undertaking welfare provision, national associations gave legitimacy to national claims and further discredited the supranational Austrian state. By 1918, the budding imperial welfare system was largely in the hands of national associations, for example, the Imperial Widow and Orphan fund, the largest wartime welfare fund in the monarchy, was managed by semiprivate national commissions and relied on private financial support.<sup>253</sup> In the central domain of food supply, the imperial government also needed

<sup>248</sup> Helena Malířová, *Rudé besidky 1918–1921* (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1922), 96.

<sup>249</sup> Friederike Kind-Kovács, “The ‘Other’ Child Transports: World War I and the Temporary Displacement of Needy Children from Central Europe,” *Journal of the History of Irregular Childhood*, 15 (2013): 75–109; on the notion of social offensive, see Hsia, *Victims’ State*, 74.

<sup>250</sup> *Böhmerwald Volksbote*, April 21, 1918, 3.

<sup>251</sup> *Prager Tagblatt*, March 28, 1918, 2.

<sup>252</sup> *Národní politika*, July 24, 1918 (afternoon), 2.

<sup>253</sup> Zahra, “Each Nation Only Cares for Its Own”; on the mix between public and private in welfare, see also Hsia, *Victims’ State*.



to rely on national associations for its welfare ambitions. Viennese circles even considered putting *České srdce* in charge of the food supply for Bohemia and Moravia in April 1918.<sup>254</sup> The work of the association, meanwhile, could help bolster the claim that the nation was more efficient than the imperial state in providing welfare. Already in their original appeal for help to the Czech public “Don’t let them perish” in October 1917, they established the failure of the state and the necessity for the nation to take matters into its own hands: “nobody can feed themselves with what is left for us by the state.”<sup>255</sup> The association even attempted to take on some prerogatives of state power before the regime change: appeals in the Bohemian countryside encouraged peasants to deliver a percentage of their potato harvest directly to *České srdce*.<sup>256</sup> In the course of a year and before the end of the monarchy, it had managed to position itself as the major welfare agency for Czechs and particularly in Prague. In a context where food supply was so central, being able to provide for hungry children and adults was a key factor in cementing loyalty to the Czech cause among Prague residents.

If the goal was national, its scope remained anchored in the traditional municipal framework of welfare. Prague was the first recipient of the association’s actions, which were only progressively extended to other large industrial cities such as Brno/Brünn and Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau. The original statutes specifically mentioned that it operated for the population of the municipalities of Greater Prague.<sup>257</sup> Indeed, throughout the period, *České srdce* worked in close contact with the Prague municipality.<sup>258</sup> It offered a complement to municipal actions. The municipalities, which took care of food supply, food distribution and war kitchens, in the context of reduced wartime budgets, also needed to rely on private charities. For example, *České srdce*’s public feeding program delivering 25,000 meals a day came to supplement the municipal public feeding programs.<sup>259</sup> Immediately after the regime change, the association asked the Czech National Committee to honor a donation of 500,000 crowns promised by the former Bohemian Governor’s Office in discussions with the Prague municipality a few weeks before. The letter specifically referred to the financial burden of the large public feeding program developed in Prague for *České srdce*’s purse. The reply explained that the amount was instead promised to the

<sup>254</sup> *Domov za války*, V, 425.

<sup>255</sup> *Sborník dokumentů*, IV, 199.

<sup>256</sup> ÖStA, AdR, AuS, BMfVE, AR, K113, no. 138897, October 4, 1918.

<sup>257</sup> Statutes of the association Czech Heart, 1918, AHMP, MHMP II, SK, II/384.

<sup>258</sup> *Domov za války*, V, 473.

<sup>259</sup> Vožický, *Kronika*, 528.

municipality for all the public kitchens.<sup>260</sup> We see here an instance of the state delegating food supply actions to the municipality, which delegated them in turn to private associations.

This interplay was very typical of charitable associations in East Central Europe in this period, which operated between overwhelmed municipalities and a state which did not have welfare within its purview.<sup>261</sup> Another wartime private welfare association, the Protection of Mothers and Infants (*Ochrana matek a kojenců*), created in November 1915, was also firmly grounded in the municipality. The association providing support with infant feeding (helping mothers nurse and giving them safe milk when impossible) was in 1916 still aimed “in first line” at women with right of residence in Prague and then to the families of soldiers.<sup>262</sup> In 1917, the association bought the oatmeal for infant feeding to be distributed through the Prague municipality.<sup>263</sup> Both the Czech Heart and the Protection of Mothers and Infants continued to develop their action in the immediate postwar years. The Žižkov branch of *České srdce*, for example, found it difficult to stop their activity, as the suburban youth still needed assistance and in September 1920, it still distributed 900 pairs of shoes.<sup>264</sup> After the regime change, although many actions were coordinated through the Czechoslovak Ministry of Social Welfare, the mix between public and private in welfare actions still prevailed and the municipal level remained the basis of welfare action.

The activity of the Czech association *České srdce* at the end of the war and in the immediate postwar period shows a successful attempt at recreating a national community in a society where food shortages had created many cleavages. In so doing, it legitimized the efficiency of national solidarity over imperial state initiatives. The city of Prague was at the center of this strategy: poor children in the largest Czech city were to be saved by the nation. The municipality, both before and after the regime change, relied on private actors to fulfil its welfare obligations. Ten years later, one of the association’s leaders, credited *České srdce* for the unity of the nation and the peaceful building of the new state.<sup>265</sup>

<sup>260</sup> *České srdce* to National Committee, NA, PMV, ka 60, sig. V/Č/1, November 15, 1918.

<sup>261</sup> Morgane Labbé, “De la philanthropie à la protection en Europe centrale et du Sud-Est (fin XIXe siècle-entre-deux-guerres),” *Revue d’histoire de la protection sociale*, 11, no. 1 (2018): 13–22.

<sup>262</sup> *Rádce v době světové války*, 18–19; On a similar association in Łódź, see Morgane Labbé, “Les débuts de la protection sociale infantile à Łódź: Association locale et réseaux transnationaux (1900–1919)” *Revue d’histoire de la protection sociale*, 11, no. 1 (2018): 46–71.

<sup>263</sup> *Domov za války*, IV, 418.

<sup>264</sup> Letter to the police, AHMP, MHMP II, SK, II/390, October 7, 1920.

<sup>265</sup> *Domov za války*, V, 426.

The worsening food supply in Prague meant that by 1917, many residents in the city were going hungry. The daily struggles for survival were reflected in the drab reality of strict regulations, insufficient rationing, and ever-present queues. To the dwindling food quantities and worsening quality, were added the hardship of the absence of heating and the difficulties to get clothes. Within this dark streetscape, there were few relative islands of prosperity, some of which were only chimeras invented by hungry imaginations. This chapter has investigated wartime food trafficking and followed its tracks in cafés, shops, and train stations to better grasp the nature of urban black markets and highlight the discrepancies between real practices and representations. The public could not rely on falling state rations alone and had to find alternative means to get provisions, often relying on their networks. The richest could still pay exorbitant prices for food in a few upmarket shops and restaurants, obtained illegally. The others tried to go directly to the countryside. The government in Vienna by 1918 even considered the rich hinterland around Prague as a factor to take into account in attributing food contingents.

The growing parallel economy worsened inequalities, created new social hierarchies, undermined prewar values, and generated an overall hatred of the “profiteers.” For Prague’s inhabitants, the farmers who sold food at high prices belonged to that category. Czech national circles, who perceived the threat posed by this antagonism, attempted to recreate a link between urban dwellers and the rural population by sending hungry children to the countryside. The role of the association *České srdce* (created in 1917) cannot be overestimated. By getting support from the Agrarians and providing food to poor Prague residents, it shifted wartime mobilization along national lines. The parallel imperial actions for destitute Prague children organized by the state did not get the same visibility and anyway relied on the association. Imperial welfare was thus nationalized. The Habsburg state only intervened very late in welfare and by then municipalities and national associations had deployed the same self-mobilization we saw for war relief causes. Impoverished municipalities responsible for food supply increasingly relied on private associations. The state had no choice but to go through them. Nationalization was not a foregone conclusion of modern twentieth-century warfare. It was the product of communities who increasingly framed their sacrifice against their neighbor’s. Chapter 5 will shed more light on the forms the progressive loss of state legitimacy took on Prague’s streets.