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**A MUNICIPALITY AGAINST THE STATE:  
POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN STATE  
AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES,  
BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF BOHEMIA AT THE TURN  
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY\***

**Abstract**

This paper is a case study of relations between the agents of self-government and the state administration as representatives of the local elite in the milieu of a small town in central Bohemia. Set in the context of the political crisis in the 1890s and at the beginning of the twentieth century, it follows the power relations and the struggle of self-government bodies against the district captain (representing the central government), as well as the efforts of the state to force the local elite to respect the state authority and to arrange for proper operation of the public administration.

**Keywords:** Austria-Hungary, Bohemia, district captain, self-government, public administration

I  
INTRODUCTION

There are several definitions of local elites in the milieu of a district town, such as the one under study. One of the most frequent and fruitful ones is an analysis of the representatives of the local self-government (the Municipal Committee, Ger. *Gemeindeausschuss*) that met the criteria of having enough property or adequate education and

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\* This study was supported by the project of the Czech Science Foundation, no. 20-19463X, “Social mobility of elites in the Central European regions (1861–1926) and transition of imperial experience and structures in nation-states”.

passed through the filter of local elections.<sup>1</sup> The Municipal Election Act clearly stipulated who was entitled to vote and to be elected to the Municipal Council. The selection process for the deputies, councillors, and ultimately the mayor favoured the wealthy and educated social classes, such as prospering business people and traders, as well as the local intelligentsia with university degrees – typically attorneys, notaries, and physicians, although pertinently also secondary school teachers – who unlike others were deemed to have the necessary education and experience to hold the office of Mayor or Councillor.<sup>2</sup> The Municipal Committee and the Council as its executive body, no doubt represented the local elite, concentrating in their hands a high amount of public authority and, at the same time, enjoying respect from their fellow burghers.<sup>3</sup> As a specific counterpart and antipode of the town hall, in each district town there was also a state agent, the district captain, who represented the central power, i.e. the Emperor and the government. This district captain (*Bezirkshauptmann*) was appointed to his position by the Minister of the Interior and directly subordinated to the Governor (*Statthalter*) in the crown land capital.<sup>4</sup> While the Municipal Committee and the mayor were elected for mandates of three years, the district captain remained at his post until he asked for a transfer, was promoted, pensioned off, or died.<sup>5</sup> As chief of the

<sup>1</sup> For a classical work on the small town bourgeoisie, see Peter Urbanitsch and Hannes Stekl (eds), 'Kleinstadtbürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie, 1862–1914', in *Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie*, ix (Wien, 2000); as regards the Bohemian lands see Lukáš Fasora, Jiří Hanuš, and Jiří Malíř (eds), *Občanské elity a obecní samospráva 1848–1948* (Brno, 2006); and for the Moravian and Silesian milieu see Pavel Kladiwa, *Lesk a bída obecních samospráv Moravy a Slezska 1850–1914*, i: *Vývoj legislativy* (Ostrava, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See Jiří Klabouch, *Die Gemeindefelbstverwaltung in Österreich 1848–1918* (München–Wien, 1968); and for a more concise analysis, see Jiří Klabouch, 'Die Lokalverwaltung in Cisleithanien', in Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (eds), *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, ii: *Verwaltung und Rechtswesen* (Wien, 2003), 270–305.

<sup>3</sup> Gernot Stimmer, *Eliten in Österreich 1848–1970* (Wien, 1997), 55–66.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the role of the Governor, see Marion Wullschleger, "'Gut österreichische Gesinnung". Imperiale Identitäten und Reichsbilder der letzten österreichischen Statthalter in Triest (1904–1918)', in Tim Buchen and Malte Rolf (eds), *Eliten im Vielvölkerreich. Imperiale Biographien in Russland und Österreich-Ungarn 1850–1918* (Berlin, 2015), 90–106.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the Austrian bureaucracy in the latter half of the nineteenth century, see Waltraud Heindl, *Josephinische Mandarine. Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich*

District Office, the district captain may also be perceived as a member of the local elite. He was educated (he was required to hold a law degree), was well-respected as a representative of the Emperor, and also equipped with wide-ranging public authority. However, the district captain was a foreign element in the local milieu, usually arriving as a newcomer shortly after his appointment so that he had no family or ties of friendship in the local society. His stay in the district was more influenced by external circumstances than by his own wishes.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the 1860s, after the constitutional regime was re-established in Austria, a new municipal constitution was enacted, placing the operation of municipal self-government on entirely new grounds. Thereafter, in hundreds of cities and towns all across the Empire, there were two representatives of both circles in the Austrian public administration, coexisting next to each other: either working together or, in the worst-case scenario, resenting each other. The mayor and the head of the District Office (called a district captainship/*Bezirkshauptmannschaft* after the reform of 1868 and encompassing a larger area of several judicial districts) personally represented not only the offices they were in charge of, but they were also generally perceived as symbols of both the local self-government power (coming from the people) and state power (coming from the Emperor).<sup>7</sup> Although neither could choose the other, their cooperation, or at least mutual respect, was of key importance for the proper administration of the town they both lived in, as well as of the district as a whole. While in fact the power relations were set down by law for all regions, the reality of everyday life could be completely different from town to town.<sup>8</sup>

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1848–1914 (Wien, 2013); and for more on the position of the District Captain, see Franz Rapprich, ‘Politische Behörden’, in Ernst Mischler and Josef Ulbrich (eds), *Österreichisches Staatswörterbuch*, iii (K–Q) (Wien, 1907), 924–7; Kurt Hürbe, ‘Allgemeine und Sicherheitsverwaltung: kollegiale Behörden I. Instanz, denen der Bezirkshauptmann vorsteht’, in Johannes Gründler (ed.), *100 Jahre Bezirkshauptmannschaften in Österreich* (Wien, 1970) 127–85.

<sup>6</sup> See Gary B. Cohen, ‘The Austrian Bureaucracy at the Nexus of State and Society’, in Franz Adlgasser and Fredrik Lindström (eds), *The Habsburg Civil Service and Beyond. Bureaucracy and Civil Servants from the Vormärz to the Inter-War Years* (Wien, 2018), 49–65.

<sup>7</sup> John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State. State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford, 2015), 154–6.

<sup>8</sup> For a Moravian example, see Aleš Vyskočil, ‘Radnice a okresní úřad na Moravě na sklonku monarchie’, in Hana Ambrožová, Tomáš Dvořák, Bronislav Chocholáč,

The role of the district captain was that of a supervising power and a controlling authority. The state agent was the one to oversee the legality of procedures in the municipal election, and he was also necessarily present during the first meeting of the newly elected Municipal Committee and was supposed to administer an oath to the new mayor. Among other things, this oath committed the mayor to respect and uphold the state laws, which were monitored and, if necessary, also enforced by the district captain.<sup>9</sup> Apart from the many festivities and ritualised and repetitive events – such as the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Birthday of the Emperor in August, his Name Day in October or the anniversary of his ascension to the throne in December – where the mayor came into contact with the state, represented at the local level by the district captain, importantly he also had such contact as part of carrying out his administrative duties within the framework of the delegated agenda.<sup>10</sup> After the failed attempt in the 1850s to build Austria as a strong and centralised state with a unified and professional administration even at the lowest level, the municipalities were entrusted – as established in the new municipal constitution of 1862 – with a number of tasks and duties that were performed, first and foremost, in the state's interest and represented a gift horse for the municipal budget. While the communities could not renounce carrying out these services for the state, nevertheless, they did not receive any extra money for them. These duties comprised many fields of activity: the collection of taxes; maintenance of taxpayers' records; control over the population's movements in the form of police records of registered inhabitants within the town or home certificates; assisting state authorities during the conscription of recruits or carriages for possible mobilisation; administering a number of requests from various state agencies demanding information, confirmation, or some other measures; and last but not least, keeping law and order on their territory. While in this way the state freed itself from a number of both extensive and expensive tasks – tasks which, however, were necessary and vital for its functioning – at the same time it put a powerful

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Jan Libor, and Pavel Pumpr (eds), *Historik na Moravě. Profesoru Jiřímu Malířovi* (Brno, 2009), 425–32.

<sup>9</sup> Josef Žalud (ed.), *Obecní zřízení a řád volení v obcích Království českého* (Praha, 1907), especially 81, 298–301.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel L. Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism. Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria 1848–1916* (West Lafayette, 2005), 26–30, 146–8.

weapon into the hands of elected municipal representatives and the state could keep only partial control over it.

While the district captain was authorised to step in if the mayor was not fulfilling his duties arising from either the proper municipal agenda or the delegated one, finding an adequate remedy that would work was a long process that could eventually turn against the district captain. He could summon the mayor, he could fine him for neglecting his municipal duties, he could propose the mayor's removal, or in extreme cases, he could demand from the governor that the Municipal Committee be dissolved. However the latter two measures required approval from superior local self-government bodies – a District Committee in Bohemia – which was difficult or impossible to achieve if the local elites represented in both the municipal and district self-governments initiated a concentrated and coordinated offensive against the state, or specifically against the district captain.<sup>11</sup> In the event the municipal administration refused to work with the District Office, the state was entitled to arrange for the necessary tasks by itself at the expense of the commune, and the money was subsequently exacted from the municipality. Similarly, after the resignation or dissolution of the Municipal Committee, the district captain was supposed to come up with a suitable candidate for the function of Government Commissioner, who would take over the local administration at the expense of the commune and would report directly to the District Office.<sup>12</sup> These were, however, extreme options which, if applied, could only bring about a remedy after some time and then only for a short period. It was the first task of each such governmental administrator to start preparing a new election so that a new Municipal Committee could take the place of the old one as soon as possible.

The state had a strong interest in good cooperation at the local level between the elected representatives and appointed state officials, which in the end considerably limited the district captain's range of powers as well as the extent of his influence while granting a fairly large manoeuvring space to the mayor when the latter was trying to achieve his own political, economic or personal goals. This paper focuses on

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the role of the District Committee and District Self-Government, see Milan Hlavačka, *Zlatý věk české samosprávy. Samospráva a její vliv na hospodářský, sociální a intelektuální rozvoj Čech 1862–1913* (Praha, 2006), 16–36.

<sup>12</sup> Žalud (ed.), *Obecní zřízení*, 494–6.

the communication and cooperation between the two representatives of public authority at the local level, as well as among other members of the local elite in the milieu of a central Bohemian Czech town in the context of the political crisis sparked by the Badeni Cabinet in 1897, which lasted until at least the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

## II INFLUENCE OF THE YOUNG CZECH PARTY ON THE LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

The town of Mnichovo Hradiště/Münchengrätz had almost 4,000 inhabitants at the end of the nineteenth century, so it was one of the smaller towns in the Kingdom of Bohemia. It was a typical administrative centre for the Czech-speaking agrarian region. In the town, there was the Wallenstein chateau, the former seat of the patrimonial administration before 1849, while a connection to the centre of Prague was provided by a railway, which had begun operating in 1865 and also went to Mladá Boleslav/Jungbunzlau, the seat of the country court and the State Procurator's Office.<sup>14</sup> Like most Czech urban centres in Bohemia during the 1890s, Mnichovo Hradiště also went through protracted struggles between the Old Czech political fraction, often represented by traditional local notables such as tradesmen and craftsmen, and the Young Czechs, where members of the intelligentsia (attorneys, notaries, physicians or teachers) could be found to a greater extent.<sup>15</sup> This development was part of a political differentiation process and represented a parallel to similarly-staged struggles between German liberals and radicals for town halls in the German-speaking

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<sup>13</sup> The Badeni Crisis was triggered by promulgation of the language ordinances implementing the Czech language in Bohemia and Moravia as a language of official communication, together with German, and requiring, therefore, all state officials to prove knowledge of both languages. This was especially difficult, if not impossible, for officials with German as their mother tongue while Czech officials were mostly bilingual. The Badeni Ordinances sparked a protest movement in German speaking parts of monarchy, their revocation in October 1899, on the other hand, was met with demonstrations on the Czech side.

<sup>14</sup> Lenka Procházková, *Mnichovo Hradiště 1866–1895. Každodenní život malého města ve druhé polovině 19. Století*, a diploma thesis at Charles University (Praha, 2011), 24–6.

<sup>15</sup> Zdeněk Martínek *et al.*, *Pelhřimov* (Praha, 2014), 364–7; Lenka Sýkorová *et al.*, *Klatovy* (Praha, 2010), 324–6; Bohumír Roedl (ed.), *Louny* (Praha, 2005), 224–6.

part of Bohemia. The last Old Czech Mayor of Mnichovo Hradiště was Rudolf Šmolík, a local coal trader who, however, quickly understood the changing landscape of political power and decided to use the dynamics of the emerging Young Czech party, which had dominated the Czech political scene since the imperial election in 1891.<sup>16</sup> It was stated in the report of the district captain that the mayor's motives were mostly personal, based on his ambition and vanity. In order to become unanimously elected as mayor for the next period, he struck a secret deal with the Young Czechs, despite the resolution of his own party.<sup>17</sup> The political fight between both Czech parties in Mnichovo Hradiště basically copied the situation in Bohemian politics as a whole.<sup>18</sup> The agitation of the Young Czech fraction was based on an exaggerated display of Czech national patriotism and aimed not only against their Old Czech opponents, but mostly against local state authorities. The imperial official became a perfect target in the political struggle, in which attacks on the district captain were deemed to show the courage and fearlessness of the "Young Czech patriots". In a totally homogenous Czech milieu, where there were no Germans to engage in any Czech-German national struggle, the imperial official (together with a priest) was the only convenient target, being an alien element from outside the local society. In April 1894, Mayor Šmolík raised a complaint against the then district captain Jan Maydl, claiming that the latter had not sufficiently respected the official authority of the municipal administration by treating him as his subordinate and using the municipal police without the mayor's approval or even knowledge.<sup>19</sup> It is apparent from the wording of this complaint that the mayor made

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<sup>16</sup> Muzeum města Mnichovo Hradiště, František Mendík, *Vzpomínky*, iii (MS), 93.

<sup>17</sup> Národní archiv Praha (hereinafter: NA), Prezidium místodržitelství (hereinafter: PM), box 2085, ref. 1/19/15, no. 4675/1894, a report of District Captain J. Maydl to Governor F. Thun (25 April 1894).

<sup>18</sup> For more on the rise of the Young Czech Party, see Bruce M. Garver, *The Young Czech Party 1874–1901 and the Emergence of a Multi-Party System* (New Haven, 1978); Tomáš Vojtěch, *Mladočeši a boj o politickou moc v Čechách* (Praha, 1980); for an analysis with an extensive use of archival sources and in a thorough form, unpublished however, see Luboš Velek, *Národní strana svobodomyslná (mladočeská) 1889–1907. Příspěvek k dějinám politického stranictví v habsburské monarchii v období procesu politické modernizace*, a dissertation thesis, Charles University (Prague, 2004); especially 369–77.

<sup>19</sup> NA, PM, box 2085, ref. 1/19/15, no. 3943/1894, a complaint of Mayor R. Šmolík to Governor F. Thun (5 April 1894).

extensive use of the legal expertise of two of the local Young Czech leaders – attorneys Ferdinand Kopečný and Alois Šebor. Both of them had arrived in the town only a few years previously and quickly got involved in the opposition against the traditional local elite organised within the National (Old Czech) Party.<sup>20</sup>

Having won the municipal election in May 1896, the Young Czech Party dominated the town hall when Alois Linke, originally from the town of Slaný/Schlan,<sup>21</sup> a well-known centre of Young Czech radicalism, became its first mayor. Linke had come to the town only ten years previously after graduating from the Faculty of Medicine in Prague and settled down as a local physician.<sup>22</sup> The second man at the town hall was then Alois Šebor, the local Young Czech leader who eventually took over from the mayor after his sudden death in October 1900. The Young Czechs took over control of the Municipal Committee, but they needed to secure their newly-acquired power in the coming election. The period in office of each committee was only three years, so in 1899 the electoral struggle would start anew. In order to gain the political support and popularity necessary to keep their position, the local Young Czech fraction proceeded in a similar way as previously, using an argument with the district captain in their

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<sup>20</sup> Dr. iur. Ferdinand Kopečný (\* 5 Aug. 1852 at Německý Brod/Deutschbrod, today Havlíčkův Brod; † 28 Aug. 1903 in Mnichovo Hradiště/Münchengrätz) was a son of a district magistrate, after graduating from Prague Faculty of Law, he worked as an articulated clerk in the attorney office of Alois Pražák in Brno/Brünn, in 1884, he opened his own office at Mnichovo Hradiště, chairman of the local Sokol organisation, representative of the Young Czech Party and member of the District Committee. Dr. iur. Alois Šebor (\* 29 Dec. 1859 in Nymburk/Nimburg; † 22 Dec. 1929 in Mnichovo Hradiště/Münchengrätz), son of an upholsterer, after graduating from Prague Faculty of Law, he opened his attorney office in Mnichovo Hradiště in 1893, in 1893–1908 chairman of the local Young Czech organisation, in 1896 member of town council, in 1900–9, 1912–19 mayor of Mnichovo Hradiště, in 1902–10 deputy of the district mayor, in 1895–1908 chairman of the local Sokol organisation; on 29 Oct. 1918, appointed chairman of the District National Committee of Mnichovo Hradiště, it was him who accepted the oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic from the then district captain and other state officials.

<sup>21</sup> *Národní listy* (12 May 1896, afternoon edition), 3. Dr. med. Alois Linke (\* 19 June 1858 in Slaný/Schlan; † 4 Oct. 1900 in Mnichovo Hradiště/Münchengrätz), after graduating from the Prague Faculty of Medicine, he became a municipal physician in Mnichovo Hradiště in 1887, in 1896–1900 mayor of Mnichovo Hradiště.

<sup>22</sup> *Národní listy* (1 Jan. 1888), 10.



campaign to stay in power. For the district captain, the situation was more difficult than before since the Young Czechs already controlled not only the Municipal Authority but also managed to obtain important positions in the district self-government and could use their close contacts with the Young Czech deputies in both the Bohemian Diet in Prague and the Imperial Council in Vienna. The Young Czech Party, unlike its Old Czech rival, found itself between two types of political groupings: an informal political faction of the old type on the one hand, and a modern mass political movement with an established organisation on the other. The Young Czechs were able to construct a permanent party structure and link it up to local self-government bodies such as the Municipal and District Committees, which ensured their presence on the local level and secured the position of the Young Czechs as a leading political force in the country.<sup>23</sup>

By this time, the district captainship in Mnichovo Hradiště had been administered for five years by Adolf Wunsch. He was born in Bechyně/Bechin in South Bohemia, and the district of Mnichovo Hradiště was his first posting after he was promoted to the rank of district captain, prior to which he had served in subordinate positions for sixteen years both at country district offices and at the Prague Governor's Office (*Statthaltere*). Wunsch came from the same generation as his colleagues and counterparts in the local self-government – he was born in 1853; Linke in 1858; and Šebor a year later; he graduated from the same university in Prague; and before joining the state service he had gathered his first administrative experience in the Prague City Council.<sup>24</sup>

The first attempt to provoke an argument took place in April 1898, when the Town Council in Mnichovo Hradiště refused to collect taxes for the state until it had been given the necessary forms in the Czech language.<sup>25</sup> The district captain managed to settle this provocation by persuading the Land Direction of Finance to comply with the language ordinances of Thun's Cabinet.<sup>26</sup> In January of the following year,

<sup>23</sup> Luboš Velek, 'Rozvíjení české samosprávy jako náhrady neexistujícího státu a jako představně státní samostatnosti', in Fasora, Hanuš, and Malř (eds), *Občanské elity*, 149–51.

<sup>24</sup> Alexandra Špiritová, *Slovník představitelů státní správy v Čechách 1850–1918* (Praha, 1993), 228.

<sup>25</sup> 'Verweigerung der Steuereinhebung', *Prager Tagblatt* (30 March 1898), 3.

<sup>26</sup> NA, PM, box 2211, ref. 3/13/7, no. 5707/1898, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (7 April 1898). For more on Thun's language

a full-blown argument broke out when the Town Council decided not to accept any German or bilingual documents from either the local self-government bodies (from the German-speaking part of Bohemia) or the state agencies, including the military ones. The Town Council's resolution, which was passed in the year of the municipal election, looked like a response to the punishment of a mayor in the nearby village of Mohelnice nad Jizerou/Mohelnitz an der Iser. The district captain was alleged to have imposed a considerable fine of 50 fl. on him because the mayor had refused to sign a gendarme service pass.<sup>27</sup> This ridiculously marginal case started a large-scale controversy between the local self-government and the state administration. Basically, the gendarme on patrol went through various villages where he was obliged to stop at the mayor's to learn what was new in each place. As proof of his visit, mayors would put their signatures in the gendarme's service pass which, as an internal document of the gendarmerie, i.e. of a part of the Austrian military forces, was necessarily printed in German. The act of signing a gendarme's pass was not meant to be the supervision of the local self-government representatives – it was not even part of the public administration agenda. Besides, the gendarme, who naturally spoke Czech, could easily explain and demonstrate to the mayor what he needed from him. The mayor of Mohelnice not only refused to sign the pass, he also refused to pay the fine, which the district captain consequently extracted by confiscating his mirror. As the *Národní listy* (National News) maliciously observed, nobody wanted to buy it at an auction because when one looked at the mirror, one saw the horrendous state of Czech language rights in a purely Czech district.<sup>28</sup> In the case of the local administration and the district captain in Mnichovo Hradiště, two intransigent representatives of public authority met, each aiming to show the other and the public

policy, see Luboš Velek, 'Pokusy ministerského předsedy Františka hraběte Thun-Hohensteina vyřešit jazykovou otázku v Čechách v letech 1898–1899', in Dagmar Hájková and Luboš Velek (eds), *Historik nad šachovnicí dějin. K pětasedmdesátinám Jana Galandauera* (Praha, 2011), 134–66. Franz Thun was in 1889–96 the Governor of Bohemia and in 1898–9 the prime minister of Cisleithanian Government in Vienna. As Thun's Ordinances were considered government decrees to implement Czech language into internal official communication between state authorities in Bohemia and Moravia.

<sup>27</sup> NA, PM, box 2286, ref. 8/1/2-16, no. 1384/1899, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (17 Jan. 1899).

<sup>28</sup> 'Z Mnichova Hradiště', *Národní listy* (24 Jan. 1899), 3.

who was the first in command in the district.<sup>29</sup> They both had powerful allies behind them: the mayor could rely on local self-government bodies, and the district captain on the superior state authorities.

At the end of January 1899, the mayor of Mohelnice gained support from all other mayors in the district, who solemnly pledged themselves to push through resolutions in their respective Municipal Committees which would refuse any further cooperation with state authorities, including assisting the gendarmerie or military officials during conscription campaigns.<sup>30</sup> These resolutions were a clear demonstration against the state, as represented by the district captain – who knew as well as his colleagues and lawyers sitting in the local self-government bodies that such a procedure was unlawful. Neither the municipalities nor district self-government were supposed to make political decisions. Their role was conceived as straightforward administration of common property; thus the district captain suspended every single resolution, and his decision was in turn confirmed by the Governor's Office in Prague.<sup>31</sup> By this time, it was clear that this had been a coordinated action. No one could have expected the mayors of small countryside communities, who often had problems in keeping up with the administrative agenda, to create a well-founded appeal both to the Governor in Prague and to the Minister of the Interior in Vienna, complaining against suspension decree of the district captain. The author of the appeal and organiser of the coordinated resistance in the local self-government structures was identified as Benedikt Řezníček, a secretary of the District Committee in Mnichovo Hradiště.<sup>32</sup> Although the district captain came up with a proposal to initiate criminal proceedings against him, the Governor's Office, hoping for a conciliatory solution to the whole issue, decided to wait and not to add fuel to the flames.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Muzeum města Mnichovo Hradiště, Mendík, *Vzpomínky*, iv, 83–5.

<sup>30</sup> NA, PM, box 2286, ref. no. 8/1/2-16, a confiscated print of declaration of all the mayors and municipal representatives in the Mnichovo Hradiště district (19 Jan. 1899).

<sup>31</sup> NA, PM, box 2286, ref. no. 8/1/2-16, reports of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (18 and 21 Feb. 1899).

<sup>32</sup> Benedikt Řezníček († 22 Dec. 1915 in Mnichově Hradišti/Münchengrätz), 1888–1915 a secretary and managing executive official of the District Committee, a representative of the local Sokol organisation.

<sup>33</sup> NA, PM, box 2286, ref. no. 8/1/2-16, a writ of Governor K. Coudenhove to District Captain A. Wunsch (24 Feb. 1899).

However, the controversy could not be resolved. Quite the reverse, it began to gain momentum after a National District Council was established in the summer of 1899. Řezníček, Mnichovo Hradiště Mayor Linke, his deputy Šebor, a former Old Czech parliamentary deputy Josef Dürich<sup>34</sup> and other members of the local elite soon understood that the powers of the district captain were too strong and far-reaching in official dealings. The state authority was authorised to demand copies from Municipal or District Committee minutes to learn about any resolution they had made, and to suspend it instantly if it was believed to have been unlawful. The original plan of using local self-government bodies – which were fully under Young Czech control in 1899 – for the political mobilisation failed, and a new body under the name of National District Council was created. The official breakup between the district captain and the mayor symbolically occurred during the celebration of the Emperor's name day in October 1899, which took place after the dismissal of Thun's Cabinet in anticipation of the withdrawal of the language ordinances. Before this actually happened, the Municipal Committee in Mnichovo Hradiště passed a resolution on 1 October 1899, taking a pledge to engage in "the most severe fight for the inalienable rights of the Czech language".<sup>35</sup> A ceremonial mass on 4 October in honour of Francis Joseph I was entirely ignored by the municipal and district self-government representatives and, ostentatiously, there was no flag in provincial or imperial colours on the town hall.

When the cabinet of Franz Thun-Hohenstein, a former Governor of Bohemia, assumed office in March 1898, the inner-political crisis – which began after the disbanding of Taaffe's Iron Ring in 1893 and escalated by an imprudent step on the part of Prime Minister Badeni in dealing with the language issue in Bohemia in 1897 – reached its

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<sup>34</sup> Josef Dürich (\* 19 Aug. 1847 in Borovice; † 12 Jan. 1927 in Klášter Hradiště nad Jizerou), son of a miller and, after death of his father the owner of the family mill, in 1882–1914 served as Mayor of the local community Klášter Hradisko near Mnichovo Hradiště, 1883–95, 1906–19 district mayor of Mnichovo Hradiště, 1896–1905 deputy district mayor; 1884–91, 1907–17 deputy in the Imperial Council (Reichsrat) in Vienna, since 1915 in exile working together with T.G. Masaryk, yet later their visions of managing the exile movement differed and Dürich submitted his efforts to the Russian government.

<sup>35</sup> NA, PM, box 2037, ref. 1/6/26-11, no. 17866, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (4 Oct. 1899).

climax. Count Thun, in spite of his numerous efforts, was not able to prevent the German parliamentarians in the Imperial Council from carrying on with obstructionist tactics, nor could he give them what they demanded – which was to abolish the language ordinances and restore the *status quo ante*. His conservative and, as perceived by German parties, the pro-Czech cabinet was compelled to govern with the help of absolutist Article 14 of the December Constitution.<sup>36</sup> Thun's fall and the appointment to the office of Prime Minister of Manfred Clary-Aldringen, who was generally expected to withdraw the language ordinances, brought a renewed impetus and high intensity to the fight for power at the local level.<sup>37</sup>

On 29 October 1899, a convention of representatives of the Czech municipal and district self-governments from Bohemia took place in Prague, where a resolution was passed to support the opposite stance of Czech deputies in Vienna. However, the elaboration of specific measures was left up to local meetings. The governor observed an important point that the convention brought up. Young Czech leaders and agitators were supposed to gain support from local imperial officials. The goal was to discourage them from respecting the orders of the Clary government and to “treat harshly those who would not defend the equal rights of the Czech language”. What such harsh treatment of state officials would look like was not stated explicitly.<sup>38</sup> Shortly afterwards, a meeting of all mayors took place in Mnichovo Hradiště, where they committed themselves to suspend the entire agenda in the field of delegated administration. Although the district captain could make use of various tools to counteract the obstruction, it became obvious that he was completely helpless to ensure the uninterrupted and proper functioning of public administration. His writs and decrees were left unanswered by the mayors; no response came even after repeated reminders. Subsequent fines were cumulatively appealed at the Governor's Office and at the Ministry of Interior, and even if these appeals were rejected, the fines were not paid, and the

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<sup>36</sup> Jan Galandauer, *Franz Fürst Thun. Statthalter des Königreiches Böhmen* (Wien, 2014), 200–12.

<sup>37</sup> Berthold Sutter, *Die Badenischen Sprachenverordnungen von 1897. Ihre Genesis und ihre Auswirkungen vornehmlich auf die innerösterreichischen Alpenländer*, ii (Graz, 1965), 398–9.

<sup>38</sup> NA, PM, box 2037, ref. 1/6/26-11, no. 19788/1899, a circular writ of Governor K. Coudenhove to all district captains (2 Nov. 1899).

mayors appealed in the same way against warrants of execution.<sup>39</sup> In his letter to Vienna, the governor basically admitted that the threat of repeated penalties did not scare the mayors since, according to the legislation, the fines paid would go back to the municipal budget or local fund for poor families. And the mayor, together with the Municipal Committee, could easily find a way to get back to 'his' money.<sup>40</sup> It is more than apparent how much proper administration suffered under such circumstances: the municipalities did not collect taxes or military fees; did not cooperate with district physicians over sanitary measures; boycotted the preparations for the population census in 1900; did not deliver summonses; and did not assist during the conscription of recruits. The mayors also appealed against or complained about all the demands coming from state authorities, using forms prepared and copied beforehand by the National District Council in Mnichovo Hradiště.<sup>41</sup>

### III

#### DISTRICT CAPTAIN AND THE LOCAL SOCIAL NETWORKS

The National District Council created in 1899 gradually took over the position of local self-government bodies that were controlled by the Young Czech party, although under the supervision of the state authority. The National Council, as a formally non-political association, was not subject to any control, even if its members were nearly identical with representatives of the District Committee.<sup>42</sup> As the district captain happened to find out, the National District Council was headed by the district mayors (*Bezirksobmänner*, the title for a Chairman of the District Committee) from both Mnichovo Hradiště and Bělá pod Bezdězem/Weisswasser (self-government bodies on the district level were based on the judicial district, not the districts of political administration),

<sup>39</sup> NA, PM, box 2211, ref. 3/13/11, no. 3304/1900, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (11 Feb. 1900).

<sup>40</sup> NA, Ministerstvo vnitra, Vídeň (Ministry of Interior, MV/R), box 360, no. 41452/1899, copy of a report of Governor K. Coudenhove to the Ministry of Land Defence (5 Dec. 1899).

<sup>41</sup> NA, PM, box 2209, ref. 3/1/58, no. 4919/1900, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (5 March 1900).

<sup>42</sup> NA, PM, box 2297, ref. 8/1/13-4, no. 17150/1900, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (1 Oct. 1900).

and assisted by both secretaries of District Committees – including Benedikt Řezníček, who used the official district copy machine and distributed the campaigning mail in the official envelopes of the District Committee, so that they were forwarded for free. Other members included the mayor of Mnichovo Hradiště Alois Linke, and his First Councillor Alois Šebor, as well as Josef Dürich, a former deputy of the Imperial Council in Vienna and Mayor of Klášter Hradiště nad Jizerou, where he owned a mill.<sup>43</sup> Although the National District Council stood outside the existing structure of the Austrian public administration, it managed – due to its personnel and its intensive activity within the district – to acquire a considerable amount of power and influence, which it used to bring about an incremental paralysis of public affairs in the district. It rightfully assumed that the blame for this situation would be put, first and foremost, on the district captain, who was not able to enforce the necessary respect for the law and the proper operation of the administrative system. The opposition used, among other things, a variety of petty tactics to purposefully stall the work of the district captain and make his life miserable. The mayors, under pressure from the National District Council, stopped attending consultation days organised by the District Office and cancelled their subscriptions to the official bulletin. In addition, official requests from the district captainship were disposed of in such a slovenly manner that the district authority had to send them back several times, which excessively burdened the operation of the District Office and increased its costs. Newly elected mayors and councillors stopped going to the district town to be sworn in, and they insisted instead that the district captain came to them; which again required time and money. The mayors hid or pretended not to be home just to avoid situations in which they would have to sign gendarmerie service passes. It is evident that such an approach was detrimental to the proper operation of public administration and made it harder, if not impossible, for citizens to exercise their rights. However, gradually the national campaign lost its momentum. Many ‘old-guard’ mayors from the Old Czech Party opposed it and refused to participate further in the destructive tactics that had been so vehemently criticised as pointless and absurd by the Young Czech fraction in the 1870s during their struggle against

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<sup>43</sup> NA, PM, box 2297, ref. 8/1/13-4, no. 19235/1900, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (18 Oct. 1900).

the passive resistance of the Old Czech Party in the Bohemian State Diet and Imperial Council. District Secretary Řezníček first made promises, then threats, claiming that names of the disloyal mayors would be published and “put on a pillory of national shame”.<sup>44</sup>

These conflicts gradually came to the attention of the district captain and confirmed his suspicions regarding who was behind the opposition movement and who was managing the National District Committee. Via the Governor’s Office, he approached the High State Prosecutor in Prague, who immediately ordered the state prosecutor in Mladá Boleslav to initiate an investigation of members of the National District Committee, and in particular against Benedikt Řezníček.<sup>45</sup> According to the routine practice, the state prosecutor entrusted the preliminary steps to the local judiciary officials at the District Court in Mnichovo Hradiště, who were supposed to use their local knowledge and obtain the necessary information. However, this fact may be considered crucial to the negative outcome of the investigation, as it resulted in endless interrogations and ultimately led nowhere.<sup>46</sup> The District Court, consisting of Chief Judge (*Vorstand des Bezirksgerichtes*) Antonín Vrba and assigned judges (*Gerichtsadjunkte*) Vavřinec Sláma and Karel Riegel, maintained close and intimate contacts with the leading Young Czech representatives of the local self-government.<sup>47</sup> Local judges did not hesitate to personally attend the ‘counter-actions’ of local municipalities that were organised in defiance of traditional dynastic celebrations. While they all came to the solemn mass to mark the Emperor’s birthday in August 1900, they were dressed only in civilian clothes instead of a ceremonial *gala* uniform, which the district captain saw as a lack of respect toward the importance of the whole event. A month later they appeared in full uniform with their wives during the Saint Wenceslas Day organised by the mayor ostentatiously as a national celebration of the Czech patron saint. No less significant was their regular attendance of numerous events held by the national

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<sup>44</sup> NA, Vrchní státní zastupitelství (hereinafter: VSZ), box 236, ref. III-c, no. 8511/1900, a note of Governor K. Coudenhove to High Land Prosecutor M. Merhaut (12 Nov. 1900).

<sup>45</sup> NA, VSZ, box 236, ref. III-c, no. 7835, a note of Governor K. Coudenhove to High Land Prosecutor M. Merhaut (15 Oct. 1900).

<sup>46</sup> NA, PM, box 3661, ref. 8/1/86-1, no. 1287/1901, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (22 Jan. 1901).

<sup>47</sup> Muzeum města Mnichovo Hradiště, Mendík, *Vzpomínky*, iii, 62–5.



Czech gymnastic association Sokol.<sup>48</sup> The District Court consistently replied to the district captain's notes or messages in Czech, even after withdrawal of the language ordinances, so it may also be claimed that the Czech local self-government found the necessary partners in ignoring Clary's language policy in the court officials. From this point of view, it cannot be any surprise that the opposition's stance and the resistance of local and district self-government administration was aimed only at the district captain; the demands and requests sent from the District Court were settled swiftly with all due diligence. However, the most humiliating part for the district captain to put up with must have been the behaviour of the judges' wives towards the spouse of the district captain. She traditionally sponsored the local branch of the Austrian Red Cross, yet the events organised to support the humanitarian cause all failed after most local women refused to come, asking why they should get involved if the wives of state officials and judges did not participate either?<sup>49</sup>

The result of the court's investigation into the National District Council was more than lamentable. It found that the existence of the Council, as an association that had not been properly registered, could not be proved; therefore there was no valid evidence of its interference in the public administration nor of its unlawful assumption of public authority. The whole matter was finally disposed of by a fine of 40 K imposed on District Secretary Řezníček for unauthorised use of the district copying machine.<sup>50</sup>

As a result of its obviously specious activities, the campaign, promises, and threats from the National District Council were no longer working, and some of the local mayors refused to participate further in the protracted obstruction. The mobilisation actions such as the Saint Wenceslas Feast or the People's Rally on Mužský hill had only a short-term effect; it was becoming obvious that a radical course of action had ever decreasing public support.<sup>51</sup> However, the new Young

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<sup>48</sup> NA, PM, box 2297, ref. 8/1/13-4, no. 20122, reports of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (18 Aug. 1900 and 24 Nov. 1900).

<sup>49</sup> NA, PM, box 2297, ref. 8/1/13-4, no. 20122, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (24 Nov. 1900).

<sup>50</sup> NA, PM, box 3661, ref. 8/1/86-1, no. 12977/1901, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (12 Aug. 1901).

<sup>51</sup> NA, PM, box 2297, ref. 8/1/13-4, no. 19235/1900, a report of District Captain A. Wunsch to Governor K. Coudenhove (18 Oct. 1900).

Czech Mayor Šebor (elected after Linke's death in 1900) needed a clear and convincing victory in his struggle against the district captain; only then could he think about successfully calling off the passive resistance and expect a victory in the municipal election. At that moment, Young Czech deputies in Vienna came to his rescue; in particular Ervín Špindler, an important representative of the Young Czech fraction in local self-government who since 1891 had been Mayor of Roudnice nad Labem/Raudnitz, and a deputy of the Bohemian State Diet and Imperial Council in Vienna.<sup>52</sup> With the help of the Czech Minister Antonín Rezek, he repeatedly intervened with Prime Minister Ernest von Koerber, who was looking, at the beginning of 1901, for the support of the Young Czech parliamentary club. To sacrifice a district captain was a price Koerber was willing to pay, even if it meant the devaluation of state authority. In an April 1901 decree, the Prime Minister indicated to the Bohemian Governor that there should be a change in the person of the district captain in Mnichovo Hradiště.<sup>53</sup> Although the governor fulfilled the wish of the superior authority, in a personal letter to the Prime Minister he could not refrain from clarifying the situation of state officials at a local level having direct contact with political leaders, as follows: "Ich muss ... hervorheben, dass es für die politischen Beamten Böhmens nicht leicht ist, bei den so vielfach wechselnden Forderungen, welche rücksichtlich der materiellen und formalen Behandlung nationaler und politischer Angelegenheiten in den letzten 10 Jahren an sie gestellt wurden, ohne dass diese Anforderungen immer genau formuliert worden waren, in ihrem Vorgehen jene Nuancen richtig zu treffen, welche jeweilig von ihren Vorgesetzten gewünscht werden".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Literární archiv Památníku národního písemnictví Praha, Personal papers of Antonín Rezek (unsorted), no. 252/MC ex 1901, a letter of E. Špindler to A. Rezek (6 April 1901), in which he expressed "an ardent wish for the quickest possible removal and humbling of District Captain Wunsch since he had crowned his despicable actions by yet another unheard act. It was not enough that he tyrannised our villages and corporations as well as representatives by criminal investigations, he now submitted an infamous denunciation to the county court against all judicial officials of the district court in Mnichovo Hradiště". Špindler added that this information had been provided by "our excellent Mayor" A. Šebor.

<sup>53</sup> NA, Prezidium ministerstva vnitra, Vídeň (hereinafter: PMV/R), box 20, no. 3095/MI ex 1901, a letter of Czech Minister A. Rezek to Prime Minister E. von Koerber (18 April 1901).

<sup>54</sup> NA, PM, box 3661, ref. 8/1/86-1, no. 6346, a confidential report of Governor K. Coudenhove to Prime Minister E. Koerber (2 May 1901): "I have to emphasise

The situation of the district captain was untenable without the support of the government. His disgrace after the failed investigation of the National District Council was exacerbated by other fiascos. The fine of 10 K imposed on one of mayors for forwarding official correspondence to the National District Council was at first confirmed by the Governor's Office, but after a few days, the governor changed the decree and dropped the fine in order to calm down the escalated mood in the district.<sup>55</sup> Soon after, district captain Wunsch was transferred to Rychnov nad Kněžnou/Reichenau an der Knieschna. Through no fault of his own, he had to move with his family to a rather inhospitable submontane region, while the mayor and district self-government representatives could celebrate their victory, which was subsequently sealed in the municipal election.<sup>56</sup> Despite the formal position of an influential district captain with broad authority, the situation of the local state official was clearly unstable, as he was in conflict with an elected member of the local self-government. The district captain, once he was in the position of an ostracised stranger against a close group of local notables, had no chance to meet the expectations that the superior authorities had in him when they sent him to the country, and his stay in the district was untenable in the long term.

For the proper operation of the public administration in the district, and for public life in general, it was essential to find a right combination of a state official appointed to the function of district captain and a co-operative district and municipal self-government. While unfit, argumentative, weak or timid officials could easily be transferred from the periphery, where they were endowed with far-reaching powers and where they had to rely only on themselves, it was not that easy to affect the composition of local self-government bodies. In this case, the governor and the district captain were forced to use a great variety of tools and measures on the fringes of the law, many of which are very difficult for a historian to track down. For the further cooperation among the local administrative elites, it was of key importance

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that it is not easy for state officials in Bohemia to work under frequently changing conditions, without them being explicitly defined, as for the dealing with national and political issues in the last ten years and, therefore, to comply with all the nuanced wishes that are being expressed by their superiors”.

<sup>55</sup> NA, PM, box 3661, ref. 8/1/86-1, no. 12956, a writ draft to District Captain A. Wunsch, *s.d.*

<sup>56</sup> *Národní listy* (20 Oct. 1900, afternoon edition), 4.

to arrange for the appropriate composition of the Municipal Committee, and/or to ensure the election of a moderate and conciliatory mayor.<sup>57</sup>

The cases of adversarial cohabitation between local self-government bodies and an appointed imperial representative from the turn of the nineteenth century show how important it was for the district captain to reach a mutual consensus with the local elites if he wished to stay in his place and avoid having the reputation of a problematic and troublesome official. This inevitably meant that he had to partially sacrifice his independence as a government representative who stood above the parties, observing and supervising. He was compelled to get involved in local social networks, to look for allies and collaborators, and to build his social capital in the local milieu, which was usually utterly new to him. This was often possible only if the loyalty of the key state official was first to the place of his service, i.e. to the local milieu and the local elites, and only then to the interests of the imperial centre, i.e. to the Prague Governor or Vienna government. A typical example of this can be seen in the careers of two district captains in Pilsen: Jan Paraubek and Čeněk Hatlák. They both managed to become so accustomed to the local Young Czech municipal and district representatives that the promotion of Paraubek to the Ministry of the Interior caused a heated controversy between the Pilsen local organisation, which was trying, in vain, to keep its capable and conciliatory official, and the party leadership that saw Paraubek's new place in Vienna, where they would use his influence to push their goals at a state-wide level. Paraubek's successor, Čeněk Hatlák, was recalled during the First World War because he had become so assimilated into the Pilsen society over the years that, from the government's point of view, he was too mild and too unreliable for a region of such

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<sup>57</sup> See e. g. the efforts of the district captain in Žatec/Saaz who managed to coerce state officials to vote for the liberal candidates in 1900 municipal elections. The government-friendly liberals, indeed, won and returned to the town hall after a period of German radical administration, the activities of the state representative that became public were, however, subject to widespread criticism and even parliamentary debate. See *Stenographische Protokolle über die Sitzungen des Hauses der Abgeordneten des österreichischen Reichsrates in den Jahren 1899 und 1900*, IV (Wien, 1900), 3544–5. Since the parliament was closed in June 1900, the interpellation was never answered, yet the detailed report of the district captain is in NA, PM, box 2217, ref. 3/18/3, no. 11384, a report of District Captain H. Campe to Governor K. Coudenhove (13 June 1900).

importance during the war as was the Pilsen industrial agglomeration.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the assimilation of state bureaucratic elites into the local societies in the milieu of district towns considerably eased the transformation of the Austrian bureaucratic apparatus into the structures of the new Czechoslovak state.

*proofreading James Hartzell*

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<sup>58</sup> Karel Waska *et al.*, *Dějiny města Plzně*, ii: 1788–1918 (Plzeň, 2016), 258–73.