5 Not Only Red

Street Protests, State Legitimacy, and Social Justice

On July 31, 1918, the apostles of the famous Prague astronomical clock, who every hour since the fifteenth century had circled above the dial to mark the passing of time, stopped working. A little sign placed beside the clock explained the "strike": "Where the bread is cut by half, there is no zeal. Where there is no bread at all, there are no obligations. Hunger brings evil that is difficult to avert. We have stopped working and death will follow, The Apostles."[1] Placed on Old Town Square, one of the most frequented squares in the city, the apostles' "protest" expressed the sentiments of many in Prague. Exhaustion and hunger led the population to demonstrate against the state's management of the food crisis and of the war. Crowds regularly gathered across the city to voice their grievances and demand change.

The years 1917 to 1920 saw an unprecedented level of unrest in the city: more so than the scale of isolated demonstrations (in January 1918 or on the day of independence), it was the frequency of small gatherings and riots of all kinds during this period that sets it apart. The street and the square were the primary locations where political and social change could occur. Demonstrations in the prewar years (especially the mobilization for universal suffrage in 1905) had generated a belief in the power of the street.[2]

This chapter provides a fine-grained analysis of the protests over the period, exploring as it goes the shifting relationship of Prague residents to the state(s).[3] It examines the occupation of public space by crowds contesting the social order, often in conflict with official authorities. What forms did this occupation take? What were the goals? Who were

[1] Police report, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2891, sig. A 15/1, August 3, 1918.

[2] On demands for democratization, see Beneš, *Workers and Nationalism*, 99–142; on crowds in prewar Hungary, see Alice Freifeld, *Nationalism and the Crowd in Liberal Hungary, 1848–1914* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore, 2000).

[3] On the link between food riots and declining state legitimacy: Healy, *Vienna and the Fall*, 73–85; Davis, *Home Fires Burning*; Barbara Engel, "'Not by Bread Alone': Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I," *Journal of Modern History*, 69, no. 4 (1997): 696–721.

the participants? Taking together demonstrating marches, violent riots, strikes, and small-scale gatherings, it does not focus on one mode of action (violence), but rather on space as both location and object of social conflicts.[4] The main streets, squares, and buildings of a city like Prague were contested sites, not just between nationalities but also between elites and the working class. Most of the unrest studied in this chapter started among the working class, which was reflected in the way public order authorities managed them in continuity with prewar practices.[5]

Demonstrations were also an important "emotional communal experience": marching together, singing the same songs, or shouting the same slogans created a shared political animus.[6] Wartime protests thus reshaped popular politics beyond external ideological or party categories. As Thomas Lindenberger has shown, interpretating "street politics" runs the risk of imposing one category or meaning on a specific event.[7] The many demonstrations which marked these years in Prague were often at the crossroads between different motives, modes of action, and participants. This chapter tries to recapture these ambiguities. Most of the unrest centered on questions of access to food and fair distribution, but it could easily incorporate antisemitic and anti-German slogans. Women played a central role and they emerged as important political actors in shaping the post-war city. A careful study of these movements highlights the profound imbrication of various discourses resulting from the war conditions. The Prague demonstrations show that the distinction between the nationalist and social revolutions of 1918 is not sustainable. In the capital city of the Czechoslovak national revolution, most citizens on the ground were concerned with social issues. Similarly, the notion that the Bolshevik revolutionary model generated a wish for emulation does not stand up to further scrutiny either. Calls for more social justice, more redistribution were very much a product of homegrown concerns and local conditions.

To better understand the nature of urban unrest, it is necessary to look closely at where it took place. The protests in front of government buildings studied in the first section highlight the Habsburg Empire's progressive loss of state legitimacy. The trajectories of demonstrations in the city analyzed in the second section show an increased occupation of symbolic

[4] For an approach through violence, see Konrád, Kučera, *Paths out of the Apocalypse*.

[5] On the prewar context, see Claire Morelon, "State Authorities, Municipal Forces, and Military Intervention in the Policing of Strikes in Austria-Hungary, 1890s-1914," in Matteo Millan, and Alessandro Saluppo (eds.), *In Defence of Freedom: Corporate Policing, Yellow Unionism, and Strikebreaking, 1890–1930* (London: Routledge, 2020), 79–96.

[6] Bryant, *Prague*, 132–133.

[7] Thomas Lindenberger, *Strassenpolitik: Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin, 1900–1914* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1995).

public space in 1918, as the riots moved from the Prague suburbs to the city's central squares.[8] The third section focuses on the continuation of the demonstrations in 1919–1920 and the renewed crisis of legitimacy after the war. The last two sections of the chapter interrogate other forms of unrest by looking at forced evictions linked to housing shortages and the increased intervention by common citizens in the management of public order.

Demonstrations and Deputations: Sites of the Waning of Habsburg Power

In April 1916, a disillusioned tram conductor remarked to his colleague on a ride: "the state leaves us to die of hunger."[9] The "state" was considered responsible for Prague's food crisis, and increasingly, its inhabitants publicly addressed the "state" to ask for improvement. The first small gatherings linked to food shortages started to take place in 1915. They mostly consisted of a few hundred women who went to complain to the authorities. The demonstrations remained relatively small and containable in 1916, but intensified in 1917 and 1918: their number grew, they involved more people and were more likely to involve violence. Throughout the period, however, the first target of demonstrators was official buildings. Early demonstrations entailed the sending of deputations of complainers to various levels of authority and this form of demonstrative plea remained the most important mode of action. Spatially, the distribution of the protests in the city reveals citizens' interactions with the Habsburg state and other forms of local power such as municipalities or religious institutions. Another dynamic in the evolution of the demonstrations was the gradual move away from local suburban gatherings (often in working-class neighborhoods) in favor of larger protests in the center of Prague.

The late spring of 1915 saw the first examples of disgruntled shoppers who collectively took their grievances to the nearby authorities. The police reports confidently state that agents were able to successfully defuse the situation. On May 5, 1915, for example, 200 women who wanted to go to the Governor's Office were dissuaded by the police and sent a deputation to the municipality's economic department instead. Later that day, 100 women from Smíchov who also tried to reach the Governor's

[8] On spatial approaches to the history of protest, see Julian Aulke, *Räume der Revolution: Kulturelle Verräumlichung in Politisierungsprozessenwährend der Revolution 1918–1920* (Stuttgart: Franz-Steiner Verlag, 2015); Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place 1789–1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

[9] Police report, April 25, 1916, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5083, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 13205/16.

Office were prevented by the policemen's "amicable persuasion."[10] At that stage, the police were still able to maintain public order through negotiation with the crowd.

Deputation at the Town Hall

In the morning of Sunday June 20, 1915, several women shoppers got together at the market on Tyl Square and bemoaned that they did not manage to get either bread or flour. Soon, their group was joined by passersby and a crowd of 500 people went up to the nearby town hall on Purkyně Square. A deputation sent inside received the promise that bread and flour would be delivered the following Wednesday. Most of the crowd dispersed thereafter, but a few people remained to debate together on the square. The police took five women to the police station to give them a warning. They were then released.[11]

New incidents broke out in the late spring and summer of 1916 as supplies dwindled before the harvest. In several suburbs, groups of women united to go and complain to the Governor's office in Malá Strana. The police's goal was to keep the protests in the suburbs as much as possible and to stop them going through the inner city. In May 1916, for instance, women gathered in the market square in the working-class suburb of Žižkov complaining about the supply. They decided to go to the governor and the crowd soon reached 2,000 people. The police, however, prevented them from reaching Prague by closing the streets leading to the center, managing to keep them "at the city border." The demonstrators were told they could send a deputation to the governor, going by streetcar rather than walking. But the women did not give in so easily. Some of them did the forty-five-minute walk to Malá Strana, avoiding police through the nearby suburb of Král. Vinohrady; 200 of them reached Radetzky Square and demonstrated in front of the Governor's Office.[12] A week later, separate groups of women in the suburbs of Libeň and Břevnov, who had congregated in front of local official buildings expressing their intention to go to the governor, were also persuaded not to do so.[13] The police were eager to preserve the center from the sight of angry crowds. The fear was that seeing other organized discontented

[10] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5062, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 21438, May 6, 1915.
[11] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5064, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 30203, June 21, 1915.
[12] Report on provisioning, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M 34/2, May 13, 1916.
[13] Report on provisioning, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M 34/2, May 21, 1916.

citizens in busy streets would tempt Prague residents to demonstrate. A police report following a protest in June 1916 went as far as recommending that local and municipal authorities be instructed "not to direct such processions to Prague because the perception of such examples could easily lead to its imitation in the local population whereby the now calm atmosphere in Prague and the suburbs could be again disturbed in an unnecessary way."[14] Breaking up demonstrators into deputations and making them as discreet as possible in the streetscape was seen as an effective way to contain dissent: as long as discontent was not visible, it did not exist.

The police task of avoiding the formation of demonstrations became, however, increasingly difficult. As gatherings in front of official buildings became more frequent, the Governor's Office recommended that local authorities (district officers) pacify and inform the population.[15] In Smíchov, the authorities complained about the renewed presence of crowds of women in front of the district officer's building: "we do not know what they want. […] When they come to see me in my office, I calm them by saying that on our side everything is done that can be done. The people go away but stay in front of the building."[16] The next day, the Police Headquarters noted that reassuring words on improvement would not be sufficient as flour was missing and potatoes, that people had come to rely on, were now also unavailable: "the population was until now very patient and has let itself be appeased. Yet now that people must go hungry […] mere promises cannot suffice to maintain order."[17] Shipments of potatoes meant a reprieve that lasted only a few days. The situation was soon "critical again," leading to renewed gatherings.[18] The authority of local officials, constantly renewing assurances of better supply, was at this point already in danger of being eroded by the reality of worsening conditions. The new harvest as well as the authorization of "self-supply" in the countryside nevertheless brought a relative improvement to the situation in the autumn of 1916.[19] This seasonal pattern, flaring up in the summer and calming down with the harvest, characterized the food protests of the initial years.

In 1917, the number of demonstrations markedly increased. They also took a more violent turn.[20] Between February 27 and March 2, there

[14] Report on provisioning, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M 34/2, June 26, 1916.
[15] NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, sig. D 6/1, no. 20321, July 26, 1916.
[16] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4976, sig. 8/1/18/14, no. 23834, August 3, 1916.
[17] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4971, sig. 8/1/16/7, no. 24132, August 4, 1916.
[18] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4971, sig. 8/1/16/7, no. 24495, August 8, 1916.
[19] *Aprovisace obce pražské*, 103.
[20] Also elsewhere in Bohemia, Heumos, "Kartoffeln her oder es gibt eine Revolution," 256.

were several attacks on bakeries and bread carts throughout the city. Thirty-four persons, mostly women and adolescents, were arrested during those days. The movement started in Žižkov where crowds assembled in front of the town hall to request bread without ration cards. A woman was arrested while trying to lead the others into the town hall (shouting "come, so that they give us something to eat"), which led to more protests. The authorities in Žižkov decided that night to give in and distribute leftover bread without cards. Rumors of what had happened quickly spread elsewhere in the city. The next day, in Libeň, people gathered in front of bakeries and asked for bread without ration cards. They attempted to forcefully enter the shops and assaulted policemen trying to prevent them. During one of these attacks, a worker from the brickworks encouraged the crowd: "Don't be afraid of them, smash everything and take what you come across." The Libeň protests also led to the delivery of pulses, potatoes, and swedes. Though censored in newspapers, news of the demonstrations traveled from one neighborhood to the next, spreading the protest movement. For example, a member of the bread commission in Holešovice told a woman that it was necessary to "stir yourself like they did in Žižkov and Libeň" to receive anything.[21] Demonstrations, although heavily repressed, could achieve their goals.

When they did not, another strategy was to ambush bread carts in order to directly "buy" loaves. The spring of 1917 saw the regular occurrence of "polite thefts" with robbers giving money in exchange for what they took. In March, a group of fifty women in Holešovice stopped a bread vendor on her way to her shop at a railway overpass, and very quickly took away 114 bread loaves while deliberately leaving six on her cart. As the vendor tried to push them away, the women explained: "Madam, we are not cheating you of anything, we are hungry, we give you money."[22] They indeed put money into her pockets and threw the rest in her cart; she found more coins than the bread was worth. The planned aspect of this action shows the gradual loss of confidence in official modes of supply. In the absence of food in shops, the rare food items spotted in the streets were directly seized but with compensation. Indeed, this technique was emulated everywhere in the Prague suburbs that month. In Libeň, eighty women stopped the driver from the bakery firm Odkolek and asked for bread against payment but without bread coupons. In Holešovice, a grocer's maid was attacked by women as she dragged a two-wheel cart with seventy bread loaves. The women stole thirty-three

[21] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4971, 8/1/16/7, no. 6785, March 2, 1917.
[22] Police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4971, sig. 8/1/16/7, no. 7784, March 11, 1917; Report on provisioning, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5095, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 8408, March 11, 1917.

loaves and gave her the corresponding price.[23] In Nusle, a group stole milk from a cart parked in the street in the morning to then return the empty cans and the corresponding money later in the day.[24] These cases represent the first instances when crowds circumvented official channels to get food, targeting isolated transporters of small amounts. The fact that the "thefts" were repeatedly paid for reveals not only the deficiencies of the coupon system, but the emergence of an alternative conception of social justice, which was to become visible in later protests.

In April and May 1917, demonstrations to local or regional authorities expressing grievances about food supply became more pressing. Demands for peace sometimes featured in protests.[25] A strike movement in machine and textile factories in mid-April, followed by another at the end of May, formed part of the protest landscape at the time. Local authorities observed this discontent with concern. Circles of power in Vienna even feared a potential revolution.[26] The crowds who tried to engage authorities did not always easily disperse. The mayor of Karlín, for example, faced with a crowd of 500 to 600 women gathered in front of the town hall, stepped on the balcony to deliver a calming speech. This top-down communication must have been less than convincing as the crowd then went to his private house to continue the protest.[27] The mayors or even the governor could not let subordinates deal with the protests anymore.

On May 1, a crowd of 1,500 women from Vršovice went to the Governor's Office with a petition complaining about irregularities in the distribution, asking for help, and praising the governor's wife for her humanitarian actions. After receiving a deputation in the building, the governor came to the square outside (Radetzky Square), where the rest of the women were assembled, and gave a "calming speech." The composition of the deputation shows that anger went beyond working-class circles: the wives of a bank clerk, a musician, and a post office clerk took part. One of them then gave a talk, back in Vršovice, urging the crowd not to listen to agitators and to still hold out for the short time remaining.[28] Interestingly, this was, in 1917, the most important demonstration held on May 1st in the city. Social Democrats limited themselves to official meetings at the Representation House and the Printing House.

[23] Report on provisioning, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, sig. M 34/2, March 28, 1917.
[24] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5083, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 14220/17, May 2, 1917; See another case of "polite theft," an individual woman who took bread (April 25, 1917) *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 1808, 226.
[25] *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 1805, 225 and no. 1906, 239.
[26] Brennan, "Reforming Austria-Hungary," 175.
[27] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 3097, sig. 8/1/92/19, April 26, 1917.
[28] NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, D 6/1, May 1, 1917.

As workers went to their jobs, the police, stunned, noted that "the streets had the aspect of a usual weekday."[29] Over the next few days, in several suburbs, women gathered and attempted to reach Malá Strana to present petitions to the governor but were prevented by the police.[30] Once again, these protests quickly generated similar actions in the same operating mode in different parts of the city.

The recurrence of such protests led the Police Headquarters to publish an announcement on May 15, discouraging the public from further demonstrations. It underlined their uselessness and warned that the police would intervene against them: while small deputations were welcome, "there [was] no need for demonstrations to induce the authorities, in compliance with their duty, to do everything that is necessary to eliminate the well-known shortages."[31] Two weeks later, a strike broke out along with large demonstrations that prompted a renewed public announcement from the Prague police: "it is brought to the general notice that processions and demonstrative gatherings of any kind on public squares and in public streets will not be tolerated anymore and will be dispersed without further warning with the force of arms."[32] From the earlier more conciliatory management of public order, the police had moved on to direct threats to the population. The poster itself generated angry reactions and, in some streets, was written over with derogatory comments. On Jungmann Square, in the very center of the city, someone wrote: "Away with Austria, give us bread."[33] In a street in Vršovice, the same poster was covered with the words: "Give us peace! Away with the Emperor!" and in Král. Vinohrady with: "Czechs, give the last blow to Austria!"[34]

The demonstrations of 30 and May 31, 1917 were the first massive protests in the Bohemian capital. They coincided with the reopening of Parliament following Emperor Charles' loosening of the military regime. Eight thousand people (according to the police; 15,000 according to the German consul) gathered on Old Town Square: striking workers from the ammunition factories, women, and adolescents together. As the crowd attempted to cross the river to the Governor's Office, it was stopped by the military sent to control the bridges who only let a deputation of

[29] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5083, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 14220/17, May 2, 1917.
[30] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5083, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 14220/17, May 4, 1917, and May 5, 1917.
[31] Announcement, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, D 6/1, no. 9345, May 15, 1917.
[32] Announcement, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4954, 8/1/5/9, May 31, 1917.
[33] Several examples: *Souhrnná hlašení*, no. 1990, 251, no. 1996, 255.
[34] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5098, sig. 8/1/92/19, 9 June and June 10, 1917.

twelve workers go through. The workers voiced complaints about food conditions, demanded peace, but also asked for the release of Friedrich Adler (Social Democrat who had assassinated Prime Minister Stürgkh in October 1916) and Václav Klofáč (National Socialist politician). The rest of the protesters waited for them in front of the Town Hall, singing Czech national songs ("*Kde domov můj*") among which the forbidden "*Hej Slované*." Reports mentioned that cries of "Long live the Russian Revolution" were heard.[35] The deputation came back and announced, as the result of its talks with the governor, the creation of a twelve-member commission on workers' issues. Despite calls for a return to work by the Social-Democratic party, the next day saw further demonstrations and continued strikes in some factories.

This event, like many wartime demonstrations, combined different forms of protest and different political messages. Complaints about the poor food supply and discontent over the war conditions for workers were a prime motivation, as is obvious from the demands laid by the deputation to the governor. The demand for the release of Viennese revolutionary Friedrich Adler showed a common concern with Social Democratic Austrian politics, reflecting the echo in Prague of Adler's trial a few weeks previously. Adler had denounced the repressive regime in wartime Austria–Hungary: support for him demonstrated a concern for more democracy, a radicalization of the Social Democrat credo, but not in a nationalist sense. The nationalist component of the demonstration surfaced in the singing during the march. In Celetná Street, leading to Old Town Square, locals (potentially middle-class) cheered from their windows and an observer enthusiastically exclaimed: "That's the type of songs they should sing!"[36] Rocks were thrown at the German House and antisemitic slogans were shouted. The Prague police Chief interpreted the whole demonstration as an attempt from a few radicals (former National Socialist members) to "jolt the large masses from the national indifference that they had fallen into during the war."[37] According to him, the workers had been manipulated by "agitators" who baited them with calls for better food supplies in order to mobilize masses and then introduced new national slogans. This protest was violently repressed by the Prague police, who sent military units and would have introduced summary justice if the strikes had continued.[38]

[35] Police report, NA, PMV/R, ka 192, 22 Böhmen, no. 11674, June 23, 1917; report, German consul: NAL, GFM 6/45, Ö101, no. 39, June 2, 1917.
[36] *Souhrnná hlašení*, no. 1964, 247.
[37] Report, Police Headquarters, NA, PMV/R, ka 192, 22 Böhmen, no. 11674, June 12, 1917.
[38] NAL, GFM 6/45, Ö101, no. 39, June 9, 1917.

The reference to the Russian Revolution in the slogans shouted by the crowd raises the question of the reception of this event in Prague. A Prague police report in March underlined that, despite the danger of imitation that the hunger riots in Petrograd held, there had not been a "favorable moment."[39] The news of the revolution had mostly raised hopes of an earlier peace.[40] The Chief of Police emphasized the role played by local conditions in the general agitation. The Russian example, however, could be used as a threat. For example, an anonymous letter to the emperor warned that something worse than in Russia would happen: the "Austrian democratic impulse (*demokratismus*)" would punish the guilty men more severely.[41] The letter-writer still framed revolutionary longing within an Austrian context. The February revolution, hence, offered an example of democratic uprising against the war. The October revolution, however, had less of an impact and is less present in police sources. Czechoslovak Marxist historiography has tended to overemphasize the role of the October revolution in the development of social movements in Austria during the war, viewing the strikes of January 1918 as a direct consequence of the Bolshevik revolution.[42] Events in Prague, however, show that the unrest was largely a home-grown response to local conditions: the protests predated Russian developments, the demands centered on food distribution, equality of sacrifice, wartime suffering, and the demonstrators' political frame of reference was centered on prewar mobilization for democratization in Austria–Hungary.

The police warnings were effective in reducing protests in June 1917. On June 4, a small deputation of twelve women came to complain to the district officer in Žižkov, but without any larger gathering.[43] However, as early as July, demonstrations erupted again. In Žižkov, 600 women shouted insults at the mayor's house and broke windows. They then threw stones at the police forces and walked through the streets of the suburb to the municipal council members' private houses shouting "Shame on you." In Král. Vinohrady, as a crowd of women and children were trying to enter the town hall, a police officer wounded a three-year-old boy on the forehead with his saber, which shocked and angered the

[39] *Sborník dokumentů*, IV, no. 17, 62 [March 31, 1917].
[40] In Žižkov, the district officer also did not notice an influence of the Russian revolution, but remarked that peace was expected with confidence, *Souhrnná hlašení*, no. 1811, 226.
[41] Letter in Czech, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2891, sig. A 15/1, no. 8909(?), received 21 April 1917.
[42] Jurij Křížek, *Říjnová revoluce a česká společnost* (Prague: Nakl. ČSAV, 1967); Jan Galandauer, *Ohlas Velké říjnové socialistické revoluce v české společnosti* (Prague: Svoboda, 1977), 92.
[43] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4979, sig. 8/1/25/4, no. 17830, June 4, 1917.

crowd further.[44] In early August, a large wave of strikes hit ammunition factories and beyond, with a total of 20,000 workers involved. The Prague public transportation did not run for several days. The workers' demands to the governor included that exports out of Bohemia be halted and that the food supply be better regulated and organized.[45] As was the case the previous year, the new harvest induced a temporary lull in the unrest. The improvement in food supply implied fewer direct demonstrations to the seats of power, but the atmosphere remained tense during the autumn.[46] A delegation of fifty women at Vršovice's town hall asking for coal in November 1917 threatened to use violence if their demands were not met within two days.[47] A month later, the suburbs witnessed fresh demonstrations of women determined to go the governor's office.[48]

The impulse to go to Malá Strana to the Governor's Office is a recurrent feature of the wartime protests. The governor represented the highest authority present in the city and the baroque palace that housed the regional administration on Malá Strana Square embodied the Habsburg state for Prague residents. The reverential attitude of the first deputations was increasingly replaced by more aggressive behaviors as the situation worsened and calming declarations became insufficient. In November 1917, a leaflet found in Smíchov threatened to blow up a factory and ended with the words: "we have all had enough, we will go to Malá Strana to see if the governor is also hungry."[49] The person of the governor, coming from a prominent Bohemian noble family, and whose wife was the patron of local charities, was the target of both appeals to the state and potential challenges to the state. This subtle shift over the war period was embodied in the protests' move from the administrative building of the Governor's Office to the governor's summer palace in the Stromovka park. The neo-gothic pavilion perched on a hill above the park in the city's outskirts stood for the remoteness of the rich classes from the growing

[44] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4979, sig. 8/1/25/4, no. 22832, July 17, 1917 and sig. 8/1/24/11, no. 22982, July 19, 1917; see also *Prager Tagblatt*, July 20, 1917, 4.

[45] NA, PMV/R, ka 193, 22 Böhmen, no. 18251, August 4, 1917; Rudolf Kučera has shown how this movement, in contrast to strikes in Plzeň/Pilsen, could not be sustained because it failed to integrate other types of protesters like women or older workers: Kučera, *Rationed Life*, 156.

[46] See the mood reports from the Military Command in September: NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5102, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 34431/17, September 15, 1917 and no. 34753/17, September 30, 1917. On the calm but excitable atmosphere, see Mood report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5104, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 38914/17, October 28, 1917.

[47] NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, sig. D 6/1, November 2, 1917.

[48] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4979, sig. 8/1/24/11, no. 40600, December 21, 1917.

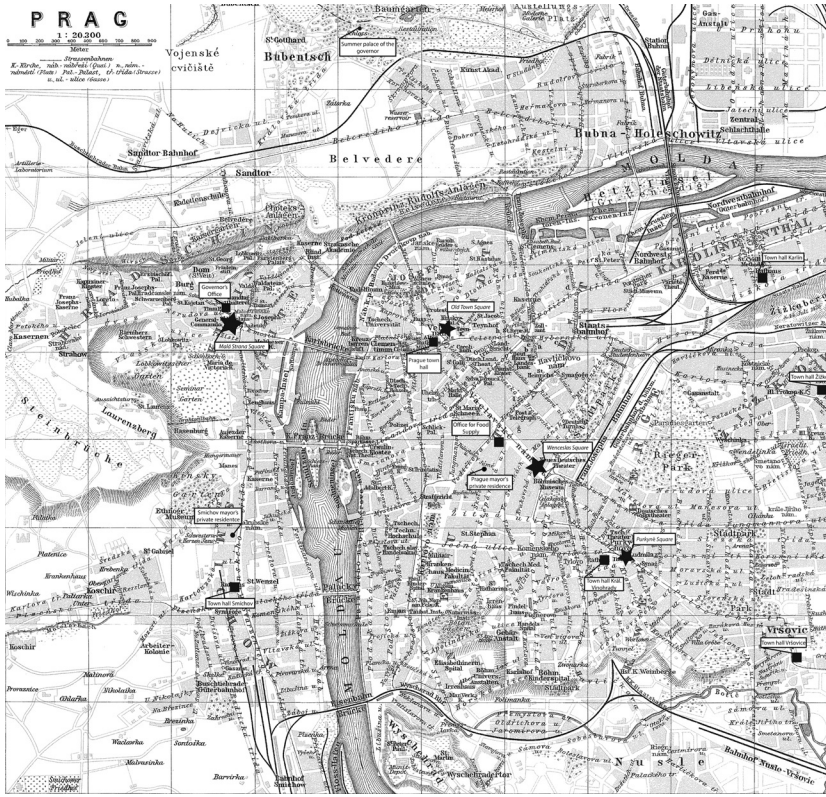
[49] Found on November 27, 1917 by a concierge on her doorstep, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5104, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 40019/17, December 13, 1917.

material misery around. Expeditions to this residence in the summer of 1918, which included the mayor of Bubeneč on one occasion, marked the difference in status between the hungry masses and the noble elite.[50]

In many of the demonstrations, the crowd remained at one location before being dispersed by the police. However, demonstrations sometimes moved through the city. The protesters often changed location in the hope of finding a suitable interlocutor for their grievances. In May 1917, for example, in a queue in the suburb of Holešovice, a few hundred people who had left empty-handed decided to walk to the Governor's Office in Malá Strana to complain. As they were not received there, sixty of them took their complaints to the mayor of Prague in the Old Town and were received by the food supply referent at the town hall.[51] Crossing from one level of authority to the next, from the state to the municipality, the demonstrators looked for responsive employees who could enact change. The Governor's Office was perceived as the main center of power but not the easiest to access. Municipalities and mayors sometimes acted as intermediaries. Petitions were drafted in the suburbs and then ceremoniously transmitted by a deputation to the Governor's Office while the crowd waited outside. When protesters were not able to obtain a meeting, they took their anger to the officials' private residences. In several cases in 1918, protests turned personal. Angry at the mayor of Smíchov, 400 people came to the quiet and leafy neighborhood of Malvazinky to smash the windows of his villa.[52] The apartment of the Prague mayor in the center was similarly targeted.[53] Protesters turned to mayors' private residences and resorted to direct threats to the persons of officials (sometimes with rocks thrown) often because they were not granted access to their offices. Other occasional points of protest suggest potential alternative sources of authority. In March 1918, for example, a group of women went to the archbishop's palace to voice their grievances on the food supply crisis.[54] During that period, a few appeals also gathered in front of suburban Czech National Houses, signaling the premises of a shift toward national institutions.

The location of the protests in the city is key to understanding the dynamics of contention and their evolution in wartime Prague (see Map 5.1). Throughout 1917 and 1918, despite the gradual erosion of trust in the authorities, official buildings remained the first site where

[50] *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 2784, 366, May 28, 1918, no. 2936, 388, July 24, 1918.
[51] *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 1908, 239.
[52] *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 2714, 357, and no. 2937, 388.
[53] 15 and July 20, 1918, *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 2924, 387.
[54] Phonogram, Police Headquarters, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/28, no. 9869, March 21, 1918.



Map 5.1 Sites of protests, 1917–1918

crowds gathered. According to my estimations, a little under a third of demonstrations in Prague in 1917 and 1918 occurred in front of such official buildings, the Governor's Office, the district offices, police stations, the town halls of the various suburbs, and Prague's town hall. To this number should be added several protests in front of the private houses of officials. Around 18 percent of the street disturbances during these years occurred at food distribution points (managed by the municipalities). Another 18 percent of demonstrations were concentrated in public spaces (like the major squares) and this includes the nationalist celebrations of May 1918 (see below). Finally, over a fourth directly targeted shops and food carts that were attacked or plundered.[55]

[55] Rough estimates drawn from the weekly reports in *Souhrnná hlašení*. Many demonstrations took place in several locations, which renders a precise and accurate division between the locations impossible.

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This distribution underlines the role of a dialogue with the state or municipal representatives in these demonstrations. Obtaining adequate food supply was a negotiation with central and more local authorities. The repeated visits of hungry women and children wanting official reassurance soon found civil servants who did not have the means to remedy the situation. The district officer in Žižkov explained in May 1918: "Three or four times a week I am obliged to deal with big deputations of hungry agitated women from Žižkow. There are scenes that demand strong nerves and great self-denial." He had stopped reporting these incidents to the Governor's Office as he was aware that the situation was just as bad in other parts of Prague, but the point was now reached where the "agitation and exasperation of the poorest sections of the population" made the handling of ever bigger delegations more difficult. The official required both more police assistance and better supply of food products for his district.[56] This reaction shows how increasingly overwhelmed Habsburg authorities were in dealing with these deputations. The inefficiency of these protests gradually led to the impression that the state was indifferent. As historian Iris Rachamimov concluded about Austro–Hungarian POWs: "it was clearly the Habsburg state that had abandoned them rather than the other way around."[57] The legitimacy of the state was undermined by the food crisis. This was a gradual process accentuated in 1917 and 1918. Compared with Russia, hungry citizens in Austria–Hungary carried on attempting to negotiate with the state for longer. While Barbara Engel describes scenes of assault on policemen as early as 1915 in Russia, in Prague incidents in which rocks are thrown at the police only became commonplace from 1918.[58]

The year 1918 started with a large wave of protests that remained very local both in its causes and modes of action, but also formed part of a larger movement in the Austrian half of the Empire. The police in Prague warned in early January that the nervous atmosphere of despair could lead to outbursts that the authorities would not be able to control.[59] The impulse came from the halving of the flour ration announced on the 14th. A wave of strikes broke out throughout the monarchy (from Trieste to Galicia, and of course in Vienna): overall, 700,000 workers participated in the strike during the second half of January.[60] Prague joined the

[56] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4979, 8/1/25/4, no. 16211, May 15, 1918.
[57] Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 213.
[58] Engel, "Not by bread alone."
[59] Report, Police Headquarters, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/28, no. 604, January 5, 1918.
[60] Plaschka, Haselsteiner and Suppan, *Innere Front*, 89, 61–90.

strike movement relatively late but the agitation in the city from January 17 to 30 revealed a discontent that went beyond the strikes themselves. On the 17th, two separate deputations visited the Bohemian governor: the first was composed of women from the suburbs who complained about the flour situation, the second consisted of eighty workers with six Social–Democrat deputies and one National-Socialist. The latter delegation proclaimed its solidarity with the political demands of the workers in Lower Austria (Vienna) and asked for an improvement in the supply of food and coal. The deputies also emphasized the desire for a fair peace and self-determination. They pointed to their own discredit among the population after they had called for calm in May and warned that this could be the last plea as these actions seemed ineffective. The Governor assured them that everything was done, especially by the Emperor, to achieve peace very soon.[61] In the afternoon of the same day, 200 women expressed similar demands for bread and peace to the Mayor of Prague and asked him to convey them to Vienna. In the rush in front of the town hall, the rumor spread that the janitor controlling the crowd had called for the women to be shot.[62] In both events, the still respectful deputations were marked by growing distrust toward the authorities.

The location of the frequent wartime protests within Prague reveals two intertwined dynamics: the importance of a political culture of pleading with authorities, of sending deputations, of negotiating with power, which was gradually replaced by a decline in trust in local and imperial officials. This shift was visible spatially: protesters increasingly refused to be contained by discussions with local officers at the town hall or the suburban district office, they went to the Governor's Office and mobilized crowds in the city center. The reassurances and promises were less and less effective and the respectful attitude to power morphed into resentment against state representatives.

Riots, Crowds, and the Occupation of Public Space

Increasingly, the relative order of demonstrations to the authorities gave way to more direct forms of occupation of public space. To be sure, this was not a linear progress: major crowds had gathered on Old Town Square in May 1917 and deputations to the governor continued in 1918. But, the last year of the war saw more occasions when crowds attempted

[61] Report from the Governor, NA, PMV/R, ka 195, 22 Böhmen, no. 1874, January 18, 1918.

[62] A few women complained about this to the Mayor but the janitor denied it: Deposition from Václav D., NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2619, D 6/1, January 18, 1918.

to take direct control of the city or which involved violence. What sets the wartime unrest apart from previous demonstrations was the frequency of the protests and the way they built upon each other to use public space in unprecedented ways.

Demonstrations during the First World War reused old locations and repertoires as well as found new ways of occupying urban space. Beyond the buildings targeted by demonstrators, specific squares were in themselves endowed with a symbolic value.[63] Wenceslas Square and Old Town Square were already prime locations for demonstrations in the prewar period. The 674-meter-long boulevard of Wenceslas Square had long become the stage for political and social events, the "riot square."[64] Both the 1905 demonstrations for universal suffrage and the 1908 nationalist demonstrations saw massive and violent clashes on Wenceslas Square.[65] Some of the accompanying symbols and rituals (the singing of national songs, for example) also harked back to late nineteenth-century national demonstrations to mark the city's territory.[66]

The year 1918 started with a wave of major demonstrations in the center and the suburbs. In the wake of the movement in the rest of the monarchy, workers in Prague demonstrated against the reduced flour ration and in favor of peace. Historian Zdeněk Karník considered it the largest mass event in the history of workers' movement in the Bohemian Lands.[67] It was, in any case, the largest demonstration in Prague since the movement for suffrage in 1905.[68] On January 22, 30,000 workers were striking in Prague: workers from the militarized factories but also from the tramways, the printing shops, part of the railway workshops, and other factories.[69] Every shop was closed, "work stopped in the whole police district." A major procession took workers through the center: Wenceslas Square, Ferdinand Avenue, the river bank, and from there

[63] On demonstrations' itineraries as language, see Danielle Tartakowsky, *Manifester à Paris: 1880–2010* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2010).

[64] Zdeněk Hojda, "Der Wenzelsplatz in Prag – Bühne moderner tschechischer Geschichte," in *Die Besetzung des öffentlichen Raumes: politische Plätze, Denkmäler und Straßennamen im europäischen Vergleich*, ed. by Rudolf Jaworski and Peter Stachel (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2007), 101–114; For a detailed study of Wenceslas Square in the interwar, see Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen*, 270–287.

[65] Wingfield, *Flag Wars*, 128; Beneš, *Workers and Nationalism*, 120.

[66] Hugh LeCaine Agnew, "Demonstrating the Nation: Symbol, Ritual, and Political Protest in Bohemia 1867–1875," in Matthias Reiss (ed.), *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85–103.

[67] Zdeněk Karník, *Habsurk, Masaryk či Šmeral. Socialisté na rozcestí* (Prague: Karolinum, 1996), 273.

[68] 100,000 participants on November 28, 1905, see Beneš, *Workers and Nationalism*, 126.

[69] *Souhrnná hlašení*, no. 2399, 309.

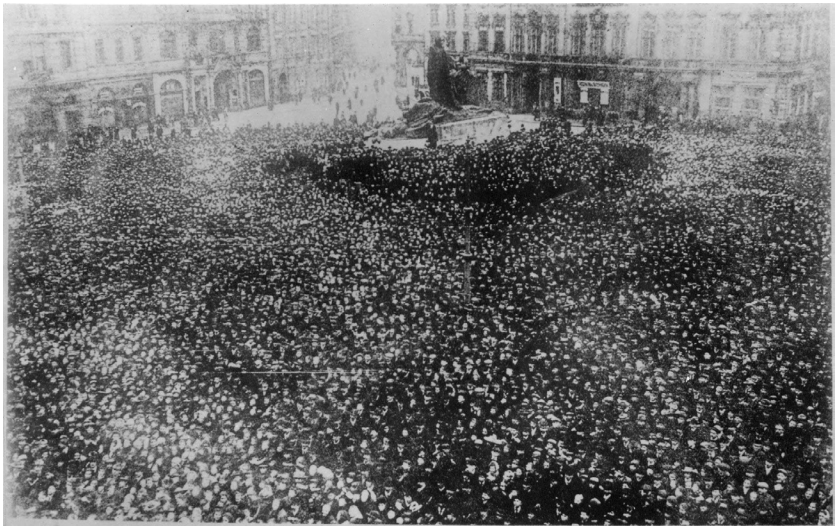


Figure 5.1 Demonstration on Old Town Square, January 22, 1918
Source: NA, *Fotodokumentace, ka 1, inv. č. 22*

back to Old Town Square where 50,000 to 70,000 people assembled.[70] The square was absolutely full and so were the nearby streets: it was difficult to access it and to move across (see Figure 5.1).[71] Several speakers (Social Democrat and National Social politicians) held speeches from the Town Hall balcony. One observer remarked that the crowd applauded pleas for bread and peace more than political statements. The atmosphere was peaceful and solemn: at the end, the whole crowd sang "*Kde domov můj*." The demonstration ended on Wenceslas Square where thousands of handkerchiefs were waved in the air.[72]

Over the next few days, as work slowly resumed in Prague's factories, local demonstrations against the reduced flour ration turned into riots. In Vršovice, on the 24th, discontent grew as people assembled in front of the town hall. The municipal employee who reported the results of yet another deputation sent to the governor could not finish his speech: he was interrupted by a tumult; the crowd left the square, demonstrated through the nearby streets, and broke three shop windows. The next day, a few hundred people gathered at the local selling point in Vršovice

[70] 50,000 in the police reports, 70,000 according to *Národní listy*, January 23, 1918, 1.
[71] Photograph, NA, Fotodokumentace, ka 1, no. 22, "Demonstrace na Staroměstském náměstí," January 22, 1918; description in *Prager Tagblatt*, January 24, 1918, 2.
[72] Ibid.

to urge other buyers to refuse the reduced ration, and workers in a local factory to continue the strike. The protests also spread to other parts of the city, in the Old Town and especially in Vinohrady where they took a violent turn: many shops were looted for a total damage of 20,000 crowns. Some Vinohrady youths even reached Wenceslas Square, where they broke into a shoe shop. A closing time of 9 p.m. was imposed for restaurants and cafés in the whole city. Despite these measures, demonstrations resumed the following day in Vršovice and Vinohrady, leading to repeated clashes with the police.[73]

Riot Square

In the morning of the 25th, 500 people gathered on Purkyně Square by the municipal selling point at the National House. They attempted to persuade those queuing to refuse the reduced ration. The police "energetically" dispersed them. The demonstrators, however, returned to the square to address their grievances to the mayor at the town hall. Once the deputation was received, the police scattered them again. At 3 p.m., as a crowd of 300 flocked to the square, a man suggested going to the nearby Beránek market hall to rob the merchandise. The well-stocked modern food shops suspected of profiteering aroused the envy of hungry demonstrators. The police, at that stage, managed to prevent them from carrying out this plan. But, by 5 p.m., a crowd of 3,000 people had formed again on the square. Some of them went down to the cured meat seller Maceška on nearby Palacký Street and broke the display window. The police claimed to have prevented the plunder of the shop using sabers and one officer was wounded. Rumors soon circulated in the city that the whole shop had been raided and salamis and sausages stolen. Crowds wreaked havoc in the main streets of Vinohrady during the following hours: in total, nineteen shops, cafés, and restaurants were looted or damaged. All fourteen windows of the large angle restaurant "Heine" were shattered. The police decreed the closing of all shops, establishments, and even house doors in the suburb at 7 p.m. On the following day, the police cleared the square on foot and on horseback four times as thousands of demonstrators kept congregating there. In midafternoon, an army battalion was stationed to guard Purkyně Square. The crowds were pushed back into the adjoining streets where a bakery and several other shops were attacked.

The late January riots corresponded to the day when coal shortages forced the city's gasworks to stop gas lighting entirely. The police were

[73] Daily police reports, 25, 26, and 27 January 1918, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/28, no. 3778/18; see also, *Národní politika*, January 27, 1918, 4–5; *Národní listy*, January 26, 1918 (evg ed.), 2.

clearly concerned by the lack of public lighting on streets and tried to intervene with the municipal council.[74] The riots delayed the extinguishing of streetlights, which were left on for longer than usual to allow better policing.[75] Since December 1917, only a few electricity-lit central avenues in the center remained lit at night, the rest of the city was dark by 9 p.m. A month later, the shortage of gas suddenly "plunged" the streets into "an impenetrable and inscrutable darkness" much earlier.[76] This certainly facilitated looting on winter nights when darkness fell around 5 p.m. and jeopardized the safety of Prague's streets. As a police report pointed out, darkness not only facilitated the "illegal actions of rioting elements," but also hindered the quick repression of "excesses."[77]

The January riots also marked a turning point in the state's repressive response: an announcement warned that agents would counter any public disturbance "with the greatest severity and all possible means." Even if army troops had not actively intervened, their presence indicated a willingness to repress unrest militarily if necessary. The police made use of their weapons and dispersed crowds on horseback. A memorandum from the Bohemian governor, issued a few days after the riots, invited authorities to draw a clear distinction between peaceful demonstrators complaining about provisioning issues – who should be treated benevolently offering mediation – and rioters who destroyed private property – who should be ruthlessly repressed "with draconic severity" and arrested.[78] Yet, as shown, precisely, by these events, the line between these two types of crowds was often very blurry.

While the looters' targets were of course indicative of a desire to obtain food or other objects of primary necessity (such as shoes), they also revealed resentment against shops and establishments that removed themselves from the general wartime sacrifices. The riots primarily took place in the suburbs, and especially in Král. Vinohrady, which concentrated new modern shops and market halls, such as Beránek and Maceška, often accused of black-market activities, near working-class residences. These shops were still showing food that had become entirely inaccessible for part of the population. As the crowd from the suburbs made its way

[74] Police headquarters phonogram regarding public lighting in Vršovice, January 26, 1918, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/28, no. 3778/18.

[75] Police Headquarters to Governor's Office, January 25, 1918, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2999, sig. L 20/2, no. 1283.

[76] *Národní politika*, January 27, 1918, 5; see *Prager Tagblatt*, December 22, 1917, 4.

[77] See a report protesting the total interruption of street lighting, Police Headquarters to Governor's Office, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2999, sig. L 20/2, no. 11979, October 2, 1918.

[78] Memorandum from the Governor, February 1, 1918, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/28, no. 3778/18.

to Wenceslas Square, they threw rocks at three coffeehouses, including "Nizza" and "Elektra" on Jungmannova.[79] In March 1918, it was the café Hlavova on Purkyně Square whose window was smashed during a riot.[80] The café culture, which had become an integral part of large cities of the Habsburg Empire, remained associated with the bourgeois classes. This was especially true for the larger more luxurious coffeehouses situated on main boulevards and squares.[81] During the war, cafés represented a symbol of material well-being and superfluous consumption that hungry protesters were excluded from. As a group of adolescents attacked a café in Brünn/Brno during a riot, a young man cried: "that's where most of the paunchy ones sit!"[82] As we have seen, cafés were also rumored to be a hub of black-market trafficking during the war. The equation of coffeehouse with material well-being continued after the war. In May 1920, during a demonstration, a group of 300 people stood in front of the café in the Municipal House and condemned the guests' lifestyle: "Some here eat cakes while others have nothing to eat," exclaimed one of the protesters.[83]

The months of February and March 1918 were marked by many incidents involving minor violence. The crowd could not be placated as easily as previously and violent confrontations with the police became more commonplace (see Figure 5.2). The riots on March 4, 1918 illustrate the various trajectories that a single event could take. In the morning, 600 women went to the mayor's office in Král. Vinohrady to ask for help. They then went to his private residence and finally to the local branch of the War Grain Office. At the same moment, in the nearby suburb of Vršovice, 1,000 people gathered in front of the town hall and got into skirmishes with the police. Later that day, 1000 women and youths demonstrated on Purkyně Square with shouts and whistles. Part of the crowd attempted to break into a shop in a nearby street and broke the main window. In another street, merchandise worth a hundred crowns was stolen from a grocer. Rocks were thrown at the police officers, who suppressed the protest.[84] Within the span of a day, we can observe different strategies played out in the urban space: pleading with the authorities in front of official or private buildings, occupying the main sites to protest, and directly looting shops.

[79] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/28, no. 3778, January 25, 1918.
[80] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4979, sig. 8/1/24/11, no. 7477, March 3, 1918.
[81] *The Viennese Cafe and Fin-de-Siecle Culture*, ed. by Charlotte Ashby, Tag Gronberg and Simon Shaw-Miller (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Bendová, *Pražské kavárny*.
[82] Police report, Moravský zemský archiv, Presidium moravské mistodržitelství B13, sig. 1, ka 408, May 10, 1917.
[83] NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N 1920, no. 133, May 12, 1920.
[84] Reports in NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4979, sig. 8/1/24/11, no. 7658 and 7662, March 5, 1918.

Figure 5.2 Police intervention to prevent the looting of a silk shop, 1918
Source: *Muzeum města Prahy, HNS 20 213-75*

As demonstrations turned more violent, they also targeted national or religious minorities. Later riots in March took aim at the synagogue in Král. Vinohrady where the crowd suspected that food was stored. The moral economy of wartime sacrifices easily veered to antisemitism as Jews were portrayed as black marketers. Similarly, another protest took place that month in front of the private apartment of a Jewish man near Wenceslas Square, who was suspected of hoarding foodstuffs.[85] In May, another group of demonstrators from the working-class Peter neighborhood protested on Wenceslas Square with loud jeers and cries of "Shame on the Jews." They also broke a window in a luxury hotel on Joseph Square, mixing antisemitism and resentment against the well-off.[86]

Most of the wartime protests did not display a coherent ideological content (nor were they linked to a specific party), but they shared a common discourse. The slogans found in leaflets to mobilize the population emphasized the demand for better supply, reciprocity for the sacrifices done, and the perceived abandonment from the state. A leaflet found in

[85] *Souhrnná hlášení*, no. 2551, March 13, 1918, 333; no. 2577, March 25, 1918, 336.
[86] Note from the police headquarters, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/34, no. 69446, May 6, 1918.

a factory in February 1918, addressed to "working men and women," urged them to work only on the condition that they receive food. It expressed the disillusionment with the local authorities' ability to intervene: "Gradually dying of hunger, you have called imploringly for help! You have been however shamefully fed with promises! Your women and children suffer with you! You are supposed to sink prematurely into the grave with them."[87] Earlier in the war, leaflets or graffiti had already surfaced in Prague to express war-weariness and dissatisfaction with the government. A well-written nationalist pamphlet hung on trees in Pohořelec in 1916 urged Czechs to "wake up": "What have we done to the Germans for them to persecute us so? […] We fight just as much as the Germans, starve and die for their glory just as much as they do."[88] Located near army barracks, it was probably aimed at soldiers. Another one, a year later, was more influenced by socialism. Found in a mailbox on Wenceslas Square and inserted in a crack on one of the Vltava bridges, it called out to "citizens, soldiers": the war had only brought "rivers of blood" and "indescribable hunger," "Long live the revolution! […] Long live Liebknecht and Adler! Away with despots!"[89] On the booth of a street vendor in Holešovice, someone had scribbled: "the soldiers are hungry, sleep on bare ground, have lice. We call for redress, for them to have rest before they go to fight. We call for redress, all the mothers, we want peace!"[90]

Leaflets were one means to spread discontent, but the endless queues were also a prime location where critique of the government was shared and demonstrations planned. Already in 1916, a heavily pregnant woman was arrested for holding a heated speech against war loans in front of the market hall in Smíchov.[91] Another woman had called to forty people in a queue at a baker's to "do as in Žižkov, with a stick to them and we will immediately have enough bread and flour."[92] In a report from September 1917, describing lines with thousands of people, the Prague police warned against the "steady growth of queues ("*Fronten*") in front

[87] Found in the Ringhoffer works in Smíchov in February 1918, Military Command to Governor's Office, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/15, no. 18118, February 1, 1918.

[88] Leaflet to the "Czech-Slavic nation," Mood report, Military Command, NA, PMV/R, ka 190, 22 Böhmen, no. 207, December 14, 1916.

[89] Deposition, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5097, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 13141/17, April 24, 1917; NA, PMA 1911-1920, ka 5098, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 15385/17, May 16, 1917.

[90] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5107, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 8900/18, March 8, 1918.

[91] Police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5088, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 26312/16, August 23, 1916.

[92] Police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5089, sig. 8/1/92/19, no. 30778/16, October 3, 1916.

of stores": "these crowds of people stand in the most lively streets of the city and are so embittered that they could, with the smallest provocation, get violently agitated."[93] A simple incident could turn the queues into riots.

The repeated demonstrations had created networks of protesters who, having met on the squares, went on to organize further. One such nebulous movement of women caught the attention of the police in May 1918. The women held daily meetings on the embankment of the Vltava in an area of former mills undergoing renovation. A woman who had come to hear them denounced the violence of the speeches: "I also acknowledge the seriousness of the time and of the situation, but nothing gets resolved like that."[94] One of the speakers on the riverbank was also the instigator of another meeting held in Smíchov that month which gathered a crowd of 1,000 people. In her police deposition, Josefa Kohnová, a single mother who suffered from tuberculosis, stated that she participated in the protests because of the "enormous misery we live in." Her speech to the crowd had contended that the war would be ended through revolution in the hinterland: "we have long been going and asking [for bread] but today we will not go with tears but with clenched fists." In her view, the monarch did not care for its people and neither did the governor: "the governor and other notables surely have good food supply and do not eat the bread people eat." According to the police, her "heated speech ignited the crowd" and provoked an "incredible anger" in people. A young man who was arrested for speaking in favor of the revolution at the meeting excused his behavior by the "fervor – ecstasy" that the speech had left him in. Kohnová and the other women involved called this social protest the "hungry movement" or the "popular movement." Born of food concerns, the movement led to broader discussion among women and adolescents all around Prague about the state at war and the political future of the country. The women had not known each other previously but, as appeared from the police depositions, had met during the regular demonstrations in Prague, for example on Radetzky Square in front of the Governor's Office. Their political affiliations were fluid and they mostly mobilized independently (arranging their own protests), but Kohnová mentioned attending a political meeting held by National Social politician Klofáč in a beer hall. The Social Democratic newspaper *Právo lidu* was also circulating its censored pieces to be read

[93] Report, Police headquarters, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/23, no. 29164, September 7, 1917.

[94] Anonymous denunciation to the police, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2891, sig. A 15/1, no. 5356, May 23, 1918.

out loud in those meetings. The core of the movement, however, was angry women (and some young men) who had seen their protests of the last two years fall on deaf ears and tirelessly attempted to meet, discuss, and mobilize. They organized meetings in more remote locations in the (vain) hope of escaping police surveillance. Some suggested that they should meet outside the police remit of the city to make sure they would not be arrested.[95]

The level of unrest remained high through mid-August 1918. Among the various protests of these months, the celebrations of the fifty-year anniversary of the Czech National Theatre in May stand out in their decidedly national character. They lasted several days and were the occasion to display national pride and support for Czech statehood. A large number of visitors from the Bohemian Lands and other Slavic nations of the monarchy came to stay in the city. Large crowds assembled around the theater and other central squares of the city, singing national songs. National costumes appeared everywhere. A censored letter described the atmosphere: "Prague is full of Croats, Italians, and Slovaks in national costumes. You cannot imagine how beautiful it is. For us as well, national costumes are again in fashion. Every other person has a costume."[96] For another eyewitness, the celebrations felt as though they were taking place outside of the war: "there was a great celebration in Prague, it was a national celebration, nobody knew of the war; the celebrations went splendidly without disturbance."[97] The participants in the national celebrations also differed from those in other wartime protests: they often belonged to the middle classes, or were young students. It was an important moment for the politically informed Czech public and the large participation and numerous visitors made it an exceptional occasion. Overall, however, the festive atmosphere contrasted with the more quotidian unrest of the period. It recalled rather large prewar national rallies such as the All-Slav Sokol festival of 1912.[98] Spatially, the demonstrations were concentrated in the central avenues of the city: Ferdinand Avenue from the National Theatre by the Vltava River all the way to Wenceslas Square.

Middle-class crowds occupying the city center was nothing new, but the locations of the other protests show an evolution of the relationship

[95] See the depositions by the policemen, Josefa Kohnová, and other women: NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4976, sig. 8/1/18/14, no. 15998, May 9, 1918.
[96] Letter from Franz Š. in Prague to Vojtěch V. in Zürich, May 18, 1918, ÖStA, KA, FA, AOK, Evb/NA, K 3800, no. 3098.
[97] Letter from Josef N. in Prague to Anna N. in Switzerland, May 4, 1918, NA, PM 1911-1920, sig. 8/1/92/19, ka 5112.
[98] Nolte, "Celebrating Slavic Prague," 37–54.

between Prague and its working-class suburbs over the war period. As the suburbs were not yet administratively incorporated into the city, the act of "going to Prague" (i.e., going from the suburbs to the center) still represented a powerful symbol. Protests had a different significance according to whether they took place in the working-class suburbs or in the city center. While some remained local, others took their participants to the larger boulevards and squares of Prague, either to demonstrate on the city's main squares or to reach the edifices of power. Crowds grew progressively more inclined to protest in the center. While in 1917–1918 only a third of the demonstrations took place in the inner city, in 1919–1920, half of them happened in the center of Prague.[99]

Regime Change in the Suburb

A discontented "Austrian" wrote to the police to complain about the gathering on Purkyně Square on October 1918: there were American and Pan-Slavic flags in front of the (Czech) National House and no policeman in sight. Referring to the governor's announcement, the letter writer expressed his declining trust in the state: "The poster says that they (*man*) have the means to keep order. The scenes on Purkyněplatz are the first sneer against it."[100]

The importance of Prague's central squares in the development of wartime protests is illustrated by the events of October 1918. A big uprising was planned for October 14th, with the intention to proclaim the Czech Republic from the balcony of the Prague town hall. The Austrian military was well informed of this.[101] It thus encircled the inner city and every access point, giving what was to be the last impression of a powerful monarchy. An announcement from the Governor's Office posted in the streets warned against the attempt of a violent coup and any participation in demonstrations. It aimed at dispelling rumors of state transformations by reaffirming the monopoly of the state over legitimate violence. The military dispersed the crowd on Wenceslas Square. However, even during this last show of force, the control of public space

[99] From the weekly police reports on protests in *Souhrnná hlášení* and *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení presidia zemské správy politické v Praze o situaci v Čechách 1919–1920*, ed. by Alois Kocman (Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1959).

[100] Anonymous letter in German signed "Ein Österreicher," NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3074, sig. P 55/35, no. 33314, October 14, 1918.

[101] See Richard Georg Plaschka, *Cattaro-Prag: Revolte und Revolution: Kriegsmarine und Heer Österreich-Ungarns im Feuer der Aufstandsbewegung vom 1. Februar und 28. Oktober 1918* (Graz: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1963), 198–201.

by the authorities was limited. The demonstrations were suppressed in the center but took place in the suburbs (see text box). The strong state intervention in the city center was the Habsburg state's last effort and stands in stark contrast with the noninterference of authorities two weeks later, on October 28th, as Czechoslovakia became independent. While the demonstrations on the 14th were confined to the suburbs, the movement on the 28th started on Wenceslas Square (see Chapter 6). Regime change had to proceed through an invasion of the city center by the crowd. What mattered in these demonstrations, as much as the numbers involved and the slogans, was their location in urban space.

During the last year of the war, as shortages became increasingly unbearable, social unrest invaded the major streets and squares of the city. It was increasingly violent and aggressive toward those who were perceived as less affected by wartime restrictions. These protests called for peace and a fairer form of government that would not ignore the concerns of ordinary people. For some, this included calls for Czech self-determination which would stop the alleged food shipments to Germany. For others, it was a vaguer yearning for more democratic rule. The protests showed anger at the rich and the profiteers able to continue life as normal. They also showed clear signs of antisemitism, mixing old prejudices with the new grievances. The birth of a new state in October 1918 did not mean the end of the protests.

New Republic, Same-old Protests

The social tension which had generated many demonstrations and strikes in the last years of the war did not disappear overnight and was still present in the first years of the new Republic. In 1919 and 1920, there were around 300 demonstrations in the streets of Prague, including political rallies.[102] The number of strikes in the Bohemian lands also went up after 1918: from 184 that year to 242 the next year and 590 in 1920.[103] Part of this increase can be explained by the less-repressive attitude of the Prague police compared with wartime. Crowds in this period were mobilizing for new causes but, more often, for similar motives and in ways comparable to the previous years. Some of the unrest of the immediate postwar period was happening around the same sites, although the Republic introduced new landmarks in the city landscape. For example, the former Rudolfinum gallery on the Vltava became the National Assembly and constituted a new rallying point for protests. The Ministry

[102] *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 9.
[103] Heumos, "Kartoffeln her oder es gibt eine Revolution," 271.

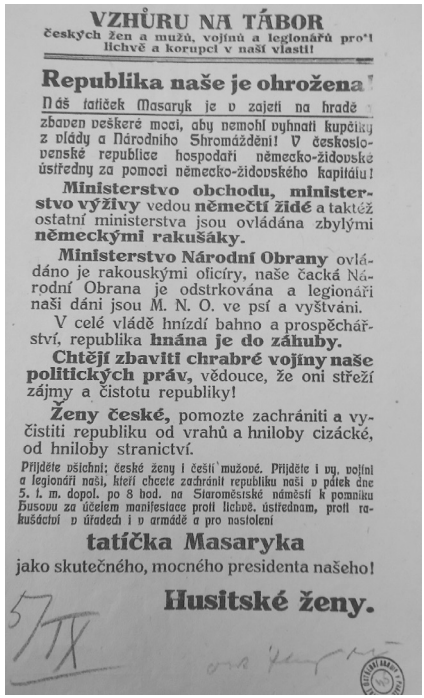
for the Alimentation of the Population (*Ministerstvo pro zásobování lidu*) housed in the Straka Academy, formerly used as a Red Cross hospital, was a target for complaints about the still inadequate food supply.

The food riots continued in 1919. Protesters gathered on main squares to appeal to the authorities (sometimes sending deputations to the newly founded Ministry for the Alimentation of the Population) or forced shopkeepers to sell their food at peacetime prices. The largest riots in Prague took place at the end of May. During these protests, the crowd attacked many shops in the inner city and the suburbs and brought the gallows to scare the "profiteers." On May 22 in Prague, the gallows bore the sign: "Last warning for the profiteers."[104] Some shopkeepers had to put their neck through the noose in front of the crowd in an act of public humiliation. This symbolic act manifested the protesters' willingness to appropriate some forms of state violence.

The hopes that the new state would bring an end to high prices and profiteering were disappointed. The common feeling was that peace should have implied the end of the war economy and the war prices. The demands during these protests were thus not much different from what they had been in the previous years. Striking workers wanted higher wages to compensate for the inflation and all classes protested against the scarcity of certain goods. The foundation of a new republic had not fundamentally changed citizens' dissatisfaction with the state and their general impression on the inefficiency of the food supply.

The movement "Hussite women" (*husitské ženy*, in reference to the protestant reformer Jan Hus), being antisemitic and antigovernment, is a good example of a group that does not easily fit traditional political labels. They organized demonstrations and printed flyers to voice the complaints of women on the material situation in the city. According to historian Antonín Klimek, the movement was born out of the anger from the Prague "pavlač" (apartment building).[105] It certainly recruited its members in public space. One woman heard about it from another woman on the Old Town Square and came to a meeting.[106] Another woman met an acquaintance in a passage who invited her to a meeting in the nearby pub. She found out that the women were wearing a black armband with a red chalice (symbol of the Hussites), which she went back home to sew for herself.[107] The movement was not composed only of women, legionnaires often attended their meetings and protests.

[104] *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 57.
[105] Antonín Klimek, *Vítejte v první republice* (Prague: Havran, 2003), 46.
[106] Statement by Marta L, September 11, 1919, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, sig. D 6/11.
[107] Statement by Marie S, September 10, 1919. NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, sig. D 6/11.



VZHŮRU NA TÁBOR

českých žen a mužů, vojínů a legionářů proti lichvě a korupci v naší vlasti!

Republika naše je ohrožena!

Náš tatíček Masaryk je v zajetí na hradě zbaven veškeré moci, aby nemohl vyhnati kupčíky z vlády a Národního Shromáždění! V československé republice hospodaří německo-židovské ústředny za pomoci německo-židovského kapitálu!

Ministerstvo obchodu, ministerstvo výživy vedou **němečtí židé** a taktéž ostatní ministerstva jsou ovládána zbylými **německými rakušáky.**

Ministerstvo Národní Obrany ovládáno je rakouskými oficíry, naše čacká Národní Obrana je odstrkována a legionáři naši dáni jsou M. N. O. ve psí a vyštvání.

V celé vládě hnízdí bahno a prospěchářství, republika **hnána je do záhuby.**

Chtějí zbaviti chrabré vojíny naše politických práv, vědouce, že oni střeží zájmy a čistotu republiky!

Ženy české, pomozte zachrániti a vyčistiti republiku od vrahů a hniloby cizácké, od hniloby stranictví.

Přijďte všichni: české ženy i čeští mužové. Přijďte i vy, vojíni a legionáři naši, kteří chcete zachrániti republiku naši v pátek dne 5. t. m. dopol. po 8 hod. na Staroměstské náměstí k pomníku Husovu za účelem manifestace proti lichvě, ústřednam, proti rakušáctví v úřadech i v armádě a pro nastolení

tatíčka Masaryka

jako skutečného, mocného presidenta našeho!

Husitské ženy.

Figure 5.3 Leaflet calling for a demonstration of the "Hussite women," 1919
Source: NA, PP 1916-1920, ka. 2919, sign. D6/5 IX

In a column intended for the newspapers, the editor Jaroslav Motyčka explained their goal of refusing any political affiliation: "Our group was founded according to, and follows only, humanitarian goals, not at all clerical, Bolshevik or monarchical goals."[108] Their interpretation of the situation separated the good elements of the Republic (Masaryk and the legionnaires) from the civil servants who were the cause of all wrong. In a leaflet calling for a demonstration, the "father" president Masaryk was presented as a hostage of the German Jews and the German Austrians in the ministries (Figure 5.3). The Hussite women invited men and women to protest "against the profiteering, the central agencies, the 'Austrianity' (*rakušáctví*) in the administration and in the army."[109] On September 5, 1919, 10,000 women, soldiers, and legionnaires responded to their call

[108] Ibid.
[109] Leaflet for a demonstration on September 5, 1919, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, sig. D6/5 IX.

and congregated on Old Town Square.[110] Social movements in the postwar period were clearly not limited to the actions of the main political parties. Rather, they were spontaneous outbursts of civil discontent and often largely improvised.

Ines Koeltzsch has highlighted the antisemitic dimension of postwar unrest.[111] Slogans against Jews (and particularly the remaining Galician Jewish refugees) were heard during demonstrations and Jewish shops were disproportionately targeted. In August 1919, for example, a crowd of women in Prague chanted: "Away with the [food-controlling] agencies. Away with the Jews. Give us groceries. We want potatoes."[112] The high point of antisemitic violence in Prague took place immediately after the 28th of October, in riots on 1 and December 2, 1918. Their timing, immediately after the regime change, coincided with other more violent pogroms in Eastern Europe and in the Bohemian Lands.[113] Though the events in Prague also presented an anti-German character, the antisemitic component prevailed.[114] Jewish shop owners were pulled into the streets and beaten by the crowd. Anti-Jewish slogans calling for violence were heard, and the German consul remarked on the riots' "strong antisemitic fundamental tone (*Grundton*)."[115] The police, which internally referred to the riots as "anti-Jewish excess," had to call in thirty gendarmes for backup to repress the movement.[116] Newspapers and announcements called for appeasement. The atmosphere was, however, menacing. The Jewish pianist Alice Herz-Sommer recalls the anxiety of her parents around the 1919 New Year's celebration.[117] Anti-Jewish violence had been present in the last year of the war and did not disappear afterward: many of the demonstrations or riots in the postwar period

[110] Daily police report, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, sig. D 6/5, September 5, 1919.
[111] Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen*, 151–176.
[112] *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 87.
[113] On antisemitism in the early Republic, see Michal Frankl, and Miloslav Szabó. *Budování státu bez antisemitismu? Násilí, diskurz loajality a vznik Československa* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2015); on anti-Jewish violence see: Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews?: National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 110–111.
[114] The German House was, for example, occupied by the military police on December 2, 1918: AHMP, Německé kasino, ka 1, inv. č. 220, "Ereignisse betreffend dem Verein 'Deutsches Haus,'" December 2, 1918.
[115] *Deutsche Gesandtschaftsberichte aus Prag: Innenpolitik und Minderheitenprobleme in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, ed. by Manfred Alexander (München: Oldenbourg, 1983–2009), I: *Von der Staatsgründung bis zum ersten Kabinett Beneš 1918–1921* (1983), 108–109.
[116] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5043, sig. 8/1/90/32, no. 37353, December 2, 1918 and no. 1219, January 12, 1919.
[117] Melissa Müller and Werner Piechocki, *Alice Herz-Sommer – 'Ein Garten Eden inmitten der Hölle': ein Jahrhundertleben* (München: Droemer, 2006), 74.

incorporated an antisemitic discourse or even physical assaults on Jewish citizens. On March 2, 1919, for example, several Jews were slapped in front of a café.[118]

The presence of veterans was a new feature of the demonstrations in the immediate postwar. Returning home from years of combat, they felt entitled to respect and gratitude from the fatherland and did not necessarily easily conform to the rules of the new state. This phenomenon echoes the return of many soldiers in Europe during those years, but the situation here was complicated by the divide between the veterans who had fought for the future Czechoslovakia and those who had remained in the Austro–Hungarian army.[119] The legionnaires who had deserted on the Russian or Italian front to join the legions or who had joined special units in France wanted to control the "new" city and participate in the creation of its new Czech identity under the Republic. Having fought for the creation of Czechoslovakia, they felt robbed of their victory by politicians.

In many cases, the legionnaires acted as surrogate policemen, defending their own vision of what was good for the nation, which could either coincide or clash with the police's conception. On March 2, 1919, a crowd of 1,000 people gathered to disrupt a meeting to protest the suspension of the German-speaking newspaper *Bohemia*. By the time policemen and legionnaires intervened, the crowd had moved to another restaurant where it intended to remove a statue of German Emperor Wilhelm II. A German student was apparently lightly wounded in the scuffle. The legionnaires then cleared the street Am Graben/na Příkopě and interrupted a dancing evening in the German House, suspecting that someone had fired on a legionnaire. They also closed all the nearby cafés and sent their guests home.[120] They arrested several people. These events show the feverish atmosphere of the first months of Czechoslovak power. It seems highly unlikely that an armed person would have fired a shot from the German house (a cultural institution). The other interesting feature of this event is that legionnaires considered it within their purview to maintain public order to the detriment of the local police. The public sometimes supported legionnaires in this role as is visible

[118] NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5043, sig. 8/1/90/32, no. 6985, March 3, 1919.

[119] Jiří Hutečka, "'Completely Forgotten and Totally Ignored': Czechoslovak Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Transitions of 1918–1919," *Nationalities Papers*, 49, no. 4 (2021): 629–645; on uniformed violence, see Rudolf Kučera, "Exploiting Victory, Siking into Defeat: Uniformed Violence in the Creation of the New Order in Czechoslovakia and Austria, 1918–1922," *The Journal of Modern History*, 88 (2016): 827–855.

[120] *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 34–35; NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 5043, sig. 8/1/90/32, no. 6985, March 3, 1919.

in the following case. In April 1920, a legionnaire, upon seeing a long queue to buy milk, exclaimed: "Is that what we fought five years for?" A woman in the queue, witnessing his reaction, asked him to go and slap the saleswoman; a request that he carried out.[121] The government was often ambivalent toward the legionnaires, treating them as official heroes of the new state while at the same time fearing their potential for upheaval.[122] Czech veterans in this period were both instigators of low-level violence in the streets in some cases and regulators of the violence of citizens in others.

The unrest of those years in Prague pitted different conceptions of the new state against each other. For some, the creation of Czechoslovakia should have meant the definitive purge of German presence in Prague, in continuity with prewar riots. The November 1920 riots, a complex event directed both against Germans and Jews, constitute the high point of nationalist agitation.[123] On November 16, 1920, 600 people protested on Wenceslas Square against the closing of a Czech school in the Northern Bohemian region of Eger/Cheb.[124] The crowd (by then grown to 1,500) headed to the German Estate theater with a deputation of soldiers wounded at Eger/Cheb and children who occupied the theater and installed a Czech red and white flag. An actor from the Czech National Theatre gave a speech from the balcony, declaring the theater seized. Soon other symbols of German culture in the city were targeted. The crowd attempted to prevent the newspaper *Bohemia* from publishing in the morning. Another group went inside the building of the *Prager Tagblatt* and pillaged the offices. In the Jewish town hall, archival material was destroyed. Portraits of Bismarck and Wilhelm II were taken out into the street. The next day, German-speaking passersby were mishandled by the crowd.[125] A young man whispering in German to his female companion got beaten by the mob until he fell unconscious.[126] The crowd continued to target German institutions, heading for the German Turnhalle (gymnastics hall)

[121] NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, 1920, č. j. 104, Police report on the events of the day, April 13, 1920.

[122] Ivan Šedivý, "Zur Loyalität der Legionäre in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik," in Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.), *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1938: politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004), 141–152.

[123] On the riots see, Bernard Michel, *Prague, Belle Époque* (Paris: Aubier, 2008), 282–288.

[124] On the clashes in Eger/Cheb see Nancy Wingfield, "Democracy's Violent Birth: The Czech Legionnaires and Statue Wars in the First Czechoslovak Republic," *Austrian History Yearbook*, 53 (2022): 1–17.

[125] Police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, no. 322, November 17, 1920.

[126] Deposition by Ernst P. from December 11, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2919, sig. D6/30.

and the seats of German student associations. They attempted to remove remaining German-speaking signs in the city, on an insurance building, or on the German Embassy. In the German House, the crowd entered and ripped off every sign, broke the dishes and mirrors of the restaurant, hoisted the Czech flag, and declared the building confiscated for Czech students.[127] The police were overwhelmed and the attitude of the Mayor of Prague, ambiguous. He published an announcement both sanctioning the buildings' annexations and calling for a return to order. The rioters felt that their actions were vindicated. These riots showed the will to eliminate all German presence out of the public space and to conquer symbolic sites (the placing of flags on the buildings is a revealing gesture in this respect). This event, which constitutes the culmination of nationalist violence, shares many features with other types of unrest in the city in this period, and emerges as part of a continuum of street protest in which different issues became conflated to reclaim urban space.

The postwar contention was shaped by material concerns and the challenges faced by Prague residents in their daily lives. Citizens made increasing demands on the new state in return for their sacrifice, asking for what Adam Seipp has termed "reciprocity."[128] Food was not the only issue which affected the city's inhabitants: housing soon became a pressing question. As we have seen, the inflation of common goods' prices meant that many working-class families had to move to smaller homes. The problem, which was already considerable during the war, was amplified in the postwar.[129] Protests took the form of public evictions to move in new tenants. These signaled a new form of invasion of public space and a blur between the private and the public realm.[130] They also epitomized the new conceptions of social justice present in Prague at the time, when a crowd could decide who should live where. New forms of participation in the public sphere emerged, which can be seen as direct products of the war.

The Housing Crisis and Direct Action

By 1920, Prague was full. It was very hard for a newcomer to the city to find accommodation. Working-class lodgings were already overcrowded

[127] AHMP, Neměcké kasino, ka 1, inv. č. 223.
[128] Adam Seipp, *The Ordeal of Peace: Demobilisation and the Urban Experience in Britain and Germany, 1917–1921* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
[129] See letter in Czech from the "organised workers in Karlín" to City Council, AHMP, Archiv města Karlín, ka 390, sig. 8/2, inv. č. 879, no. 11969, August 2, 1918.
[130] On the border between home and city see: Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (University of California Press, 1999).

before the war and the situation only became worse after. As a police report in the summer of 1920 explained: "the housing crisis has gone so far that a clerk lives in a bathroom and a working-class family with sick children live on a balcony!"[131] Even someone as well connected as the head of the American Red Cross branch failed – after six weeks and asking eight government officials – to find a place to house his family.[132] Contemporary caricatures in the satirical newspaper *Humoristické listy* often made reference to the difficulties in finding a place to live. One of them depicted the Old Town Square in the near future, absolutely full of people at every window and on every roof, while the sky is invaded by hot-air balloons where Praguers have set up their businesses.[133] The housing crisis of the immediate aftermath of the war, which Prague shared with most cities in Europe, was partly due to the reduced construction in the war years because of severe shortages of building materials and lack of labor force. The rent freeze imposed by the Austrian government in 1917 also meant that, with rents not increasing despite the inflation, investors were not interested in building dwellings which would provide them with few gains.[134] These difficulties were increased in the immediate aftermath of the war by the influx of various populations looking for a place to stay in Prague. Returning soldiers gravitated toward the new capital city in search of employment. Civil servants from Vienna came to Prague to staff the new ministries. Finally, as more factories resumed activity, they attracted workers from the countryside who tried to find a place to stay. Overall, in 1919 and 1920, 100,000 people migrated to the capital city.[135] The general impression of a city bursting at its seams was also conveyed by constantly overcrowded trams, which passengers could barely get on and off.

The overcrowding of flats, where several families would sometimes live together, posed a threat to health conditions in the city. Working-class families in Prague often lived in a one-room apartment, often without a separate kitchen.[136] The American Red Cross commented

[131] Situation report, Prague VII police station, August 22, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3.

[132] Letter from Dr. Eversole to Kendall Emerson, [May 1921], HILA, ANRC, box 68, folder 11.

[133] *Humoristické listy*, March 28, 1919, 105; other examples of cartoons on the same topic: March 14, 1919, 89; April 11, 1919, 125; June 20, 1919, 202.

[134] Rašín. *Les finances de la Tchécoslovaquie*. 215–216; on housing shortages in Belgrade, Zlata Vuksanović-Macura, Vladimir Macura, "The Right to Housing: Squatter Settlements in Interwar Belgrade – The Defense and Demolition of Jatagan-mala," *Journal of Urban History*, 44, no. 4 (2018): 755–774.

[135] Boháč, *Hlavní město Praha*, 62.

[136] See Holubec, *Lidé periferie*; see also press cutting: *Čas*, July 25, 1920, NA, MZV VA, ka 2517.

on the prevalence of overcrowding in Žižkov and its health consequences: "Like all of Prague, Zizkov is terribly congested and the housing question is one of its greatest problems. In many cases seven or eight live in one room and they still have room for boarders. Nine cases out of every ten visited have tuberculosis in the family, all sleeping in the same room with windows tightly closed."[137] Housing shortages also led to the creation of slums (*nouzové kolonie*) in the city's outskirts.

The state intervened, creating in larger towns a Housing office, which distributed vacant apartments. A set of laws was voted at the National Assembly in 1919 to protect tenants. The municipalities could "requisition" apartments or rooms if they were empty or only partially used. The local housing office identified prospective rooms and asked the owners to rent them out to tenants assigned by the housing office. The office would also control to whom flats were rented, in order to ensure that individuals would not rent an apartment larger than they needed.[138] In practice, the implementation of these measures was difficult and sometimes unjust given particular circumstances. Owners in some cases contested the requisition arguing that they were still using the dwelling.[139] The government conceived these measures as transitory, but they still implied a high level of state interference in the housing market and a weakening of the sanctity of private property.

Housing Office

The municipal council of Král. Vinohrady created a housing office located in a building next to the town hall. This new office registered apartments which had become vacant. In February 1919, the local newspaper reported that many people crowded the office: "from the morning on, it is like in a mill." Their complaint was in most cases: "I don't have a flat." The commission found many unoccupied or not entirely occupied apartments, but their number was not sufficient.[140]

[137] Report by Myrtle Weiss "Health center – Zizkov" [May 1921], HILA, ANRC, box 68, folder 11.

[138] Josef Gruber, "Bytová politika v Rakousku a v republice československé," *Obzor národohospodářský*, 27 (1922): 18–25, 65–73, 115–123, 208–214, 249–255, here 70–71; see dispatch, 31 October [1919], MZV VA, ka 2517; On the distribution of apartments in Soviet Petrograd, see Mary McAuley, *Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd 1917–1922* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 268–275.

[139] Examples of letters of complaint sent to the Housing Office in Vysočany can be found: AHMP, Archiv města Vysočany, ka 101, sig. XV/2, Bytová komise, 1919.

[140] *Vinohradské listy*, February 18, 1919, 3.

The government's actions reflected the pressure from the street. Already during the war, attacks on unoccupied houses had demonstrated the readiness to infringe on private property as life circumstances grew more difficult. A group of teenagers had, for example, attempted to steal all the wood furniture from the unoccupied villa Bělka in Nusle, presumably to use as fuel material.[141] The street was also an important factor in the successful execution (or not) of a mandated eviction. Commenting on an eviction in Bubeneč where a crowd had immediately moved all the expellee's furniture from the removal car back into the house after the police intervention, a police administrator questioned their purpose: "eviction is only possible to carry out with consideration of the crowd's mood."[142] With inefficient government measures failing to absorb the increased flow of new arrivals and housing office decisions not always enforced by the police, people turned to "self-help."

In the summer and autumn of 1920, many people were moving into apartments without warning or permission. The police reported 114 cases of "forced installation" in Greater Prague from June to December 1920, with a peak in August, September, and October.[143] The term covered a variety of situations: people moving into an unoccupied flat or building, forcibly taking rooms in an apartment, or contesting the allocation by the Housing Office. They often saw their action as a prolongation of the Housing Office's distribution, but in a more efficient manner. Some of the clashes that erupted in the streets and in apartments were caused by colliding visions of who was the worthiest recipient of a place to sleep in Prague. For example, a legionnaire, who had notified an empty apartment to the Housing Office in the hope of securing it for himself, prevented the new tenant assigned by the authorities from moving in.[144] When 600 workers came to move one of their number into a disused pub, they clearly enunciated why they were acting thus: "because the Housing Office was not fulfilling its duty and because there is no trust in it."[145]

The highest numbers of such "forced installations" occurred in the working-class neighborhoods of Smíchov, Libeň, and Holešovice. Workers from the largest factories in the city created their own housing

[141] Daily police report, NA, PM 1911-1920, ka 4972, sig. 8/1/16/28, no. 3778(?), January 26, 1918.
[142] Police administration Holešovice to Police Headquarters, January 20, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 770.
[143] NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 10889.
[144] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, č. j. 238, August 25, 1920.
[145] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, č. j. 244, August 31, 1920.

commissions, which found apartments for workers without lodging and moved them in. Such "housing offices" existed at the Ringhoffer machine factory in Smíchov, the Česko-moravská factory in Libeň, the Daněk factory in Karlín, and several factories in Holešovice.[146] The members of these commissions investigated around the neighborhood looking for empty rooms, often attempted to negotiate with the current tenant or landlord and, in case of refusal, forcibly moved in families with the help of other workers. In Smíchov, two joiners from the Ringhoffer factories accompanied by groups of workers, women, and adolescents, moved in twenty tenants in late August. Among their attempts were the installations of a widow into a disused storage room and of a worker into someone's kitchen.[147]

In the desperate search for a roof, rumors were the primary means to learn about a potential vacant room. Neighbors spied on everyone's comings and goings to determine the level of occupancy of every inch of space. A police officer, having overheard in a park that a flat might soon be sold, found out, upon investigation, that the owner, a widow, spent most of the day at her son's apartment. He denounced her to the housing office.[148] Even after having obtained an apartment through the Housing Office, nobody was safe. A civil servant who had moved from Vienna in 1919 and been granted a one-room apartment with a stove in a former industrial workshop was threatened to have to leave this accommodation to workers from the Daněk factory. The intervention from the workers' housing commission was based on a denunciation from a neighbor who had noticed his absence from his flat. The civil servant had in fact only been away on a business trip.[149]

The pressure from the street if living in an "oversized" apartment was high, as it was likely that someone would at some point try to move in or at the very least denounce it to the Housing Office. Professor Pecháček's apartment in Malá Strana was a very coveted good and the subject of repeated attempts at "forced expulsion," as it was comprised of three rooms and a kitchen. On September 2, a legionnaire came to the professor's flat requesting one of the rooms for himself. The professor instead found another place to stay for the legionnaire. He also decided, in order

[146] Exceptional situation report, Prague VII police station, September 3, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 10756; report to the Prague VIII police station, September 4, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 12630.

[147] Report to the Chancellery of the President of the Republic, September 4, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 10436.

[148] See deposition from Karel Š., November 25, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 14212.

[149] Letter from Bohumil H. to the Ministry of Railway, September 7, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 10959.

not to be further bothered by such requests, to move into the convent of the order he belonged to, the Knights of the Red Cross. His now vacant apartment was forcibly taken by another legionnaire, who then left for Pardubice to get his family. While he was away, a pregnant woman named Marie Froňková moved in with her family and had her furniture installed during the night. The next day, as the police tried to make her leave, a painter rolled up with his furniture in a cart to attempt to move into the flat as well, arguing that he currently lived with his mother and eight other people on the far side of the city while his work was close by. The police managed to deter him from moving in, but Marie Froňková stayed. When the legionnaire came back, he left her one room and the kitchen and moved into the two remaining rooms with his brother-in-law.[150] Such compromises or arrangements could be found on the spot between the different people vying for the same apartment. Family circumstances often invited understanding or compassion from one of the parties.[151]

It was thus not only empty apartments that were targeted but also rooms in dwellings deemed too large for their occupiers. A group of eight workers warned a councilor occupying four rooms with his servant in Žižkov that they would soon requisition some of them.[152] In the same neighborhood, a group of people took advantage of an employee's absence to break into his flat with a picklock, push the furniture from the kitchen and one room into the other room, and move two people in.[153] Similarly, in Smíchov, a cab driver hired five workers to install his furniture into two rooms of the three-room apartment inhabited by an inspector and his wife.[154] In several cases, people moved into the kitchen of a one-room apartment.[155] Finding a stranger in your living room seemed to be a not so rare event in the difficult economic context of the postwar period, and the police were often at a loss to intervene.

The violence present in these "forced installations" was sometimes direct and physical, but often the movers relied on the crowd to impose

[150] Police report, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, October 29, 1920; see also, police report, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 11738, September 13, 1920 and report, Police Headquarters, October 12, 1920, no. 12062.

[151] For example, in a case in Smíchov where a couple left the larger apartment to a family and moved into the apartment they had just left, Police report, September 27, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 11364.

[152] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, č. j. 255, September 11, 1920.

[153] Interior Ministry to Police Headquarters, September 24, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 11755.

[154] Report, Smíchov police station, October 5, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 12002.

[155] Report, Prague VII police station, August 28, 1920 NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3.

their will. In Král. Vinohrady, a tailor who tried to move into a flat he had identified as empty was stopped by the police. Three days later, he came back with a crowd of 200 people and a workers' leader who explained to the police that they would move in using "terror." They pried open the door with a hammer and wounded the policeman who tried to stop them.[156]

Whether organized or spontaneous, the move ins generated gatherings on the street: in some cases, a crowd of up to several hundred people would assemble to witness the process. The sympathies of these bystanders could either go with the person moving in or with the expelled. In January 1920, ten legionnaires arrived at the apartment of a Galician Jewish family and took out the furniture to enable another legionnaire to move in. Their action was approved by many people queuing at a nearby office to get tobacco, revealing the antisemitic anti-refugee sentiments of the crowd.[157] In another case, the public sided with the expellee instead because he had a family.[158] These expulsions could be seen as a sort of performance for the people assembled. As a rumor went around Smíchov that workers from the Ringhoffer factory would move someone into the parish building, an expectant crowd of 400 people formed.[159]

Evictions or partial evictions aimed to establish what people saw as a form of social justice in the distribution of housing. The anger against those with larger dwellings mirrored the anger against the rich, the better provisioned – all those who had not suffered as much from the war. As with other forms of protest, housing protests blurred many motives and hatreds of the postwar years. A demonstration of 500 people in front Julius Petschek's house during the anti-German riots of November 1920 illustrates this point. Petschek was an industrialist and banker, one of the richest man in Czechoslovakia, and a prominent Jewish member of the German community in Prague. The crowd came to his mansion bordering the public park by the train station and asked for the cession of some rooms in the building for public housing. They also removed a German sign by the lift.[160] In targeting his house, the protesters mixed antisemitism, hostility to German presence in Prague, and resentment against wealth.

[156] Report, Vinohrady, station, September 16, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 11927.
[157] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, č. j. 9, January 9, 1920.
[158] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, č. j. 236, August 25, 1920.
[159] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, č. j. 245, September 1, 1920.
[160] Police report, Lower New Town station, November 19, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 14211.

As with provisioning, the housing crisis was seen as a failure in allocation that called for a more just distribution, rewarding those who had fought and worked for the common good. The wartime hierarchies of sacrifice appeared again, excluding those who were shielded from hardship. In a meeting in September 1920, the "Club of Prague employees who live outside Prague" summed up this division: "18,000 families in Greater Prague are without a roof. They are the families of civil servants, legionnaires, soldiers and workers. While on the other hand the families of bourgeois and war profiteers live in full luxury. […] We consider the actions of the workers who moved into an apartment inhabited by only one person, and we recognize that they did not commit any crime against the social order unlike those who keep large apartments and circumvent laws."[161] In this context, the "forced installations" were only a just redress against unearned privileges. A group which called itself the Black Hand saw as its mission to move in as many people as possible by any means possible. They considered that violence was an acceptable way to impose social justice. In one of their meetings in Žižkov in August 1920, they stated their determination to continue: "When the government is doing nothing, the working class will act."[162]

Legionnaires were overrepresented in the group leading the installations, which reflects their recent arrival in the city. It also reveals their sense of entitlement to the fatherland they had fought for upon returning home. In a case from October 1920, a legionnaire asked a janitor to open an apartment for him, telling her that she should obey him as he was a military person. He then announced that he was taking two rooms in the apartment and pulled out the furniture from these two rooms with the help of his friends.[163] In another case, a legionnaire threatened the crowd with a fake grenade in his hand.[164] Having fought for the creation of the country put them at the height of the new Czechoslovak hierarchy of merit. The notion that the inviolability of property was not as important as a moral order of social worth became more widespread in the immediate postwar period.

The government and the police walked a thin line between permitting some "self-help" in apartment seizures and condemning violent evictions.[165] The government recommended a "liberal execution" of the

[161] Report from the Chancellery of the President of the Republic, September 20, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3.
[162] Regional political administration to Police Headquarters, September 21, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 11493.
[163] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, č. j. 297, October 23, 1920.
[164] August 24, 1920, Alois Kocman ed. *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 258.
[165] Memorandum from the regional political administration, October 21, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, no. 12628.

law on the taking (*zabírání*) of apartments to avoid discontent among the population but at the same time "to not suffer the abuse of the crisis by disruptive elements." The police similarly warned against violent apartment takeovers in a public announcement, which acknowledged that the housing shortage could "in some cases" excuse them, but insisted that they could not be tolerated in a rule-of-law state.[166] The other side of the housing debate often appealed to this notion of rule of law to denounce the illegal seizing. The specter was that of a republic ruled by anarchy. A manufacturer of baking powder, in his complaint to the police about a drunken man who had violently broken into his storage room and installed his furniture, explained: "as a citizen of the Czechoslovak republic, I am of the personal opinion that this type of violence threatens not only the legal safety and the trust in the authority of the state without which no state can last unhindered, but that this type of event is capable of threatening the reputation of our state abroad as a rule of law state."[167] On both sides of the debate, the "forced installations" revealed the citizens' lack of trust in the state and the state's own difficulties in asserting its legitimacy.

The very regular occurrence of these scenes of wild evictions in the Prague of 1920 gives us an interesting clue not only on the dire housing situation in the city, but also on the new idea of justice and the readiness to use minor violence.[168] They also highlight how various groups (workers, legionnaires) organized to take matters into their own hands in order to supplement the action of the state. This conception was indicative of a general mindset at the time, which rested on the promises of a new Republic.

Living on the Street: Citizenship and Entitlement

In the first two postwar years, Prague witnessed an effervescence of opinions and speeches that populated urban space. Every class in society engaged in the public sphere on an unprecedented scale. Among the population prevailed a sense of entitlement to make claims and share power. The new democracy was perceived to give legitimacy to all sorts of protests. The police reports of those years are full of rallies, demonstrations, peaceful gatherings, and meetings in pubs or on public squares. A report from January 1919 described the "widespread opinion that in the republic

[166] Police announcement, September 6, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3.
[167] Complaint from František R., NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 2903, sig. B 22/3, September 4, 1920.
[168] On public violence and its link to social justice, see Konrád, Kučera, *Paths out of the Apocalypse*.

everybody can do as he pleases and that the political authority, if it asks to be notified about a meeting in order to know what it concerns, has nothing else on its mind other than to 'harass in the Austrian way' the citizens."[169] As political journalist Ferdinand Peroutka remarked, "1919 was certainly the year when most efforts were done in favor of direct democracy and when direct democracy most existed. Politics then were a real popular movement. […] The people, politically awakened, tried to have a direct influence on the administrative decisions. […] The idea of democratic government prompted everybody to want to personally feel that they participated in the government."[170] As he explained, this new enthusiasm was first visible in the streets: "in every agitated period, life takes place a lot on the street, even more so with the appeal of novelty. During the war, public manifestations were forbidden; they were all the more popular after as if to make up for lost time. Truly a lot of street demonstrations sprang up with the most various organizers and goals."[171] Students, women, workers, former soldiers, invalids, and civil servants all demonstrated for better living conditions, but also against clericalism, in support of territorial gains for Czechoslovakia, or in favor of various political parties.

Debates and Soapboxing

On August 27, 1919, a member of the Král. Vinohrady municipal council called for a meeting on Purkyně Square to discuss food provisioning issues. Among the 2,500 people gathered, many argued with the speaker. People contradicted each other to the point that the meeting turned into a demonstration against the municipal council. As they dispersed into the side streets, smaller groups continued to loudly debate. Two weeks later, an opera singer from the "Republican party of cleansing" organized a meeting on the square. Five-hundred people attended, but his speech was interrupted by the crowd who disagreed with him. He then collected money among the listeners to be able to publish a printed version of his speech.[172]

An event such as the May 1 celebrations in 1919 epitomized this diverse participation in politics. The two main socialist parties organized processions that culminated with meetings on the Old Town Square and on Havlíček Square. Sixty-thousand persons attended the first rally and 12,000 gathered for the other, climbing statues and lampposts to listen

[169] Alois Kocman ed. *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 18.
[170] Ferdinand Peroutka, Budování státu (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1991), quoted in Michel, *Prague, Belle Époque*, 278.
[171] Ferdinand Peroutka, Budování státu (Prague: F. Borový, 1934), II, 951.
[172] Kocman, ed., *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 91; 97.

to the orators. Various personalities gave speeches from the balcony of public buildings. The Sokols had also arranged their own parade on the exhibition ground. Popular celebrations closed the day on both islands of the Vltava.[173] Beyond these large meetings, smaller groups formed at the local level in the suburbs to discuss the events of the day. Several interest groups (students, invalids, apprentices, concierges) demonstrated to voice their specific complaints.

At times, the taste for protest of Prague crowds would even impede the normal functioning of the city. By 1920, the regular occupation of Wenceslas Square frequently interrupted tramway traffic, as crowds of onlookers stood on the tracks. The mayor wanted to find an alternative square for meetings and demonstrations – Wenceslas was just "too full."[174] The police underlined the difficulty in moving the crowds: "This square became a sort of historical ground to which the people of Prague run with all their most important grievances and debate them."[175] In the suburbs, the police published an announcement banning gatherings on locations used by public transportation in December of that year, highlighting the frequency of protests everywhere.[176]

Elections in the new republic were flashpoints of the growing participation in politics. The municipal elections in June 1919 were the first to be held with universal suffrage. Up until then, the franchise for local elections in Prague had been very limited, even though universal suffrage had been introduced for parliamentary elections in 1907. Now, all could vote in all elections, including women. There were concerns that these elections "on a democratic basis" should take place in a "dignified" manner without obstruction or intimidation in polling stations toward opposing parties or the German minority.[177] Rumors circulated that some political parties would set up people in the queues for the polling booths to prevent others from voting. The police forbade the sale of alcohol on those days.[178] The parliamentary elections a year later

[173] NA, PMV, ka 50, sig. IV/K/36, I/2230, no. 3116, May 3, 1919; see also a short film on the events available at: http://film.nfa.cz/portal/avrecord/0064919 (accessed October 24, 2014).

[174] Prague Mayor to Police Headquarters, October 22, 1920, and Interior Ministry to Police Headquarters, October 25, 1920NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3000, sig. L 20/40, no. 13082.

[175] Police Headquarters to Interior Ministry, November 24, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3000, sig. L 20/40, no. 13115.

[176] December 13, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3000, sig. L 20/40, no. 15376.

[177] Police Headquarters to the police stations, June 10, 1919, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3000, sig. L 20/24.

[178] Request from the National Democratic party, June 15, 1919, no. 6149 and instructions from the Regional political administration, June 10, 1919, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3000, sig. L 20/24.

generated disputes over campaigning in public space. Two adolescents carrying a banner in Vyšehrad were stopped by the police, who considered that only adults should participate in campaigning. In Nusle, neighbors complained when a man ran a string across the street from his window to display sticked Social Democratic posters.[179] In Žižkov, a priest noticed "unprecedented misbehavior": "houses pasted with flyers, sidewalks covered with slogans, even the parish house was pasted and the windows covered with black writing." The sacristan was beaten up for removing the posters and "they painted caricatures on the church walls."[180] The agitation around elections epitomized a time when being freshly included into active citizenship spurred hopes for change and political slogans took over public space.

The will to participate in the shaping of the new country and city sometimes led to a direct intervention in state affairs. The immediate postwar years also saw the rise of volunteers helping in the management of public order. Common citizens substituted the bearers of authority in a world where the notion of authority had been undermined or at least redefined. On October 28, Sokols immediately mobilized to guard train stations, occupy administrations and military buildings, and prevent theft and plunder in the city. In the following days, they also watched places "which could irritate the public": the German consulate, the German House, and banks. In the first weeks of the new government, middle-class men put their jobs on hold to patrol the city streets at night in their Sokol uniform. They were not professional soldiers or policemen, but ordinary citizens. According to one testimony, some of them became ill standing guard outside in the cold or got bugs from the returning soldiers they inspected. Sokol guards needed to watch over the guards themselves as some "suburban brothers" visited cinemas or the café at the Municipal House while on duty and in their uniform.[181] To underline the voluntary character of their mission, they refused a donation from the German consulate in gratitude for keeping watch of the building, explaining that they had only done their duty and financial compensation would "diminish the moral value" of the deed.[182]

The Sokols remained at their posts for a few weeks until December. Progressively they were replaced by volunteer members of the National Guard (*národní stráž*). The call to enlist in the force was signed by the Sokols, the Union of Czechoslovak students, and the Workers'

[179] Police report, April 18, 1920, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3000, sig. L 20/37.
[180] AHMP, FÚ u sv. Prokopa Praha – Žižkov, Pamětní kniha 1911–1943, 68.
[181] NA, SP, ka 57, XX 4, "28. říjen 1918."
[182] Letter from Josef Scheiner to German consul, November 12, 1918, PA AA, Ö101, R 9092.

gymnastics association. Members of these associations and returning soldiers joined the ranks of this structure, which performed watch duties for the first few months of the republic.[183]

Among the tasks of the volunteers was the regulation of traffic in and out of the city. Actively taking part in the building of the new state meant preventing stuff from leaving it. An important part of the Sokols' job was the surveillance of train stations. A testimony from the Northwestern station recalled the controls undertaken by the improvised guards. They had to direct arriving military persons but also to check the suspicious luggage of civilians. At this time of upheaval, the Sokols made sure that food and other important items were not taken outside the city. They seized stocks of meat, apples, sugar, sardines, or clothes, which they then delivered either to the Czech Heart or to the police department against profiteering.[184]

The issue of profiteering and its threat to the new society was never far among volunteers' motivations to help rid Prague of this wartime plague. The department for the prevention of food profiteering relied on the help of volunteers to carry out inspections. Representatives of cooperatives or workers, as well as invalids and unemployed, were drawn upon in 1919 to go into shops to check whether guidelines were respected, but also look at suspicious shipments at train stations.[185] In August 1920, a volunteer corps of citizens was created to control food prices on marketplaces and in shops. Especially established for the Greater Prague area, it consisted of unpaid members who would tour the city in search of contraventions to the current regulations. They would then report these to the department for the prevention of food profiteering. Members were chosen from the six main political parties. A member of parliament complained that their searches were violating the freedom of those under suspicion, an indication of the conflicting uses of the notion of rights.[186]

Prague at the time was teeming with semiofficial guards and regulators – in uniforms or civilian clothes – who wanted to help bring order but could also increase confusion. In postwar Prague, the legionnaires who had fought for the new state had immediate legitimacy and their uniform alone gave them prestige. The privileged status of legionnaires may have induced some men to falsely adopt their uniform. The association of

[183] *Národní politika*, November 9, 1918, 2; December 28, 1918, 2.
[184] NA, SP, ka 57, XX 4, "Stručné paměti o činnosti sokolské stráže na nádraží drahy severo-západní."
[185] Memorandum of the regional administration, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3026, M 34/2, no. 644, January 19, 1919; Report, July 10, 1919, NA, MZL, ka 506, sig. V/4/9, no. 57068.
[186] See the file: NA, MV I SR, ka 278, sig. 12/373/40.

invalid legionnaires published a notice in *Národní listy* against individuals who organized fake collections.[187] A railway employee also complained in a letter about the lack of regulation on the wearing of legionnaires' uniforms. Although the men accused in the letter might not have been usurping their uniforms, it reveals the weight that the wearing of such a uniform had in public space and the authority carried with it.[188]

Legionnaires acted as substitute policemen in some cases, refraining mob outbursts, but also acted as if above the laws in other cases. As a crowd was breaking into the apartment of a lieutenant colonel who was accused of throwing water on a parade of Sokols, some legionnaires intervened to get everybody outside.[189] But they could also be seen to use violence in order to impose their vision of the new "democratic republic," as in the case of a journalist threatened of abuse in his office by two legionnaires who did not like the last article he had published.[190] This ambiguity in their role as both perpetrators and regulators of violence is characteristic of the first years of the republic, when democracy and republic were understood differently by elites and by more radical groups on the ground.

The immediate postwar emerges as a period of flux, when the new ideas of democracy and self-government led to dissolution of the centers of authority and power. On the one hand, a form of enthusiasm for the newly found freedom expressed itself through eager political debating on the streets. On the other hand, the new state was exposed to intervention and criticism from many sides. Streets were patrolled by volunteers, legionnaires set a new standard for state action.

The end of the war and the immediate postwar period constitute a unique moment of occupation of public space by crowds. There had obviously been mass demonstrations in the pre-1914 period, but the frequency of unrest on a small scale was a product of the wartime period. The crowds became more and more daring as the war went on. From polite delegations to the local authorities, demonstrations transformed into mass movements that reached the city center. The street turned into a forum where citizens' expectations of their state were voiced. The increasing failure of the Austrian state to respond to this challenge contributed to its demise. However, the new Czechoslovak state faced many similar challenges, multiplied by the conviction that freedom and democracy meant

[187] *Národní listy*, June 29, 1919, 4.
[188] Letter from Karel S. to Police Headquarters, NA, PP 1916-1920, ka 3074, sig. P 55/40, no. 409, January 12, 1919.
[189] June 13, 1920, *Souhrnná týdenní hlášení*, 214.
[190] Daily police report, NA, PMV, ka 179, sig. N, 1920, č. j. 27, January 27, 1920.

more participation in public space. Hunger riots were not only about hunger: they engaged a conception of the state. Conversely, nationalist demonstrations sometimes found their roots in economic difficulties. The strong undercurrent of antisemitism in many of these movements also displayed the imbrication of the social and the national: it sometimes stemmed from rumors of profiteering or could also be linked to a rejection of the German presence in Prague. What emerged from urban unrest was a new conception of social justice less bound by traditional notions of right and wrong, and more determined by wartime hierarchies of sacrifice. The city was taken over by crowds who wanted to impose their own vision of fair distribution, from the polite thefts of 1917 to the forced evictions of 1920, or common citizens mobilizing to regulate public space and "profiteering." Just as violent attacks on shops replaced deferent deputations to government offices, direct seizing of apartment spaces became a semilegitimate form of political action. Crowds also wanted to participate in the creation of the new republican city, with rallies and demonstrations to shape its meaning and enact a form of "direct democracy." The complex nature of street protests in Prague from 1917 to 1920 has implications for the nature of the revolution in 1918. It was never purely a Czech national revolution (with the national feeling overriding any other concerns during these years) or an aborted Bolshevik coup. Rather, it was centered around class and moral economy in recognition of wartime sacrifices.