

# The Birth of Czech Nationalist Activism in Reichenberg (Liberec) and its Conflicts with the City Hall (with a focus on the conflict during the 1890 census)

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## KEY WORDS:

Nationalism — Habsburg Monarchy — Bohemian Lands — Reichenberg — Municipal History

## INTRODUCTION

Multi-ethnicity has existed in the Bohemian lands at least since the era of medieval colonization, but it was not until the 19th century that it began to assume greater social importance.<sup>1</sup> This rise in importance occurred in connection with an ongoing process of national identification among the population; however, such national identification did not apply to the entire population, it did not always occur with the same high degree of intensity, and it did not always involve a clear delineation against other types of identity.<sup>2</sup>

This study focuses on nationalist agitators and municipal politicians in the North Bohemian city of Reichenberg (now Liberec) during this period of national identifi-

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  - <sup>2</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper warn against an approach which views groups as the basic units of social life — groups which are homogeneous, i.e. externally defined. They view key terms of the social sciences and history such as “nation”, “ethnicity” and “race” as at once categories of social and political practice and categories of social and political analysis. These identity-related terms have been used by agitators in everyday life during various periods of history, and it is the task of the social sciences to explain the processes and mechanisms by which they have been transformed into a powerful and convincing “reality”. Brubaker emphasizes that the formal institutionalization and codification of ethnic and national categories tells us nothing about the depth, repercussions and force of these categories in the experience of categorized individuals. He considers it important to address the question of how everyday ethnicity is, or is not, influenced by the politics of nationality on the local and national levels. He considers the everyday activities of urban dwellers to be insignificant for ethnicity; the normal population cannot be easily mobilized for national conflicts initiated by elites — indeed the normal population is largely indifferent to such conflicts. Rogers Brubaker — Frederick Cooper, *Beyond “identity”, Theory and Society* 29, 2000, p. 4; Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnizität ohne Gruppen*, Hamburg 2007, pp. 10, 83.



cation. The analysis explores the ways in which the discourse of the political elites became nationalized — though this hardly reflects the intensity with which people were committed to national issues in their everyday lives. For part of the society (the question is how large a part), national identification was either unimportant, or it was only important on certain occasions. For some individuals, their national identity was in fact unclear; for this reason I avoid using terms such as “Reichenberg Germans” or “Liberec Czechs”.

On the other hand, the degree of nationalist activity undoubtedly grew during the period under investigation — not only due to pressure from nationalists, but also due to the policies of the state, which increasingly defined and measured things in terms of ethnic categories. In the years leading up to the First World War, the nationalization of ethnic differences greatly increased the potential for conflicts within society. Starting with the 1880 census, the Cisleithanian government, forced by the pressure of circumstances, began to collect census data on respondents’ *Umgangssprache*, i.e. their language of daily use. By collecting this data, the state contributed significantly to the formal definition of nations as linguistic communities. The census data on language of daily use in Cisleithania between 1880 and 1910 was used by the state authorities as a basis for dealing with the increasingly fraught issue of coexistence among the Monarchy’s nations. The state needed information on language and nationality among the Monarchy’s population as a basis for its administrative duties. Ostensibly the government was careful to draw a clear distinction between nationality and language of daily use; however, in reality this did not prevent nationalist activists from considering *Umgangssprache* as a form of referendum on nationality.<sup>3</sup>

According to Czech nationalist activists, the category “language of daily use” led to an underestimation of the numerical strength of the Czech nation. They were right inasmuch as the interpretation of the term *Umgangssprache*, and the way in which census data were collected, created pressure on people who had migrated to the Sudetenland from Czech-speaking areas. Because the central authorities did not issue detailed instructions on how the census was to be conducted, various interpretations of the term *Umgangssprache* were possible — German politicians and nationalist activists viewed it as the language which a person used when at work (according to this interpretation, the only possible “language of daily use” within a “self-contained German territory” would be German, and so even Czech-speakers living in such areas would have to state German as their *Umgangssprache*). The Czech nationalists’ perspective was also limiting. They did not accept the notion that somebody originating in a Czech-speaking area or community could voluntarily identify with German nationality, and they considered all cases of linguistic assimilation to have taken place under duress, as a result of the unjust policy of the imperial state, and thus to be illegitimate in principle. However, linguistic assimilation is a normal and natural phenomenon, especially in the case of ethnic groups whose language is less socially prestigious; languages associated with higher social status attract the attention of

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3 For more details see Emil Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation: die Sprachenstatistik und die zisleithanischen Volkszählungen 1880–1910*, Wien — Köln — Graz 1982, above all pp. 14–17.

upwardly mobile individuals or families, those migrating from rural to urban areas in search of a better life, young people seeking a good career, and parents keen to enable their children to take advantage of social and economic progress.

The decisive motivation behind the Taaffe government's introduction of the dubious category "language of daily use" in the 1880 census (instead of, for example, mother tongue or family language) was the desire to grant legal recognition to the possibility of assimilation — i.e. to prevent nationalities becoming fixed and immutable, and ultimately thereby to preserve the unity of the state. Taaffe's decision was evidently guided by the state's interests, which required a certain balance to be maintained. The lower birth rate among Germans compared with Czechs was to a considerable extent cancelled out by the potential for assimilation in the primarily German-speaking industrial areas of the Sudetenland. The chosen method of ethnic classification clearly took this assimilation into account. Its most serious weakness was the fact that it was unable to prevent either respondents being coerced into giving German as their *Umgangssprache*, or census officers indulging in fraudulent behaviour during the data collection process (as the task of conducting the census was entrusted to municipal authorities). The effects of this weakness on the Czech-speaking minority in the Sudetenland were most keenly felt in the city of Reichenberg. Before moving on to discuss the events that took place in the city in late 1890 and early 1891, I will first briefly sketch the demographic, economic and political context within which the events unfolded.

## THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Labour migration from the Czech-speaking Bohemian interior to the province's industrial German-speaking border areas (the Sudetenland) led to an increase in the percentage of Czech-speakers living in these regions. Based on the results of the 1900 census (which was actually conducted in early 1901), Heinrich Rauchberg concluded that the population of the primarily German-speaking territory had increased by 144 973, taking into account immigration and emigration. A total of 218 535 people had migrated to German-speaking areas from Czech (i.e. Czech-speaking) areas, while only 73 562 people had migrated in the opposite direction.<sup>4</sup>

Czech-speakers (I also use the term "Czechs" for reasons of simplicity, though this word does not denote solely those individuals with a strong degree of national self-identification) also came to the Reichenberg area, though not in such large numbers as in the case of the North Bohemian coalfield. According to Rauchberg, Czechs in the Reichenberg area were more susceptible to assimilation than those in the coalfield, as they migrated in smaller numbers and settled in a more scattered way. In 1900, immigrants from primarily Czech-speaking districts made up 21.4% of the population of Reichenberg, but only 7.6% of the city's inhabitants reported Czech as their language of daily use.<sup>5</sup>

4 Heinrich Rauchberg, *Der nationale Besitzstand in Böhmen*, Leipzig 1905, Vol. I, pp. 263–264.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 326.



Another author writing at the turn of the 20th century, Johannes Zemmrich, also noted an increase in the non-German population within Reichenberg. He explained this by stating that Czechs, despite their modest needs, were no longer able to make a viable living in Czech regions, and were therefore migrating to German-speaking industrial areas. He claimed that German parents no longer placed their children in apprenticeships for certain less lucrative trades (tailors, cobblers, bakers), so the only available labourers for these professions were Czechs. Czech workers were also cheaper to employ than Germans. In Zemmrich's view, this trend could be combated by employing German domestic staff, apprentices, labourers and factory workers, and by encouraging the German population to do likewise; by only purchasing goods and services from Germans; and by only renting apartments to Germans who employed solely German staff — or at least staff who sent their children to German schools.<sup>6</sup>

Jan Havránek states that of all the children attending Reichenberg's schools in 1900, 4.7% spoke only Czech and 14.8% spoke both languages; from this he deduces that Czechs made up approximately one fifth of the city's population.<sup>7</sup> In 1900 a private census carried out by the Czech community recorded 7 800 Czechs living in Reichenberg — i.e. around 23% of the population. Caitlin Murdock estimates that around 20% of the city's population in 1900 were Czechs, though she also emphasizes the fact that not all individuals felt a strong sense of national self-identification.<sup>8</sup>

In this regard it is interesting to note that that 1921 census, the first census carried out in the post-war independent Czechoslovak Republic (which, unlike the Cisleithanian censuses, asked respondents to declare their nationality, which was essentially based on ethnic origin), recorded 4 894 Czechs (Czechoslovaks) living in Reichenberg — making up 14.82% of citizens living in the city. The next census, in 1930, revealed an increase in the number of Czechs living in Reichenberg, to a total of 6 314 (17.2%).<sup>9</sup> For this reason I consider the most accurate opinion to be that of Miloslava Melanová, who estimated the number of people in Reichenberg identifying themselves as Czechs to be slightly over one tenth of the population; she also took into account unforced assimilation and deducted the Czech soldiers stationed at the local garrison from the final figure.<sup>10</sup> The private census data and Murdock's estimate of 20% are evidently too high, if we consider the lower figure ascertained by the 1921 census — which, after all, was designed to achieve the highest possible figures for "Czechoslovak" nationality.

6 Johannes Zemmrich, *Sprachgrenze und Deutschtum in Böhmen*, Braunschweig 1902.

7 Jan Havránek, *Češi v severočeských a západočeských městech v letech 1880–1930*, In: *Ústecký sborník historický*, 1979, pp. 227–253, here p. 233.

8 Caitlin E. Murdock, *Changing Places: Society, Culture and Territory in the Saxon-Bohemian Lands, 1870–1946*, Ann Arbor 2010, p. 35.

9 See *Statistisches Gemeindeflexikon des Landes Böhmen. Auf Grund der Volkszählungsergebnisse vom 1. Dezember 1930*, Prag 1935.

10 Miloslava Melanová, *Česká menšina v Liberci před první světovou válkou*. In: *Fontes Nissae. Prameny Nisy: regionální historický sborník 1*, 2000, pp. 93–122, here p. 94.

## THE POLITICAL CONTEXT ON THE PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL LEVELS



In 1879, the government — dominated by German liberals — collapsed due to a clash of views on the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The German Liberal Party became the opposition, and Czech political representatives joined the conservative Taaffe government, which became known as the “Iron Ring”. During the 1880s the political elites of the Bohemian Germans became increasingly concerned with the Czechs’ progress in educational and language policy — rewards for their support of Taaffe’s government. In 1883 the Germans lost their majority in the Bohemian Diet (Landtag), when the federalists won victory for the first time in eleven years.

Once the German liberals had lost their political power in Vienna and Prague, they began to call for Bohemia to be divided into two parts; many of them harboured plans for complete secession and the establishment of a new administrative province with its capital in Reichenberg. Another of their demands was the distribution of tax revenues along national lines (at the turn of the century, the 37% German minority in Bohemia contributed 50% of the province’s tax revenue). In 1884 the Germans’ representative Eduard Herbst, speaking in the Bohemian Diet, called for the division of the province’s administrative districts along national lines. The Cisleithanian government was not against this idea, but would support it only in cases where it reflected the wishes of the inhabitants of mixed-nationality districts; in other words, the government refused to simply impose the division by diktat, which was the preferred solution of the Bohemian German politicians. In 1886 the German liberals left the Bohemian Diet in protest, having failed to secure the abolition of the Stremayr language ordinances in the territory of the regional courts of Eger (Cheb), Brůx (Most), Böhmisches Leipa (Česká Lípa), Leitmeritz (Litoměřice) and Reichenberg (Liberec). Their passive resistance was to last until 1890.

The intransigence of German political representatives in Bohemia, and their quickness to take offence, were further aggravated by the failure of the Bohemian Compromise in 1890, which would have set up national curias, thus *de facto* dividing the province into a German part (with German as the sole administrative language) and a bilingual part.

The failures of the German Liberal Party led to internal tensions and the emergence of an opposition wing known as the national liberals (Deutscher Klub), which placed a greater emphasis than the old liberals on the national idea and used nationalist rhetoric. The National Liberals made their breakthrough in 1885, when they defeated the old liberals in two key electoral districts; in Tetschen (Děčín) Karl Pickert defeated the icon of the liberal movement Eduard Herbst, while in Reichenberg — the unofficial capital of *Deutschböhmen*<sup>11</sup> — the election was won by Heinrich Prade

11 The first call for a province of “Deutschböhmen”, with Reichenberg as its capital, seems to have appeared in the Reichenberg-based *Deutsche Volkszeitung* at the end of 1897 (during the so-called *furor teutonicus* caused by the Badeni language ordinances); the issue was subsequently raised in the Reichenberg City Assembly. See Miloslava Melanová: Hlavní město severních Čech? Liberec 1848–1918, In: Kristina Kaiserová — Miroslav Kunštát (eds.), *Hledání centra. Vědecká a vzdělávací instituce Němců v Čechách v 19. a první polovině 20. století*, Ústí nad Labem 2011, pp. 285–308.



(1853–1927). A businessman and a native of Reichenberg, Prade was active not only in imperial and provincial politics (he sat in the Chamber of Deputies of the Imperial Council and the Bohemian Diet), but also in municipal politics.<sup>12</sup> In the mid-1880s the local German nationalist association (Deutschnationalerverein in Reichenberg), led by Prade and the lawyer Karl Schücker (1836–1917), founded the daily newspaper *Deutsche Volkszeitung* and gained considerable influence within the City Hall. The nationalists' declared aim was "to protect the German character of the city". In 1884 Schücker became the Deputy Mayor, and a year later he secured the post of Mayor. In 1889 Heinrich Prade became his Deputy. The largest German city in Bohemia was thus governed by nationalists with close links to the German National Party (*Deutschnationale Partei*), which in 1896 changed its name to the German People's Party (*Deutsche Volkspartei*).<sup>13</sup>

The failure of the Bohemian Compromise led to a radicalization of the already hostile attitude of German nationalist activists towards Czech minorities in the Sudetenland region. It is evident that the German activists' aim was to support the concept of a "self-contained" German-speaking territory within Bohemia, whose political goal was to achieve the administrative division of the province into a Czech part and a German part. Reichenberg lay at the heart of these efforts to create a linguistically self-contained territory. Municipal politicians strove for the official recognition of this major industrial centre as the capital city of the German-speaking territories. The presence of a Czech minority in Reichenberg represented a thorn in the side of such efforts, as it undermined the argument that the city was solely German in character.<sup>14</sup>

It was during this period that Reichenberg's Czech community was becoming more actively involved in national life. In 1881 a Czech school was opened by the *Ústřední matice školská* (a foundation set up to promote the establishment of Czech schools in linguistically mixed areas), and in 1885 — despite opposition from the Reichenberg City Assembly (at the time known as the *Stadtverordnetenkollegium*) — a publicly funded Czech school was established. An important role in this burgeoning national community was played by a doctor named Václav Šamánek (1846–1916), a native of Milotice in South Moravia, who came to Reichenberg as a military doctor and opened his own private practice there after his discharge from the army. In his free time, Šamánek was an enthusiastic promoter of Czech national and cultural activities. In the 1880s he founded the local branch of the Sokol association, and he also became

12 For more on Prade see Miloslava Melanová, Heinrich Prade, liberecký místostarosta a představitel německých nacionalů v Čechách. In: *Osobnosti v dějinách regionu 2, Liberec 2005*, pp. 55–73.

13 Helmut Rumpel — Peter Urbanitsch (eds.), *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918, Volume VIII/1*, pp. 674–676; Miloslava Melanová, Česká menšina v německém centru. Změny v postavení české menšiny v Liberci v období 1880–1907. In: Olga Fejtová — Václav Ledvinka — Jiří Pešek, *Národnostní skupiny, menšiny a cizinci ve městech: Praha — město zpráv a zpravodajství*, Praha 2001 pp. 157–170, here pp. 161, 164; Milan Hlavačka et al., *Česká země v 19. století. Proměny společnosti v moderní době, Volume I*, Praha 2014, p. 138.

14 Miloslava Melanová, *Česká menšina v Liberci...*, p. 94.



the chairman of the local chapter of the National Union of North Bohemia (*Národní jednota severočeská*), the *Česká beseda* cultural association and the local branch of the *Matice* educational foundation (*Ústřední matice školská*). In the early 1890s he helped to establish a Czech savings bank and credit institution in Reichenberg. Václav Šamánek was a member of the radical wing of the Young Czech Party, and in the 1890s he served as a deputy in the *Reichsrat* (1893–97) and in the Bohemian Diet (1895–1907). He encountered opposition from German nationalist activists in Reichenberg — opposition that was all the more forceful because Šamánek’s career coincided with growing nationalist tendencies both in town halls and in German national associations and institutions.<sup>15</sup> Despite speaking German fluently, Šamánek stubbornly defended his right to communicate with the City Hall (*Magistrat*)<sup>16</sup> in Czech, as it was the state authority of the first instance (according to the Stremayr language ordinances of 1880).



### THE CONFLICT DURING THE 1890/91 CENSUS IN REICHENBERG

Tensions between the Reichenberg City Hall and the Czech activists concerning the upcoming census began to escalate on 20 December 1890, when the City Hall informed the Bohemian Provincial Governor’s Office (*Statthalterei*) and the State Prosecutor’s Office (*Staatsanwaltschaft*) that it had confiscated a leaflet published by Václav Šamánek about the census; the leaflet had been submitted to the City Hall on the previous day, which was a legal requirement prior to distribution. The Mayor justified the confiscation on the grounds that the leaflet called on Czechs to state their language of daily use as Czech, and that this would have distorted the results given by individuals who, although Czechs, did not use Czech as their language of daily use. In the Mayor’s opinion, this represented a violation of Section 5 and Section 320 e) of the Imperial Law Gazette (*Reichsgesetzblatt*) and also a breach of Section 9 of the Press Act, as the leaflet lacked the name and address of the printing house. Mayor Schücker and the City Hall interpreted the confiscation as meeting the requirements of a circular sent by Governor Thun to all District Governors’ Offices on 23 November 1890, which called on the authorities to take action against agitation regarding the recording of the *Umgangssprache* in the upcoming census, using all legal means available.

On 9 January 1891 the District Court in Reichenberg, which was responsible for matters of press regulation, confirmed the legality of the City Hall’s confiscation of the leaflet, entitled “*Čechové! Komité pro sčítání lidu*” [“Czechs! Committee for the Census”]. On 11 January the State Prosecutor’s Office in Reichenberg confirmed that the leaflet was indeed in breach of Section 9 of the Press Act as it lacked details of the publisher, the place of publication and the printing house. Because the authorities suspected that the leaflet was nevertheless being distributed illegally, the Reichen-

15 M. Melanová, *Česká menšina v německém centru*, pp. 161, 166; [http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A1clav\\_%C5%A0am%C3%A1nek](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A1clav_%C5%A0am%C3%A1nek)

16 In statutory cities the City Council acted as the executive body of the municipal government and as the lowest instance of the state authorities (i.e. as a “Level 1” political authority). In the latter case it was known as the *Magistrat*.



berg court was instructed to launch a preliminary investigation into a possible breach of Section 23 of the Press Act. On 24 January 1891 the State Prosecutor's Office in Reichenberg notified the City Hall that one Mr Stiepel, a public partner in the "Gebrüder Stiepel" printing house, had been fined 5 gulden for a violation of Section 9 and Section 17 of the Press Act.<sup>17</sup>

Let us now return to December 1890 and examine the other events leading up to the census. The Czech and German versions of events only concur on the level of basic facts; their interpretations of these facts are entirely different. First the Czech version: Representatives of the Czech minority complained that the census notification forms<sup>18</sup> were distributed in Reichenberg on 24 December, though the distribution was not scheduled until 29 December, and that homeowners were asked to return the completed forms by the end of the year, even though the official deadline was not until 3 January. If anybody stated Czech as their language of daily use, they received a new blank form and were told (including threats) that they were instead to state German. The Czech activists cited a number of specific cases where such coercive methods had been applied. They claimed that the City Hall had set up a census committee consisting solely of members of the *Deutschnationaler Verein*. They also complained that a virulent campaign had been mounted by the *Deutsche Volkszeitung* against the Czech community, that the City Hall had rejected a request to set up a Czech census committee which would have helped Czech speakers to complete the notification form, and that the City Hall had also confiscated a text submitted by Czech activists in order to obtain the necessary permit to distribute the text in the form of posters,<sup>19</sup> which

17 Národní archiv v Praze [National Archive in Prague, further quoted as NA], collection Prezidium místodržitelství [Presidium of the Governor's Office, further PM], carton 1811, call no. 13/45/1; Státní okresní archiv Liberec [State District Archive in Liberec, further SOkA Liberec], collection Archiv města Liberce [Liberec's City Archive, further AML], prezidiální spisy [presidential records], carton. 5, volume 5/198.

18 In Reichenberg, due to its status as a statutory city, the census data was collected by means of notification forms (in German "Anzeigezettel"), which were distributed to individual households. The owner of the building then collected all these forms and passed them on to the census authorities.

19 The Czech text for which Šamánek requested a permit: "Čechové! Až dostanete ku konci prosince od domácích pánů tak zvané archy pro sčítání lidu, upozorňujeme Vás obzvláště na rubriku „obcovací řeč“ (Umgangssprache).

Kdybyste nevěděli, co zákon rozumí Vaší „obcovací řečí“, aneb jak máte správně dle zákona archy sčítací vyplniti aneb vůbec v jakékoli pochybnosti byli, kdybyste jakoukoli stížnost podati chtěli, přijďte jen do Matičné budovy v Rollgasse č. 8 v Liberci, kde od 25. prosince až do konce ledna poradí Vám, popřípadě stížnosti Vaše zdarma provede komité pro sčítání lidu. MUDr.Šamánek" ["Czechs! When at the end of December your landlords give you the so-called notification forms for the census, we would like to draw your attention particularly to the section headed "language of daily use" (Umgangssprache). If you do not know what is meant by this term in law, or if you are unsure how to complete the notification forms according to the legal requirements, or if you have any doubts whatsoever, or if you would like to submit any complaint whatsoever, just come to the *Matic* building in Rollgasse no, 8, Reichenberg, where the census committee will be available





would have given information on the establishment and location of a Czech census committee. Moreover, on 28 January the District Education Board sent an instruction to the headteacher at the Czech *Matice* school Ferdinand Wölfel and a teacher named Paleček (both of whom were prominent members of the small group of Czech activists in the city), warning them not to indulge in any political agitation during the census and threatening them with a possible hearing in front of the Provincial Education Board. On the following day both teachers were summoned to the City Hall.

The Czech activists in Reichenberg subsequently created a group which — though not actually bearing the title of census committee — nevertheless aimed to assist the Czech-speaking population in completing the census notification forms. Large posters giving information to this effect were displayed in the windows of the *Matice* building. On 30 December 1890 a police officer came to Dr Šamánek and informed him that nobody would be permitted to complete the notification forms at the *Matice* building, and that the posters should be removed. Šamánek asked that this order be delivered in writing. The police officer went away, but returned after a quarter of an hour and stood outside the building, preventing anybody from entering. Despite a telegram of complaint sent to the Bohemian Governor's Office, the police continued to guard the *Matice* building and the neighbouring house (Šamánek's residence) on 30 and 31 December. They searched anybody who entered the building, including Šamánek's patients. On 1 January 1891 the Ministry of the Interior received a telegram sent by Šamánek in his capacity as the chairman of the Czech savings bank, which also had its offices in the *Matice* building. He complained that the police officers were standing outside the building, illegally entering private rooms, and preventing people from gaining access to the building. However, none of these telegrams and letters of complaint achieved any positive results.<sup>20</sup>

The Czech activists sent several such complaints, all concerning the restrictions on free movement and breaches of personal freedom in the vicinity of the *Matice* building (which housed not only the school, but also several Czech associations and organizations) and the neighbouring buildings. Besides Šamánek, the committee of the vocational college also complained (on 2 January). On 3 January there was a protest by the local leaders of the Sokol organization, whose members were prevented from entering the building (where they would go to exercise together) and who were required to give their names. The argument given in the Sokol representatives' complaint was based on the beneficial nature of physical exercise, with such an emphasis on the benefits to the Habsburg state that it sounds somewhat comical, coming as it does from a Czech nationalist organization: "It has been statistically proved that young people are useless when called up to do military service, as they have been

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from 25 December to the end of January to advise you, or if you have a complaint, will handle the complaint free of charge."]

<sup>20</sup> NA, PM, carton 2690, no. 1215/1891, Chronicle of the census in Reichenberg and in some surrounding areas, 25. 1. 1891, signed MUDr. Václav Šamánek, doctor and chairman of the Czech Savings Bank, Ferdinand Wölfel, headteacher at the private school, F. A. Paleček, teacher at the *Matice* school, František Šulc, trader.



crippled in the factories.”<sup>21</sup> On 5 January the management committee of the savings bank also lodged a protest, claiming that on the previous day a journalist for the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, one Mr. Günzel, had entered the *Matic* building with a large dog on a leash. This was followed by protests from the teacher František Paleček and a locksmith named Johann Viewegh, whose workshop was located in the neighbouring building.<sup>22</sup>

The City Hall viewed the events entirely differently. According to a report dated 30 December 1890, two days previously it had received information that pupils at Czech schools had been encouraged by their teachers to ensure that their parents completed the notification forms (or had them completed) at the school. This, argued the report, meant that the Czech teachers Ferdinand Wölfel and František Paleček were engaged in agitation regarding the census, and that the building of the Czech private school was being used for this purpose. The Mayor, as the chairman of the District Education Board, forbade the teachers from engaging in further activities of this type, citing a regulation which banned teachers from all forms of political agitation. He also forbade them from using the school for the purpose. Half an hour later, the Mayor learned that a poster had been displayed in the school’s windows calling upon Czechs to have their notification forms completed at the school. Because nobody had applied for permission to display these posters, an order was issued for them to be taken down. This could not be done from outside the building, as the posters were attached to the inside of the windows. When a police officer entered the building in a search for the person in charge of the building, he discovered that a committee of seven members was inside the school building, completing the notification forms (though, as the City Hall emphasized, such a committee had been officially banned on 27 December). The posters could not be taken down, as the room was locked and the key had somehow become “lost”. The Mayor subsequently forbade the use of school premises for this purpose, and in order to enforce this ban he had a police guard stationed outside the building; the police officer was to refuse entry to (“abweisen”) anybody wishing to obtain information about the census there, directing them instead to the official information point. The police had therefore not in fact prevented access to the building.<sup>23</sup> On 19 January Mayor Schücker added that he had been receiving reports that members of the German population had been outraged by these Czech posters, and therefore he had taken steps “in view of the understandable outrage of the German population, to prevent any outbreak of violence directed against the *Matic* building”.<sup>24</sup> Schücker also mentioned that he was in possession of just one copy of the banned Czech texts, though several hundred of them had been printed. He was aware that it was unacceptable to expel the Czech committee from private

21 In the original German: “Wie statistisch nachgewiesen ist, sind die jungen Leute bei den Assentierungen nicht zu gebrauchen, weil dieselben in den Fabriken verkrüppeln werden”.

22 SOkA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 5, volume 5/198.

23 SOkA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 5, volume 5/198.

24 In the original German: “...dass irgendeinen gegen das Matic Gebäude gerichteten tätlichen Ausbrüche der begreiflichen Entrüstung der deutschen Bevölkerung vorgebeugt werde”.



premises or prevent anybody from entering the premises, but he had to bear in mind the orders issued by the *Statthaltere* and the Provincial Education Board instructing that school premises must not be used for nationalist and political agitation. For that reason he had issued an order that the police guard outside the *Matic*e building should ask anybody entering what the purpose of their visit was, and that visitors who answered that they were there for census-related purposes should be informed that school premises were not to be used for purposes of agitation, and that information on the census would be provided at the municipal residence registration office (*Stadtmeldeamt*). Those who still wanted to enter the building despite having received this information were not to be prevented from doing so, and indeed had not been prevented from doing so. The Czechs' claim that people had been barred from entering the building was, according to the Mayor, "a blatant lie". Schücker insisted that he had in no way acted in violation of the law. The police guard was removed from the area outside the *Matic*e building on 31 December, when the Czech census committee moved its operations to the savings bank offices in the same building. Schücker did not deny that a police inspector subsequently searched the savings bank offices, as he always had the right to do (in order to determine what was going on inside the building), but he insisted that the search had been conducted entirely within the law.<sup>25</sup>

On 2 January 1891, Mayor Schücker requested that a criminal investigation be launched against Šamánek, the teacher Paleček, and the inn-keeper at the *Beseda*; as grounds for the investigation, he stated that these persons were surely concealing further copies of the banned leaflet, because although 600 copies had apparently been printed, the three above-mentioned individuals had not been found to be in possession of any copies.<sup>26</sup> Schücker also responded to the Czech complaints outlined above. On 19 January 1891, referring to Paleček's complaint, he stated: "... this complaint is nothing but lies and distortions from beginning to end".<sup>27</sup> On the same day he also rejected Viewegh's complaint; he denied that the complainant had been stopped from entering his workshop (which was adjacent to the *Matic*e building), stating that the complaint was "a malicious fabrication".<sup>28</sup>

Like the Czech complainants, Mayor Schücker and the City Hall supported their version with written eye-witness accounts given by several police officers (who confirmed the legality of the operation and emphasized that the Czech posters in the school windows were so provocative that a police guard had to be posted in order to avert potential violence), and also by the *Deutsche Volkszeitung* journalist Günzel and one Florian Baudisch. Günzel stated that the incident outside the *Matic*e building had been provoked by three Czechs, who had shouted abuse at him while he was on one of his regular walks, whose route led past the building. He then called for two police officers who ascertained the identity of those who had shouted. These individuals entered the *Matic*e building, and so they were followed by the police officers and by Günzel himself. His version of events is just as comical as the Sokol leaders' claim that

25 NA, PM, carton 2690, no. 1215/1891.

26 SOkA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 5, volume 5/198.

27 In the original German: "...diese Beschwerde von Anfang bis zu Ende Lüge und Entstellung ist".

28 NA, PM, carton 2690.



their physical exercises were beneficial to the Habsburg state; nevertheless, it was confirmed by Baudisch, described as “a chance witness”, who stated that the journalist had been the target of vulgar language. By contrast, the Czech Josef Dlouhý, who was accused by Günzel of having started the entire incident, denied that he had insulted the journalist, instead claiming that he had heard Günzel say “Czech rogues, Czech trash”.<sup>29</sup>

The flames were further fanned by the German nationalist newspaper, the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*. In mid-December 1890 the newspaper reported on an article that had been written in Reichenberg, allegedly by Šamánek, and published in *Česká stráž*. The article argued that before the census it would be necessary to compile complete lists of Czechs living locally, including addresses. This list would then be used to distribute promotional materials to the Czech population, or to send representatives to talk to them in person.<sup>30</sup> In early January the *Volkszeitung* printed an attack on Šamánek, alleging that he was completing the notification forms on behalf of other people, which he was not legally entitled to do [sic! — Cisleithanian legislation, unlike the law introduced by the independent post-WWI Czechoslovakia, did not forbid anybody from completing the notification forms — author’s note]. The *Deutsche Volkszeitung* stated that people who were either living off German money, or whose earnings were almost entirely dependent on Germans, were engaging in blatant and illegal agitation, which was causing indescribable outrage among the German population. The article claimed that many Germans were lodging complaints with the City Hall and demanding that this illegal agitation be stopped.<sup>31</sup>

The events outside the *Matic* building were described by the *Deutsche Volkszeitung* as an unprecedented provocation by the Czechs. The newspaper claimed that Germans had been assaulted on the street outside the building, and that notification forms had been torn from their hands. (No explanation for this alleged act was given, nor did the newspaper explain why Germans were walking past the building holding notification forms, which were usually completed at home and then had to be given to the homeowner.) The newspaper stated that the police had intervened at the request of passers-by to ensure a free right of way past the school, and in doing so it had prevented several Czechs from entering the building.<sup>32</sup> The *Volkszeitung* called on its German readers “to continue to remain calm and rise above the violence and provocation of the Czechs, because the government, and above all the *k. k. Statthaltereien*, has reached the conclusion that the Czech population in Reichenberg are the victims of injustice. There is no other course of action than to wait until the authorities are better informed”.<sup>33</sup> The *Deutsche Volkszeitung* repeatedly published and subsequently denied reports from the Old Czechs’ German-language daily newspaper *Politik*, such as a report claiming that the private census had recorded 8 000 people in Reichenberg

29 SOkA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 5, volume 5/198. In the original German: “tschechische Luder, tschechische Bagage”.

30 *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 15. 12. 1890, Zur tschechischen Agitation anlässlich der Volkszählung.

31 *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 1. 1. 1891, pp. 3–4, Tschechische Agitationen.

32 *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 2. 1. 1891, p. 1, Unerhörte tschechische Frechheit in Reichenberg.

33 *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 11. 1. 1891, p. 3, An die Deutschen von Reichenberg.



stating that Czech was their language of daily use, and that — besides coercive practices during the data collection — the *Magistrat* in Reichenberg must have falsified and erased data; the Czech census committee had completed around 1 600 forms, and there must have been at least 500 households which completed the forms themselves, giving Czech as their language of daily use — giving a combined total of well over the official figure based on census data (1 613 inhabitants using Czech as their language of daily use).<sup>34</sup> Between 5 and 19 January 1891, the State Prosecutor's Office confiscated four articles on the census due to be published by the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, due to the radical nature of their content.<sup>35</sup>

The concerted German nationalist pressure targeting migrants from Czech-speaking areas (many of whom may of course not have felt a strong sense of Czech national identity) frequently had the desired effect; this can be deduced from an interesting statement sent to the *Deutsche Volkszeitung* by a master baker named Wenzel (Václav) Hejduk: "I declare that I stated my language of daily use in the census form as Czech, but that I did so in error, having received incorrect information; I have already corrected this error, as the actual language of daily use — both of myself and of my family — is German, given that our only contact is with Germans. I would ask the highly respected and peaceful German population of the city of Reichenberg, and above all our esteemed readers, to refrain from taking retribution against us for this highly regrettable misunderstanding."<sup>36</sup> Hejduk also donated 25 gulden to the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*.<sup>37</sup>

Šamánek's above-mentioned complaint to Count Taaffe citing the inaction of Governor Thun was in fact somewhat unjust. Thun was acting within the full extent of his powers. He responded to the telegram complaint sent by Ferdinand Wölfel regarding the police guard outside the *Matice* building, which had been placed there by the City Hall because Czech citizens were entering the building in order to ask for information on how to complete the census forms. In a telegram of 30 December, Thun instructed the City Hall to send him a report on the incident. He also instructed the District Governor (*Bezirkshauptmann*) to discreetly and rapidly ascertain information on other relevant circumstances, sending a written notification to the *Statthaltere*.<sup>38</sup> On 2 January 1891 Thun sent a circular to all District Governors' Offices in Bohemia and to the City Halls in Prague and Reichenberg, pointing out that — despite his decree

<sup>34</sup> *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 12. 1. 1891, p. 1, Tschechisches aus Reichenberg.

<sup>35</sup> *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 20. 1. 1891, p. 3, Beschlagnahme.

<sup>36</sup> In the original German: "Ich erkläre, daß ich in dem Volkszählungsbogen von mir als tschechisch eingetragene Umgangssprache auf einem Irrthum infolge nicht richtiger Belehrung beruht, und daß ich diesen Irrthum bereits richtiggestellt habe, weil mein und meiner Familie Umgangssprache, da wir nur mit Deutschen verkehren, richtig die Deutsche ist. Ich bitte die hochgeehrte friedliebende deutsche Bewohnerschaft der Stadt Reichenberg und insbesondere unsere verehrten Kunden mich und meine Familie dieses höchst bedauerliche Mißverständniß nicht entgelten zu lassen. Reichenberg am 3. Januar 1891."

<sup>37</sup> *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 10. 1. 1891, pp. 3–4: Volkszählung.

<sup>38</sup> NA, PM, carton 1811, callno. 13/45/1; SOKA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 5, volume 5/198.





issued on 23 November of the previous year, he was still receiving reports of cases in which people had been subjected to coercion when giving data on *Umgangssprache*. He ordered the District Governors to instruct the census officers to refrain from influencing citizens' responses in any way, and to record in the census forms only the information stated by the respondents.

On 9 January 1891, having received an order from the Ministry of the Interior, Thun forwarded Šamánek's telegram complaint to Reichenberg and instructed the City Hall to draw up a report on the matter immediately. He also informed the City Hall that he had received information on the activities of one Fischer, a suspended City Councillor, who — together with a journalist from the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, had caused a crowd of people to gather in Rollgasse [outside the *Matice* building — author's note]. Thun also instructed that a report be compiled on the alleged eviction of Czech labourers from their apartments as a form of retribution for their statement of Czech as their *Umgangssprache*. He noted that he had reached the conclusion that Schücker had exceeded his powers as the chairman of the District Education Board and as the Mayor, by using police officers to deny citizens access to the Czech school building. "I cannot help expressing my astonishment at your esteemed self, and I must instruct you with the greatest urgency, in your future actions, to bear in mind the legal provisions concerning the use of state police authority, and to order those state organs under your control to maintain strict compliance with the relevant regulations, without exception".<sup>39</sup>

In February 1891 Thun evidently lost patience with the conduct of the Reichenberg City Hall. Mayor Schücker further fanned the flames of the conflict on 12 February in his response to a telegram complaint by two Czech traders claiming that the Czech population had been the victims of nationalist German agitation. Schücker confirmed that the city's *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, in its columns "Fragekasten" and "Mitteilungen der Schriftleitung", had repeatedly printed the names of those citizens who had given Czech as their *Umgangssprache*. He claimed that this had been done in response to questions sent by readers, and that the City Hall fully rejected the Czechs' accusations that it had provided the relevant information to journalists. The City Hall stated that these complaints were merely "malicious suspicions". It expressed its regret that it repeatedly had to carry out lengthy investigations and compile reports in response to such baseless allegations.

Franz Thun was evidently angered by this comment. In a handwritten letter of 28 February 1891, he stated that such comments by a subordinate authority with regard to its superior authority were entirely inappropriate, and were to be condemned with the utmost severity. Thun stated that the authorities existed for the benefit of the population, who at all times and in all circumstances had the right to lodge complaints. The justification or otherwise of the complaint was to be determined by the necessary in-

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. In the original German: "Ich kann nicht unterlassen, deshalb Euer Wohlgeboren mein Befremden hierüber auszusprechen, zugleich aber auch an Sie die dringende Aufforderung zu richten, sich in Hinkunft die gesetzlichen Bestimmungen über die Handhabung der staatlichen Polizeigewalt genauestens vor Augen zu halten und den unterstehenden Organen die strengste Einhaltung der diesbezüglichen Vorschriften ausnahmslos zur Pflicht zu machen".



vestigation, which the relevant authority was duty-bound to carry out. The authority could not avoid undertaking this duty, however lengthy such investigations may be.<sup>40</sup>

On 19 February 1891 Thun sent a letter to Mayor Schücker outlining his stance on the events which had taken place in the city in late December and early January. Thun stated that the Czech community had been outraged by two measures taken by the City Hall during the census: above all by the posting of a police guard outside the *Matice* building, but also by the police search of this building in an attempt to prevent illegal agitation during the census. Responsibility for both of these measures rested with the Mayor, who had ordered them in his capacity as the chairman of the District Education Board and the leading official of the political authority for the city of Reichenberg, in order to enforce the order that the private school premises in the *Matice* building should not be used for purposes of agitation during the census. Regarding this point, Thun stated that the provision of information and advice on how to complete the census forms — and the provision of information on where such advice was available — could not be considered to be agitation, let alone illegal agitation, and therefore nobody could be legally forbidden from providing such information and advice. He added that it was highly dubious whether the Imperial Education Act could be interpreted as giving the chairman of the District Education Board the authority to prevent people from using a building which contained rooms used for teaching, in cases when teaching was not under threat, and without any preceding court decision entitling the chairman to act in such a way. Thun furthermore stated that it was entirely inappropriate for the chairman of a District Education Board or the leading official of a political authority to post a police guard to monitor activities at the building in an attempt to enforce such a ban, to ask people entering the building about the purpose of their visit, and to carry out a police search within the building. In addition, there was also the fact that the building was not used solely as a school, but also contained the premises of a vocational college, a savings bank and a tourist association. The steps taken by the Mayor, which had caused inconvenience and distress to part of the city's population, could not be justified on the grounds of school inspection or the maintenance of public order. In conclusion, Thun again emphasized that the Mayor's objection to his instructions, expressed on behalf of the City Hall, was an entirely inappropriate way for a subordinate authority to express an opinion on its superior authority.<sup>41</sup>

In October and November 1891 the Bohemian *Statthaltereien* issued a total of five decrees instructing the City Hall in Reichenberg to undertake investigations of events that had allegedly occurred during the census there. Franz Thun was also ordered by the Prime Minister Taaffe (evidently in response to questions on the repression of the Czech minority in Reichenberg raised in the *Reichsrat* by the deputies Tilšer, Krumbholz and Špindler) to send a *Statthaltereien* official to the city in order to conduct the necessary investigative work. In late November 1891 Thun instructed Schücker to provide the necessary office space for this official to carry out his duties.<sup>42</sup>

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40 NA, PM, carton 2690.

41 Ibid.

42 SOkA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 25, volume 25/6.



## A CONTINUATION OF THE CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH

Without wanting to equate “language of daily use” with ethnicity, it is clearly evident that the coercive practices of the Reichenberg City Hall had an effect on the results of the census with regard to this category. In 1880, when the census took place in a calm atmosphere, a total of 2 488 citizens of Reichenberg (9.1% of the population) were recorded as having Czech as their language of daily use. Ten years later, this figure had fallen to 1 613 (just 5.4% of the population). The City Hall’s efforts to ensure the highest possible proportion of citizens stating German as their *Umgangssprache* continued in the last two pre-war censuses (in 1900 a total of 2 505 people gave Czech as their language of daily use, and in 1910 the figure was 2 217).<sup>43</sup>

The City Hall was engaged in a constant conflict with Czech nationalist activists who demanded that their language-related rights be respected. The Supreme Administrative Court in Vienna (the *Verwaltungsgerichtshof*, which ruled on constitutional matters) issued a ruling in April 1885 confirming that the Czech language was *landesüblich* (i.e. it was in common use within the province) in Reichenberg. This ruling was issued in response to a complaint lodged by the City of Reichenberg against a decision of the Bohemian *Landesausschuss* (the executive body of the Diet) dated 19 August 1884, which ordered the Reichenberg City Hall to accept medical reports (notifying the authorities of patients and their treatment) written by Václav Šamánek in Czech. In the court’s view, the use of Czech in this case — despite the fact that German was the official language of the Reichenberg municipal government — was fully in accordance with Article 19 of the Basic State Law on the General Rights of Citizens (*Staatsgrundgesetz über die allgemeinen Rechte der Staatsbürger*) no. 142 of 21 December 1867.<sup>44</sup>

Even after its clearly scandalous conduct during the census in late 1890 and early 1891, the Reichenberg City Hall was in no mood to tone down its blatantly confrontational approach to the Czech-speaking minority — an approach that in some cases bordered on or even crossed the line into illegality. Franz Thun’s aversion to the German nationalists in the Reichenberg City Hall certainly grew even stronger after the Emperor Franz Joseph’s visit to the city in the autumn of 1891, when there were violent clashes between members of the German *Turnverein* gymnastics association and

<sup>43</sup> The percentage of the population with Czech as their language of daily use was always given for the persons present at the time of the census and holding Austrian citizenship; this language data was not collected in the case of foreign citizens. According to the official census results published in Special-Orts-Repertorien der im österreichischen Reichsrat hevertretenen Königreiche und Länder, IX. Böhmen, Wien 1885; Special-Orts-Repertorien der im österreichischen Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, IX. Böhmen, Wien 1893; Gemeindelexikon von Böhmen. Bearbeitet auf Grund der Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1900, Wien 1904, I. Teil; Spezialortsrepertorium der österreichischen Länder IX, Spezialortsrepertorium von Böhmen: bearbeitet auf Grund der Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1910, Wien 1915.

<sup>44</sup> Erkenntnisse des k. k. Verwaltungsgerichtshofes. Zusammenestellt auf dessen Veranlassung von Dr. Adam Freiherrn von Budwiński, IX. Jahrgang 1885, Wien 1885, pp. 235–237.



members of Czech associations. During the following year, celebrations held in the city to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Sedan were the scene of speeches which the state authorities deemed to be anti-Austrian, and the Bohemian *Statthaltereien* decided to dissolve the City Assembly. This brought an end to Karl Schücker's career as Mayor. However, his successor Franz Bayer continued on the same nationalist course. He protected "German" public space against the Czech activists — though his tactics were more skilful than Schücker's, in order to avoid accusations of illegal conduct.<sup>45</sup>

Besides the conflicts which accompanied the following censuses<sup>46</sup> (though less acute than those experienced in 1890/91), linguistic conflicts also continued. In 1896 Václav Šamánek, sitting in the *Reichsrat*, directed a question to the Minister of the Interior Badeni in connection with the fact that the Reichenberg City Hall, as the authority of the first instance [i.e. as a state authority — author's note], had repeatedly sent him letters in German — both as a private citizen and in his capacity as the chairman of Czech associations. Šamánek cited the Stremayr language ordinances, which stipulated that if a letter or other communication directed to the state authorities was in Czech, the authorities had to reply to it in Czech.<sup>47</sup> In November 1896 the Bohemian *Statthaltereien* responded to Šamánek's complaint (to which he had appended the document in question, dated 9 May 1896) by ordering the Reichenberg City Hall to deliver the document to Šamánek again, this time in Czech. The *Statthaltereien* pointed out that the Ministry of the Interior had already issued a decree (on 23 December 1895) requiring the City Hall — as the political authority of the first instance — to send documents to Šamánek in Czech.<sup>48</sup>

The most serious anti-Czech disturbances in Reichenberg took place in 1897, when a crowd of around two thousand people marched through the town to celebrate the resignation of Prime Minister Badeni (who was despised by the German nationalists

45 See Miloslava Melanová, *Hlavní město severních Čech? Liberec 1848–1918*. In: Kristina Kaiserová — Miroslav Kunštát (eds.), *Hledání centra. Vědecké a vzdělávací instituce Němců v Čechách v 19. a první polovině 20. století*, Ústí nad Labem 2011, pp. 285–308.

46 E.g. in July 1901 the Deputy Václav Březnovský, speaking in the Bohemian Diet, asked a question of the Provincial Governor Count Coudenhove concerning irregularities during the census in Reichenberg. He gave specific examples of coercion, including the direct and unacceptable involvement of the Reichenberg City Hall; Council or Ringlhaan had allegedly summoned Czech traders to the City Hall offices by sending them official documents instructing them to present themselves in person at the City Hall "on a business-related issue" or "to provide information"; there he had allegedly put pressure on them to change their declaration of *Umgangssprache* from Czech to German. The City's police officers had allegedly been involved in encouraging people to declare their language of daily use as German — including when off duty and not wearing uniform. They had visited several citizens who had stated Czech as their *Umgangssprache* and persuaded them to change their declaration. <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1895skc/5/stenprot/009schuz/s009004.htm>

47 Haus der Abgeordneten, 509. Sitzung der XI. Session am 13. 6. 1896 See <http://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=spa&datum=0011&page=26928&size=45>

48 SOkA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 25, volume 25/6, 24. 11. 1896, místodržitelství libereckému starostovi Bayerovi.



due to his language ordinances, which strengthened the position of the Czech language); the mob smashed the windows of the *Česká beseda* cultural association, the Czech school, Václav Šamánek's house, and several Czech-owned companies.<sup>49</sup>

In a question raised at a session of the Bohemian *Landtag* in June 1902, Václav Šamánek complained that Czechs had been victimized in Reichenberg, both in terms of their nationality and also in material terms. His examples included cases of favoritism towards German applicants — both at the labour exchange and in the issuing of trade licences and municipal contracts, as well as the presence of two signs in public places bearing the words “Germans! Buy goods from Germans!”. The Reichenberg City Hall's response to the latter of Šamánek's above-listed complaints — in a report addressed to the Provincial Governor — was very detailed and took a high-handed tone: it stated that the two signs had been produced by the German nationalist association in Reichenberg and had been permitted by the City Hall “because there is nothing illegal about such an exhortation; the text ‘Germans! Buy goods from Germans!’ merely calls upon members of the German community to purchase goods from fellow members of the community. This must be considered an entirely acceptable exhortation, which cannot possibly hurt anybody's feelings or be detrimental to their rights or national desires. The exhortation does not state that people should purchase goods solely from Germans; its wording does not explicitly exclude Czechs from the ranks of potential vendors”.<sup>50</sup> In conclusion, the City Hall emphasized that by issuing permission for such signs to be erected in the public space of a city with a population of 1 557 Czechs, it did not consider itself to have exceeded its autonomous powers, breached the law, or provoked members of another nation.<sup>51</sup>

In 1910 the Reichenberg City Hall once again came into conflict with the *Verwaltungsgerichtshof* as a result of its attempts to ensure that German was the sole official language used in the city. The case in question dated back to 1908, when the City Hall refused to accept a Czech-language application — though this time the matter was part of the City Hall's local government powers (i.e. not its state administration powers, for which the *Magistrat* was the authority of first instance). The municipality argued that the only official language of the City Council or the City Hall was German, and that Article 19 of the *Staatsgrundgesetz* did not apply to autonomous authorities. The *Verwaltungsgerichtshof* rejected this argument on the grounds that an urban mu-

49 M. Melanová, *Česká menšina v německém centru*, p. 167.

50 In the original German: “weil in der Aufforderung keine ungesetzliche Handlung gelegen ist, denn in der Aufforderung ‘Deutsche kauft bei Deutschen’ liegt lediglich die Anweisung an die deutschen Bewohner ihre Einkäufe bei ihren Volksgenossen zu besorgen. Das muß als eine vollständig zulässige Aufforderung betrachtet werden, durch die niemand in seinen Gefühlen, in seinen Rechten, in seinen nationalen Ansprüchen verletzt werden kann. Die Aufforderung enthält nicht einmal die Bemerkung nur bei Deutschen zu kaufen, sondern sie begnügt sich mit einem Wortlaute, der die Tschechen nicht ausdrücklich aus dem Kreise der zu berücksichtigenden Verkäufer ausschließt”.

51 SOkA Liberec, AML, pres. spisy, carton 25, volume 25/6. Question by the Deputy V. Šamánek and colleagues at the Bohemian Diet, 26. 6. 1902, and the response by the Reichenberg City Hall, 10. 7. 1902.



municipality did indeed have the right to choose as its official language one of the two languages which were *landesüblich* (in common use) within the province of Bohemia, but it could not prevent persons who were not in the service of the municipality from submitting documents to the municipality in another of the province's languages and requesting that the municipality take action on the basis of the submitted documents — even if the municipality's response was in German, its official language. The court thus ruled that the municipality's right to choose one of the province's languages as its official language was subordinate to the right of a citizen to use any of the province's *landesüblich* languages when submitting documents.<sup>52</sup>

What, then, were the implications of all this? The Cisleithanian state authorities consistently — and, in my opinion, genuinely — attempted to solve, or at least to alleviate, national disputes. For the most part these were not disputes between large numbers of people; this only occurred in exceptional cases, when tensions escalated. More often the disputes were between nationalist agitators and political representatives. The flames of nationalist passions were fanned especially by newspaper journalists; although their articles were ostensibly written merely to reflect the opinions and attitudes that were prevalent in society (or in the newspaper's particular national “camp”), in reality these articles formed part of an attempt to provoke and shape these opinions and attitudes. For that reason we should be very cautious when studying newspaper articles; of course, this does not only apply to articles written around the turn of the 20th century.

The conflicts in Reichenberg demonstrated the power of civil society and civic politics. The Cisleithanian state can be said to have failed when granting the City Halls of statutory cities not only powers in local government matters, but also executive powers in state administration; this meant that the state found it very difficult to enforce compliance with basic civil legislation. However, on the other hand the state managed to create an environment in which the civil principle (and, with it, also the national principle) was able to develop and flourish, and ultimately to exert pressure on the state (which then had to introduce new, more precise rules to improve the enforcement of civil law — e.g. through court rulings).

The intensification of the conflicts in Reichenberg is not a sign of the weakness of civil society, but rather of its growing strength. In the days when the Czech-speaking community in Reichenberg occupied an entirely inferior status, there was no friction between it and the majority German community. The friction came about when the Czech-speaking middle classes gained in strength and influence, and began to engage in nationalist agitation — which, admittedly, was sometimes confrontational in nature. The hostile response from the city authorities was essentially a symptom of a struggle for the symbolic occupation of public space.<sup>53</sup>

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52 Budw. 7299/A ex 1910 ze 17.3. 1910. See Budwińskis Sammlung der Erkenntnisse des k. k. Verwaltungsgerichtshofes, XXXIV. Jahrgang 1910, Administrativrechtlicher Teil, Wien 1911, pp. 381–384.

53 For more on this topic see e.g. Peter Haslinger, *Nation und Territorium im tschechischen politischen Diskurs 1880–1938*, München 2010 (Veröffentlichung des Collegium Carolinum, Bd. 117).





It was not an easy task for the Cisleithanian state authorities to maintain public order and peaceful coexistence — and they were not helped by either the German or the Czech nationalists. Nevertheless, the events in Reichenberg were an extreme manifestation of national conflicts rather than the rule. Having sifted through large volumes of correspondence between the Bohemian *Statthaltereien* and the District Governors' Offices, nowhere else did I find such an arrogant, disrespectful attitude on the part of the first-instance political authority towards the highest-ranking state official in Bohemia as in some of the reports emanating from the Reichenberg City Hall and the city's Mayor. The radicalization of the City Hall's approach towards the Czech-speaking minority evidently reflected the failure of attempts by Bohemian German politicians to secure the administrative division of the province into German-speaking and Czech-speaking areas. By February 1891 the Provincial Governor Franz Thun had evidently had enough, and he mounted an unusually open attack on the Reichenberg City Hall, which he perceived as being disloyal to the Austrian state.

The confrontational style adopted by the Reichenberg City Hall (which was similar to other "German" authorities in ethnically mixed towns and cities in the Bohemian lands) did not abate even in the period leading up to the First World War; this to some degree explains (though it does not excuse) the highly confrontational approach taken by the independent Czechoslovak state towards its German citizens in the immediate post-war years. Two months after Franz Thun was appointed the Bohemian Provincial Governor for the second time in January 1911, he once again had to deal with yet another Reichenberg affair. On 22 February 1910 the City Assembly passed a resolution stating that the city's German name Reichenberg was the sole admissible name and must not be translated; the resolution coincided with the launch of the preparations for the upcoming census. The city's authorities subsequently refused to accept correspondence bearing the Czech name Liberec. Following protests by Czech nationalist activists, the Bohemian *Statthaltereien* informed the City Council on 25 March 1911 that according to an order of the Ministry of the Interior, Justice and Finance (9 October 1854) both Reichenberg and Liberec were considered authentic names. In view of this, the *Statthaltereien* considered the City Council's resolution to be invalid. On 27 April 1911 Franz Thun wrote to the Minister of the Interior stating that in his decree of 25 March 1911 he had deliberately not chosen the form of an order (*Entscheidung*), but instead the form of a declaration, even though in his opinion the actions of the Reichenberg City Hall were illegal. Why? "There can be no doubt that such an order would have caused outrage on the German side, even though such outrage would have been groundless, and that would have provoked fierce attacks on the government, which must be avoided in view of the upcoming elections to the *Reichsrat* and also in the interests of the conclusion of a Bohemian Compromise. For that reason I chose to word my decree as a declaration, and I addressed it to the Mayor himself. I expected that the Mayor would acknowledge the grounds for the declaration and would put a stop to the illegal acts committed by the City Hall."<sup>54</sup>

In this regard, the expectations of the staunchly pro-Austrian loyalist Franz Thun remained unfulfilled.

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<sup>54</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, collection Innenministerium-Allgemein, call no. 33/1 in spezie, carton 2369, no. 14 812/1911.