

Veterans of the Great War in Interbellum Czechoslovakia

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In 1918, Czechoslovakia emerged in the final moments of the Great War as one of the successors to the Habsburgs. The conflict left the new republic with a complex legacy; its future citizens had fought during the war both on the side of the Central Powers and that of the Triple Entente. This thesis explores the interwar world of Czechoslovak veterans to understand how Czechoslovakia and its society dealt with the complicated memory and legacy of the Great War.

The thesis explores the tension between the official state narrative, which celebrated a relatively small number of soldiers who had fought in the Allied units and became known in the republic as the legionaries, and the Austro-Hungarian past of the vast majority of the Czechoslovak veterans. Through several different topics, it analyses how the ex-servicemen perceived and portrayed their wartime service, how the state approached and treated them, and how these men participated in Czechoslovak society. In particular, the thesis focuses on disabled veterans, who, unlike their able-bodied counterparts, left behind a relatively large number of historical sources.

The thesis shows the complicated and contested position of the Great War and its veterans in Czechoslovak society. After the end of the conflict, these men produced various narratives with which they explained their past military service. The Czechoslovak state and society did not treat all veterans equally; various factors influenced how they were perceived. During the interwar period, disabled ex-servicemen participated in numerous efforts and projects, both to support the Czechoslovak state and promote peace. Most of their organisations became politicised, but they largely avoided radicalisation. Amongst themselves, different groups of veterans gradually developed a degree of cooperation. Much of this quickly changed in 1938, however, as the new world war was about to begin.

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The chapter 'The Great War and Czechoslovak Society' (Ch II) explores both how Czechoslovak veterans were perceived by the new republic and how they retrospectively portrayed the Great War and their service. The chapter begins by elucidating the privileged place of the legionaries in the Czechoslovak state narrative. It then traces the changing collective memory of the war that was produced by veterans living in interbellum Czechoslovak society, in which the Austro-Hungarian legacy bore very few positive connotations. The chapter identifies the dominant strand in the discourse of Czech and Slovak veterans, which accentuated their resistance within the Austro-Hungarian armed forces, thereby supporting their patriotic credentials. As the chapter shows, even mutinies within the Austro-Hungarian forces were largely viewed positively and mutineers received considerable amounts of attention and praise.

However, the chapter also touches upon the change that came about with the emergence of an alternative narrative in the 1930s, in which some ex-servicemen as well as Czechoslovak officials stressed Czech military pedigree and the ability to fight. Furthermore, the chapter briefly discusses the rhetoric of German veterans, many of whom portrayed their service as protection of their German homeland. However, others remembered the Great War through their own version of the Dolchstoßlegende, according to which the empire was defeated despite their valiant service due to its various nations seeking independence. All in all, there was no single way of portraying the Great War amongst Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen, and men's service could be inscribed with a vast variety of meanings.

'The Czechoslovak (Re-)Public and Disabled Veterans' (Ch III) examines a wide range of disabled veterans' roles. The case study of the Těšín plebiscite shows that ex-servicemen were clandestinely used by the Czechoslovak state to proselytise on its account amongst

fellow war victims. Disabled Czech veterans also helped the Czechoslovak state in its military campaign against Hungary. Indeed, the momentous events of 1918–1919 allowed many Czech veterans to express their loyalty to the country and stake their own claim to heroic patriotism as many of them reinvented themselves as soldiers of the republic.

The chapter also explores how disabled Czech veterans assumed the role of metaphorical carers when they established their own orphanage in Načeradec. The orphanage served two important purposes for disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans. Firstly, it allowed them to help fellow victims of the war. Secondly, these veterans, whose wartime service had been largely erased from the national narrative, also felt that through Načeradec they were helping the Czechoslovak republic. They believed that by educating and raising its children, they were shaping the future of their Czechoslovak state.

In addition, the chapter explores the pacifism of disabled veterans and their organisations. For a number of years, both Czech and German disabled veterans participated in the peace movement. As war victims, they felt particularly obliged to speak against war and prevent any future conflicts. Although this ultimately proved to be a tall order, an analysis of their efforts to protect peace provides us with yet another dimension of Czechoslovak veterans' lives.

‘State Care in Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovak Veterans’ (Ch IV) shows that the system of state care for disabled veterans in interwar Czechoslovakia was far from unified and straightforward. The way in which the men who qualified as disabled and their welfare were approached depended on several different variables; service in the Legions was not the only factor that influenced the positions of veterans – their rank, severity of disability, and its origin could also play a role. Whilst professional Austro-Hungarian officers and non-commissioned officers (as well as some legionaries) received fairly generous pensions that

allowed them to lead comfortable lives, Austro-Hungarian soldiers and most legionaries were expected to work to earn their living. However, this latter group of men possessed a different and preferential access to employment and other forms of state support. The venerated legionaries could apply for many of the positions reserved for them as reliable members of the republic; by contrast, few such privileges were accorded to Austro-Hungarian soldiers, who instead had to make their living in a state which never legislated for their compulsory employment. The state did offer those veterans the opportunity for employment through its system of licences; however, these could not be relied upon by all and were far from guaranteed, and veterans never enjoyed any legal entitlement to them.

‘Ethnicity and Ex-servicemen’ (Ch V) shows that organisations of war victims and their members approached war victims from other ethnic groups with varying attitudes. However, it can be observed that relations between war victims improved with time. Indeed, in the immediate postwar years, the Bohemian branch of the largest of these associations, Družina československých válečných poškozenců, often attacked its German counterpart, Bund der Kriegsverletzte, Witwen und Waisen, and Germans in general. This section of Družina also explicitly rejected any notion of German war victims entering the organisation. By contrast, Bund allowed at least some Czechs to become its members, despite repeated complaints about Czech discrimination. Furthermore, for many years Bund promoted the cooperation of Czechoslovak war victims. Meanwhile, other organisations, be it the Slovak section of Družina československých válečných poškozenců, Družina oslepených vojinů československé republiky, or Nadiya - Tovaristvo voennykh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpatskoi Rusi, openly encouraged war victims from various ethnic groups to join them and work together towards their shared goals.

Cooperation of war victims was significantly strengthened in the late 1920s with the establishment of Říšský svaz organisací válečných poškozenců, which brought together

several of their organisations. The union allowed disabled legionaries and Austro-Hungarian veterans, Czechs, Slovaks, and Germans to collaborate in the pursuit of their social demands. During this period, attitudes within Družina československých válečných poškozených also underwent a considerable change as the organisation began to woo and recruit German war victims. Despite the complaints and anger of Bund, this tendency continued even throughout 1938 until the very end of the first Czechoslovak republic.

‘Politics and Disabled Veterans’ (Ch VI) explores the political identities of war victims and their organisations. In the interbellum, major Czechoslovak associations of war victims largely avoided radicalisation. Instead, most of them became closely affiliated with various mainstream parties and their rhetoric. In particular, Czech Social Democrats developed close ties with war victims, which only grew stronger with the passing years. František Neumeister, who was both the long-time secretary general of Družina československých poškozených and a Social Democratic MP, embodied this connection. Ironically, the German Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen, remained politically neutral throughout most of the interbellum and, in the 1930s, even expressed certain activist, pro-Czechoslovak tendencies. That it was eventually drawn towards Nazism was far from a foregone conclusion. Meanwhile, the story of Nadiya – Tovarishstvo voyennikh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpatskei Rusi shows that the state and leaders of disabled veterans alike did not hesitate to exploit these organisations for political purposes and haggle with each other as the threat of radicalisation loomed large in the region.

‘Legionaries and the “Others”’ (Ch VII) explores the position of disabled legionaries in Czechoslovak society and the relations of veterans of the Legions with other ex-servicemen. Although legionaries represented a privileged group of Czechoslovaks, whose wartime service was continually praised, commemorated, and referred to by the state and legionaries themselves, disabled veterans of the Legions received relatively little attention. Despite this

lack of interest in them, the veterans believed that the republic emerged from their sacrifice. In turn, they repeatedly demanded preferential treatment compared with Austro-Hungarian war victims.

Not surprisingly, the belief in the superiority of legionaries and their privileges met with criticism from Austro-Hungarian veterans, be they Czechs, Germans, or Ruthenians, in the 1920s. Czechs spoke out against the creation of what they perceived to be a 'privileged caste', whilst they also brought up their own resistance to the empire; Germans, who could not adhere to the dominant state narrative, which praised the Legions and portrayed them as liberators of Czechoslovakia, sharply criticised legionaries for a number of issues; Ruthenians voiced their anger with the arrival of the favoured veterans into their region where they apparently took the jobs of the locals. However, significant changes took place in the 1930s. During this period, relations between Austro-Hungarian war victims and legionaries improved considerably, particularly as disabled Czech veterans of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces and their organisation *Družina československých válečných poškozců* drew themselves closer to the state narrative. Nevertheless, legionaries still, by and large, expressed little interest in Austro-Hungarian war victims.

'White Russian Veterans and Czechoslovakia' (Ch VIII) analyses the activities and rhetoric of this unusual group of ex-servicemen. Not only had the state that they had fought for ceased to exist, but they also had to flee their homeland and vie for support in a far-away country. In turn, the Russian involvement in the war was both portrayed as a part of a long-term Russian struggle to liberate fellow Slavs and ascribed with great significance for the ultimate victory of the Entente. Not surprisingly, Russian veterans associated their service with the fighting of the venerated legionaries, with whom they established close relationships. Apart from these fellow veterans, their cause was also supported by many Czechoslovak notables. In turn, Russian veterans spoke highly of Czechoslovakia and its inhabitants. By

contrast, it appears that disabled veterans of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces viewed them as rivals with whom they were competing for public and state support.

‘Blinded Veterans’ (Ch IX) shows that blindness in both wartime Austria-Hungary and interwar Czechoslovakia was considered the most deleterious of disabilities, often even being portrayed as worse than death itself. As a result, blinded veterans received considerable attention from both the state and wider public. However, after the end of the war, any connotation of heroism that these soldiers might have once possessed came to be wholly expunged from Czech public rhetoric and imagination. In turn, blinded veterans were largely relegated to being merely objects of pity. Meanwhile, various sections of blinded veterans portrayed themselves and other blind people in distinct ways: on the one hand, one group of men focused exclusively on the negative aspects of blindness and depicted themselves as those most affected by the war. On the other hand, another group of veterans held and publicly articulated a different, far more multifaceted perception of their impairment, which dwelt not only on the issues encountered by blind people, but also made a point of underscoring their abilities and potential.

Likewise, a spectrum of interests and concerns on the part of blind veterans towards their civilian counterparts can be detected in ex-servicemen’s rhetoric. Although the interests of blind civilians from Czechoslovakia and abroad received scant mention amongst the demands and grievances of blind veterans, blind civilians were nevertheless present in veterans’ journals. Indeed, it could even be argued that relatively close ties existed in some regards between Austro-Hungarian veterans and blind Czechoslovak civilians, perhaps as a result of the dethroning of the veterans in public consciousness that followed the disappearance of the Habsburg monarchy.

However, the comparison between blind civilians and veterans suggests that even Austro-Hungarian veterans still found themselves in a somewhat privileged position. In the period when the state and local authorities were providing disabled citizens with only limited support, blinded soldiers were given considerably more help and attention than their civilian counterparts were. However, this appears to be a reflection of the uneven development of the Czechoslovak welfare state rather than any sign of recognition of the veterans' military past.

'Epilogue' (Ch X) briefly explores the lives of Czech and Slovak veterans in the territory of Czechoslovakia beyond 1939. It discusses the changing position of the ex-servicemen of the Great War in society during World War II, the period of 1945–1948, and also after the Communist coup. Furthermore, it depicts the end of the disabled veterans' movement in the early 1950s.

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- Archiv národního osvobození – Archive of National Liberation
- Bund der Kriegsverletzten für Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien – Union of the War Wounded for Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia
- Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen der Tschechoslowakischen Republik in Österreich – Union of the War Wounded, Widows, and Orphans of the Czechoslovak Republic in Austria
- Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen der Tschechoslowakischen Republik in Deutschland – Union of the War Wounded, Widows, and Orphans of the Czechoslovak Republic in Germany
- Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen in der tschechoslowakischen Republik – Union of the War Wounded, Widows, and Orphans in the Czechoslovak Republic
- Bund der Deutschen – Union of Germans
- Chelčického mírová společnost – Chelčický's Peace Society
- Československá jednota výchovná a humanitní – Czechoslovak Educational and Humanitarian Union
- Československá obec legionářská (ČsOL) – Union of Czechoslovak Legionaries
- Československá ústřední péče o slepé – Czechoslovak Central Care for the Blind
- Československé literární sdružení – Czechoslovak Literary Society
- Československý červený kříž – Czechoslovak Red Cross
- Deylova výchovna slepců – Deyl's Educational Institute of the Blind
- Dělnická tělocvičná jednota (DTJ) – Workers' Gymnastic Union
- Družina dobrovolců československého zahraničního vojska – Fellowship of Volunteers of Foreign Czechoslovak Forces
- Družina československých válečných poškozců – Fellowship of Czechoslovak War Victims
- Družina oslepených (osleplých) vojáků československé republiky – Fellowship of the Blinded Soldiers of the Czechoslovak Republic
- Družina slovenských oslepených vojáků Kochanovce – Fellowship of Blinded Slovak Soldiers [in] Kochanovce

- Gallipolské sdružení – Gallipoli Fraternity
- Hlavný spolok válečných invalidov, válečných vdov a sirot pre Slovensko – Main Society of War Invalids, War Widows and Orphans for Slovakia
- Jednota mírová – Peace Union
- Jednota slovenských válečných slepcov – Union of the Slovak War Blind
- Kancelář československých legií – Office of the Czechoslovak Legions
- Kaiserlich und königlich Arbeitsvermittlung an Kriegsinvaliden – Imperial and Royal War Invalid Job Placement Service
- Klárův ústav slepých – Klar's Institute of the Blind
- Komitét pro postavení památníku rakouskou vojenskou justicí popravenému vojínu Kudrnovi v Motole – Committee for Erection of a Memorial to Private Kudrna Who Had Been Executed by the Austrian Military Justice in Motol
- Kroužek přátel ruských válečných invalidů v ČSR – Circle of Friends of Russian War Invalids in the ČSR
- Kruh francouzských legionářů – Circle of French Legionaries
- Kruh starodružníků – Circle of Old Fellows
- Masarykova liga proti tuberkulóze – Masaryk's League against Tuberculosis
- Nadiya - Tovaristvo voennykh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpatskoj Rusi – Hope - Society of War Invalids, Widows and Orphans of Carpathian Ruthenia
- Národní garda – National Guard
- Národní jednota legionářská – National Legionary Union
- Národní sdružení vojáků z fronty – National Association of Soldiers from the Frontline
- Nejvyšší správní soud – Czechoslovak Supreme Administrative Court
- Nezávislá jednota československých legionářů – Independent Union of Czechoslovak Legionaries
- Občianské sdruženie válečných poškodencov – Civil Association of War Victims
- Obec přátel legionářů (OPL) – Society of Friends of Legionaries
- Odbor pro slepecký tisk český – Section for Czech Blind Publishing
- Okresní úřadovna pro péči o válečné poškozence – State District Office for Care for War Victims
- Památník odboje – Memorial of Resistance
- Památník osvobození – Memorial of Liberation

- Říšský svaz organizací válečných poškozců/Reichsverband der Kriegsbeschädigtenorganisationen in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik – Imperial Union of Organisations of War Victims in the Czechoslovak Republic
- Sdružení československých válečných poškozců – Association of Czechoslovak War Victims
- Sdružení rumburských vzbouřenců – Association of Rumburk Mutineers
- Sdružení Rusů – účastníků války – Association of Russians – Participants in the War
- Sociální ústav legionářský – Legionary Social Institute
- Soukromý ústav pro výchování a léčení chudých slepých dětí a na oči chorých – Private Institute for the Education and Treatment of Poor Blind Children and the Visually Impaired
- Spolek nevidomých intelektuálů „Macan“ – Society of Blind Intellectuals ‘Macan’
- Spolek ruských válečných invalidů v ČSR – Union of Russian War Invalids in the ČSR
- Spolek válečných slepců československých – Society of the Czechoslovak War Blind
- Spolek vdov po záložních důstojnících – Society of Widows of Reserve Officers
- Spolek židovských válečných poškozců – Society of Jewish War Victims
- Státní zemská ústředna pro království České pro péči o vrátivší se vojíny – State Provincial Central Office for the Kingdom of Bohemia for Returning Soldiers
- Sudetendeutscher Soldatenbund – Sudeten German Union of Soldiers
- Svaz československých invalidů (SČI) – Union of Czechoslovak Invalids
- Svaz československých válečných invalidů-důstojníků – Union of Czechoslovak Invalids-Officers
- Svaz československých válečných poškozců křesťansko-sociálních – Union of Czechoslovak Christian Social War Victims
- Svaz československých válečných poškozců v Německu – Union of Czechoslovak War Victims in Germany
- Svaz invalidů československých legií – Union of Invalids of the Czechoslovak Legions
- Svaz lidových válečných poškozců – Union of People’s War Victims
- Svaz národního osvobození – Union of National Liberation
- Svaz oslepených vojínů – Union of the Blinded Soldiers

- Svaz ruských válečných invalidů v Československu – Union of Russian War Invalids in Czechoslovakia
- Svaz slepeckých spolků – Union of Societies of the Blind
- Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů v republice Československé – Union of State Employees-Invalids in the Czechoslovak Republic
- Svaz trafikantů válečných poškozců při Družině – Union of Trafikanti – War Victims at Družina
- Svaz válečných invalidů, vdov a siroteků „Svépomoc“ – Union of War Invalids, Widows, and Orphans ‘Self-Help’
- Svaz válečných poškozců v Rakousku – Union of War Victims in Austria
- Svaz vojáku z fronty – Union of Soldiers from the Frontline
- Štátny úrad pre vojnových poškodených – State Office for War Victims
- Ústřední jednota invalidů (ÚJI) – Central Union of Invalids
- Vojenské museum Republiky Československé – Museum of the Czechoslovak Republic
- Vojenský archiv Republiky Československé – Military Archive of the Czechoslovak Republic
- Volné sdružení vojáků ze světové války – Loose Association of Soldiers from the World War
- Zahraniční svaz ruských válečných invalidů – Foreign Union of Russian War Invalids
- Zemský úřad pro péči o válečné poškozené – Provincial Office for Care for War Victims
- Zemský ústav pro výchovu nevidomých – Provincial Institute for the Education of the Visually Impaired
- Zentralgewerkschafts-Kommission – Central Trade Union Committee

List of Alternative Place Names

- Aš (cz) / Asch (de)
- Benešov (cz) / Beneschau (de)
- Bílsko (cz) / Bielsko (pl) / Bielitz (de)
- Boletice nad Labem (cz) / Politz an der Elbe (de)
- Bratislava (sk) / Pozsony (hu) / Preßburg (de)
- Brno (cz) / Brünn (de)
- Cheb (cz) / Eger (de)
- Čata (sk) / Csata (hu)
- Dobratice (cz) / Dobracice (pl) / Dobratitz (de)
- Frýdek (cz) / Friedek (de)
- Hejnice (cz) / Haindorf (de)
- Hlučínsko (cz) / Hultschiner Ländchen (de)
- Horní Těrlicko (cz) / Cierlicko Górne (pl) / Ober Tierlitzko (de)
- Hrušov (cz) / Gruszów (pl) / Hruschau (de)
- Jasiňa (cz) / Körösmező (hu) / Yasinia (uk)
- Karlovy Vary (cz) / Karlsbad (de)
- Komorní Lhotka (cz) / Ligotka Kameralna (pl) / Kameral Ellgoth (de)
- Lazy (cz) / Łazy (pl) / Lazy (de)
- Liberec (cz) / Reichenberg (de)
- Litoměřice (cz) / Leitmeritz (de)
- Most (cz) / Brüx (de)
- Načeradec (cz) / Natscheradetz (de)
- Nemecké Pravno (sk) / Deutsch Proben (de)
- Nové Zámky (sk) / Érsekújvár (hu)
- Opava (cz) / Troppau (de)
- Plzeň (cz) / Pilsen (de)
- Prague (en) / Praha (cz) / Prag (de)
- Prostějov (cz) / Proßnitz (de)
- Rumburk (cz) / Rumburg (de)
- Stonava (cz) / Stonawa (pl) / Steinau (de)
- Šumbark (cz) / Szumbark (pl) / Schumbarg (de)

- Tábor (cz) / Tabor (de)
- Teplice (cz) / Teplitz (de)
- Teresva (cz) / Taracköz (hu) / Teresva (uk)
- Těšín (cz) / Cieszyn (pl) / Teschen (de)
- Těšínské Slezsko (cz) / Śląsk Cieszyński (pl) / Teschener Schlesien (de)
- Trenčín (sk) / Trencsén (hu)
- Trnovany (cz) / Turn (de)
- Ústí nad Labem (cz) / Aussig (de)
- Veľká Bytča (sk) / Nagybecse (hu)
- Vitorazsko (cz) / Weitraer Gebiet (de)
- Zborov (cz) / Zboriv (uk)
- Žatec (cz) / Saaz (de)
- Žilina (sk) / Zsolna (hu)

Chapter I: Introduction

- How much will the war cost the Habsburgs?
- Very little. Only two crowns (the Austrian and the Hungarian).

Czech wartime anecdote.¹

In late 1918, several states emerged from the ruins of Austria-Hungary. ‘War, the midwife of all modern epochs’,² had drastically changed the map of Europe. In its east-central part, Czechoslovakia was one of the main political beneficiaries of these changes. The very conflict that killed millions was also the catalyst that brought about the birth of a state that few would have imagined possible before the fateful events in Sarajevo.

After the early tumultuous months, the borders of Czechoslovakia were drawn around three ethnically, religiously, economically, and politically heterogeneous regions of the former monarchy – the Bohemian lands, Slovakia, and Ruthenia. Indeed, much space would be required to explain all the various differences between individual regions of the new state in detail. Suffice to say, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia in the west, which were predominantly populated by Czechs, Germans, and Poles, represented the most economically advanced parts of the country. Meanwhile, the more agricultural and religious Slovakia was home to Slovaks, Magyars, Germans, and also Ruthenes. Finally, the eastern province of Ruthenia, which constituted by far the poorest region in Czechoslovakia, was inhabited by Ruthenes, Magyars, as well as peasants with arguably no fixed national identity. Furthermore, several hundreds of thousands of Jews, as well as members of the Romani community, were scattered across various parts of the republic.³ Indeed, comparisons between Bohemia, the richest and most industrialised province, and Ruthenia, the least economically developed mountainous region, speak volumes about how

¹ H-ský (ed.), *První tucet válečných anekdot: (Kterak se náš lid za války těšil a bavíval)* (Pacov, n.d.), p. 2.

² R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century – and After* 2nd edn. (London, 1997), p. 6.

³ *Statistická příručka republiky Československé II.* (Prague, 1925), pp. 362-363, 379.

varied Czechoslovakia could be. To give just one example, according to a 1921 census, the literacy rate in Bohemia was 97.6%; by contrast, in Ruthenia it was just below 50%.⁴

Perhaps not surprisingly, if we consider this economic and cultural diversity, what can be anachronistically called the ‘Czechoslovak’ history of World War I was equally multi-faceted and complicated despite only a small part of its future territory having been the site of fighting. Similar to other regional beneficiaries of the conflict, namely Poland, Yugoslavia, and Romania, the new republic began its existence with war veterans who had served on opposite sides of the recent conflict. The vast majority of veterans who lived in Czechoslovakia – Czechs, Germans, Slovaks, Magyars, Ruthenes, and others – had been conscripted into the armed forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its territorial armies. According to rough estimates of the Czech military historian Otakar Frankenberger, more than 1.4 million Czechs and Slovaks had served in these units.⁵ Significantly, this figure does not include the hundreds of thousands of men from Czechoslovakia’s ethnic minorities who also participated in the conflict. Meanwhile, approximately one hundred thousand Czechs and Slovaks,⁶ at first mainly prewar emigrant volunteers and later also POWs from the Austro-Hungarian forces, participated in the conflict on the side of the Entente on several different fronts in volunteer units, which became known as *Československé legie* (Czechoslovak Legions).⁷ Although recent publications have recognised legionaries’ motivations for enlistment as varied and

⁴ *Statistická příručka republiky Československé III.* (Prague, 1928), pp. 293-294.

⁵ Otakar Frankenberger, ‘Čeští vojáci ve světové válce’, *Od Sarajeva k velké válce. Sborník příspěvků vědeckého semináře k 80. výročí vypuknutí první světové války*, vol. 2, ed. Jan Galandauer et al. (Prague, 1995), p. 3.

⁶ Ivan Šedivý, ‘Družina československých legionářů v počátcích legionářského hnutí v Československu’, *Sborník k dějinám 19. a 20. století*, 13 (1993), p. 94.

⁷ Although the term ‘Legions’ (‘*legie*’) only began to be used after the end of the war, this work utilises it for the sake of convenience in place of the historically more precise wartime terms ‘foreign Czechoslovak forces’ (‘*zahraniční československá vojska*’) and ‘revolutionary volunteer forces’ (‘*revoluční dobrovolná vojska*’). Furthermore, the term ‘Legions’ became commonplace in the interwar period, which constitutes the focus of the attention of this thesis.

complex,⁸ it can still be argued that the men were hoping that their military manifestations of loyalty to the Allies, together with the defeat of Austria-Hungary, would concomitantly initiate a change in the political positions and fortunes of their respective nations.

Furthermore, interwar Czechoslovakia became the refuge of another group of former Allied soldiers. Many of the several thousand émigrés from Imperial Russia who came to live in Czechoslovakia were not only veterans of the Russian Civil War but also of the conflict that had preceded it. In the interwar period, these Russian men constituted a part of the highly distinct émigré community with their own journals, associations, events, and holidays.⁹

Indeed, the military past of both Austro-Hungarian veterans and legionaries was far from uniform. Austro-Hungarian soldiers had served in different units of the joint army and navy, the Austrian Landwehr and Landsturm, and their Hungarian equivalents, the Honvéd and the Népfelkelés. Individual soldiers saw vastly different theatres of war; some had served as sailors in the Adriatic Sea, while others had experienced high-altitude warfare in the Italian Alps. Many were taken as prisoners of war on the Russian front and then moved to remote parts of Russia's hinterland. Similarly, legionaries had experienced various conditions in France, Italy, Serbia, and Russia. The length of their service and date of returning home could also differ significantly; many Italian legionaries came to Czechoslovakia almost immediately after the end of hostilities, whilst thousands of Russian legionaries had to travel around the world across the Pacific Ocean and the USA, only reaching the new republic in 1920.

⁸ Václav Šmidrkal, 'The Defeated in a Victorious State: Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army in the Bohemian Lands and Their (Re)mobilization in the 1930s', *zeitgeschichte*, 47.1 (2020), p. 81.

⁹ According to the Czech historian Světlana Tejchmanová, the number of Russian refugees in Czechoslovakia reached its apogee of more than 20,000 at the beginning of the 1920s; throughout the rest of the interbellum, it dropped significantly, falling to 8,000 immigrants in 1939. Světlana Tejchmanová, 'Politická činnost ruské a ukrajinské emigrace v Československu v letech 1920-1939', *Ruská a ukrajinská emigrace v ČSR v letech 1918-1945: Sborník studií* vol. 1, ed. Václav Veber (Prague, 1993), p. 3.

The subsequent two decades of the republic's existence were far from untroubled. Czechoslovakia's ethnic heterogeneity, German and Hungarian discontent with the Paris Peace Treaties, the communist threat of the early postwar period and clashes with Poland and Hungary, the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism, and fraught international relations of the 1930s all meant that it was rarely smooth sailing for the interwar republic. Its own shortcomings and failures should not be ignored. In particular, minority questions were often approached by Czechs with insufficient sensitivity and foresight. And yet, for all its issues, it is difficult to see Czechoslovak democracy as 'seriously flawed from the first'.¹⁰

Universal suffrage for both men and women, which was introduced already in 1919–1920; improvements to the education and health systems, particularly in Slovakia and Ruthenia; and the inauguration of workers' old age pension and health insurance were only some of the important interwar changes that had a significant positive impact on the lives of millions of Czechoslovaks. Indeed, Czech nationalism often antagonised other ethnic groups in the state; however, it did not prevent them from active participation in politics. Between 1926 and 1938, there was no Czechoslovak government without German representation, with the Social Democrats spending almost a decade in various Czechoslovak coalitions.

As Andrea Orzoff's study of Czechoslovakia reminds us, the image of the republic as 'an island of democratic values, rationalism, and fair mindedness' in a growingly more authoritarian Europe formed a part of the national myth disseminated and supported by the leading Czechoslovak officials.¹¹ Nevertheless, such an account of the interwar state, albeit idealised, was certainly not a complete fabrication. Already in the early 1920s, Hungary

¹⁰ Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven, 2009), p. 49.

¹¹ Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (Oxford, 2009), p. 11.

and Romania abandoned some of the basic principles of electoral democracies, and Poland and Yugoslavia followed them only a few years later.¹² The events of the early 1930s in Germany and Austria hardly need to be mentioned. Although Czechoslovakia also became affected by the changing political climate and growing radicalisation in Europe in the latter part of the interbellum, the republic was still a significantly freer, more stable, and progressive state than any of its neighbours until late 1938.

This situation was also reflected in the lives of Czechoslovak veterans and the activities of their organisations. Unlike in other countries of this region, there was no watershed moment that would suddenly cause the severe curtailment of citizens' freedoms or realignment of local political life. Even the wide-ranging *Zákon na ochranu republiky* (Law for the Protection of the Republic) from March 1923 – originally criticised by many, including veterans, for its potentially far-reaching restrictions on freedom of speech – was ultimately not exploited as frequently as had been feared.¹³ In turn, veterans and their organisations were able to act with considerable degrees of liberty and openness, particularly compared with the situations after 1939 and 1948.

Existing Historiography

Despite the direct involvement of hundreds of thousands of men in the conflict, not to mention the millions affected by it on the home front, the Great War received little public attention in Czechoslovakia and its successor states. Apart from the story of the Czechoslovak Legions and of Czech and Slovak political resistance to Austria-Hungary, the Great War has largely disappeared from local collective memory. Whilst the 28th of October, the day the first Czechoslovak republic was established in 1918, remains a Czech

¹² See, for example, Crampton, pp. 44-50, 86, 110-111.

¹³ The law 50/1923 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*. See 'Das Gesetz zum Schutze der Republik', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Apr. 1923, pp. 1-2.

state holiday, the war itself is generally mentioned merely as the precursor of Czech independence. The prominent Czech historian Ivan Šedivý observed this trend as recently as 2014 when he noted that ‘the Czech memory of the Great War is still being overlaid with the memory of formation and building of the interwar Czechoslovak republic’.¹⁴

This is hardly surprising when one considers the past of the region. As will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis, the Austro-Hungarian war effort held an awkward position in Czechoslovak society of the 1920s and 1930s as the Czechs and Slovaks largely sought to distance themselves from the Habsburg monarchy. This situation was also reflected in the historiography from this period. After 1945, World War II overshadowed the Great War in Czechoslovakia as not only a more recent conflict, but also one which the entire population of the country had directly experienced.

Nevertheless, the Great War did attract both scholarly and public attention in the 1950s and 1960s. This period saw the release of the films *Štyridsaťštyri* and *Hvězda zvaná Pelyněk*, which speak about mutinies of Slovak and Czech soldiers, respectively, in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces,¹⁵ and Karel Pichlík and several other historians produced a number of studies about the conflict.¹⁶ Unfortunately, these and other scholarly works, which were published before 1989, were not much more nuanced than their interwar predecessors;¹⁷ the studies, which were written from a point of view that combined Czechoslovak Marxism and nationalism, often overemphasised the unwillingness of

¹⁴ Ivan Šedivý, *Češi, České země a Velká Válka 1914-1918* 2nd edn. (Prague, 2014), p. 351.

¹⁵ *Štyridsaťštyri*. Directed by Paľo Bielik, Štúdio hraných filmov Bratislava, 1957; *Hvězda zvaná Pelyněk*. Directed by Martin Frič, Filmové studio Barrandov, 1964.

¹⁶ See Karel Pichlík, *Bojovali proti válce: Revoluční boj českých vojáků a námořníků v rakousko-uherské armádě za imperialistické světové války 1914-1918* (Prague, 1953); Karel Pichlík, *Čeští vojáci proti válce: 1914-1915* (Prague, 1961); Karel Pichlík, ‘Rozpad Rakousko-uherské armády na podzim 1918’, *Historie a vojenství*, 11.4 (1963), pp. 226-276; Karel Pichlík, *Vzpoury navrátilců z ruského zajetí na jaře 1918* (Prague, 1964); Karel Pichlík, Vlastimil Vávra, and Jaroslav Křížek, *Červenobílá a rudá: Vojáci ve válce a revoluci 1914-1918* (Prague, 1967).

¹⁷ Marián Hronský, *Vzbura slovenských vojakov v Kragujevci* (Martin, 1982).

common Czech and Slovak soldiers to serve in the imperial forces and the impact of the Russian October Revolution and its ideas on these men.

The political changes brought about by the Velvet Revolution of November 1989 were also reflected in the historiography of Czechoslovakia, which began to tackle various previously ignored or taboo topics.¹⁸ Soon after the revolution, several Czech and Slovak historians, including Jan Galandauer, Karel Pichlík, Ivan Šedivý, Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová, and Elena Mannová, began to re-examine the Czechoslovak Legions and the Czech involvement in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces. Their efforts resulted in numerous military, political, diplomatic, social, and cultural histories of the wartime period.¹⁹

Although a small number of historical studies have also looked at the former combatants of the Great War in interbellum Czechoslovakia, this subject remains largely unexamined. Amongst the few existing works, Ivan Šedivý's studies have sought to dislodge the perception of Czechoslovak legionaries as an exceptionally privileged and influential sector of interwar society.²⁰ It is much more difficult to find a clear argument in

¹⁸ In West Germany, the historian Gerburg Thunig-Nittner published her thesis on the Russian Legions already in 1970. In it, she not only explored the wartime history of the Russian Legions but also briefly looked at the position of Russian legionaries in interwar Czechoslovakia. Gerburg Thunig-Nittner, *Die tschechoslowakische Legion in Russland: Ihre Geschichte und Bedeutung bei der Entstehung der 1. Tschechoslowakischen Republik* (Wiesbaden, 1970)

¹⁹ See, for example, Jan Galandauer, 'Wacht am Rhein a Kde domov můj: Válečné nadšení v Čechách v létě 1914', *Historie a vojenství*, 45.5 (1996), pp. 22-43; Jan Galandauer et al. (eds.), *Od Sarajeva k velké válce. Sborník příspěvků vědeckého semináře k 80. výročí vypuknutí první světové války*, vol. 1 (Prague, 1995); Jan Galandauer et al. (eds.), *Od Sarajeva k velké válce*, vol. 2; Karel Pichlík, Bohumír Klípa, and Jitka Zabloudilová, *Českoslovenští legionáři, 1914-1920* (Prague, 1996); Marie Koldinská and Ivan Šedivý, *Válka a armáda v českých dějinách: Sociohistorické črty* (Prague, 2008); Ivan Šedivý, 'Velká válka 1914-1918 (Pokus o rekapitulaci)', *Český časopis historický*, 96.1 (1998), pp. 1-25; Ivan Šedivý, *Češi, České země a Velká Válka*; Jan Gebhart and Ivan Šedivý (eds.), *Česká společnost za velkých válek 20. století: (Pokus o komparaci)* (Prague, 2003); Gabriela Dudeková, 'Sociálne aspekty vojnového hospodárstva', *Slovensko na začiatku 20. storočia: Spoločnosť, štát a národ v súradniciach doby*, ed. Milan Podrimavský and Dušan Kováč (Bratislava, 1999), pp. 415-435; Elena Mannová, 'Zmeny vo vedomí slovenskej spoločnosti za prvej svetovej vojny', *Slovensko na začiatku 20. storočia*, pp. 353-363.

²⁰ Ivan Šedivý, 'Legionáři a československá armáda 1918-1938', *České země a Československo v Evropě XIX. a XX. století: Sborník prací k 65. narozeninám prof. dr. Roberta Kvačka*, ed. Josef Hanzal and Jindřich Dejmek (Prague, 1997), pp. 209-230; Ivan Šedivý, 'Legionářská republika? K systému legionářského zákonodárství a sociální péče v meziválečné ČSR', *Historie a vojenství*, 51.1 (2002), pp. 158-184.

Jan Michl's monograph *Legionáři a Československo*; however, his positivist work serves as an indispensable survey of social provisions, legionary leaders and organisations, holidays, films, artists, and many other topics.²¹ Katya Kocourek's biography of the right-wing legionary leader and writer Rudolf Medek and her article on *Nezávislá jednota československých legionářů* (the Independent Union of Czechoslovak Legionaries), with its particular form of Czechoslovak nationalism, reveal a different, militant side of the legionary movement, a topic often ignored or overlooked.²²

Amongst the most recent Czech works on the subject, Jiří Hutečka's two studies stand out due to his novel approach to the Great War and its veterans. Whilst his examination of Czech soldiers' wartime morale and motivations, which he explores through the lens of gender history, is only tangentially related to this thesis, it must be recognised as an important contribution to the Czech history of the Great War which adds another dimension to our understanding of the conflict.²³ Hutečka's other study analyses and explains Austro-Hungarian veterans' retrospective portrayal of their wartime service in interbellum Czechoslovakia. Its findings about the narrative strategies and rhetoric of Czech ex-servicemen are further confirmed in Chapter II of this thesis.²⁴

Indeed, several other studies have also discussed the complicated memory of the Great War in Czechoslovakia. Recently, Jakub Beneš explored this topic in relation to the Austro-Hungarian deserters, the so-called *Zelené kádry* (Green Cadres), who operated in some rural parts of East-Central Europe towards the end of the war and in the immediate

²¹ Jan Michl, *Legionáři a Československo* (Prague, 2009).

²² Katya Kocourek, *Čechoslovakista Rudolf Medek: Politický životopis* trans. Milan Kocourek (Prague, 2011); Katya Kocourek, "In the Spirit of Brotherhood, United we Remain!" Czechoslovak Legionaries and the Militarist State', *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Last Habsburg War*, ed. Mark Cornwall and John Paul Newman (New York, 2015), pp. 151-173.

²³ Jiří Hutečka, *Muži proti ohni: Motivace, morálka a mužnost českých vojáků Velké války, 1914-1918* (Prague, 2016).

²⁴ Jiří Hutečka, 'Kamarádi frontovníci: Maskulinita a paměť první světové války v textech československých c. a k. veteránů', *Dějiny-teorie-kritika*, 11.2 (2014), pp. 231-265.

postwar period. This study reveals that political and class identities may play an important role in the retrospective perception of the conflict and its participants.²⁵ The question of Czechoslovak collective memory has also been discussed by Martin Zückert and Nancy M. Wingfield.²⁶ Both scholars have observed that the interbellum narrative produced by the Czechoslovak state about the Great War, which focused on the Czech and Slovak resistance to Austria-Hungary, excluded a large number of Czechoslovak citizens.

The German historian Natali Stegmann has also examined the meaning of the Great War for Czechoslovak society as part of her research on Czechoslovak state building and legitimization.²⁷ Her book *Kriegsdeutungen, Staatsgründungen, Sozialpolitik: Der Helden- und Opferdiskurs in der Tschechoslowakei 1918–1948* examines how the interwar state sought to derive its legitimacy from an ability to provide for its citizens who had been affected by the conflict. She also discusses the specific Czechoslovak narrative about the war and its impact on the republic's system of social care, which privileged legionaries over Austro-Hungarian veterans. Few of Stegmann's general conclusions can be disputed; however, due to the scope of her project, which also includes World War II and its victims, Stegmann has not been able to explore several of the topics in as much detail as they

²⁵ Jakub Beneš, 'The Colour of Hope: The Legacy of the 'Green Cadres' and the Problem of Rural Unrest in the First Czechoslovak Republic', *Contemporary European History*, 28.3 (2019), pp. 285-302.

²⁶ Martin Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität: Die tschechoslowakische Armee und ihre Nationalitätenpolitik, 1918-1938* (Munich, 2006). For an abbreviated version of this study in English, see Martin Zückert, 'Memory of War and National State Integration: Czech and German Veterans in Czechoslovakia after 1918', *Central Europe*, 4.2 (2006), pp. 111-121. Nancy M. Wingfield, 'National Sacrifice and Regeneration: Commemorations of the Battle of Zborov in Multinational Czechoslovakia', *Sacrifice and Rebirth*, pp. 129-150.

²⁷ Natali Stegmann, 'Deutsche Kriegsgeschädigte in der Tschechoslowakei', *Bohemia*, 48.2 (2008), pp. 440-463.

Natali Stegmann, '„Geburt“ und „Wiedererrichtung“ der Tschechoslowakei. Das Legionärsparadigma am Ende des Ersten und des Zweiten Weltkrieges', ed. Stegmann, *Die Weltkriege als symbolische Bezugspunkte*, pp. 71-90; Natali Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen – Staatsgründungen – Sozialpolitik. Der Helden- und Opferdiskurs in der Tschechoslowakei, 1918-1948* (Munich, 2010); Natali Stegmann, 'Veteran Status and War Victims' Policy in Czechoslovakia from the End of the First World War until the Nineteen-Fifties', *Veterans and War Victims in Eastern Europe during the 20th Century. A Comparison*, ed. Katrin Boeckh and Natali Stegmann (Leipzig, 2010), pp. 63-74; Natali Stegmann, 'Social Benefits and the Rhetoric of Peace in Czechoslovak Veteran Organizations', *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism*, ed. Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 118-135.

warrant. Thus, some of her arguments and observations leave space for further research and revision.

Czechoslovak state care for war victims was also explored by Marek Růžička in his unpublished PhD thesis.²⁸ This largely positivist work provides a vast amount of detailed information about the development of social provisions for war victims and, as such, serves as an invaluable factual overview of this topic. Its major shortcoming is the author's often uncritical treatment of primary sources, which results in a fairly idealised portrait of interwar Czechoslovakia.

Most recently, a collaborative project involving historians in the Czech Republic and Austria has resulted in the publication of several studies of World War I veterans in the journal *zeitgeschichte*. Amongst them, a comparative article by Rudolf Kučera and Hannes Leidinger discusses the previously neglected topic of war trauma in Czechoslovakia and Austria.²⁹ Importantly, the article argues that in Czechoslovakia and Austria alike, medical experts often suspected men with war neuroses of being frauds, and public discourse marginalised them.

Václav Šmidrkal's analysis of various veterans' associations, their roles, and interaction with the Czechoslovak state shows how the position of Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen changed in the interwar period.³⁰ He observes that whilst activities of veterans and their associations were fairly limited in the 1920s, particularly amongst the Czechs, the subsequent decade saw the remobilisation of these men. However, the Czechoslovak state proved largely unable to react to this shift and to channel it for its own benefit because the

²⁸ Marek Růžička, 'Péče o invalidy v Československu v letech 1918-1938' (Univerzita Karlova PhD thesis, 2011).

²⁹ Rudolf Kučera and Hannes Leidinger, 'Challenges for Science, Threats to the Nation. Austrian and Czech War Neurotics as Examples of a Transnational History of Trauma (1914–1938)', *zeitgeschichte*, 47.1 (2020), pp. 15-32.

³⁰ Šmidrkal, pp. 81-106.

official definition of what had constituted worthy military service during the war and in its immediate aftermath changed only marginally in the 1930s.

In her article in the same collection, Radka Šustrová explores social care provided to war veterans and the interaction between these veterans and the state.³¹ She points to the lack of overlap in the aims and rhetoric of the two sides; whilst the state focused on notions of economic efficiency and state security, veterans invoked tenets of social justice and democracy. As this thesis will also observe, most ex-servicemen were deeply discontented with welfare provision, which did not improve significantly in the interwar period despite veterans' numerous pleas.

Aims and Methods of the Thesis

This thesis aims to develop a greater understanding of interwar Czechoslovakia and its veterans. It investigates the role and position of all ex-servicemen of the Great War in interbellum Czechoslovak society, be they Austro-Hungarian veterans, legionaries, or Russian ex-servicemen, and explores the complicated interaction between the state, public, and veterans. The work examines how the ex-soldiers participated in the new republic, what expectations and beliefs they possessed regarding the state, and how these expectations and beliefs evolved throughout the interwar years. Moreover, it discusses how the state and public perceived and treated the Great War and its participants.

As with any other research project, existing scholarship has influenced and shaped this thesis. Parts of the thesis deal with topics that have already been explored to some degree; for example, several scholars have examined interwar narratives about the Great War in Czechoslovakia and social care for disabled veterans. In these parts, the project

³¹ Radka Šustrová, 'The Struggle for Respect: The State, WWI Veterans and Social Welfare Policy in Interwar Czechoslovakia', *zeitgeschichte*, 47.1 (2020), pp. 107-134.

aims to provide new perspectives as well as add to and further confirm the existing knowledge by examining these topics in greater detail and discussing previously unused primary resources. In other parts, the thesis contributes to the understanding of the interwar period by exploring themes that have been previously examined only briefly or not at all. These include the question of blinded veterans, the topic of disabled Czech ex-servicemen's support of the Czechoslovak state in the period of 1918–1920, and the subject of Ruthenian veterans. Indeed, unlike many other studies, the project explores these topics across the whole of Czechoslovakia; although the nature of the existing primary sources means that Czech veterans play a dominant role in the thesis, this work also draws on sources produced in various other languages spoken throughout the republic.

This thesis joins other recent works in recognising and identifying the complicated and manifold legacy of Austria-Hungary and its war effort for Czechoslovakia; the revolution, which took place in the final moments of the Great War, did not bring a clean break with the past despite the republic's subsequent fascination with and celebration of 28th October 1918. Instead, the Austro-Hungarian past has accompanied Czechoslovakia throughout its existence in many different forms, of which the war veterans were amongst the most tangible. Indeed, whilst Czechoslovakia might have presented itself as a victorious state, in reality, the policies, rhetoric, and culture within the republic were much more complex.

An analysis of the Czechoslovak veterans of the Great War can reveal much about the interwar republic. By examining a group of people over a period of two decades, we can observe their attitudes, beliefs, and actions as well as wider political, social, cultural, and other developments which were reflected into their lives. There are obvious limitations to the existing sources which can skew our vision at times; however, in that sense, this thesis is hardly different from any other historical project.

This work focuses predominantly on the largest group of Czechoslovak veterans: Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen. For reasons that will be discussed in more detail throughout the thesis, few able-bodied Austro-Hungarian veterans chose to speak about their military service or their interwar lives. Similarly, relatively few participated in any veterans' societies or gatherings, with the notable exception of German ex-soldiers.³² However, tens of thousands of former soldiers who were left with various impairments joined associations of war victims to fight for and protect their rights vis-à-vis the Czechoslovak state. Sources created by these organisations, the state administration dealing with care for war victims, and, to a lesser extent, individual disabled ex-servicemen thus constitute the largest body of information available by far about the legacy of the conflict and its impact on Czechoslovak citizens. As a result, disabled veterans play the most prominent role in the thesis. Where available, these sources are supplemented with materials produced by able-bodied soldiers, such as memoirs and newspaper articles.

A vast number of sources were left behind by the celebrated Czechoslovak legionaries, who received significant attention in the interwar republic. As in the case of Austro-Hungarian veterans, the thesis focuses predominantly on the disabled men from this group. As such, it is able to show similarities and differences between the two cohorts of men with impairments. Apart from these ex-servicemen, the work also discusses the small group of disabled Russian veterans-émigrés who resided in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period.

At first sight, similarities between Czechoslovakia and some of the other successors to the Habsburgs appear obvious. In Yugoslavia, Romania, and Poland, where

³² See Šmidrkál, pp. 81-106.

veterans from different ethnic groups came to reside, the recent past and its remembrance were just as complicated as in Czechoslovakia. In all four countries, the state chose a particular narrative about the Great War and its fight for independence which privileged a certain group of soldiers whilst ignoring the service of the others.³³ As John Paul Newman observed, ‘the panoply of veterans’ war experiences tended to be reduced to an edifying story told by those who had won the war’.³⁴ Yet, the large number of variables that affected the position and treatment of veterans in each country makes it difficult to put forward any more detailed comparisons. The countries differed markedly in many ways, such as the political atmosphere, economic conditions, recent history, and position of ethnic minorities, all of which influenced the lives and behaviour of veterans.

Amongst other factors, the important difference between Czechoslovakia and the other countries was the ratio of veterans who were honoured for their military service to those whose wartime years did not fit into the state narrative. For all the Czechoslovak state’s celebration of legionaries, these men formed a very small minority of veterans; more than 90% of all ex-servicemen in Czechoslovakia had not fought in the Legions. Even most Czechs and Slovaks, not to mention Germans and members of other ethnic groups, never entered these units. In turn, there is little evidence of any ‘institutionalized prejudice against Austro-Hungarian veterans’, which did exist, for example, in Yugoslavia.³⁵ Although these ex-servicemen were sometimes treated in an insensitive way or with little respect, their sheer numbers meant that the state could not be actively biased against them.

³³ John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903–1945* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 13; Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Indiana, 2009), pp. 98-143; Eichenberg, *Kämpfen für Frieden und Fürsorge. Polnische Veteranen des Ersten Weltkriegs und ihre internationalen Kontakte, 1918–1939* (Munich, 2011), pp. 51-54.

³⁴ Newman, p. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Akin to other postwar European countries, disabled veterans constituted a significant proportion of the population of Czechoslovakia. By the end of 1923, 193,791 former Austro-Hungarian soldiers had been classified by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Social Care as having reached the level of disability necessary to be eligible for state pensions.³⁶ The applications of 68,133 others had been either rejected by officials or deemed not to have reached the required 20% disability threshold; many others apparently missed the application deadline.³⁷ Neither of these figures includes the further thousands of disabled men – Austro-Hungarian officers and professional non-commissioned officers (NCOs) – who were classified and treated separately by the Ministry of National Defence. Meanwhile, a total of 10,345 Czechoslovak legionaries were also recognised as being disabled.³⁸ Although several thousand disabled Czechoslovak citizens included in these figures resided abroad,³⁹ it can still be observed that one in 20 adult Czechoslovak men qualified in the early 1920s as either physically or mentally impaired as a result of the Great War.⁴⁰

Hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovak citizens were also officially recognised as war victims, be it as widows/partners, children, parents, or siblings of deceased servicemen. In total, 552,266 noncombatants had met the legal criteria by December 1923;⁴¹ according to organisations of war victims, thousands of others failed to apply within the set period.⁴² Shortly after the end of the conflict, war victims, including disabled

³⁶ *Statistická příručka II.*, p. 472.

³⁷ '§ 29. prodloužen', *Nový život*, 21 March 1936, p. 1.

³⁸ 'Kolik je legionářů invalidů?', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, 1 Nov. 1928, p. 6.

³⁹ In December 1922, 5,909 veterans staying outside of Czechoslovakia were receiving disability pensions from the republic; this figure included 3,724 men in Germany and 1,866 in Austria. For more information about these veterans, see Chapter VI. O. Kypr, 'Výroční zpráva Zemského úřadu pro péči o válečné poškozené v Čechách za rok 1922', *Sociální služba*, Apr. 1923, pp. 164-166.

⁴⁰ *Statistická příručka II.*, pp. 382-383.

⁴¹ *Statistická příručka II.*, p. 472.

⁴² See, for example, 'Komu na tom záleží a komu nie!', *Nový život*, 23 March 1935, p. 2.

veterans, represented roughly 6–7% of the entire Czechoslovak population.⁴³ As the Czech member of parliament Rudolf Laube observed in April 1921, care for war victims constituted ‘a tremendous social problem given to our young republic’.⁴⁴

Although membership figures of war victims’ organisations fluctuated in the interwar years, the largest of them, Družina československých válečných poškozenců (Fellowship of Czechoslovak War Victims)⁴⁵ and Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen in der tschechoslowakischen Republik (Union of the War Wounded, Widows, and Orphans in the Czechoslovak Republic),⁴⁶ grew to as many as 120,000 and 94,000 members, respectively.⁴⁷ Other associations were significantly smaller and in most cases did not attract more than 10,000 war victims.⁴⁸ No comprehensive statistics exist detailing the readership of journals produced by these organisations; however, in 1937, *Nový život*, which belonged to Družina československých válečných poškozenců, was produced in runs of approximately 15,000 copies.⁴⁹ Almost a decade earlier, Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen had apparently issued its *Der Kriegsverletzte* in runs of more than 50,000 copies.⁵⁰ Several smaller journals were also published by war victims, often for a short period of time.

⁴³ *Statistická příručka II.*, p. 365.

⁴⁴ *Zákon o požitcích válečných poškozenců*, ed. Rudolf Laube (Prague, n.d.), p. 3.

⁴⁵ The association was established in June 1917 as Družina českých invalidů válečných ze zemí koruny svatováclavské (Fellowship of the Czech War Invalids from the Lands of the Crown of Saint Wenceslas). Its name changed to Družina československých válečných poškozenců in 1919.

⁴⁶ The original name of the organisation was Bund der Kriegsverletzten für Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien (Union of the War Wounded for Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia). It was renamed to Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen in der tschechoslowakischen Republik in 1921.

⁴⁷ František Neumeister, ‘V novém roce, do nové práce’, *Nový život*, 1 Jan. 1927, p. 1; ‘Zusammenkunft der Vertreter der Verbände der Kriegsbeschädigten u. Kriegsteilnehmer in Genf’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 May 1923, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Pět let práce Svazu čsl. válečných poškozenců křesťansko-sociálních* (Brno, n.d.), p. 4; ‘Zpráva o řádné valné hromadě Družiny oslepených vojinů Č. S. R. ...’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 June 1922, p. 3; K-g, ‘Do nového roku’, *Naše směry*, 14 Jan. 1924, p. 1. See Chapter V for a discussion of the dubious figures provided by the organisation of war victims Nadiya (Hope) from Ruthenia.

⁴⁹ *Zpráva ke XIV. sjezdu Družiny československých válečných poškozenců dne 10. a 11. listopadu 1945 v Obecním dome hlavního města Prahy* (Prague, 1945), p. 52.

⁵⁰ Leppin, ‘10 Jahre „Der Kriegsverletzte“’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Jan. 1929, p. 1.

As Julia Eichenberg pithily observed in one of her studies of Polish ex-servicemen, ‘ein demobilisierter Soldat ist noch kein Veteran’.⁵¹ She perceived the process of a former soldier becoming a veteran as being defined not only by outside factors, such as legal regulations, but also by personal decisions of individual men to take up this identity and participate in various types of social interaction.⁵² In this sense, Czechoslovak men were not any different from their counterparts living in other post-Habsburg states or elsewhere in the world. Some would refer publicly to their service, whereas many others tended to avoid this topic for a variety of reasons. Similarly, the definition and meaning of disability are not easy to pinpoint. As Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky observed:

‘disability’ ... is not simply located in the bodies of individuals. It is a socially and culturally constructed identity. Public policy, professional practices, societal arrangements, and cultural values all shape its meaning.⁵³

Indeed, some of the Czechoslovak men who returned home with lasting injuries and illnesses chose to actively participate in organisations for war victims, and thus became highly visible to historical researchers; others never joined such organisations or at most became passive members and rarely voiced any opinions or beliefs. To briefly consider the latter group of men, whose lives have become largely impossible to trace, we can examine Josef Sudek, one of the most influential Czech photographers of the 20th century.

⁵¹ Eichenberg, *Kämpfen*, p. 41.

⁵² See also Šmidrkál, pp. 84-85.

⁵³ Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, ‘Introduction: Disability History: From the Margins to the Mainstream’, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York, 2001), p. 19.

⁵⁴ Josef Sudek, ‘Z Invalidovny’, accessed 1 May 2020 at http://sbirky.moravska-galerie.cz/dielo/CZE:MG.MG_8421.



Fig. 1. One of Josef Sudek's photographs from *Invalidovna*.⁷⁰

There can be no doubt that Sudek's life was greatly influenced by the Great War. As he recollected, even half a century after the conflict, the first impulse to become a professional photographer came in wartime Italy, which he visited as an Austro-Hungarian soldier.⁵⁵ However, the war affected Sudek in an even more significant way: he lost his right arm after a grenade explosion.⁵⁶ After 1918, Sudek

spent several years living in the Czechoslovak veterans' home *Invalidovna* in Prague. In *Invalidovna*, which was, incidentally, also the headquarters of *Družina československých válečných poškozců*, Sudek produced some of his most famous photographs.⁵⁷

However, Sudek was by no means vocal about his service. By all accounts, he neither actively participated in *Družina* or any other veterans' organisations nor discussed the war at any great length. A Nobel Prize-winning friend of his, Jaroslav Seifert, observed both Sudek's silence about his injury and the significant impact it had on him and his way of working:

[He did] everything with his left [hand]. An empty sleeve was dangling on the right side of his coat. The First World War ripped off his shoulder and

⁵⁵ V. J. Kovářik, 'Ateliér ve stínu činžáků', *Květy*, 14 Sep. 1968, pp. 42-44, cited in Jaroslav Anděl and Adéla Petruželková (eds.), *Josef Sudek v rozhovorech a vzpomínkách* (Prague, 2014), p. 45.

⁵⁶ Anna Fárová, *Josef Sudek*, (Prague, 1995), p. 23.

⁵⁷ See Pavel Heřmánek, „Aby nemuseli nakonec žebrať“: *Příběhy z dějin karlínské Invalidovny* (Prague, 2015), pp. 130-132.

his arm. He never spoke about it. ... When he was setting up the device, he would help himself [by using] his teeth.⁵⁸

Sudek's silence about the Great War precludes a closer analysis of him as a disabled veteran. Although the loss of his arm clearly affected his professional life, little more can be observed that would be directly connected to the conflict. Many other veterans presumably approached their wartime injuries in a similar manner.

Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows. The chapter entitled 'The Great War and Czechoslovak Society' (Ch II) introduces and explores the complicated collective memory of the conflict obtained in interbellum Czechoslovakia and the uneasy position of Austro-Hungarian veterans in it. The state narrative, which emphasised and celebrated resistance of Czechs and Slovaks to Austria-Hungary in the Legions and elsewhere, inevitably marginalised the military experience of the vast majority of Czechoslovak veterans. Whilst many ex-servicemen reacted to this situation by avoiding any discussion of their service in public, others adjusted their narratives to match the rhetoric of the state. The eagerness of the republic and its Czech and Slovak inhabitants to distance themselves from the Habsburg Empire was reflected even in the Czechoslovak perception of wartime mutinies of Czech and Slovak soldiers. As the chapter shows, these events came to be seen as expressions of resistance to Austria-Hungary and their participants were remembered as martyrs instead of malcontents after October 1918. That a vastly different narrative about the veterans' military past began to emerge with the passing years, which allowed the Czech men to emphasise their martial prowess and

⁵⁸ Jaroslav Seifert, *Všecky krásy světa* (Prague, 1982), pp. 368-369.

wartime credentials, and became even more widespread in the bellicose atmosphere of the 1930s was hardly a surprise.

‘The Czechoslovak (Re-)Public and Disabled Veterans’ (Ch III) seeks to expand our perception and understanding of them by exploring the varied roles of individual ex-servicemen and their organisations, which stretched far beyond the mere pursuit of social rights. Immediately after the revolution, disabled Czech veterans provided aid to the fledgling state both by maintaining and protecting order and by proselytising on behalf of the republic amongst fellow war victims in Těšín Silesia. In this disputed region, the Czechoslovak republic used care for war victims as a tool in its attempt to sway the local population. Only a few years later, Družina československých válečných poškozenců established its own home for war orphans, which it then operated for a number of years. The veterans perceived this enterprise not only as a way to help children of the fallen comrades but also as an attempt to safeguard the future of the Czechoslovak state. Furthermore, similar to their counterparts in other countries, disabled Czechoslovak veterans became involved in the peace movement, in which they participated at both national and international levels. In particular, German ex-servicemen were vocal supporters of efforts to protect peace throughout the interwar years.

‘State Care in Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovak Veterans’ (Ch IV) examines how the complicated memory of the Great War and the past of Czechoslovak ex-servicemen were reflected in this area; the chapter looks at how the state approached and treated its disabled veterans and how they interacted with the republic, in which the role of nonstate actors in care for war victims was severely limited. In the early 1920s, Czechoslovakia established a complicated system of provisions and care for various groups of ex-servicemen. In some ways, it reflected the privileged position of legionaries in Czechoslovak society; in others, state care was guided by financial considerations, class

hierarchies, and various other factors. Most disabled veterans were expected to earn their living through work. However, despite their numerous calls, the republic never made it obligatory to employ war victims. In turn, many of the veterans ended up competing with fellow ex-servicemen and other Czechoslovaks for the few employment opportunities provided by the state.

‘Ethnicity and Ex-servicemen’ (Ch V) looks more closely at relations between different ethnic groups of disabled veterans to understand to what degree they were able and willing to cooperate based on their shared status as war victims. The chapter shows that attitudes of war victims’ organisations towards their counterparts and fellow Czechoslovak citizens from other ethnic groups underwent significant positive changes throughout the interbellum. After highly strained interaction in the early years of the republic, when disabled Czech veterans often attacked members of the German minority, the two groups began to cooperate to achieve their goals. Although leaders of the largest Czech and German organisations fell out in the 1930s (for reasons unrelated to politics), many ex-servicemen continued to espouse hopes of cooperation between ethnic groups until the end of the first Czechoslovak republic.

‘Politics and Disabled Veterans’ (Ch VI) examines the topic of political allegiances of organisations of war victims. It shows that most of these associations were far from apolitical; for example, *Družina československých válečných poškozenců* became closely affiliated with the Czechoslovak Social Democrats, and some of its leaders even became MPs for the party despite *Družina*’s incessant claims about its apolitical nature. However, no large group of disabled veterans ever became radicalised, with the notable exception of the German Bund, which started to openly support the *Sudetendeutsche Partei* of Konrad Henlein in 1938 after two decades of strict political neutrality. Furthermore, the chapter explores how in Ruthenia the local association came to act as a valuable tool for both local

politicians and Czech officials, who were looking for public support in the remote and little-known region.

‘Legionaries and the “Others”’ (Ch VII) argues that disabled veterans of the Legions were largely conspicuous by their absence in the public discourse and at official events. Nevertheless, they saw themselves as superior to disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen; the legionaries proudly emphasised their wartime service and its voluntary nature, which apparently separated them from their Austro-Hungarian counterparts. Not surprisingly, in the 1920s, many Austro-Hungarian veterans expressed a great amount of frustration and disappointment with the privileged status of legionaries. However, in later years, as the atmosphere in the republic began to change under the threat from neighbouring Nazi Germany, disabled Czech ex-servicemen established closer cooperation with the legionaries. The legionary narrative even permeated the rhetoric of Czech Austro-Hungarian war victims, who began to portray themselves as being inspired by the Legions and their legacy. For all their differences, disabled German veterans also gradually developed ties with Czechoslovak legionaries in the 1930s.

‘Disabled White Russian Veterans and Czechoslovakia’ (Ch VIII) examines the rhetoric of ex-servicemen from the Russian Empire who came to reside in Czechoslovakia. By doing so, the chapter provides a different point of departure for the analysis of how the Great War and service in the conflict were understood in the republic. In their newspapers as well as numerous books, which were written largely in Czech instead of Russian for them to be able to influence the local population, disabled Russian veterans combined their highly nationalistic vision of the Great War with the local legionary narrative. These veterans depicted the conflict in an idealised manner as a struggle for Slavic freedom, in which they had fought for the liberation of fellow Slavs shoulder to shoulder with the valiant legionaries. In turn, the cause of disabled Russian veterans was supported by

various right-wing notables and legionaries, who stressed the role of Russia in the Allied war effort in an attempt to foment public support for these men.

‘Blinded Veterans’ (Ch IX) analyses the position of these servicemen and their perception in Czechoslovak society. The chapter shows that not all disabled veterans were treated the same way; due to their particular type of impairment, blind men were perceived and approached as much different from other veterans. This was a reflection of a wider understanding of blind people as particularly affected by their disability, which in turn resulted in a considerable amount of interest on the part of society. Most, albeit not all, of the veterans themselves employed the rhetoric of helplessness and suffering. Nevertheless, blind ex-servicemen received considerably better care compared with their civilian counterparts in a period in which the Czechoslovak welfare state was still only being formed and developed.

‘Epilogue’ (Ch X) briefly considers the lives of ex-servicemen beyond 1938–1939. The chapter follows the disabled veterans and their organisations throughout the years of World War II and the postwar period, during which their position underwent further significant shifts. Whereas during the war there were attempts to revise the meaning of the service in the Austro-Hungarian ranks and paint it in more positive colours, after 1945 and 1948 disabled ex-servicemen became builders of the republic and the new order. The disabled veterans’ movement ultimately disappeared from public view in the early 1950s after the regime decided to create a unified organisation of disabled Czechoslovaks.

This thesis stems from and builds on its author’s MPhil research. It makes use of his MPhil dissertation entitled ‘Veterans of the Great War in Interbellum Czechoslovakia’, particularly in Chapters V and VI as well as in the Introduction and Epilogue.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Adam Luptak, ‘Veterans of the Great War in Interbellum Czechoslovakia’ (University of Oxford MPhil thesis, 2015).

Furthermore, it utilises articles published in two volumes of conference proceedings in Slovakia and the Czech Republic and in the *Journal of Social History*, which were written during the duration of the author's DPhil degree.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Adam Lupták, 'Vojenská invalida rakúsko-uhorských ozbrojených síl na území medzivojnového Slovenska', ed. Nikoleta Dzurikaninová, *Stretnutie mladých historikov V. Vojenské konflikty v dejinách Európy*, (Košice, 2016), pp. 94-104; Adam Lupták, '„Zapadli jsme do ústraní jako staromodní hrdinové, ponechavše místo jiným“: „Váleční slepci“ v medzivojnovom Československu', ed. Jaromír Karpíšek, Zbyněk Sturz, and Marie Bláhová, *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století XII.*, (Hradec Králové, 2018), pp. 165-172; Adam Luptak and John Paul Newman, 'Victory, Defeat, Gender, and Disability: Blind War Veterans in Interwar Czechoslovakia', *Journal of Social History*, 53.3 (2020), pp. 604-619.

Chapter II: The Great War and Czechoslovak Society

‘In the morning, we wanted them to take us prisoners. But they gave us their rifles and begged us to take them prisoners. We asked why and they said they had had enough of the war and that they were Macedonians’.¹

A Czech veteran describing the morning after his unit had been drinking with enemy soldiers, into whom they had accidentally run in a Serbian village.

Following more than four years of bloodshed, Austro-Hungarian veterans came back to an entirely new state; a state that did not conscript them, but, on the contrary, one whose troops waged war against these men and the Habsburg empire. Military service for the monarchy suddenly became an awkward reminder of the pre-Czechoslovak past, which linked a substantial part of the adult male population to the *ancien régime*. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Austro-Hungarian veterans found themselves in a difficult situation.

This chapter brings to light and discusses the uneasy and complicated relationship of Austro-Hungarian veterans with the Czechoslovak memory of the Great War. Firstly, the chapter briefly introduces the respective positions of legionaries and Austro-Hungarian veterans in the highly selective collective memory of the new republic. It then looks at some of the wartime mutinies of Czech and Slovak soldiers in the imperial ranks, which were viewed positively in the first Czechoslovak republic. Afterwards, the chapter shows how the rhetoric of former Austro-Hungarian soldiers, who came to live in a state they had not fought for, changed and developed throughout the interwar period. It analyses how the Czech and Slovak veterans retrospectively attempted to explain their presence in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces, and how they described and justified their wartime

¹ Karel Tůma, ‘Na srbském bojišti’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl I, ed. Alois Žipek (Prague, 1929), p. 202.

actions. The chapter observes the silence of the vast majority of men and their reluctance to associate themselves with the former empire. Later, it explores the considerable changes in the veterans' rhetoric that came about in the increasingly militarised atmosphere of the 1930s.

In regard to the discourse produced by Czech veterans, the thesis further confirms and expands on earlier findings of Jiří Hutečka, who identified several ways in which these ex-servicemen dealt with and portrayed their imperial past.² According to Hutečka, the Austro-Hungarian war service of legionaries could be presented as a prelude to their ultimate desertion and joining of the Legions; those who did not become members of the Legions could portray it as a site of their passive resistance to the Habsburg war effort, from which they often tried to escape. Men who had distinguished themselves in the Austro-Hungarian ranks sought to downplay their military achievements. However, in the 1930s, a different discourse appeared, which emphasised the military prowess of Czech soldiers in the Great War.

Czechoslovakia and Its Legionaries

Indeed, from its inception in 1918, Czechoslovakia interwove the narrative about its wartime Legions, which had fought valiantly against the Central Powers, into the fabric of its national myth. This helped the state to legitimise itself by virtue of the resistance offered by the Czechs and Slovaks to Austria-Hungary, and of a history of strong and widespread patriotic sentiment towards the idea of Czechoslovakia. It is almost impossible to encapsulate how conspicuous legionaries were in the Czechoslovak republic, particularly when compared with former Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen. Official Czechoslovak accounts of the Great War focused predominantly on the legionary

² Hutečka, 'Kamarádi frontovníci', pp. 231-265.

involvement in the conflict, and Czechoslovak armed forces took up the Legions as the source of their military tradition.³ By contrast, the state largely glossed over the military service rendered by hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovaks on behalf of Austria-Hungary,⁴ or described it as being involuntary, enforced, and meeting with Czech resistance.⁵ Instead of being depicted as heroic warriors, these men were largely portrayed as resisting Austria-Hungary and being willing to desert the Habsburg ranks in order to join their legionary brethren. The republic went so far as to establish Památník odboje (Memorial of Resistance) and Archiv národního osvobození (Archive of National Liberation) with the intention of preserving and honouring the memory of the Legions and the Czechoslovak struggle for independence.⁶

Throughout the interwar period, legionaries were accorded a prominent and privileged role in state rituals and their service was celebrated and constantly remembered in public space; streets and squares were named after these men, and several films depicting their struggle were produced.⁷ Meanwhile, ‘legionary literature’ (*legionářská literatura*) became a taxonomic term for a vast body of work, which consisted of several hundred, often substandard, novels and a few dozen plays and poems.⁸ Whilst Austro-

³ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 212.

⁴ See, for example, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Světová revoluce za války a ve válce, 1914-1918* (Prague, 1925), p. 448.

⁵ In his book, Martin Zückert shows how a reunion of former soldiers of the 36th infantry regiment in Mladá Boleslav was named ‘Celebration of 36ers’ Resistance’ after the instigation of a local government office in 1924. See Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, pp. 227-229.

⁶ In 1929, these institutions were merged with Vojenský archiv Republiky Československé (Military Archive of the Czechoslovak Republic) and Vojenské museum Republiky Československé (Museum of the Czechoslovak Republic) into Památník osvobození (Memorial of Liberation). ‘Národní památník na Vítkově’, accessed 4 Apr. 2015 at <http://www.vzpominej.nm.cz/narodni-pamatnik-na-vitkove>; ‘Historie Vojenského historického ústavu Praha’, accessed 6 Aug. 2020 at <http://www.vhu.cz/zakladni-informace-o-vhu-praha/historie-vhu-praha/>; Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 215.

⁷ Tomáš Lachman, ‘Legionářská tematika v hraném filmu první republiky aneb Od Československého Ježíška ke Zborovu’, *Film a dějiny*, ed. Petr Kopal (Prague, 2005), pp. 209-218; Michl, p. 79.

⁸ See Robert B. Pynsent, ‘The Literary Representation of the Czechoslovak ‘Legions’ in Russia’, *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe, 1918–1948*, ed. Mark Cornwall and Robert John Weston Evans (Oxford, 2007), pp. 63-88.

Hungarian uniforms were forbidden by Czechoslovak authorities,⁹ legionaries wore theirs with pride at their meetings and gatherings as well as various state events. The three interwar rallies (*‘manifestační sjezdy’*) of the largest legionary organisation, Československá obec legionářská (ČsOL – Union of Czechoslovak Legionaries), in 1924, 1928, and 1935 were colossal events, for which thousands of former soldiers streamed into Prague. There, they were greeted by high Czech and Slovak state and military officials, representatives of other organisations, such as Sokol and Dělnická tělocvičná jednota (DTJ - Workers’ Gymnastic Union), and members of the public who celebrated their service.¹⁰



Fig. 2. President Masaryk (centre) and his entourage (left) visiting a disabled veterans’ cooperative in 1919. Although presumably most of the men in the picture were ex-servicemen, some of whom were definitely veterans of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces, tellingly the only one in uniform is the Czech legionary standing next to Masaryk.¹¹

Prague Castle, the official residence and office of the Czechoslovak president, was even guarded by soldiers in three different types of legionary uniform, each one representing a different (i.e., Russian, French, or Italian) branch of the Legions.¹² In 1935,

⁹ See Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, pp. 224-225.

¹⁰ Lev Sychrava and Ladislav Sýkora (eds.), *Památník manifestačního sjezdu legionářů v Praze 1924* (Prague, 1924); Josef Svatoš and Václav Kaplický (eds.), *Památník II. manifestačního sjezdu legionářského v Praze ve dnech 29. června až 2. července 1928* (Prague, 1928); Josef Svatoš (ed.), *Památník III. manifestačního sjezdu čs. legionářů, konaného pod protektorátem pana presidenta republiky dra T.G. Masaryka ve dnech 4.-7. července 1935 v Praze* (Prague, 1935).

¹¹ *Dvacet let: ODIP výrobní orthopedické družstvo invalidů v Praze* (Prague, 1938), p. 24.

¹² Marie Koldinská and Ivan Šedivý, *Válka a armáda v českých dějinách: Sociohistorické črty* (Prague, 2008), p. 365.

the Ministry of National Defence went so far as to order its soldiers on active duty to salute legionaries wearing uniform regardless of their rank.¹³ Symbolically, legionaries were also eligible for military funerals even after leaving the armed forces, thus forever remaining soldiers of the republic.



Fig. 3. A photograph from the second half of the 1930s depicting soldiers from the guard of Prague Castle dressed in the three different types of legionary uniform – Italian (closest), French, and Russian.¹⁴

This veneration of the Legions and their intertwining with the state was perhaps best exemplified by the treatment of the Battle of Zborov (Zboriv in Galicia). The anniversary of this 1917 battle, which was regarded as the first significant involvement of the Legions on the Eastern Front, was remembered from 1928 onwards on the 2nd of July as the Day of the Czechoslovak Army (*‘svátek československé armády’*).¹⁵ The date became a prominent national holiday during the interwar period, second in importance only to the 28th of October, when the establishment of Czechoslovakia was celebrated.¹⁶ Even Prague’s Tomb of the Unknown Soldier commemorated the body of a legionary from

¹³ ‘Na schůzi čsl. sekce FIDACu’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Nov. 1936, p. 4; Michl, p. 41.

¹⁴ ‘Fotogalerie k přehlídkám v letech 1918-1939’, accessed 14 June 2015 at <http://www.acr.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=11865>.

¹⁵ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 216.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Zborov.¹⁷ Importantly, little thought was given to the sacrifice of Czech soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian units, many of whom incidentally stood against the legionaries at Zborov.

Indeed, the fall of Austria-Hungary and the subsequent emergence of Czechoslovakia were not seen by many Czechs as a mere change of political elites. Instead, they viewed the events of 1918 as both a national and political ‘revolution’, which they associated with images of a new, better, and fairer state. ‘Democracy’ became one of the buzzwords of the period, first as a cherished dream and later as an unfulfilled goal and an idealised benchmark. However, due to the vastly differing political opinions of different strata of Czechoslovak society, this word was largely used as an empty container that would be filled with qualities based on the respective political beliefs of its users.¹⁸

In particular, legionaries came to be seen as bearers of the supposed revolutionary changes, both in 1918 and in the later period. For years, leading Czech and, to a smaller extent, Slovak politicians lauded their service and emphasised their role in the life of the republic. As the Social Democratic member of parliament Rudolf Bechyně observed on the occasion of the 1928 rally of the left-wing Československá obec legionářská (ČsOL),

I would not want legionaries to become dependent on socialist parties. Let them be outside political parties as a whole and let them preserve their freedom towards all, so that they would be able to freely enact their mission: to be a Tábor [i.e., a Hussite revolutionary town] of the republic; to be the guardians of ideas which formed the spiritual backbone of resistance.¹⁹

Legionaries themselves engaged in this rhetoric; throughout the interwar period, these veterans regularly emphasised that 1918 was meant to be a break with the ancien

¹⁷ See Jan Galandauer, ‘Hrob Neznámého vojína v proměnách času’, *Historie a vojenství*, 48.2 (1999), pp. 251-273. See also the monumental film about the battle, *Zborov*. Directed by J. A. Holman and Jiří Slavíček, Nationalfilm, 1938.

¹⁸ See Orzoff, pp. 219-220.

¹⁹ Rudolf Bechyně, ‘Jak já to vidím’, *Národní osvobození*, 1 July 1928, p. 2.

régime and a starting point of a new order, in which they would actively participate. One of the legionary leaders, the National Socialist member of parliament Josef Patejdl, observed in 1924 that during the war, the legionary became a ‘new man’, whose ‘weapon was [only] a temporary tool for the fulfilment of his revolutionary program’.²⁰ Indeed, four years earlier, a disabled legionary leader Jindřich Habrovanský had already spoken of legionary-run businesses, ‘envisioning them as ... front sentries ... penetrating each branch of our economic, commercial, and industrial life’.²¹ Thus, whilst legionaries’ fighting in the war was over, the ex-servicemen were still expected to work for the republic, this time within its peacetime society; as the ‘Manifesto of Czechoslovak legionaries’ of Československá obec legionářská noted in 1928,

Primarily, it [is] necessary to work towards the liberation of our people, to raise a fully and entirely liberated citizen, who will [form] a strong basis and a reliable support of national and state freedom.²²

Indeed, the unequal position of legionaries and Austro-Hungarian veterans was reflected even in the most basic aspects of their treatment. Since there was never any significant need to establish precisely who qualified as an Austro-Hungarian war veteran, no separate Czechoslovak law was issued to provide a definition. Information about able-bodied veterans of the empire was simply not gathered by the officials; only data about disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen were recorded by the state.

In total, the names of 109,590 men were entered into the registers of Kancelář československých legií (The Office of the Czechoslovak Legions), a department which was established within the Ministry of National Defence to help and work with legionary veterans.²³ However, not all of these men qualified as legionaries according to the law

²⁰ Patejdl, ‘Úvaha k manifestačnímu legionářskému sjezdu’, *Národní osvobození*, 28 June 1924, p. 1.

²¹ Jindra Habrovanský, ‘Hospodářská akce svépomocná’, *Československý legionář*, 12 June 1920, p. 2.

²² ‘Manifest československých legionářů’, *Národní osvobození*, 2 July 1928, p. 3.

²³ Šedivý, ‘Družina československých legionářů’, p. 94.

462/1919. The law defined legionaries as volunteers of the Czechoslovak foreign forces who had joined the ranks by the 28th of October 1918 and were performing their duty on this day; or those who could not be present on the 28th of October 1918 for reasons outside their control; or those who had been ‘properly’ (‘řádně’) released from the forces beforehand.²⁴ Furthermore, according to the law, legionaries were also those men of Austrian, Hungarian, or German citizenship who had voluntarily joined Allied forces and were performing their duty on the 28th of October 1918; or those who had been ‘properly’ released, if they could prove that they had been unable to enter the Czechoslovak Legions due to reasons outside their control.

All in all, only 88,688 soldiers managed to fulfil these criteria.²⁵ In his detailed work on legionaries, the historian Jan Michl listed a number of reasons why more than 20,000 men failed to do so.²⁶ Most, including the author of *The Good Soldier Švejk*, Jaroslav Hašek, were Russian legionaries who left their units or were expelled from them in the period after the October Revolution, when many of these men were drawn to the Communist ideology. Others simply failed to prove their presence in the Legions or joined them too late.²⁷

The disparate positions of legionaries and Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen were also echoed in linguistic terms. Importantly, veterans of the imperial forces were usually not addressed with words that would explicitly mention their service for Austria-Hungary.²⁸ Instead, the more numerous disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen were

²⁴ The law 462/1919 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

²⁵ Šedivý, p. 94.

²⁶ Michl, pp. 16-17.

²⁷ Needless to say, tens of thousands of soldiers of the Czechoslovak Home Guard in Italy (Československá domobrana v Itálii), which emerged in November 1918 from amongst Czech and Slovak POWs, were also not considered legionaries.

²⁸ Similarly, Czechoslovak laws for war victims avoided any references to Austria-Hungary. See laws 199/1919 and 142/1920 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

usually referred to in Czech simply as ‘invalid’ (*invalida*), ‘war invalid’ (*válečný invalida*), or ‘war victim’ (*válečný poškozenec*). Their able-bodied counterparts could be addressed as a ‘soldier from the world war’ (*voják ze světové války*); only occasionally would a somewhat derogatory expression ‘Austrianer’ (*austriák*) be used. Veterans’ organisations also used the terms ‘frontline soldier’ (*frontovník*) and ‘former warrior’ (*bývalý válečník*). Meanwhile, the exceptional nature of legionaries’ service was also reflected and remembered in separate terms used for these men. A disabled legionary would not usually be referred to in official and semi-official documents merely as an ‘invalid’; instead the expression ‘legionary-invalid’ (*legionář-invalida*) would be used. Similarly, able-bodied veterans of the Legions were rarely conflated with Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen; they were known throughout Czechoslovakia as ‘legionaries’ (*legionáři*), although other expressions such as ‘foreign warrior’ (*zahraniční bojovník*) were occasionally utilised.

Paul Fussell famously observed that ‘every war is ironic’.²⁹ In the case of Czechoslovakia, even war’s memory turned out to be ironic when Jaroslav Hašek’s imaginary soldier Josef Švejk became famous worldwide, thereby eternally tying the Czechs, who had been constantly trying to dissociate themselves from Austria-Hungary, to the war effort of the empire. The role of Švejk, who was in Czech minds transformed into an archetypal shirking soldier, as an important inspiration for Czech veterans and their dealing with the wartime past has already been recognised by Jiří Hutečka.³⁰ However, it needs to be observed that although this archetype was certainly present in many of the

²⁹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, 2013), p. 8.

³⁰ Hutečka, ‘Kamarádi frontovníci’, pp. 241-242.

veterans' narratives, the name of Švejk was not brought up by veterans as often as one might expect.³¹

The 28th Imperial and Royal Infantry Regiment

The story of the 28th Austro-Hungarian infantry regiment offers us a fascinating example of the Czech interwar desire to downplay their imperial past within the public discourse. In early April 1915, the regiment, which consisted mainly of Prague Czechs and was therefore known as the 'Prague Children' (*'pražské děti'*), was almost completely annihilated in fighting on the Eastern front, with many soldiers either killed or taken prisoner. Immediately after the event, the Austrian command decided to lay the blame for the loss at the feet of the Czech soldiers and the unit was temporarily disbanded. The defeat was viewed by many German-speaking inhabitants of the monarchy as its betrayal; meanwhile, for Czech activists this loss and the subsequent accusations against the unit served as evidence of the heroic disloyalty towards Austria-Hungary.³² However, such views did not correspond with the actual course of events; to quote the historian Richard Lein,

Hardly anybody on the Austrian or the Czech side was interested in the fact that the collapse of the regiment had not been caused by a betrayal of its soldiers, but by fatal strategy errors of the officers in command, who had later let the unit take the blame for their own mistakes.³³

Nevertheless, in interwar Czechoslovakia, this legend about the regiment and its soldiers who supposedly deserted their positions 'with the [military] band [playing] and

³¹ See, for example, František Liederbauch, 'Strach ze „Švejkovštiny"', *Nový život*, 14 July 1928, pp. 1-2; František Koza, '11. domobrana v Kopháze', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Alois Žípek (Prague, 1931).

³² Richard Lein, 'The "Betrayal" of the k.u.k. Infantry Regiment 28.: Truth or Legend?', *East European Identities in the 19th and 20th Century*, ed. Arnold Suppan and Richard Lein (Vienna, 2009), pp. 232-233.

³³ Lein, p. 233. See also Josef Fučík, *Osmadvacátníci: Spor o českého vojáka Velké války 1914-1918* (Prague, 2006), pp. 119-149.

[them] singing’³⁴ took on an evocative life of its own, with the event being repeatedly glorified in public.³⁵ The story also has a conspicuous presence in the writing of General Jaroslav Kunz, a former high-ranking Austrian military lawyer, who played a crucial role in the creation of Czechoslovak military justice after October 1918.³⁶ Before his death in 1933, Kunz authored several memoirs in which he discussed wartime Austria-Hungary, using his first-hand knowledge of many of the events.

In one of his books, Kunz directly addressed the question of the 28th infantry regiment and its defeat. Contrary to the existing narrative, Kunz claimed that this predominantly Czech unit had not deserted en masse and without so much as firing a single bullet at the enemy. Instead, in the chapter tellingly entitled ‘The False Legend about the 28th Infantry Regiment’, he argued that the unit had been defeated in combat after heavy fighting.³⁷ As an experienced military lawyer, Kunz supported the claim with a number of eyewitness reports and other sources.

However, at the same time, Kunz appears to almost want to apologise for his words. The author uses very cautious expressions and seems desperate to stress that he does not mean any harm when he claims that the unit had genuinely fought before being defeated. Furthermore, he immediately tries to stress that many of the soldiers did in fact surrender, as if to not question the opposition of the Czechs to the Habsburg monarchy.

I have to turn *to all good Czechs* at home. Let’s be honest! The history of our resistance at home, at the front and beyond the borders has to be *sacred* to us and has to be *true*. A wrong leaf has been woven into the laurel of our glory. Away with it! *Truth above everything!* ... I admit that possibly many will be unpleasantly affected [by these words], especially amongst the ‘Prague Children’ – 28ers and that many will [see this statement] as scandalous.

³⁴ Fučík, p. 424.

³⁵ To this day, a street named in honour of the unit stands near the Slavia Prague football stadium in the Czech capital.

³⁶ Jan Galandauer, ‘Generál Jaroslav Kunz: Příběh českého vojenského právníka’, *Historie a vojenství*, 63.3 (2014), p. 89.

³⁷ Jaroslav Kunz, *Tajnosti rakouského generálního štábu* (Prague, 1931), pp. 80-113.

Just to make it clear, I emphasise that on 3 April 1915, the Russians in the Carpathian Mountains really took most of the 28th regiment prisoner. No one has any doubts about the fact that many 28ers voluntarily let themselves to be captured. No one denies this truth. ...

[However,] [n]ot all the Czech soldiers in the Austrian army had the chance to be taken ... prisoners and they had to fight in the Austrian ranks [;] we cannot criticise them for that. None of them deserves [to be] shamed.³⁸

Despite Kunz's cautious approach, his contention met with strong opposition on the part of certain high-ranking legionaries, including Vojtěch Vladimír Klecanda, who had been credited with orchestrating the surrender of the regiment from his position of a Russian legionary officer.³⁹ Three years after Kunz's memoirs came out, Klecanda published a book in which he directly addressed the issue. He squarely rejected Kunz's claims and more or less reiterated his earlier arguments, which demonstrated the eagerness of the 'Prague Children' to give up.⁴⁰ With Kunz having passed away the previous year, the controversy did not develop any further.⁴¹

Austro-Hungarian Veterans' Portrayal of the Conflict

Indeed, so few of the hundreds of thousands of Czech and Slovak veterans wrote about their military experiences in the first decade of the republic that their works can be discussed within two paragraphs. Immediately after the war, the memoirs of the Slovak writer Ján Hrušovský were published.⁴² This book, which reuses some of Hrušovský's wartime articles, was rare in its approach to the conflict. Hrušovský seems to have no desire to be settling old scores with the empire. Although the author does not romanticise the war and hints at his later change into a more indifferent person, the sense of early excitement and adventure is clearly present in his writing, which depicts only the first few

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

³⁹ Fučík, pp. 418-427; Jiří Fidler, *Generálové legionáři* (Brno, 1999), pp. 139-140.

⁴⁰ Fučík, pp. 423-424; Vladimír Klecanda, *Slovenský Zborov* (Prague, 1934), pp. 51-63.

⁴¹ Fučík, p. 427.

⁴² Ján Hrušovský, *Zo svetovej vojny* (Turčiansky Svätý Martin, 1919).

months of the conflict. Soon afterwards the Czech writer Karel Vaněk, who would later be tasked with finishing the Švejk series after the death of Jaroslav Hašek, published his „*Charašó, pán, da?*“ 1914-1919: *Zápisky všelijakého vojáka*.⁴³ In a series of stories, poems, and daily observations, Vaněk portrays with sarcasm both his Austro-Hungarian military service and the time spent in Russia as a POW, during which he saw the horrors of the Russian Civil War. In 1920, a somewhat similar volume of Jan Valoušek was published. In the book *Z války a zajetí: S obrázky*, only a small portion of the text is dedicated to the war.⁴⁴ Instead, the work largely serves as a travelogue of this former POW, in which Valoušek introduces his reader to far-away Siberia, its people, and their culture and also briefly portrays everyday life in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution. A year later, another veteran, who wrote under the somewhat unusual pseudonym of Dr. Apostata, published two works about the war and the 35th infantry regiment.⁴⁵ The books, in which the author largely distances his own person from the narrative, serve as a damning indictment of the Habsburg monarchy and its armed forces; the author's account brims with sarcasm, anger, and hatred. In 1921, the aforementioned Jaroslav Kunz published *Za černožlutou oponou*, in which he shared with readers his experiences and observations from wartime Vienna. Not surprisingly, this as well as other volumes portrayed the high-ranking officer as a loyal Czech; the book ends in late 1918 with Kunz returning to the Bohemian lands, where he 'realised that [the Czechs were] free – and [his] eyes became moist'.⁴⁶

⁴³ Karel Vaněk, „*Charašó, pán, da?*“ 1914-1919: *Zápisky všelijakého vojáka* (Prague, 1920).

⁴⁴ Jan Valoušek, *Z války a zajetí: S obrázky* (Brno, 1920).

⁴⁵ Dr. Apostata, *Pětatřicátníci ve světové válce a na Slovensku* (Plzeň, 1921); Dr. Apostata, *Székesfőhérvár [sic] (Kletba militarismu)* (Plzeň, 1921).

⁴⁶ Jaroslav Kunz, *Za černožlutou oponou: Z vídeňských vzpomínek* (Prague, n.d.), p. 106. See also Jaroslav Kunz, *Kus českého života: Obrázky z mládí a z vojenského života* (Prague, 1929), pp. 178-179.

In 1921, the disabled veteran Jaroslav Kolman also published a volume of poems, two of which speak about the Serbian front, where he had served himself.⁴⁷ Both poems convey Kolman's rejection of the Habsburg war effort as well as a sense of personal guilt for participating in it and fighting against fellow Slavs.⁴⁸ In 1922, wartime poems of the prominent official of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Social Care Josef K. Skala were published.⁴⁹ Similar to Kolman, Skala expresses anti-war and pro-Serbian feelings in his poems. In the same year, the strongly anti-Habsburg book of Josef Šefl, who had been found guilty of mutiny during the war, also appeared.⁵⁰ In 1922, the Czech anarcho-communist writer Stanislav Kostka Neumann also published the first of his three 1920s Great War memoirs, *Elbasan: Válečné vzpomínky*.⁵¹ The three works depict the author's military journeys across south-eastern Europe, his rejection of the Habsburg monarchy, and his complete unwillingness to fight. In 1923, a war chronicle of the 21st rifle division appeared, in which the author emphasised the behaviour of its men in the final days of the war, when the unit mutinied against the monarchy, and in the subsequent weeks when it fought against Hungarians in Slovakia.⁵² A year later, a collection of anti-war and anti-Habsburg poems of the Austro-Hungarian veteran Ivan Živič appeared.⁵³ In 1924, Jaroslav Křenek also published memoirs from the war, which convey his fascination with far-away Albania, where he had to serve for the despised Austro-Hungarian monarchy.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ For a discussion of another book of Kolman, see Chapter IV.

⁴⁸ Jaroslav Kolman, '1914 a 1919', *Cassiovy listy* (Prague, 1921), pp. 37-39; Jaroslav Kolman, 'Mrtvý na Drině', *Cassiovy listy*, pp. 40-42.

⁴⁹ J. K. Skala, *Když smutek duši svíral* (Pardubice, n.d.).

⁵⁰ Josef Šefl, *Paměti domobrance 28. pluku z války světové 1914-1918* (Písek, 1922).

⁵¹ Stanislav K. Neumann, *Elbasan: Válečné vzpomínky* (Prague, 1922); Stanislav K. Neumann, *Válčení civilistovo* (Vyškov, 1925); Stanislav K. Neumann, *Bragožda a jiné válečné vzpomínky* (Prague, 1928).

⁵² Čeněk Novák, *Jak vznikl náš stát, naše samostatnost a republika 1918?? Revoluční! Stručný výťah z dějin bojů a revoluce bývalé 21. střelecké divise 1914-1918* (Beroun, 1923), pp. 61-74.

⁵³ Ivan Živič, *Pax vobiscum: Verše Čecha – austrijského vojáka* (Plzeň, 1924).

⁵⁴ Jaroslav Křenek, *Vzpomínky na vojnu v Albanii* (Jihlava, 1924).

Apart from these individual men, the only two groups of Czech and Slovak ex-soldiers to speak publicly about their Austro-Hungarian service in this period were disabled veterans and legionaries who joined the Legions as POWs. Many of the former were more or less forced to at least briefly refer to their wartime actions due to their social and economic circumstances. Albeit with subtle differences, the discourse created by organisations of disabled veterans appears to have largely chimed with the rhetoric of nondisabled ex-servicemen, with its rejection of Austria-Hungary and declarations of loyalty to Czechoslovakia.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, legionaries usually portrayed their Austro-Hungarian service as a painful and unwanted prelude to the eventual achievement of their goal – fighting for the independence of their beloved homeland on the side of the Entente.

Indeed, this almost complete silence on the part of the Austro-Hungarian nondisabled veterans of Czech and Slovak ethnicity came to an end in the second half of the 1920s. In 1927, a Czech veterans' society called Volné sdružení vojáků ze světové války (Loose Association of Soldiers from the World War) was established.⁵⁶ Soon afterwards it started to publish the newspaper *Kamarád*, which brought short war memoirs to its readers. Other veterans' groups later began to cooperate with the similarly named journal *Kamarádství*, and in the subsequent decade several individual ex-servicemen, such as Jan Morávek, Jan Šindelář, and Josef Merunka published their war memoirs.⁵⁷ A few others, including the writers Karel Konrád, Vladislav Vančura, and the aforementioned Ján

⁵⁵ See, for example, František Neumeister, 'Význam organisace', *Nová republika*, 15 Jan. 1921, p. 1; Metoděj Havlíček, 'Naše stanovisko', *Nový život*, 5 May 1923, p. 3; Ondřej Kypr, 'Žaluji!', *Nový život*, 15 May 1921, p. 1.

⁵⁶ 'K našemu V. řádnému sjezdu', *Kamarád*, 15 Dec. 1932, p. 1. For more information, see Antonín Metelka, *Sdružení českých vysloužilých vojinů a účastníků světové války 1914-1918 se sídlem v Praze: Ročenka 1942* (Prague, n.d.), pp. 25-26.

⁵⁷ Jan Morávek, *Špatný voják* (Prague, 1930); Jan Šindelář, *Proti vlastní vůli: Z deníku bojovníka první linie 1914-1918* (Prague, 1932); Josef Merunka, *Za ostnatým drátem: V zajateckém táboře v Rumunsku* (Prague, 1934); Ferdinand Lirš, *S osmadvacítky za světové války* (Prague, 1936); František Skála, *Válečný deník 1914-1918* (Kyšperk, 1937); Jaroslav Vítek, *V cizích službách* (Česká Skalice, 1937).

Hrušovský, used the wartime experience in their (semi-)fictional novels.⁵⁸ In 1932, the famous painter Karel Rélink, who had served in the 28th infantry regiment, published a volume of his light-hearted stories from the war, which focused on playful exploits of Czech soldiers, often with sexual innuendo.⁵⁹

Furthermore, 1929 saw the publication of the first of five gargantuan volumes of brief individual wartime memoirs, which were collected by Alois Žipek. The voluminous series, entitled *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*, allowed dozens of predominantly middle-class Czechs to publicly speak about their experience of the Great War. Importantly, most of these memoirs did not belong to Czechoslovak legionaries. They were largely produced by former Austro-Hungarian soldiers about their service. In turn, the ambiguous title of the series (*Home during the War* in English), which does not indicate the military nature of the vast majority of texts, points once again to the prevailing sense of unease about the Czech involvement in the Great War. To this day, the five books present the largest published source of ego documents about the Czech military involvement in the Great War on the side of the Habsburg empire.

However, with the exception of the five volumes, the emergence of war literature that began in the late 1920s was a significant change in relative rather than absolute terms. We can estimate that altogether the hundreds of thousands of Czech and Slovak veterans did not publish more than 30–40 autobiographical monographs,⁶⁰ including works of

⁵⁸ Karel Konrád, *Rinaldino: Román* (Prague, 1927); Karel Konrád, *Rozchod!* (Prague, 1934); Karel Poláček, *Hrdinové táhnou do boje* (Prague, 1936); Karel Poláček, *Podzemní město* (Prague, 1937); Karel Poláček, *Vyprodáno* (Prague, 1939); Vladislav Vančura, *Pole orná a válečná* (Prague, 1925); Ján Hrušovský, *Peter Pavel na prahu nového světa* (Prague, 1930).

⁵⁹ Karel Rélink, *28. pluk „Pražské děti“: Osmadvacátníci, veselí kluci, ve válečné vichřici* (Prague, 1932). See also the 1926 book of the Agrarian member of parliament Dominik Nejezchleb-Marcha, which poked fun at the Habsburg monarchy through various military anecdotes. Petr Západ [pseud. of Dominik Nejezchleb-Marcha], *Od regimentu k regimentu: Ironie, příhody a psiny z evropské války* (Brno, 1926).

⁶⁰ See Richard Sicha, *Český voják a říjnový převrat v Brně. Příspěvek k dějinám národního odboje domácího* (Brno, 1933).

disabled ex-servicemen František Bohuslav,⁶¹ Václav Koleč,⁶² and the Slovak Augustín Drobný.⁶³ Similarly, the circulation of veterans' newspapers and their readership remained fairly constricted as the membership of these organisations stayed relatively low, unlike in the case of German veterans living in Czechoslovakia.⁶⁴ According to Martin Zückert, Volné sdružení vojáků ze světové války and another association, Národní sdružení vojáků z fronty (National Association of Soldiers from the Frontline), had considerably fewer than 10,000 members.⁶⁵ The exception to this were regimental associations; for example, the veterans' organisation of the 36th infantry regiment, which was one of the most active and visible associations, apparently managed to bring together as many as 20,000 former soldiers, including pre-1914 servicemen, for its 1924 reunion.⁶⁶

This change that came about in the late 1920s can be explained by a combination of several different factors; the first was the publication of the war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which met with immense success in Germany and elsewhere;⁶⁷ the second was the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Czechoslovak state, which was accompanied by the production of vast amounts of official and semi-official literature relating to the state and its origins; and the third factor was the fact that the early postwar 'unwillingness to address such a recent trauma', mentioned by Rosa Maria Bracco in her

⁶¹ See Chapter IX for a closer analysis of Bohuslav's work. František Bohuslav, *Ke konci komedie: Divadelní, životní a válečné vzpomínky* (Prague, 1928).

⁶² There appear to be no extant copies of this book of one of the leaders of Družina československých válečných poškozenců. V. V. Koleč, *Črty ze života válečného a poválečného. (Z paměti vojína invalidy)* (Plzeň, n.d.); 'Kniha př. V. Koleč', *Nový život*, 16 Jan. 1932, p. 4.

⁶³ Augustín Drobný, *Krvavá potopa světa (1914-1918)* (Bratislava, 1933).

⁶⁴ Sudetendeutscher Soldatenbund, which emerged as an amalgamation of German veterans' associations in Czechoslovakia in 1938, claimed some 180,000 members. Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 223. See also Šmidrkal, pp. 86-101.

⁶⁵ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, pp. 222-224.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁶⁷ Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Providence, 1993), p. 145. The Czech translation of the book, which came out in Germany at the end of 1928, was published in 1929. See Erich Maria Remarque, *Na západní frontě klid* trans. Bohumil Mathesius (Prague, 1929).

study of British middlebrow war novels, was presumably beginning to subside.⁶⁸

Furthermore, the growing temporal distance might have eventually emboldened more veterans of the empire to speak openly about their potentially problematic service for the monarchy.

This uncertainty over whether and how to speak publicly about fighting for Austria-Hungary is clearly visible in Ivan Živič's foreword to his aforementioned collection of poems *Pax vobiscum* from 1924. In the opening section of the volume, which he tellingly entitled 'To Explain' ('Na vysvětlenou' in English), the author directly addresses the issue.

I have hesitated for a long time, if I can dare to approach the public with a handful of these verses now that several legionary poetry volumes have been published ... [the verses] of an Austrian soldier, be it only [because of having been] forced [to fight], still Austrian. ...

When I was writing them, they were a consolation to the haunted soul of a youth, an antimilitarist [and] a sworn enemy of everything black and yellow [i.e. the Habsburg colours]. ... these two main elements of their origin clearly shine through in almost every line.⁶⁹

Indeed, as observed by Ivan Šedivý and Jan Michl, the negatively perceived past of Austrian soldiers also affected the Czechoslovak army, in which the legionaries met and were expected to cooperate with their erstwhile Austro-Hungarian enemies, and its so-called 'unification' ('*unifikace*').⁷⁰ In the immediate postwar period, legionaries were in many cases antagonistic towards their Austro-Hungarian counterparts; for example, legionaries would often not salute former Austro-Hungarian officers.⁷¹ The question of unification was even addressed by President Masaryk, who emphasised the need for cooperation amongst fellow Czechoslovak soldiers in December 1919. At the same time,

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁹ Živič, p. 7.

⁷⁰ Šedivý, 'Legionáři a československá armáda', p. 213; Michl, pp. 38-43.

⁷¹ Michl, p. 38.

he still portrayed the military service of Austro-Hungarian veterans as forced and unwanted when he spoke of ‘the bitter fate of our Czech and Slovak soldiers, to whom it was not granted to escape from the Austrian army’.⁷²

The issue of ‘Austrianness’ (*‘rakušáctví’*) – that is, being associated with the bygone monarchy and its negative values – is also clearly discernible in veterans’ memoirs, as their attempts to grapple with the concept permeate their entire discourse. The desire on the part of Czech and Slovak ex-servicemen to excuse their presence in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces and to stake a claim in the Czechoslovak republic is almost tangible throughout the entire interwar period. In their writings, former soldiers describe various acts of resistance and unwillingness to fight stemming from the depths of Czech and Slovak patriotism,⁷³ and the rejection of what they perceived to be a senseless conflict. The precise patterns of behaviour vary considerably. They range from soldiers self-mutilating⁷⁴ and even shooting at their own officers,⁷⁵ faking physical and mental illnesses,⁷⁶ fraternising with enemy soldiers,⁷⁷ and actively seeking a chance to desert⁷⁸ to observations of general apathy, a complete lack of diligence and interest in the Austrian war effort,⁷⁹ and even recollections of happiness felt at learning news of the military

⁷² T. G. Masaryk, *Cesta demokracie I: Projevy – články – rozhovory 1918-1920*, ed. Vojtěch Fejlek and Richard Vašek (Prague, 2003), p. 217, cited in Michl, p. 37.

⁷³ For similar observations, see Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, p. 228.

⁷⁴ Tonda Mádl, ‘U 102. pěšího pluku’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Žipek, pp. 400-401.

⁷⁵ Viktor Flaišer, ‘Důstojníci a oficiři u 30. střel. pluku’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Žipek, p. 106.

⁷⁶ František Zajíček, ‘Z Ruska se vracejí zajatci’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl V, ed. Alois Žipek (Prague, 1931), p. 83; Václav Šístek, ‘Z vojny za každou cenu’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Žipek, pp. 364-367.

⁷⁷ František Krížek, ‘Z válečných zkušeností chudého vojáka’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Alois Žipek (Prague, 1930), p. 202.

⁷⁸ Lad. Petržílka, ‘Dva z pražských ulejšáků’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Žipek, pp. 414-415.

František Lupínek, ‘„Šestatřicátníci“ u maďarského pluku’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl II, ed. Alois Žipek (Prague, 1930), p. 248.

⁷⁹ Hanuš Sedláček, ‘Jak jsem vojančil’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl II, ed. Žipek, pp. 110-116.

defeats of the Central Powers.⁸⁰ In particular, it is the less radical forms of resistance to Austria such as the singing of Czech patriotic songs, camaraderie, and cooperation or shirking that constitute a prominent part of many narratives.⁸¹ They are often accompanied with observations about their authors' wit and masculine prowess, as manifested in fist fights or through liaisons with foreign women.⁸² Moreover, Czech officers, who found themselves in the position of power, attempted to dispel any additional accusations by speaking about their fair treatment of subordinates and the numerous ways in which they helped fellow Czechs in the armed forces.⁸³

Perhaps not surprisingly, narratives devoted to active participation in the Habsburg war effort were suppressed by the veterans. Descriptions of battles and skirmishes are considerably less common than stories of Austrian retreats, hunger, boredom, cold, and shirking.⁸⁴ However, when memories of battles do find their way into the discourse, the soldiers mostly portray themselves as the passive and unresponsive recipients of enemy fire and commands from their superiors.⁸⁵ In turn, references to feats of heroism, which would be supporting the Austrian war effort, are particularly rare. Even when actions resembling bravery are recounted, the ex-servicemen seem reluctant to present them favourably.⁸⁶ This attitude is perhaps best exemplified by the rare story of a Czech soldier who was awarded a medal for his actions under enemy artillery fire. Instead of

⁸⁰ František Bernt, 'Jak se dělala „magořina“', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Žipek, p. 175.

⁸¹ František Leitl, 'Do Rumburku ...', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl II, ed. Žipek, pp. 164-168; Albín Pavlíček, 'Učitel „p. v.“ za války', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Žipek, p. 89.

⁸² Václav Rajek, 'Několik stránek vojenského deníku z r. 1916', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Žipek, p. 38; Josef Vlach, 'Ze života u 14. zeměbranceckého pluku v Hallu v Tyrolích', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Žipek, p. 280.

⁸³ D. Panýrek, 'Ve vojenském kabátu doma (Kus dramatu a operety v rámci dějin a věčnosti)', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl V, ed. Žipek, pp. 53-59.

⁸⁴ Leopold Hlíděk, 'Z mého deníku', *Kamarádství*, July 1932, pp. 69-70; Šístek, p. 366; Rudla Beran-Homolka, 'Jak jsem se stal „sloupem Rakouska“ a jak jsem „pevně držel“', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl II, ed. Žipek, p. 327.

⁸⁵ František Jaroš, 'Boj o opěrný bod', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Žipek, pp. 300-308.

⁸⁶ Jan Plakinger, 'Smutné vzpomínky', *Kamarád*, 16 Aug. 1929, p. 4.

emphasising his heroic combat behaviour, the Czech veteran belittles his own bravery by turning the story into an ironic narrative, which instead points out the foolishness of the Austrian officials.

[After their accommodation had come under heavy artillery fire] Only four of us remained in the entire house – me, S., and two typists. Basically, we could not escape because we were paralysed with horror and fear. Manic laughter from one of the typists only magnified this ghastly atmosphere. Later, we found it ridiculous that we had been awarded medals for this bravery.⁸⁷

However, some of the memoirs provide a slightly different attitude to men's service. In these accounts, which still speak negatively of Austria-Hungary, former soldiers recognise and often take pride in their stoicism and composure when under fire.⁸⁸ As one veteran observes when talking about an avalanche, 'we are not afraid of grenades, shrapnel only makes us laugh – but we were yet to see comrades die this way'.⁸⁹ Indeed, other memoirs even convey a sense of military pride, as exemplified by stories of one František Marval, who served in the aforementioned 28th infantry regiment after it had been reconstituted later during the war. In one of his short texts, Marval recorded the reaction of Czech soldiers to Magyars lifting their hands to mock the Czechs for the surrender of the 28th regiment.⁹⁰ Apparently, Czech servicemen responded to these provocations with considerable anger, which resulted in beatings of Hungarians that were described by Marval with significant pleasure and pride. Similarly, another veteran, Jaroslav Hobzek, recorded in his memoirs how Czech soldiers attacked a Hungarian civilian in Békéscsaba after he had raised his hands in an attempt to question and make fun of Czech military prowess.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Jan Schrabal, 'Průlom italské fronty na podzim 1917', *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Žipek, p. 226.

⁸⁸ Šindelář, p. 194.

⁸⁹ K. F. Pavel, 'Horská baterie', *Kamarádství*, Aug. 1932, p. 87.

⁹⁰ Frant. Marval, 'Kousek historie jednoho osmadvacátníka', *Kamarád*, 15 Oct. 1929, pp. 7-8.

⁹¹ Jaroslav Hobzek, 'Békéscsaba, a jak jsme tam za války žili', *Kamarádství*, July 1933, p. 110. See also Lirš, pp. 24, 30-31.

Indeed, ethnicity plays a significant role in the recollections of these ex-servicemen. With a few notable exceptions, generally amongst officers, it can be observed that the encounters between Czech and Slovak soldiers and other ethnic groups are described in strongly nationalistic terms. Far from fostering inter-ethnic cooperation in the ranks of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces, wartime service was retrospectively portrayed as a period of strong ethnic animosity. Veterans described tension between the patriotic Czechs, who would often help each other and cooperate, bound by military and ethnic camaraderie,⁹² and the evil, arrogant, and warmongering yet cowardly Germans, Magyars, and Jews.⁹³ Despite admitting themselves to shirking, many Czech ex-servicemen spoke with disdain about the unwillingness of others to fight.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Czechs in general, and veterans in particular, often employed tropes of Austro-Hungarian brutality against civilians and spoke about various Austro-Hungarian war crimes.⁹⁵ For example, the volumes of *Domov za války* included photographs from Austro-Hungarian military executions of civilians and legionaries accompanied with angry and bitter comments such as ‘14-year-old traitors’ or ‘Thou shalt not kill’.⁹⁶

⁹² V. J. Matina, ‘Kadeti škola pražská za světové války’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl V, ed. Žipek, pp. 108-115.

⁹³ Václav Rajek, ‘Několik stránek vojenského deníku’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl I, ed. Žipek, p. 360; Bohuslav Brožek, ‘Bouřnými dny’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Žipek, pp. 129-135; Ladislav Wagner, ‘Černé neštovice’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Žipek, pp. 336-337.

⁹⁴ Eduard Hájek, ‘Paměti doby válečné’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl II, ed. Žipek, p. 306.

⁹⁵ František Rozsival, ‘Vzpomínky na okupaci Sandžaku za světové války’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl V, ed. Žipek, p. 27. See the following volume, which was published immediately after the war and contains various stories and photographs depicting abhorrent Austro-Hungarian behaviour. Stáňa J. Bělohradský, *Mučedníci čecho- a jihoslovenští: Zločiny a surovosti vlády a vojen. velitelství Rakušáků, Maďarů, Prušáků, jakož i Turků, páchané po celou dobu světové války nejen na bojištích, ale i v táborech zajatců a osob internovaných a na obyvatelstvu obsazených území* (Žižkov, 1919).

⁹⁶ ‘Čtrnáctiletí velezrádci’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl I, ed. Žipek, p. 148; ‘Justice v poli’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl III, ed. Žipek, p. 277; ‘Nezabiješ!’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl IV, ed. Žipek, p. 313.

Heroic Mutineers

In this atmosphere, which lauded resistance to the Habsburg monarchy, mutinies of Czech and Slovak soldiers came to be perceived favourably by many inhabitants of Czechoslovakia. In particular, three wartime events received significant retrospective attention from the Czechoslovak public; in the Bohemian lands, it was the disobedience of private Josef Kudrna and his fellow soldiers towards their officers in Benešov in May 1915 that cost Kudrna his life,⁹⁷ and the fully fledged mutiny of hundreds of soldiers in Rumburk in May 1918 that resulted in 10 soldiers being executed and many others sentenced to prison terms.⁹⁸ In Slovakia, the large-scale mutiny of the 71st imperial and royal infantry regiment in the Serbian town of Kragujevac in June 1918, after which 44 Slovak soldiers received death sentences, held a similar position.⁹⁹ However, the mutineers never became as venerated as the Czechoslovak legionaries, perhaps because of the inherently transgressive nature of military mutinies, which made some state officials reluctant to express their explicit approval of and full support for such acts.

Indeed, immediately after the war, the 1915 military trial of Josef Kudrna, who had together with other soldiers ignored and defied orders of their commanding officers before departing to the frontline, was reopened and his conviction posthumously overturned. The Czechoslovak court declared that not only had Kudrna, who had been seriously intoxicated, been non compos mentis, but also that the crime had not been proven to have taken place.¹⁰⁰ Soon afterwards, a heavily idealised play, which bore little resemblance to

⁹⁷ Petr Matějček, 'Poprava Josefa Kudrny, oběti rakouské vojenské justice', accessed 21 Sep. 2019 at <http://www.vhu.cz/poprava-josefa-kudrny-obeti-rakouske-vojenske-justice/>.

⁹⁸ Jindřich Marek, 'Rumburští rebelové si zaslouží náš respekt!', accessed 2 July 2020 at <http://www.vhu.cz/rumbursti-rebelove-si-zaslouzi-nas-respekt/>.

⁹⁹ Denisa Holúbková, 'Pamät' a pamätihodnosti trenčianskeho 71. pešieho pluku a vzbury v Kragujevci v roku 1918' (Bc thesis Masarykova univerzita, 2012), pp. 23-28; Miloslav Čaplovič, 'Vzbura slovenských vojakov v Kragujevci - 100. výročie', accessed 2 July 2020 at <http://www.vhu.sk/vzbura-slovenskych-vojakov-v-kragujevci-100-vyrocie/>.

¹⁰⁰ Matějček.

the actual events, was published by the Czech anarcho-syndicalist writer Antonín Řehoř-Hýskovský.¹⁰¹ This play was then turned into the film *Jménem Jeho Veličenstva (Poprava pěšáka Kudrny)* in 1929, which was screened in Czechoslovakia under the auspices of *Družina československých válečných poškozců*.¹⁰²

The story of Kudrna was also retold by a fellow soldier from his platoon, František Loubal, who explored it in several publications.¹⁰³ Loubal and other veterans ascribed great significance to the rebellion, which was portrayed as a reaction to the poor treatment of soldiers and the futility of war. They argued that Kudrna had been the victim of an unfair trial prepared by Austrian militarism, which clashed with the Czech national struggle for independence.¹⁰⁴ In turn, as Loubal noted, ‘the Benešov mutiny was not ... only a mutiny of Kudrna, but a mutiny of the Czechs against a depraved and violent military regime’.¹⁰⁵

In addition, the case of Kudrna was taken up by the left-wing veterans’ association *Volné sdružení vojáků ze světové války* and the journals *Kamarád* and *Kamarádství*, which published several sympathetic articles about him.¹⁰⁶ In 1929, one of the local branches of *Volné sdružení* even suggested that a street in Prague should be named after the soldier.¹⁰⁷ *Volné sdružení* also became a member of *Komitét pro postavení památníku rakouskou vojenskou justicí popravenému vojínu Kudrnovi v Motole* (Committee for Erection of a Memorial to Private Kudrna Who Had Been Executed by the Austrian

¹⁰¹ Antonín Řehoř-Hýskovský, *Jménem Jeho Veličenstva ...! (Poprava Josefa Kudrny)* (Dvůr Králové nad Labem, 1922).

¹⁰² *Jménem Jeho Veličenstva (Poprava pěšáka Kudrny)*. Directed by Antonín Vojtěchovský, Pragafilm, 1929; ‘Poprava Josefa Kudrny zfilmována’, *Nový život*, 20 Apr. 1929, p. 4.

¹⁰³ František Loubal, *Z rakouské fronty: Ze zápisků českého záložníka-důstojníka* (Boskovice, 1927); František Loubal, *Josef Kudrna, Oběť rakouské soldatesky* (Moravský Krumlov, 1929); František Loubal, ‘Justiční vražda J. Kudrny’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků)*. Díl II, ed. Žipek, pp. 76-83.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Jménem Jeho Veličenstva’, *Nový život*, 11 May 1929, p. 2; ‘Tragedie vojína Kudrny a jeho rodiny’, *Kamarád*, 25 Oct. 1930, pp. 4-5; ‘Nevinně popravený pěšák Kudrna’, *Nový život*, 11 May 1935, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Loubal, *Josef Kudrna*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ ‘7. květen 1915’, *Kamarádství*, Apr. 1932, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Pořad II. řádného sjezdu’, *Kamarád*, 5 Nov. 1929, p. 4.

Military Justice in Motol), which hoped to build a monument in the location where Kudrna had been killed.¹⁰⁸ This idea met with significant opposition from the head of Památník osvobození (Memorial of Liberation) and one of the most prominent Czechoslovak legionaries, Rudolf Medek. In Medek's opinion, the monument, which would be located in an area where soldiers were still being trained, would celebrate someone 'who had committed most serious military crimes'.¹⁰⁹ Despite Medek's rejection of the idea, the memorial was ultimately unveiled around the time of 20th anniversary of Kudrna's execution, in the presence of approximately 1,000 people.¹¹⁰ The event was even attended by the National Socialist member of parliament and legionary Joža David, who was at the time also the head of the parliamentary military committee. In his speech, David emphasised Kudrna's importance and his role as a victim of Austrian oppression. He claimed that

Kudrna's death raised anti-Austrian awareness in the Czech people who found out about it. The wound inflicted upon his body had a great meaning for our foreign resistance. It strengthened our claim that Austria is a thuggish [*'násilnický'*] state.¹¹¹

The significantly larger Rumburk mutiny from May 1918, which involved hundreds of soldiers, was viewed with similar admiration by many Austro-Hungarian veterans. The journals *Kamarád* and *Kamarádství* as well as *Družina československých válečných poškozců* spoke with respect about the 10 men who were executed for participation in the rebellion, describing them as 'martyrs' and 'heroes' who were murdered by the Austrian military justice.¹¹² On the 20th anniversary of the mutiny,

¹⁰⁸ 'Ze spřátelených organisací', *Kamarád*, 25 Oct. 1930, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Pichlík, *Čeští vojáci*, p. 94, cited in Koldinská and Šedivý, *Válka a armáda v českých dějinách*, p. 283. See the resulting attacks on Medek, in A. H., 'Rumburská vzpoura', *Kamarád*, 15 June 1932, pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁰ Tlapák, 'Odhalení pomníku Josefu Kudrnovi v Motole u Prahy', *Národní osvobození*, 7 May 1935, pp. 3-4; 'Slavnost odhalení pomníku Jos. Kudrny', *Kamarádství*, 10 May 1935, p. 96.

¹¹¹ Tlapák, 'Odhalení pomníku Josefu Kudrnovi v Motole u Prahy', p. 3.

¹¹² 'Památce rumburských hrdinů', *Nový život*, 26 May 1928, p. 2; 'Rumburská vzpoura', *Kamarád*, 15 May 1932, p. 5.

Kamarádství published an extended article about the event, which portrayed it as a part of wider Czech resistance and struggle for independence.¹¹³

Similarly, the Czech public appears to have viewed the mutiny positively. For example, in June 1919, the reburial of one of the leaders of the mutiny was apparently attended by more than 30,000 people.¹¹⁴ Fourteen years later, a monument dedicated to the mutineers was unveiled in the presence of the influential Czech Social Democratic member of parliament Vojta Beneš, who was the elder brother of Edvard Beneš.¹¹⁵ According to Vojta Beneš, ‘Rumburk ha[d] to be inscribed into Czechoslovak history with golden letters right behind the names of famous legionary battlefields’.¹¹⁶ It is telling of the atmosphere in the republic that surviving rebels even established *Sdružení rumburských vzbouřenců* (Association of Rumburk Mutineers), through which they sought to achieve various privileges in recognition of their acts of valour.¹¹⁷

Less than two weeks after the events in Rumburk, hundreds of men from the predominantly Slovak 71st infantry regiment, including a large number of former POWs who had been repatriated from Russia as a result of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, mutinied in Kragujevac before their departure for the Italian frontline. In the interwar period and also after 1948,¹¹⁸ this rebellion came to be seen as arguably the most significant expression of dissent of Slovak soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces.¹¹⁹ Similar to the other two mutinies, the Kragujevac rebellion was also perceived favourably by many

¹¹³ ‘Rumburský odboj’, *Kamarádství*, 20 May 1938, pp. 146-150.

¹¹⁴ A. S., ‘Rumburská vzpoura’, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ ‘Odhalení památníku rumburským vzbouřencům’, *Národní osvobození*, 7 June 1933, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ ‘Rumburský odboj’, p. 150.

¹¹⁷ Tomáš Richter, ‘Rumburská vzpoura a ohlas na ni v české historiografii a kultuře’ (Bc thesis Univerzita Pardubice, 2008), pp. 43-45.

¹¹⁸ See Holúbková, pp. 23-40. See also the well-known Slovak film about the event, *Štyridsaťštyri*. Directed by Paľo Bielik, Štúdio hraných filmov Bratislava, 1957.

¹¹⁹ See the semi-fictional account of the mutiny in Andrej Rybárik, *V mene Jeho Veličenstva! Román z čias svetovej vojny* (Žilina, n.d.), pp. 189-213; Holúbková, p. 28. See also Rybárik’s novel about a disabled veteran, Andrej Rybárik, *Novým prúdom: Román z povojnových časov* (Bratislava, 1935).

Czechoslovak officials. For example, in 1924, President Masaryk personally donated 384,000 crowns to the relatives of the 44 executed soldiers.¹²⁰ Eight years later, a commemorative event attended by approximately 5,000 people, including the interior minister Juraj Slávik, was held in the town of Trenčín/Trencsén, which had been the home station of the unit.¹²¹ In his speech, Slávik eulogised the executed men; he called them ‘heroes’ and stated that ‘for the 44, we only have gratitude’, before proclaiming that ‘the memory of the death of the Kragujevac victims must bind us to the will and determination to live’.¹²² Following the speeches of other notables, the commemoration ended with the music band of the 17th Czechoslovak infantry regiment – the successor to the Austro-Hungarian unit – playing the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav anthems.

Indeed, the fact that the mutiny took place in a Serbian town added another layer of meaning to it and its commemoration. In the interwar period, Czechoslovak discourse about the rebellion combined the remembrance of Slovak resistance to Austria-Hungary with the praise of Serbia/Yugoslavia and the narrative about Czechoslovak-Serbian/Yugoslav Slavic brotherhood and cooperation. Such rhetoric was used not only at the 1932 Trenčín commemoration but also at the unveiling of the monument in Kragujevac in 1924 and the remembrance events held there in 1928 and 1938, which were attended by numerous Czechoslovak representatives.¹²³ Thus, for example, in June 1938, the legionary general Rudolf Viest concluded his speech about the mutiny in Kragujevac and the

¹²⁰ Holúbková, p. 24.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

¹²² ‘Veľkolepá vlastenecká manifestácia v Trenčíne’, *Trenčan*, 1 Oct. 1932, p. 2.

¹²³ Čaplovič; Lad. Sýkora, ‘Kragujevac’, *Legionársky týden: Příloha „Národního osvobození“*, 9 Oct. 1924, p. 1; ‘Zázjzd slovenskej delegácie do Kragujevaca. Z príležitosti oslavy 10. výročia popravených 44 Slovákov v Kragujevci’, *Považské hlasy*, 6 Oct. 1928, pp. 1-2; ‘Na hroby Slováků, popravených v Kragujevaci (Referát o cestě Slovenského jubilárneho výboru)’, *Legie*, 10 Oct. 1928, pp. 1-2; ‘Manifestace pro československo-jugoslávské přátelství v Kragujevci’, *Národní osvobození*, 21 June 1938, p. 1.

executed ‘martyrs’ by proclaiming in Serbian, ‘long live His Majesty King Peter II, long live the glorious and valiant Yugoslav army! Long live the brotherly Yugoslav nation!’¹²⁴

Rhetoric of Veterans in the 1930s

The rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany and the political changes of 1933 in Austria meant that with the exception of a short border with Romania in the east, Czechoslovakia soon found itself encircled by a set of largely hostile countries. The atmosphere in the republic thus quickly lapsed into one of fear and a siege mentality took hold, with ever greater importance invested in the Czechoslovak military as the protectors of the nation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Czech military involvement in the Habsburg forces of old came to be somewhat re-evaluated both in official publications and some of the memoirs of Czech soldiers.¹²⁵ Whilst the majority of ex-servicemen persisted in their use of the aforementioned discourse of suffering and resistance to Austria-Hungary, some veterans promulgated a slightly different narrative of Czech military history, which had been present to some degree amongst the ex-servicemen already before 1933.¹²⁶ By doing so, they appear to have continued and further developed the already existing rhetoric of the veterans who had focused on their stoicism and military pride.

In the 1930s, the latter group of men began to offer a distinctly different picture of their attitudes towards their wartime service in the progressively more militarised public discourse, in which the Czech expression ‘*brannost*’ (which roughly translates as ‘military preparedness’) became an almost omnipresent buzzword.¹²⁷ As opposed to shirking, a lack of diligence, and even open resistance to Austria-Hungary, some of the post-1933

¹²⁴ ‘U našich hrobů v Kragujevci’, *Legie*, 23 June 1938, p. 2.

¹²⁵ See also Šmidrkal, pp. 93-95.

¹²⁶ Hutečka, ‘Kamarádi frontovníci’, pp. 246-247.

¹²⁷ See Edvard Beneš, *Armáda, brannost národa a obrana státu: Projevy presidenta dr. Edvarda Beneše: Z projevů od 18. XII. 1935 – 2. VII. 1937* (Prague, 1937).

statements instead brought to the fore the genuine bravery of the Czechs, their abilities,¹²⁸ and in particular their sense of duty.¹²⁹ It remains open to discussion to what extent this was also a personal reaction after years of the service of these men at best being ignored and at worst mocked and denigrated together with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Amongst others, the retired Czech general Karel Wagner became one of the proponents of this narrative. Indeed, Wagner's past was closely tied to the bygone empire. After joining the cadet school in Prague in 1882, he remained in the Habsburg forces until the very end of the monarchy.¹³⁰ Afterwards, he served in the newly created Czechoslovak army before retiring in 1923,¹³¹ and then spent the 1930s publishing military memoirs and curiously also spiritual treatises about the origins of the world.¹³²

Wagner's military volumes seem to reflect the desire to justify himself and give a meaning to his – now largely discredited – Austrian service. He does so by painting a picture of a professional soldier who was only fulfilling his duty to the best of his ability, whilst also providing arguments about the importance of Czech soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian forces. Wagner posits that these men had protected the Bohemian lands from large-scale destruction; furthermore, he observes that the prolonged fighting had given Czechoslovak representatives time to arrange the creation of the republic and also led to a complete collapse of Austria-Hungary, as opposed to some partial reorganisation of the empire.¹³³ He ultimately adds that even if these results of their fighting were a 'lucky coincidence', Czech soldiers, about whom he speaks with considerable pride and

¹²⁸ See, for example, Lirš, pp. 232-235.

¹²⁹ This different narrative was also briefly mentioned by Martin Zückert. See Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, pp. 237-238.

¹³⁰ Karel Wagner, *Tricetšest let v cizích službách. Díl I. Vzpomínky ze života českého důstojníka v bývalé rakousko-uherské armádě. Prst vzpomínek popřevratových* (Prague, 1938), p. 14.

¹³¹ 'Wagner, Karel', accessed 13 July 2020 at <https://www.valka.cz/Wagner-Karel-t60640>.

¹³² Karel Wagner, *Kosmos a jeho tvůrce. Pokus o vědecké řešení otázky existence božství* (Prague, 1930); Karel Wagner, *Náhoda či zákon? K problému „Život a vesmír.“* (Prague, 1933).

¹³³ Karel Wagner, *S českým plukem na ruské frontě* (Prague, 1936), pp. 7-8.

admiration, still deserve respect for the unimaginable hardships they had been forced to withstand during the war.¹³⁴

Wagner repeatedly deals with the question of civic duty, which he also refers to when discussing the topic of ethnic minorities in contemporary Czechoslovakia, and the idea that they could also be reliable members of its military forces. In one of his books, he poses a rhetorical question after a description of an attack carried out by his regiment:

What made Czech soldiers make such a huge sacrifice without any pressure from their superiors? Surely, it was not love for their homeland because most of them did not respect the Austrian monarchy which had treated them so badly in peacetime. It was not fear of punishment either ... It could only have been the highly developed *sense of duty* of the Czech soldiers that pushed them forward, perhaps towards certain death; [this was] the very same sense of duty that had controlled their fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers who had sacrificed their lives on every European battlefield in foreign [i.e. Habsburg] service and for foreign interests.

Equally, today, our Czechoslovak army has thousands and thousands of members from other ethnic groups in its ranks who have been looking for their homeland everywhere but in our republic. If only they would also remember their oath and its consequences in the future, just as the members of the 88th Czech infantry regiment did in their first battle at Tomaszov [sic; Tomaszów Lubelski in modern-day Poland].¹³⁵

Indeed, this belief in the Czech military prowess of old appears to have been shared by other Czechs. A similar claim can be located in František Kurfürst's somewhat anachronistic work on 'Czechoslovak' military history, which spans several centuries. In his book, Kurfürst refers to an apocryphal story¹³⁶ that allows him to give Czechs credit for their fighting, but also makes it possible for him to recognise Czech opposition to the empire.

The tragedy of the Czech fate in those years is [best] summed up in the words of an Austrian general from the Great War who said [this] about the Czechs in the Austro-Hungarian army, 'They went into the war like rams, they fought like lions and when they were defeated, they celebrated like small

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

¹³⁶ This story was also popular amongst other Czech authors, including Wagner. Wagner, *S českým plukem*, p. 10; Josef Šefl, *Paměti domobrance 28. pluku z války světové 1914-1918* 2nd edn. (Blatná, 1925), p. 10.

children'. Most people understood the tragedy of their position, however they did not have the necessary fortitude to reach the only possible conclusion – open resistance against Austria-Hungary, whether in the ranks of the Russians and their allies, or within the army itself.¹³⁷

The co-existence of these two rather contrasting and contradictory Czech narratives of the 1930s, one of resistance and the other of duty and valiant service, is perhaps best exemplified in the 1936 volume of the predominantly Czech 75th imperial and royal ('*kaiserlich und königlich*') infantry regiment from southern Bohemia. This book contains a history of the unit, which served in Serbia, Russia, and Italy and later also Těšín Silesia and Slovakia, as well as memoirs of a number of its soldiers, including even those of the regimental conductor. Indeed, most of the texts in the volume point to the new assessment of Czech service in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces and its implications for the future. As the chief editor noted in the introduction,

If 75th regiment fulfilled its duty so well during the entire duration of the war despite a number of debacles – restructured and reinforced again and again – how are its sons and grandsons in the Hradec regiment [going to fare] when they are not going to be defending a foreign dynasty but instead their home regions of Jindřichohradecko and Tábořsko as a part of the Czechoslovak army?¹³⁸

Furthermore, as this volume suggests, even the highest Czechoslovak officials had accepted such a rhetoric by this point and used it to bolster Czechoslovaks' perception of their own military prowess. According to the volume, in March 1936, President Edvard Beneš stated, during his meeting with the officers of the 5th infantry regiment, that Czechoslovaks 'must not forget the sacrifices' of men who had served for the Habsburg empire.¹³⁹ Beneš continued by saying that 'it was necessary to

¹³⁷ František Kurfürst, *Válečné dějiny československé* (Prague, 1937), pp. 332-333.

¹³⁸ Jan Vošta, 'Úvodem', *Pěťasedmdesátníci vzpomínají. Z pamětí účastníků světové války*, ed. Jan Vošta et al. (Táboř, 1936), p. 8.

¹³⁹ 'Výňatek z řeči pana presidenta Dr. Ed. Beneše k důstojníkům 5. pěš. pluku T. G. Masaryka 25. března 1936', *Pěťasedmdesátníci vzpomínají*, ed. Vošta et al., p. 14.

understand those Czech warriors, who provided great examples of military virtues in foreign service'.¹⁴⁰

Despite these words, the volume also contains the more common perspective on the Czech service in the Habsburg forces, which emphasises the unwillingness to fight and unreliability of the Czech soldiers. For example, one former soldier discusses in his account a pact that he made with another Czech to shoot each other to escape the frontline.¹⁴¹ In another article, a veteran describes how he and his fellow soldiers almost surrendered without any resistance.¹⁴² The volume even contains an excerpt from an eyewitness report of a German NCO, who describes how Czech soldiers 'ran straight ahead to the enemy, hugged, and kissed them' during the Battle of Zborov.¹⁴³ Such anti-Habsburg attitudes are even confirmed by one of the former foes. In his article, a legionary who was at Zborov claims that

75-ers and 35-ers have a lion's share in our victory mainly thanks to their passivity. It was not uncommon that some of them were chasing the fleeing army with us. [At these moments] tragicomic scenes were taking place, when father met son, brother [met] brother and I have myself discovered natives of Tábor ... who joined our decimated ranks. ... Our losses were not inconsiderable – about 1,000 men, out of whom 190 were dead or missing. They would have definitely been greater, had we been facing German or Magyar regiments.¹⁴⁴

German Veterans and the Great War

The way German-speaking, disabled, Austro-Hungarian veterans portrayed their wartime service was somewhat different to how their Czech and Slovak counterparts did. Although few German veterans expressed in public any longing for

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Jan Flíček, 'Na Kolubaře', *Pětasedmdesátníci vzpomínají*, ed. Vošta et al., pp. 72-73.

¹⁴² Václav Koleč, 'Vzpomínky pětasedmdesátníka', *Pětasedmdesátníci vzpomínají*, ed. Vošta et al., pp. 100-101.

¹⁴³ Rudolf Regentík, 'Zborov a pětasedmdesátníci', *Pětasedmdesátníci vzpomínají*, ed. Vošta et al., p. 137.

¹⁴⁴ Jar. Vacek, 'Zborov', *Pětasedmdesátníci vzpomínají*, ed. Vošta et al., p. 136.

the bygone empire or support of its wartime aims, their depiction of the monarchy was by no means as negative as that of the Czech and Slovaks. Nevertheless, wartime service was often discussed with bitterness and little nostalgia, as exemplified by the obituary of the infamous Franz Halbhuber, who had worked as a military doctor in Prague during the war. The journal of German war victims called him

the Almighty who cleansed Prague hospitals [by] sending those who had not recovered and the mortally ill soldiers to the frontline. No one can really say [about] Dr. Halbhuber that he had favoured the Germans over the Czechs; he treated both nationalities ‘objectively’, that is to say as cannon fodder.¹⁴⁵

However, according to disabled veterans, German wartime service and sacrifices were given a meaning by the protection and preservation of the hinterland. These ex-servicemen argued on numerous occasions that their blood was spilled so that the enemy would not destroy their German homeland. As the leader of German war victims Bernhard Leppin observed in 1921, when discussing the question of war memorials,

You gave everything so that the enemy hordes would not swamp German-Bohemia (*‘Deutschböhmen’*), you were those who allowed trades, agriculture, and industry to develop without any disturbance. You prevented German-Bohemia and [its] blooming towns and villages from becoming smouldering heaps of rubble.¹⁴⁶

By contrast, a different perception of wartime service, which chimes with earlier findings of Martin Zückert and Václav Šmidrkál,¹⁴⁷ is located in the memoirs of Lieutenant (*‘Oberleutnant’*) Oscar Bittner, released in 1936. Unlike many of the disabled veterans, this former officer spoke about the Habsburg empire and its demise with the sense of longing and bitterness of a man who had fought for it for more than four years. In his book, he idealises Austria and in a variation of the *Dolchstoßlegende* argues that the

¹⁴⁵ ‘Dr. Halbhuber †’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1923, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ Bernhard Leppin, ‘Zur Krieger-Denkmalfrage’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Nov. 1921, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Zückert, *Zwischen Nationsidee und staatlicher Realität*, pp. 229-231; Šmidrkál, p. 89.

empire, which was being steadfastly protected from the enemy by the author and his fellow soldiers, was destroyed from the inside by nations seeking self-determination.¹⁴⁸

Similar to some of the Czech veterans, German ex-servicemen began espousing different attitudes in the 1930s as the public discourse gradually became more militarised. During this period, they began to request from the public that they be respected for their wartime service. Indeed, when three organisations of German war victims and veterans created an overarching union in 1935, the first aim they mentioned was to ‘work towards increasing respect for war victims and former frontline soldiers (*‘Frontsoldaten’*) amongst the public’.¹⁴⁹ The following year, the union decided to ask the Ministry of Education to incorporate the topic of respect for war victims and veterans into the school curriculum as the youth supposedly did not treat these people with sufficient deference.¹⁵⁰ The union also suggested to the Ministry of National Defence that it should explore the possibility of introducing special badges for war victims and veterans so that the youth would be able to recognise them immediately.

Neither of these demands materialised. However, German war victims ultimately earned at least a modicum of public recognition in the dying moments of the republic. In 1938, the predominantly German city of Liberec/Reichenberg introduced seats on public transport that were specifically reserved for war victims, other disabled people, and the elderly.¹⁵¹ In the same period, the German cultural organisation Bund der Deutschen also asked its members to leave front seats at its events available to war victims. This gesture

¹⁴⁸ Oscar Bittner, *Kriegserlebnisse* (Brno, 1936), p. 112.

¹⁴⁹ ‘An die sudetendeutschen ehem. Kriegsteilnehmer, Kriegsgefangenen und Kriegsbeschädigten’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Nov. 1935, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Von der Arbeitsgemeinschaft’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, June 1936, p. 10.

¹⁵¹ ‘Sitzplätze in den Verkehrsmitteln für die Kriegsoffer’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 March 1938, p 4.

was supposed to demonstrate they knew ‘how to appropriately appreciate the sacrifice brought by these members of the nation (‘*Volksgenossen*’) for the homeland’.¹⁵²

Be it due to fear of censorship or to maintain absolute political neutrality, the organisation of war victims Bund der Kriegsverletzten referred only very rarely to the position of veterans in neighbouring Nazi Germany or post-1933 Austria. This was in stark contrast to their previous repeated praise of and comparisons with German and Austrian provisions for war victims.¹⁵³ One of the few telling exceptions was a couple of short reports about one Wilhelm Zippel from Haindorf/Hejnice in northern Bohemia, which were published in the journal of Bund in 1934 and 1935. *Der Kriegsverletzte* informed readers about the increased pension as well as numerous German, Austrian, and Hungarian awards and decorations received by this disabled veteran who, as a German citizen, had served on the Western front. Frustration and disappointment felt by German-speaking ex-servicemen in Czechoslovakia, who could easily contrast their treatment with that of Zippel, were visibly expressed in both articles;¹⁵⁴ as the report from 1935 observes at its very end, ‘we have brought this piece of information only to point out the gratitude of other countries to the war wounded. And [what about] our [country]?’¹⁵⁵

Indeed, the birth of Czechoslovakia inevitably evokes the opening scene of *Macbeth*; fair became foul and foul became fair as October 1918 brought an inversion of many views and values present in local society. Legionaries, who could be executed during the war for high treason when captured, were now celebrated heroes. By contrast, service

¹⁵² ‘Ehret unsere Kriegsoffer’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 March 1938, p. 4.

¹⁵³ Richard Schneider, ‘Eine Uebersicht der Kriegsbeschädigtenfürsorge im besiegten Deutschland’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 5 May 1920, pp. 1-2; ‘Die Kriegsbeschädigten müssen beschäftigt werden. Ein Gesetz zur Zwangseinstellung von Invaliden in Oesterreich’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 5 Sep. 1920, p. 4; ‘Vergleiche der Renten der Kriegsbeschädigten der Tschechoslowakischen Republik und der des Deutschen Reiches’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1929, pp. 3-4. See Chapter VI.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Haindorf’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 July 1934, p. 10.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Haindorf’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Apr. 1935, p. 6.

in the Austro-Hungarian ranks ceased to elicit admiration for Czech and Slovak veterans, and they themselves downplayed their desire to fight. As one of them proudly observed,

the complete unwillingness to shed blood for no reason for the [‘]beloved[’] monarchy seeped through us; deep in our hearts, we were determined to ‘disgracefully’ betray the banner with the double-headed eagle at the earliest opportunity.¹⁵⁶

However, memory of the Great War was not homogeneous even amongst Czechs. The alternative narrative, which emerged in the 1930s, allowed men to ascribe a different meaning to their wartime years and actions. Furthermore, it offered space for depictions of Czech martial skills, courage, and pride. For some, the new narrative was also significant for another even more personal reason; this account of the Great War made it possible to recognise the sacrifice of men’s ‘forgotten comrades’, who had ‘fought and died to stave off the invasion of enemy troops and to allow our families at home to sleep under their roof’.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ František Zajíček, ‘V bitvě u Sapanova 8. června 1916’, *Domov za války (Svědectví účastníků). Díl III*, ed. Žipek, p. 90.

¹⁵⁷ Tom. Smířak, ‘Na italském bojišti (V.)’, *Kamarádství*, 15 March 1938, p. 78.

Chapter III: The Czechoslovak (Re-)Public and Disabled Veterans

‘In our country war invalids ... will always be the tool of peace and peace politics of our state’.¹

An article of Družina from December 1933.

Near-universal conscription for young men, which was in place in Austria-Hungary from the very beginning of the war, meant that tens of thousands of disabled veterans living in Czechoslovakia came from all walks of life. Other than being male and falling within a certain age group, there were no universal characteristics of disabled veterans. Their social status, educational attainment, income, and ethnic and religious identities could vary significantly; further differences could emerge as a result of the specific nature of their disability.

Throughout the interwar period, these men and their organisations interacted with the Czechoslovak state and the public in several different ways. War victims actively participated in various events within the Czechoslovak republic; they voiced their demands and opinions on many topics related to the state; they became involved in numerous projects and campaigns that were aimed at influencing their fellow citizens and the authorities. Through a set of case studies, this chapter explores some of the diverse roles of disabled veterans in Czechoslovakia.

Firstly, the chapter examines their participation in the events of 1918–1920. It offers a glimpse into how the postwar republic vied for the loyalty of the locals living in the contested region of Těšín Silesia. The chapter then analyses the different strategies employed by the Czechoslovak state, the actions and rhetoric of disabled veterans, and their proclamations and promises to the Těšín Silesia population. In turn, this regional case

¹ ‘Z domova a ciziny’, *Nový život*, 9 Dec. 1933, p. 4.

study helps to elucidate how these individual Czech veterans participated in the construction of Czechoslovakia and also in its attempt to incorporate this border region, in which local identities still played an important role. Afterwards, the chapter examines the role of disabled veterans in keeping order and establishing and protecting Czechoslovak rule over its territory in the tumultuous early days of the republic. In particular, it discusses the military unit created from disabled Czech ex-servicemen, which participated in the military campaign against the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. The chapter shows how some of the disabled Czech veterans embraced the opportunity to proselytise for and serve Czechoslovakia as well as the significance and pride they ascribed to their work in Těšín Silesia and deployment in Slovakia. It is suggested that for many of these Austro-Hungarian veterans, who could not use their wartime service as evidence of their loyalty to Czechoslovakia, it was the plebiscite and the military campaign against Hungary that enabled them to demonstrate their patriotism.

However, activities of disabled veterans were much more varied. Throughout the interbellum, these men also sought to establish a more peaceful and fairer world for war victims and others. The chapter explores the topic of the orphanage in the village of Načeradec. This institution was not only founded but also operated, and heavily subsidised, by *Družina československých válečných poškozenců*, the largest organisation of Austro-Hungarian war victims in Czechoslovakia. This story shows how disabled veterans combined their Austro-Hungarian military past with their later role as Czechoslovak caregivers. These men viewed and portrayed the orphanage in Načeradec in two overlapping ways. Firstly, disabled Czech veterans emphasised the humanitarian role of this institution. Načeradec was established for those who were perceived as being in the greatest need of help, in part as a fulfilment of the wartime promise to dying comrades to look after their children. Secondly, the orphanage was also portrayed as an opportunity to

help the Czechoslovak republic by protecting the nation's most treasured assets – its children.

Finally, the chapter explores war victims' involvement in the peace movement. It examines the international and domestic ties that associations of war victims established in an effort to safeguard peace. It also analyses the development of veterans' attitudes to pacifism and war. It is observed that after the early interwar period, in which war victims often spoke out against wars and armed forces, disabled Czech veterans began to look at the issue from a more pragmatic point of view. By contrast, German ex-servicemen living in Czechoslovakia continued to espouse pacifist beliefs, which rejected even defensive wars, until the very end of the interbellum.

1918–1920 and Disabled Veterans

In the early months of its existence, Czechoslovakia faced a number of serious geopolitical issues. The republic clashed with two neighbouring countries, Poland and Hungary, over territories that had until very recently belonged to the Habsburg Empire. In the north-eastern part of the Bohemian lands, the disagreement with Poland flared up over the region of Těšín Silesia, which was inhabited by Poles, Czechs, Germans, as well as the so-called 'locals' – Šlonzáks. The dispute over this heavily industrialised territory broke out almost immediately after the emergence of Poland and Czechoslovakia in late 1918. The disagreement soon escalated into a week-long armed conflict in January 1919, during which Czech forces occupied a part of the region to prevent Poland from staging elections.² Following the drawing of a demarcation line in Paris in February 1919, a

² For details of this conflict, see Petr Kacíř, 'Obsazení Těšínska v roce 1919', *Slezsko v dějinách českého státu: Sborník příspěvků z vědecké konference, pořádané pod záštitou prezidenta České republiky Václava Havla u příležitosti 50. výročí Slezského ústavu SZM v Opavě*, ed. Měčislav Borák (Šenov, 1998), pp. 302–310.

lengthy impasse ensued. It was finally agreed in September 1919 that a plebiscite would be conducted in the territory. The Interallied Plebiscite Committee duly arrived in January 1920, but the vote never took place. Due to constant violence and tensions in the region, the committee declared a state of emergency in the spring of 1920. The issue was eventually resolved in the far-away Belgian town of Spa in July 1920, resulting in the division of the Těšín Silesia region between the two countries. The western part, covering 1,270 km² with approximately 290,000 inhabitants, was given to Czechoslovakia, whereas 1,012 km² of the territory in the east of the region, with some 139,000 inhabitants, was adjudged to Poland.³

In the eastern part of the republic, Czechoslovak units began moving into the territory of modern-day Slovakia immediately after October 1918. Isolated clashes with Hungarian troops, which sought to preserve Hungarian administration in this area, were superseded in April 1919 by a full-blown conflict with the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic. This brief war lasted until the end of June 1919. On the 1st of July 1919, Hungarian troops began their retreat from what was to be ultimately recognised as Czechoslovak territory.

Furthermore, in the immediate postwar period, Czechoslovakia also faced problems in the predominantly German-inhabited border areas of the Bohemian lands, over which the newly formed Republic of German-Austria proclaimed its sovereignty. These territories included the administrative provinces of Sudetenland and Deutschböhmen and the smaller regions of Böhmerwaldgau and Deutschsüdmähren. In 1918 and 1919, Czechoslovak attempts to establish administration in these areas met with resistance from local Germans; violence culminated on the 4th of March 1919 when a total of 54 protestors

³ Stanisław Zahradnik, 'Nástin historického vývoje', *Polská národní menšina na Těšínsku v České republice, 1920-1995*, Karol Daniel Kadłubiec et al. (Ostrava, 1997), p. 13.

were killed at several demonstrations in the Bohemian lands. However, even in areas not contested by other states, such as the city of Prague, officials had to work hard to establish Czechoslovak administration and avoid disorder in the first, tumultuous days of the new republic.

It is impossible to say how many of the inhabitants of Těšín Silesia, which was an ethnically heterogeneous region, had no fixed national identity or felt little loyalty to either of the newly emerged states. However, the fact that both states desperately tried to appeal to them suggests this was not a negligible number. The interest in war victims, the group that was particularly affected by the recent conflict, was just one part of a wider strategy on the part of the authorities to persuade undecided voters of the credentials of their respective states. In the run-up to the plebiscite, no effort was spared to sway the minds of the locals with money, material help, and promises. This went hand in hand with attempts to tarnish the reputation of the other republic.⁴

Indeed, as has been mentioned in the Introduction, roughly 6–7% of the Czechoslovak population officially qualified as war victims, and inhabitants of Těšín Silesia were no exception.⁵ Typically finding themselves in a precarious position, both economically and socially, local war victims, be they wounded men, widows, or orphans of fallen soldiers, quickly came to the attention of both Polish and Czechoslovak authorities and Czechoslovak officials generously bestowed various benefits upon them.⁶ Meanwhile, disabled Czech ex-servicemen, some of whom were in fact sent into Těšín Silesia by the state for this very purpose, fervently proselytised amongst local war victims

⁴ See the pamphlets *Polskému lidu na Těšínsku* (n.p., n.d.), *Proč jsou těšíňští Slezané proti Polsku při plebiscitu* (n.p., n.d.).

⁵ *Statistická příručka II.*, pp. 365, 472.

⁶ Although the works of Julia Eichenberg do not touch upon the topic of the Těšín Silesia plebiscite, one of her studies mentioned how the plebiscite in Upper Silesia affected deliberations of Polish MPs when passing legislation concerning war victims. See Eichenberg, *Kämpfen*, pp. 138–139.

to win them over. Existing sources allow us to explore the Těšín Silesia dispute through the lens of these men who lived and operated in the region in the immediate postwar period.⁷

The Czechoslovak state sought to attract these potential citizens in two interconnected ways. At the official level, the republic hastened to make promises about extending its social care for war victims in the contested territory. The Ministry of Social Care quickly established a branch of its bureau for war victims in the town of Frýdek, to which it summoned the previous head of Zemský úřad pro péči o válečné poškozence (Provincial Office for Care for War Victims) for Moravia and Silesia, the disabled legionary Jindřich Habrovanský.⁸ To promote the Czechoslovak cause, the bureau in Frýdek soon issued a flyer with a long list of provisions available to Czechoslovak citizens, which ended with the emphatic statement that ‘the Czechoslovak republic does not forget the victims of the war’.⁹

It appears that officials treated the local Těšín Silesia war victims more favourably than they did those in other, noncontested regions. To take just one example from the village of Hrušov/Gruszów, they were sold goods at discounted prices and received advance payments of their pensions. Ironically, some of these later had to be repaid after the final decision on the fate of Těšín Silesia had been made.¹⁰

⁷ In the immediate postwar period, Czechoslovakia and Poland also clashed over the regions of Orava and Spiš. The few existing sources suggest that the loyalty of war victims also became hotly contested in these areas; two Czechoslovak officials responsible for the care of war victims were murdered there in June 1920. ‘Poláci vraždí naše lidi již na Spišsku a Oravsku’, *Nový život*, 18 July 1920, p. 7.

⁸ *Zpráva o činnosti Zemského úřadu pro péči o válečné poškozence pro Moravu a Slezsko v Brně za dobu od 1. ledna 1920 do 31. srpna 1920* (Prague, 1920), p. 4; ‘I. Personalie. Do demarkační linie’, J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, Státní archiv v Opavě (SAO), Opava, Czech Republic.

⁹ ‘Důležité! Všem invalidům, vdovám po vojínech a ostatním pozůstalým’ ..., J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO. A similar, unofficial version of this flyer was also produced, presumably also by Czechoslovak authorities, in an attempt to approach war victims more directly. ‘Co zrobiła republika czeskosłowacka dla inwalidów wojennych?’, Československá plebiscitní komise pro Těšínsko, Slezská Ostrava fonds, Inv. no. 26, Sign. PIK Těš, SAO. I would like to express my gratitude to Marcin Jarząbek for bringing my attention to this source.

¹⁰ ‘Hrušov’, *Nový život*, 9 March 1929, pp. 5-6.

The Czechoslovak state also sought to persuade locals through alternative means. Pomocné výbory pro válečné poškozence (Auxiliary Committees for War Victims) appeared in the region ‘before the demarcation line’, as the Czechs described the Czechoslovak part of the Těšín Silesia region. These offices supposedly provided charity ‘from private sources (i.e. funds and public collections)’ for war victims.¹¹ However, evidence from the region ‘beyond the demarcation line’ (i.e. the Polish part), which is discussed later in this chapter, suggests that the committees were most probably funded by the Czechoslovak state.¹²

Furthermore, the state recruited individual disabled veterans to proselytise on its behalf at rallies of war victims. Archival sources reveal that both locals and men not from the region were paid to carry out this role. The exiguous paper trail that remains extant allows us to trace the work of two of these men, Josef Plotica and Klement Poštulka. Plotica and Poštulka, who were both from the region, were hired by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Social Care. In addition to office work, they were tasked with serving on the ‘propaganda committee’.¹³

It is unclear whether either of them attended the two oratory courses that were organised in Frýdek specifically for those performing ‘propaganda work’ (*‘agitační práce’*) amongst war victims.¹⁴ However, there can be no doubt about their involvement in such efforts. On Sunday, 22nd February 1920, Poštulka spoke in a hotel in Lazy/Łazy in the presence of 48 war victims. According to a report from the meeting,

[He] mentioned the law for war victims that had recently been approved in the Czechoslovak republic and the previous provision passed by

¹¹ ‘Důležité! Všem invalidům, vdovám po vojínech a ostatním pozůstalým’ ..., J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO.

¹² ‘Invalidenrat Friedek. Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitbericht’, J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO.

¹³ ‘I. Personalie. Do demarkační linie’, SAO.

¹⁴ Ibid.

the Austro-Hungarian government. He spoke about the aid [for war victims] in Těšín Silesia, about state offices for war victims, about former county offices. He further mentioned Polish care for invalids and read out to those present the law for Polish war invalids, who do not [enjoy] a 1/3 of benefits that [have been granted to] the war invalids in the Czechoslovak republic by the recently passed law ...¹⁵

On the very same day, his colleague Plotica gave a very brief speech in Horní Těrlícko/Cierlicko Górne, where he had been accompanying another speaker.¹⁶ However, only a week later, he had a much busier schedule. Within one day, he spoke at two different gatherings of war victims, firstly in Komorní Lhotka/Ligotka Kameralna and later in the nearby village of Dobratice/Dobracice.¹⁷ Just like his colleague Poštulka, Plotica got straight to the point. On both occasions, he compared the care for war victims in the Czechoslovak republic with that in Poland. Although available documents do not discuss Plotica's talks in much detail, there can be few doubts about their contents and pro-Czechoslovak nature.

Whilst these two men were locals preaching within their own region, Metoděj Havlíček presented another type of disabled veteran. He was a native of Moravia and an employee of the Provincial Office for Care for War Victims in Brno/Brünn who was sent to Těšín Silesia together with other semiprominent disabled veterans. These included the aforementioned legionary official Jindřich Habrovanský and the Moravian secretary of Družina československých válečných poškozenců and the future Social Democratic MP, František Neumeister.¹⁸ Havlíček, who would shortly after become one of the pioneers of Czech science-fiction, left behind a vivid account of his plebiscite work. In an obituary he

¹⁵ 'Zpráva o schůzi vál. poškozenců, konané dne 22. února 1920 ... v Lazích', J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO.

¹⁶ 'Zpráva o schůzi vál. poškozenců, konané dne 22. února 1920 ... v Horním Těrlisku', J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO.

¹⁷ 'Zápis o schůzi vál. poškozenců, konané dne 29. února 1920 ... v Kom. Lhotce', J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO; 'Zápis o schůzi vál. poškozenců, konané dne 29. února 1920 ... v Dobratcích', J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO.

¹⁸ 'I. Personalie. Do demarkační linie', SAO.

wrote for a coworker who passed away in 1920, he described their mutual work in the village of Stonava/Stonawa as follows:

[On the way to Stonava, Kornas] taught me to ‘speak our way’ [i.e. in the local language] [*po našem řondit*]. ... In his Polish introduction, he made himself the chairman; he said what we had come for and then let me speak. I was taking the exam in [speaking] our way. However, I soon became agitated and the Polish campaigners realised with whom they were dealing, they started uttering observations such as – ‘Bloody hell [*Ty pierone hromski*’], that is no Šlonzak, that is a bastard [*pšakrev chachar*] from Moravia’. Not even the best oratory tricks would help; Kornas would stand and talk and then I would talk again, and thus we eventually succeeded. We established a local branch with the help of some local friends.¹⁹

Indeed, as this text suggests, even disabled veterans who came from outside the region posed as locals in an attempt to persuade those indifferent enough to vote for Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, this excerpt and the story it tells are also emblematic of the general rhetoric of disabled Czech veterans involved in the plebiscite territory. Their presence was portrayed as a humanitarian effort to help the impoverished war victims of the Těšín Silesia region who were subjected to Polish arrogance, abuse, terror, and violence. According to veterans, this covered a broad range of Polish behaviour. At one end of the scale, Havlíček himself had been pelted with frozen mud and stones after the meeting in Stonava,²⁰ whereas at the other end, the head of Družina in Šumbark/Szumbark was beaten to death and his body thrown into a cesspit.²¹ The funeral of this man some three weeks later, after his decomposing corpse had eventually been discovered, gave Havlíček another opportunity to reiterate his message about Czech dedication and willingness to help the locals.²²

¹⁹ Metoděj Havlíček, ‘Josef Kornas †’, *Nová republika*, 18 Dec. 1920, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ ‘Protokoll aufgenommen am 4. Mai 1920’, J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 12, Sign. XII, Folder 5, SAO; ‘Konference Těšínská’, *Nový život*, 20 June 1920, pp. 7-8.

²² ‘Poláci vraždí naše pracovníky’, *Nový život*, 9 May 1920, p. 3.

However, Czechoslovakia also sought to spread its influence across the demarcation line. Attempts were made to establish a pan-Silesian organisation of war victims, which would incorporate territories from both parts of the region, under the aegis of Družina. Meanwhile, the Czech state also tried to influence those on the Polish side of the demarcation line through the work of Invalidenrat (Disabled Veterans' Council), which was willing to cooperate with it. Similar to the Czech side, Pomocné výbory pro válečné poškozené (Auxiliary Committees for War Victims) were established in this territory. Although they were purportedly funded by private donations, archival sources show that this was merely a ruse and state money was used to pay for their expenses.²³ To cover up any links with Czechoslovakia, the payments were officially recorded as donations from organisations of German war victims from Liberec/Reichenberg and Brno/Brünn.²⁴ Furthermore, 200,000 Austro-Hungarian crowns, which had not been stamped by the Czech authorities, were even smuggled into the territory by agents and then paid out to local war victims.²⁵ A document produced by Invalidenrat shows that its leaders were fully aware of their role in the plebiscite campaign and their importance for Czechoslovakia. The organisation boldly proclaimed that,

We do not pose as campaigners; however, we have the population in our hands and we could count on the support of 15-20,000 voters. Beyond the demarcation line, people know only too well where the money comes from. It was discussed at a public meeting in Bielitz [Bílsko/Bielsko]. Poles ordered a review of our local office, however, they could not find anything incriminating and they did not close it down due to the fear of spontaneous [public] resistance, although their suspicion is right.²⁶

Despite all these fervent efforts to sway the local population (or maybe precisely because of them), the plebiscite was eventually called off. Nevertheless, disabled Czech

²³ 'Invalidenrat Friedek. Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitbericht', J. Koždoň fonds, Inv. no. 14, Sign. XIV, Folder 6, SAO.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

veterans of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces still chose to utilise their work in its run-up as evidence of their loyalty to Czechoslovakia. For example, Metoděj Havlíček, who clashed in 1920 with the new head of the Provincial Office for Care for War Victims in Brno, Dr Jan Svoboda, boldly argued at this point that he had ‘done more for the republic in Těšín Silesia in one hour than [Svoboda] has done in his entire life’.²⁷ After a respite, references to the Těšín Silesia plebiscite became even more common in the late 1930s as public discourse in the republic came to absorb and reflect the siege mentality that pervaded society.²⁸ In this atmosphere, disabled Czech veterans of the Austro-Hungarian forces, who could hardly refer to heroic feats from the Great War, instead spoke volubly about their postwar behaviour. Thus, for example, in his radio speech in 1938 entitled ‘War Victims in Home Resistance’, František Neumeister, by now a Social Democratic member of parliament who had once campaigned for Czechoslovakia, rolled the years back when he reminisced about the work of disabled veterans in Těšín Silesia:

It is impossible to ignore the fact that our invalids performed their patriotic duty in Těšín Silesia in the plebiscite period. They fought against terror, they were preparing the environment so that the just cause of our republic would win in the plebiscite struggle. Unfortunately, three of them paid for these efforts with their lives.²⁹

Těšín Silesia was not the only region in which disabled Czech veterans propped up the new republic in its early days. According to Družina, many of them helped to preserve order in cities in the Bohemian lands immediately after the 28th of October.³⁰ The specific military unit created from them, entitled Prapor Družiny českých invalidů (Battalion of the Fellowship of Czech Invalids), supposedly numbered almost 2,000 men in Prague, not to mention other cities. Importantly, the same unit also served as a part of the hastily

²⁷ Metoděj Havlíček, ‘Dvojitá tvář p. dra. Svobody’, *Nová republika*, 11 Sep. 1920, p. 3.

²⁸ See Chapter II.

²⁹ ‘Váleční poškození v domácím odboji’, *Nový život*, 5 Feb. 1938, pp. 5-6.

³⁰ František Neumeister, ‘Proč oslavujeme 28. říjen?’, *Nová republika*, 23 Oct. 1920, p. 2.

assembled Czechoslovak army in the territory of Slovakia during the Hungarian–Czechoslovak War of 1919.³¹

Presumably due to the relative insignificance of the unit in the wider context of the conflict with Hungary, it appears almost impossible to document with any degree of certainty the story of this armed extension of Družina. The few articles left by Družina are almost the only sources available that pertain to Prapor.³² Although they do attest that Prapor participated in the 1919 conflict against the Hungarian Soviet Republic in Slovakia, due to the contradictory nature of the veterans' remarks it remains unclear whether the ex-servicemen even saw any fighting at all. Apart from two articles written by the leaders of Družina, František Neumeister and Ondřej Kypr, which refer to supposedly countless disabled ex-servicemen who died or were further injured in combat, other sources, including those produced by Neumeister and Kypr themselves, usually avoided discussion of the actual combat.³³ The most detailed and possibly also bombastic account of the veterans' service was penned by another official of Družina, Jan Bezslézina. He claimed that

it was not a small thing to be serving on the Hungarian borders, in the south of Bohemia, or in the German counties of Moravia. Invalids, who stood at Nové Zámky [Érsekújvár in Hungarian] and Čata [Csata], who [later] received the military cross with army commendation will testify [about] that to you. Even severely [disabled] war invalids were amongst them. And during the Hungarian Bolshevik invasion, [it was] the invalids [who] stopped the advance of the Hungarians from [the direction of] Žilina [Zsolna] at Veľká Bytča [Nagybiccse], because almost all of the fit people had fled.³⁴

³¹ 'Rok práce „Družiny čs. válečných poškozenců“', *Nový život*, 10 Oct. 1920, p. 1; František Neumeister, '4. červenec 1937 – Pardubice', *Nový život*, 3 July 1937, p. 1.

³² See Metoděj Havlíček, 'Českosl. vál. poškození a puč excísaře Karle', *Nový život* 6 Nov. 1921, p. 2; 'Náš slavný den!', *Nový život*, 15 Jan. 1938, p. 1.

³³ František Neumeister, 'Divné poměry', *Nový život*, 12 Feb. 1927, p. 1; 'Po dvaceti letech', *Nový život*, 17 July 1937, p. 1. Compare with František Neumeister, 'Dvacet let', *Dvacet let práce Družiny válečných poškozenců československých: 1917-1937* (Prague, 1937), pp. 27-29.

³⁴ J. B., 'Raz pre vždycky!', *Naša obrana*, Nov. 1922, p. 2.

However, other, nonbiased sources are considerably less generous to Družina and its members. The recent works of Martin Kučera and Dušan Tomášek do not mention the presence of this unit in the volunteer forces.³⁵ We find no trace of Prapor even in Zdeněk Ježek's compendious interwar analysis of the Czechoslovak combat against the Hungarians during 1918–1919, one of the most detailed in the field.³⁶ Similarly, the publication *Rok práce* issued by the government after the first year of the state's existence, which comprehensively detailed the recent tasks of the republic and its most significant efforts, does not mention Prapor. The book neither lists disabled veterans from the Austro-Hungarian armed forces amongst the groups of recognised Czech patriots who had taken part in the fight against the Hungarians, nor includes them amongst those who had helped to preserve order in the fledgling state.³⁷ Those sources that do explicitly refer to Prapor merely attest that the unit was present in the territory of Slovakia, that it lost one soldier during the deployment, and that it was ultimately disbanded in July 1919.³⁸

Nevertheless, despite the presumably insignificant nature of Prapor, the unit played a prominent role in many of the subsequent arguments and claims of both Družina and the closely affiliated organisation Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů v republice Československé (Union of State Employees-Invalids in the Czechoslovak Republic). The very existence of Prapor was used by Czech veterans on numerous occasions throughout the entire interwar period as evidence of their sincere loyalty to Czechoslovakia, and also of their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the republic.³⁹ For example, in 1931

³⁵ Martin Kučera, 'Pokus o vymezení úlohy československých dobrovolníků 1918-1919 v bojích o celistvost republiky', *Studie k moderním dějinám: Sborník prací k 70. narozeninám Vlastislava Laciny*, ed. Josef Harna and Petr Prokš (Prague, 2001), pp. 239-270; Dušan Tomášek, *Nevyhlášená válka: Boje o Slovensko 1918-1920* (Prague, 2005).

³⁶ Zdeněk Ježek, *Boj o Slovensko v letech 1918-1919* (Prague, 1928).

³⁷ *Rok práce* (Prague, 1919), pp. 42-46.

³⁸ 'Rozpuštění praporu družiny čes. invalidů', Prapor Družiny čes. Invalidů fonds, Inv. no. 2203, Vojenský ústřední archiv, Prague, Czech Republic; Jozef Chalupský, 'Štatistika padlých a zomrelých', *Obete pri obrane Slovenska 1919: Pamätník padlých pri boľševickom vpáde* ed. Ján Krasko (Bratislava, 1929), p. 189.

³⁹ Fr. Neumeister, 'Zabavuje se', *Nový život*, 4 May 1929, p. 1.

disabled veterans observed that ‘former members of Prapor Družiny invalidů do not boast with their credentials because they considered service in Prapor to be their patriotic duty’.⁴⁰ In turn, this selfless loyalty to Czechoslovakia was then juxtaposed against the insufficient level of care provided for these veterans by the very state for which they had so valiantly fought.⁴¹

The idea of Prapor was even brought back in the hectic final moments of the first Czechoslovak republic. On 24th September 1938, the newspaper of Družina issued a call to disabled veterans, who were asked to apply once again to Prapor, which was being re-established. In the event of a military conflict, the unit was supposed to be put at the government’s disposal.⁴² The new Prapor was duly created two days later and briefly worked to preserve order and security during the Munich crisis.⁴³ However, less than a fortnight after the original call, Družina announced without further comment that the unit had been disbanded.⁴⁴

Disabled Veterans and Orphans

As has already been mentioned in the Introduction, apart from more than 200,000 combatants who had been maimed in or had developed serious illnesses as a result of the Great War, hundreds of thousands of other Czechoslovak citizens were also deeply affected by the war, in which they had lost their husbands, fathers, sons, or brothers. By the end of 1923, more than 400,000 relatives of deceased soldiers were receiving a state pension.⁴⁵ This figure included some 218,000 children whose fathers had died in the war.

⁴⁰ ŇOT, ‘Pomocní zřizenci-váleční poškození u vojenské správy’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, Oct. 1931, p. 4.

⁴¹ For one of the numerous examples, see ‘19. výročí vypovězení světové války’, *Nový život*, 12 Aug. 1933, p. 5.

⁴² ‘Prapor Družiny invalidů’, *Nový život*, 24 Sep. 1938, p. 4.

⁴³ ‘Prapor Družiny invalidů’, *Nový život*, 1 Oct. 1938, p. 5.

⁴⁴ ‘Prapor Družiny invalidů’, *Nový život*, 8 Oct. 1938, p. 5.

⁴⁵ *Statistická příručka II.*, p. 472.

The Czechoslovak system of social care underwent considerable transformation in the interwar period, with changes such as the introduction of workers' old age pension and health insurance⁴⁶ and the Ghent system of unemployment benefits. However, the poor law system continued to be based on the duty of individual villages to look after those who had the right of domicile in them.⁴⁷ Although war victims were in a somewhat different position as they were often granted at least some pension and other forms of aid from the state, it was ultimately local authorities that were seen as responsible for their well-being.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, many of the more than 30,000 war orphans,⁴⁹ who were receiving only meagre benefits from the state, became an immense burden for their home villages.

The treatment of fatherless children and orphans was repeatedly decried by fellow war victims, Czechs, Germans, and Slovaks alike.⁵⁰ Throughout the years, the largest two organisations of war victims, Družina and Bund, organised a vast number of events to help the dependents of fallen soldiers, such as the annual Christmas meetings of local branches, where material aid was distributed.⁵¹ However, the orphanage of Družina in Načeradec stood out from amongst all these efforts as by far the most ambitious endeavour.

As a result of the perceived neglect on the part of the state and local authorities, Družina came up with an idea to establish its own home for war orphans in 1923.⁵² Only two years later, it purchased an 18th-century manor house in the quiet village of Načeradec near Prague. The estate encompassed more than two square miles of land as well as a

⁴⁶ See Chapter IV.

⁴⁷ Jakub Rákosník, Igor Tomeš et al., *Sociální stát v Československu: Právně-institucionální vývoj v letech 1918-1992*, (Prague, 2012), p. 96.

⁴⁸ Václav Koleč, '„Družiny čs. válečných poškozených“', *Nový život*, 9 Sep. 1933, pp. 1, 4.

⁴⁹ 'Asyl nevinných', *Nová republika*, 4 June 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁰ 'Wir verlangen die Erhöhung der Waisenrente', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Apr. 1923, p. 1; 'Zachraňte budoucnost naší republiky', *Nový život*, 10 March 1928, p. 2; 'Zmiernite kruté ustanovenia', *Nový život*, 15 May 1937, p. 2.

⁵¹ See, for example, 'Gablonz a. N.', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Jan. 1935, p. 10.

⁵² Fr. Neumeister, 'Pod Blaníkem', *Nový život*, 20 June 1925, p. 1. Similar plans of the Slovak branch of Družina to operate an orphanage in Slovakia never came to fruition. 'Deti národa!', *Naša obrana*, 1 Apr. 1923, p. 1.

steam sawmill, a brickyard, a brewery, and a distillery.⁵³ The rationale behind this was that the income generated by the property would cover the costs of operating the orphanage. Needless to say, the acquisition of such a large estate by an organisation of war victims was viewed as a significant success by many of the veterans.

Indeed, the orphanage, which was officially opened in 1927, instilled a sense of immense pride in the members of Družina. Leaders of the organisation often stressed what an achievement it was for war victims to buy and then operate their own orphanage, to a large degree from their own resources, which were generated by Družina's recurrent charity lotteries.⁵⁴ The ability of war victims and in particular disabled veterans to help each other was celebrated, as expressed in the words of a member of Družina who described the orphanage as 'built by those who are suffering for others that are suffering'.⁵⁵ Similar sentiments were expressed by František Neumeister in 1925, when he emphasised and lauded the fact that

the organisation, consisting of all the paupers, the unfortunate, crippled, and abandoned people, is doing its duty towards the youngest victims of the world war, [it is] preparing the [orphanage].⁵⁶

The humanitarian role of the institution was often discussed by members of Družina, who depicted Načeradec in highly positive terms. According to reports in *Nový život*, its residents lived in good conditions and were treated well by the prominent warden couple.⁵⁷ This consisted of the Czech writer Hana Klenková, the daughter of Vojta Beneš and niece of Edvard Beneš, who had studied sociology and psychology at Vassar College,

⁵³ 'Asyl nevinných', *Nová republika*, 4 June 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁴ 'Siroťinec Družiny', *Nový život*, 8 June 1932, p. 2; Antonín Málek, 'Načeradec', *Nový život*, 15 May 1937, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Šimůnek, 'Sirotkův Štědrý večer', *Nový život*, 19 Dec. 1925, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Fr. Neumeister, 'Pod Blaníkem'.

⁵⁷ See 'Načeradec v historii a ve světle humanity', *Nový život*, 19 Sep. 1936, p. 4.

and her husband Ladislav.⁵⁸ Journals of Družina even published letters of individual veterans who chose to visit the orphanage to examine how the organisation used its funds, only to report with great satisfaction that the orphanage was indeed a good investment.⁵⁹ At times, it was observed that Načeradec provided better conditions for children than many working-class families could.⁶⁰ In turn, veterans could and did argue that they had fulfilled the often-invoked promise given to their dying comrades to look after their children.⁶¹



Fig. 4. Children from the orphanage in Načeradec.⁶²

Usually, this was the only occasion upon which the Austro-Hungarian service of veterans and their fallen comrades were mentioned in connection with the orphanage. As discussed already in Chapter II, the Austro-Hungarian war effort was largely reduced in the Czech rhetoric to the narrative of destruction and suffering. Fathers of the children living in the institution were never heroised or described as valiant or brave. Instead, it was

⁵⁸ R. Kreisl, 'Po Načeradci-Pardubice!', *Nový život*, 19 June 1937, p. 1. For more information about life in the orphanage, see Hana Klenková-Benešová, *Dům tiché pohody* (Prague, 1938).

⁵⁹ Jirout, 'Načeradec', *Nový život*, 4 Aug. 1934, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁰ Josef Rezníček, 'Vánoce v sirotčinci v Načeradci', *Nový život*, 9 Jan. 1932, p. 5.

⁶¹ Fr. Neumeister, 'Dětský domov Družiny', *Nový život*, 14 May 1927, p. 1.

⁶² *Dvacet let Místní skupiny Družiny čsl. válečných poškozců v Brně. Deset let Svazu trafikantů válečných poškozců v Brně* (Brno, 1938), p. 13.

the legionary sacrifice that brought freedom and peace. In fact, this paradigm was visible even within the orphanage; tellingly, the warden's office in this home of Austro-Hungarian war victims contained a romantic painting of a legionary travelling through Russia, surrounded by snow and darkness.⁶³

However, disabled Czech veterans also viewed the project of the orphanage through the optic of nationalism. Children raised in the orphanage and war orphans in general were not simply any children. They were the children of the Czechoslovak nation, and they thus represented its future. Therefore, the state and its citizens had to ensure that these orphans would become virtuous and reliable citizens. In 1924, when Družina was still only planning the establishment of the orphanage, a member already emphasised its significance, arguing that

it is really an [important] question: how these orphans, when they grow into citizens, will look at the nation, which has a duty to look after the most afflicted victims of the world war for the sake of humanity, so that they will grow into proper citizens of this state.⁶⁴

Similar sentiments were expressed when the orphanage was officially opened in 1927. The institution was supposed to remedy the societal issues brought about by the Great War for the benefit of the nation. In particular, Načeradec was expected to protect orphans from moral corruption caused by the absence of their parents. As one of the leaders of Družina explained to fellow members,

We have the following task: to support the morally ruined orphans of the world war, so that they will not grow up to be criminals like Kašpařík, Lecián [notorious Czech gangsters] etc. When we follow the newspapers, we read almost daily about a murder [committed] for a few crowns – and if we examine the nature of this act further, unfortunately we discover that the war has caused a great decline of morality. The war deprived hundreds of thousands of children of motherly and fatherly love; they were raised in unfamiliar environments and the consequences [of this] are appearing now. It

⁶³ Klenková-Benešová, p. 42.

⁶⁴ Ant. Procházka, 'Válka-její oběti-mír', *Nový život*, 5 July 1924, p. 1.

is for us to show them the right path and by doing so we will not only carry out the legacy of the fallen, but also a [fair] bit of meritorious work for our land and nation.⁶⁵

In the later years, when the atmosphere in the republic grew more tense due to the rise to power of Adolf Hitler, members of Družina repeatedly used the example of the orphanage as one of many different ways in which they helped the Czechoslovak state. In this period, disabled veterans publicly prided themselves in the fact they had ‘taken on the difficult role of raising abandoned children [to become] proper citizens of our nation’.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the role ascribed to children, and in turn to their nurture, changed at this point. Children were turned into the military future of the nation. *Nový život* observed the following in 1937, very much in the spirit of the era:

In children, the nation is eternal [the motto of Vojta Beneš]. If we all follow this principle in our republic, then our nation will always be strong and invincible in the future.⁶⁷

Over the interwar period, the orphanage helped to raise more than 150 children.⁶⁸ Furthermore, more than 900 others spent their holidays there in summer camps, which were organised to help those from poor backgrounds.⁶⁹ Importantly, this was by no means the only undertaking of war victims’ organisations aimed at children. In the 1930s, Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen also held similar summer camps on its estate in Boletice nad Labem/Politz an der Elbe for children from the poorest German regions of the Bohemian lands.⁷⁰ Additionally, Družina also opened its own nonprofit sanatorium for children and adults on the Adriatic coast in 1934.⁷¹

⁶⁵ ‘Ku předu . . .!’, *Naše obrana*, 21 June 1927, p. 2.

⁶⁶ ‘Naše chloubka pod Blaníkem’, *Nový život*, 21 March 1936, p. 3.

⁶⁷ ‘Děkujeme všem!’, *Nový život*, 5 June 1937, p. 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ ‘Naše aktuality’, *Nový život*, 19 Dec. 1936, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Dr. Kr., ‘Unsere Ferienaktion für erholungsbedürftige Kinder’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Aug. 1935, pp. 3-4.

⁷¹ ‘Družina rozšiřuje svojí působnost až k Jaderskému moři. V Podgoře máme ozdravovnu pro děti i dospělé’, *Nový život*, 31 March 1934, pp. 1, 5; ‘Dětský dům Družiny válečných poškozených v Podgoře’, *Národní osvobození*, 24 May 1934, p. 6.

Ironically, the orphanage eventually outlived both Družina and the first Czechoslovak republic by more than half a century and proved to be perhaps its longest-lasting legacy.⁷² The institution operated in Načeradec until recent years, after having been first nationalised and then remodelled into an approved school in the 1940s and 1950s.⁷³ Even after decades, in the 1960s, previous residents of the orphanage would apparently return to Načeradec to visit their former home, now ‘being largely respected citizens of [the Czechoslovak] state’.⁷⁴

Peace Efforts of Czechoslovak War Victims

By contrast, other well-intended efforts of war victims proved to be much more short-lived. Throughout the interwar period, Czech, German, and Slovak veterans expressed pacifist sentiments and beliefs, which they sought to support through various projects and actions. On the transnational level, several Czechoslovak associations of war victims participated in CIAMAC (Conférence Internationale des Associations de Mutilés et Anciens Combattants), which was one of the two leading European organisations of ex-servicemen and war victims.⁷⁵ Apart from attempts to improve the social welfare of war victims and former combatants, CIAMAC focused on the reconciliation of and peaceful cooperation amongst former warring nations and their disarmament.⁷⁶

⁷² For more information about the orphanage in Načeradec under Družina, see ‘25 let Dětského domova v Načeradci’, *Nový život*, 20 July 1951, p. 2.

⁷³ ‘Dětský výchovný ústav Načeradec, 1926-1986’, AM Načeradec fonds, Inv. no. 276, Státní oblastní archiv v Benešově (SOAB), Benešov, Czech Republic; ‘Vážený kolego’, Načeradec – ZDŠ s dětským domovem – 1963-1982 fonds, SOAB.

⁷⁴ ‘Kronika základní devítileté školy s dětským domovem v Načeradci’, Načeradec – ZDŠ s dětským domovem – 1963-1982 fonds, SOAB.

⁷⁵ For more information about veterans’ internationalism, see Ángel Alcalde, ‘War Veterans as Transnational Actors: Politics, Alliances and Networks in the Interwar Period’, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 25.3-4 (2018), pp. 492-511.

⁷⁶ Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman, ‘Introduction: The Great War and Veterans’ Internationalism’, *The Great War and Veterans’ Internationalism*, ed. Julia Eichenberg and John Paul Newman (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 5, 12; Thomas Richard Davies, ‘International Veterans’ Organizations and the Promotion of Disarmament Between the Two World Wars’, *The Great War*, ed. Eichenberg and Newman, pp. 187-206.

In 1931, Prague became the site of CIAMAC's seventh international congress. The event brought together former allies as well as enemies from 11 European states, including France, Germany, and Austria.⁷⁷ The opening speech of the congress, which was delivered by František Neumeister, reflected the pacifist rhetoric of CIAMAC and its Czechoslovak member organisations and their belief that veterans and war victims were in a unique position to strive for peace.⁷⁸ In line with other previous statements of war victims,⁷⁹ Neumeister argued the following:

It is natural that we have to apply all our efforts towards securing [of welfare] of war victims, prevention of wars, and strengthening of the idea of world peace. [It is] precisely us, [i.e.] those who had suffered the horrors of war, who have the utmost duty to work towards peace amongst people.⁸⁰

Organisations of Czechoslovak veterans and war victims remained members of CIAMAC until the end of the interwar period. In 1935, the influential Czech legionary Lev Sychrava even became CIAMAC's chairman.⁸¹ Importantly, after the events in Germany and Austria in 1933 and 1934, respectively, which rang the knell of independent veterans' organisations in these countries, the Czechoslovak Bund was the largest German-speaking association that continued to participate in CIAMAC.⁸² Bund remained staunchly loyal to CIAMAC even in the late 1930s, when CIP (Comité International Permanent), with its ties to the Axis, purportedly sought to bring together veterans of all countries.⁸³ Unlike

⁷⁷ 'Sedmý mezinár. kongres světové války', *Nový život*, 8 Aug. 1931, pp. 1-2; 'Vom Prager Kongreß der Internat. Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Kriegsbeschädigten und Kriegsteilnehmerverbände (Ciamac)', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Sep. 1931, pp. 1-3.

⁷⁸ Eichenberg and Newman, 'Introduction: The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism', p. 5.

⁷⁹ 'Nebezpečí války', *Nový život*, 20 Jan. 1923, pp. 1-2; Václav Koleč, 'Cestou mírovou', *Nový život*, 18 Aug. 1923, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁰ 'Sedmý mezinár. kongres světové války', p. 1.

⁸¹ 'Předsedou Ciamacu Čechoslovák', *Nový život*, 28 Sep. 1935, p. 1.

⁸² 'Verbot des Mitteilungsblattes der Ciamac in Deutschland', *CIAMAC: Bulletin de la Conférence Internationale des Associations de Mutilés de Guerre et Anciens Combattants*, Oct.-Nov. 1933, p. 206; 'Britisch [sic] Legion v Praze', *Nový život*, 31 July 1937, p. 4; 'Unsere Kameraden aus dem Auslande', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, July 1937, p. 16; Verena Pawlowsky and Harald Wendelin, *Wunden des Staates: Kriegsoffer und Sozialstaat in Österreich 1914–1938* (Vienna, 2015), pp. 451–459. See also Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914–1939* (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 175–176.

⁸³ Martina Salvante, 'The Italian Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra and Its International Liaisons in the Post Great War Era', *The Great War*, ed. Eichenberg and Newman, pp. 173–175.

Družina, Bund rejected the call to become a member of CIP in 1937. Instead, this German organisation emphasised the importance of CIAMAC, which had facilitated cooperation of former enemies. Leaders of Bund argued that to leave CIAMAC would be ‘very unfair behaviour’, which would break the trust of those who had ‘known no difference between the war victims of the Central Powers and those of the Allies; those who, so to speak, had stretched their hands across the trenches’.⁸⁴

Although Czechoslovak pacifists apparently formed only ‘a small (*nepočetný*) group’,⁸⁵ the war victims also became involved in local pacifist projects and efforts, particularly before 1933. Not surprisingly, the envisaged paths to peace and perceived causes of conflicts could vary markedly, depending on the political beliefs of individual veterans and organisations. For example, in a 1929 radio speech, the leader of the left-wing Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů opined that it was democracy and social justice which would best serve understanding amongst nations.⁸⁶ Družina, which expressed strong pacifist sentiments in the 1920s, voiced similar beliefs and often placed the blame for the war on capitalism and human greed.⁸⁷ Similarly, the newspaper of Christian-Socialist war victims recognised capitalism to be an important factor in international conflicts,⁸⁸ however, these war victims emphasised the crucial role of religion and Christian values in the attainment and protection of peace.⁸⁹

In its pursuit of world peace, veterans from Družina cooperated closely with arguably the most prominent local pacifist organisations Chelčického mírová společnost (Chelčický’s Peace Society) and Jednota mírová (Peace Union) and their two feminist

⁸⁴ ‘Die British Legion als Werberin für die Cip in Prag’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Sep. 1937, p. 3.

⁸⁵ See Koldinská and Šedivý, p. 281.

⁸⁶ ‘Dorozumění mezi národy. (Přednáška, proslovená kol. Liederbauchem dne 6. dubna v dělnickém rozhlase)’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, 10 Apr. 1929, p. 7.

⁸⁷ J. Š. Sázavský, ‘Přípravy pro příští válku?’, *Nový život*, 17 Apr. 1921, p. 2.

⁸⁸ ‘Války jsou obchodním podnikem a proto se těžko probíjí mírové snahy’, *Lidumil*, Sep. 1931, p. 4.

⁸⁹ ‘Válka a mír’, *Lidumil*, Oct. 1930, p. 1.

leaders, Pavla Moudrá⁹⁰ and Jindřiška Wurmová⁹¹ in the immediate postwar years. In January 1921, Chelčického mírová společnost, which derived its name from the Czech medieval pacifist thinker Petr Chelčický, declared the newspaper of Družina to be the one ‘standing closest’ to itself and recommended *Nový život* to all pacifists.⁹² Later that year, cooperation between Czech war victims and pacifists developed even further when Družina’s family-oriented magazine *Zátiší* became a joint journal of the war victims’ organisation and Chelčického mírová společnost, Jednota mírová, Československá jednota výchovná a humanitní (Czechoslovak Educational and Humanitarian Union), and Československé literární sdružení (Czechoslovak Literary Society).⁹³ In the remaining two years of its existence, the magazine issued a large number of pacifist essays and articles, written by Moudrá, Wurmová, and many other authors.

In this period, Družina also published a pacifist pamphlet of the writer Jan Grmela entitled *Válku válce*. The foreword written by the head of Družina Josef Šíma illustrates the strong feelings of war victims regarding their involvement in the efforts to prevent future wars. According to Šíma,

[w]e must not forget, unless we want to become culprits of the new military tragedy that it is not enough for our movement to work towards [improved] social care for war victims[;] that healing of wounds caused by the war is not enough; our main goal needs to be the abolition of causes of this tragedy – the overall abolition of wars. ... as victims of the war, in our own interest, in the interest of the state and nation, in the interest of a better future, we have to become the vanguard of the warriors for peace and brotherhood.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ For more information about Pavla Moudrá, see Lucie Jelínková, ‘Zapomenutá aktivistka Pavla Moudrá’ (Univerzita Pardubice Mgr thesis, 2009); Olga Słowik, ‘Literární a feministická publicistika Pavly Moudré’ (Univerzita Karlova v Praze Mgr thesis, 2014).

⁹¹ One of the sons of Jindřiška Wurmová who served in the Czechoslovak legions had been killed fighting the Central Powers at Vouziers in 1918. See Petr Šmíd, ‘Ženy tří republik: Jindřiška Wurmová, bojovnice za mír a ženské hnutí’, accessed 28 June 2020 at <http://plus.rozhlas.cz/zeny-tri-republik-jindriska-wurmova-bojovnice-za-mir-a-zenske-hnuti-7579828>. Jan Hradil, *Miloš Wurm, bojovník za svobodu a mír* (Brno, 1926), p. 4.

⁹² ‘„Chelčického mírová společnost”’, *Příloha časopisu „Nový život”*, n.d., p. 3.

⁹³ ‘Českoslov. veřejnosti’, *Zátiší*, 20 Sep. 1921, n. pag.

⁹⁴ Josef Šíma, ‘Předmluva’, *Válku válce!*, Jan J. Grmela (Soběslav, n.d.), pp. 5-6.

Furthermore, Družina organised its own pacifist events, as exemplified by the peace rallies held in numerous Bohemian and Moravian cities and towns in July 1924, which commemorated the 10th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War and the victims of the conflict.⁹⁵ On these and other occasions, remarks about the importance of peace and cooperation among nations were accompanied by war victims' demands for improved social care. The lack of financial support for war victims was often contrasted with substantial sums of money that were spent on armed forces by individual states. In turn, disarmament was seen both as an opportunity to obtain more state funding for war victims and the means to achieve peace.⁹⁶

As a former journalist and publisher, the influential founder of Družina, Ondřej Kypr, who also briefly served as an Agrarian member of parliament and was the interwar head of Zemský úřad pro péči o válečné poškozence (Provincial Office for Care for War Victims) in Prague, became involved in pacifist book projects.⁹⁷ The cooperation of Kypr, who had been wounded on the Eastern front in 1916,⁹⁸ with Chelčického mírová společnost and the Czech doctor Julius Hanausek resulted in the publication of the anti-war volume entitled *Následky války, jak je pozoroval lékař* in 1920.⁹⁹ A year later, Kypr also published its German translation, which was described by Hanausek in its special foreword as showing 'the German reader the war from the opposite side [to that used by German] newspapers'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ 'Manifestujeme! 27. července 1924, desáté výročí vypovězení světové války', *Nový život*, 26 July 1924, p. 1; 'Naše manifestace pro světový mír', *Nový život*, 2 Aug. 1924, p. 1.

⁹⁶ F. N., 'Odzbrojení', *Nový život*, 12 March 1927, p. 1.

⁹⁷ See Ondřej Kypr (ed.), *Mírové čtení pro českou mládež* (Pardubice, n.d.).

⁹⁸ Ondřej Kypr, *Na vojně v Karpatech a Haliči* (Pardubice, 1916), p. 175.

⁹⁹ J. Hanausek, *Následky války, jak je pozoroval lékař. Fotografie a vypsání osudů nejtěžších invalidů. Ze zápisů odborného lékaře – s úvahami význačných myslitelů a básníků o válce* (Prague, 1920).

¹⁰⁰ J. Hanausek, *Die Folgen des Krieges, wie sie der Arzt beobachtete. Photographien und Schicksalsbeschreibungen der schwersten Invaliden mit Erörterungen berühmter Denker und Dichter über den Krieg* trans. O. H. (Prague, 1921), n. pag.

In a manner similar to the more famous *Krieg dem Kriege*, which emerged four years later, the book introduced individual disabled victims of the war – several veterans and also one child.¹⁰¹ Men, their misery, and damaged lives were discussed in detail and the stories were accompanied by graphic images showing them both before and after they suffered their injuries. These stories were interspersed with pacifist texts that bore titles such as ‘National Hatred as the Cause of Wars’. In contrast to certain other publications, which used photographs of disabled veterans to demonstrate the progress of plastic surgery and rehabilitation and emphasised improvement that could be achieved through medicine,¹⁰² this book squarely utilised war victims as unmediated evidence of the horrors of war.

As promised in the title, readers were able to gaze at the men and their injuries from the perspective of a medical practitioner. Those individuals whose wounds would have been covered by their attire were stripped of their clothing and asked to pose only in their underwear. Residual limbs, scars, and severe facial wounds were all laid bare and accompanied with text about the men. Although the book occasionally observed that a veteran was able to overcome injuries and return to his prewar employment, it overall provided a very bleak account of the men’s lives.¹⁰³ The author emphasised the loss of faculties and independence of these men caused by the war. Instead of being breadwinners and heads of their families, veterans were emasculated and reduced by their injuries to objects of care. As Dr. Hanausek observed in the introduction, ‘in this book, pictures of living human ruins are displayed, as created by war’.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ernst Friedrich, *Krieg dem Kriege! Guerre à la guerre. War against War! Oorlog aan den Oorlog!* (Berlin, 1924).

¹⁰² See F. Burian, *Plastická chirurgie ve službách sociální péče* (Letovice, 1924); František Burian, *Plastická chirurgie* (Prague, 1924).

¹⁰³ Hanausek, *Následky války*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Kypr's next anti-war publishing project exemplifies the more pragmatic approach to pacifism, which became more common amongst Czech ex-servicemen with the passing of time. Indeed, his 1929 volume entitled *Světová válka a její oběti* contained the same stories of veterans and identical photographs as the 1920 book of Hanausek, clearly communicating the horrors of war.¹⁰⁵ However, the volume also included articles which provided a more multi-faceted view of war victims and their lives. Many of the miscellaneous texts, which had been added to the material from Hanausek's book, presented Czechoslovak social and medical care provided for war victims; others spoke about the wartime patriotism and anti-Habsburg resistance of Czech soldiers, Družina československých válečných poškozců, as well as successful cooperatives of disabled veterans in Prague and Prostějov/Proßnitz. In particular, the articles about ex-servicemen's business ventures showed disabled men in a considerably different light compared with the texts of Hanausek as they manifested veterans' abilities and skills. Indeed, the report about the clothes-producing cooperative in Prostějov concluded with the proud observation that 'our members are now self-sufficient citizens of our, with Czech blood redeemed, Czechoslovak Republic'.¹⁰⁶

Importantly, the volume also presented the work of the pioneer of Czech plastic surgery František Burian. In stark contrast to the dismaying pictures provided by Hanausek, Burian's set of before and after photographs suggested that at least partial recovery and improvement in veterans' lives could be achieved.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Kypr's epilogue differed significantly from the spirit of Hanausek's original text; in this section,

¹⁰⁵ Ondřej Kypr (ed.), *Světová válka a její oběti* (Prague, 1929).

¹⁰⁶ 'Oděvní družstvo invalidů v Prostějově', *Světová válka*, ed. Kypr, p. 86.

¹⁰⁷ F. Burian, 'O činnosti ústavu plastické chirurgie v péči o válečné poškozené', *Světová válka*, ed. Kypr, pp. 48-54.

the prominent Czech official expressed highly pragmatic but simultaneously naïve beliefs regarding the questions of the Czechoslovak military and its role:

I understand very well the need for an army, which [provides] protection and safety against any enemy; that is from where my positive attitude towards the army [stems]. The army of the Czechoslovak state does not have an offensive character. Armies of the old [i.e. medieval] Czech [Bohemian] state did not have it either. ... We are creating the tradition of peaceful development and lasting peace with neighbouring nations. Protecting [what is] ours, we do not desire [what belongs] to others.¹⁰⁸

Similar statements were made by disabled Czech veterans in the remaining part of the interbellum, particularly after 1933. On the one hand, members of Družina repeatedly spoke about their strong beliefs regarding disarmament and called for peace among nations. Indeed, according to its 1930s handbook, Družina was a ‘pacifist organisation’ that was ‘thoroughly peace-loving’.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, the veterans emphasised their support of the Czechoslovak armed forces and their loyalty to the Czechoslovak republic. As the frontpage of *Nový život* declared in 1936, ‘we are pacifists, however, we are preparing for defence’.¹¹⁰ In the same year, one of the leading members of Družina proclaimed the following: ‘Hus and Chelčický will remain dear to us, but our role model will be [the Hussite military commander Jan] Žižka’.¹¹¹

By contrast, the rhetoric of Bund itself remained staunchly pacifist throughout the entire interwar period. In the early 1920s, disabled German ex-servicemen often spoke with disdain about Czechoslovak military expenditures and perceived militarism of the republic.¹¹² Such accusations became less common as relations between Germans and Czechs improved in the following years. In the 1930s, pacifist ideas and slogans, such as

¹⁰⁸ O. Kypr, ‘Závěr’, *Světová válka*, ed. Kypr, p. 87.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Program a požadavky Družiny čs. válečných poškozenců’, *Příručka pro funkcionáře Družiny čs. válečných poškozenců*, ed. Ladislav Neškrabal (Hradec Králové, n.d.), p. 8.

¹¹⁰ ‘Obrana republiky. (Jsme pacifisty, připravujeme se však k obraně)’, *Nový život*, 2 May 1936, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Antonín Málek, ‘Krise pacifismu’, *Nový život*, 18 July 1936, p. 4.

¹¹² ‘Was kostet jeden Bürger das Soldatenspielen?’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Nov. 1921, p. 7.
‘Der Militarismus!’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1921, p. 8.

the motto ‘Nie wieder Krieg’ (‘Never again war’), were repeatedly declared in public by members of Bund.¹¹³ However, due to its strongly apolitical character,¹¹⁴ Bund never addressed the sensitive issue of Nazi Germany and the threat it posed to peace. On the contrary, in 1937 *Der Kriegsverletzte* reprinted an article from Nazi Germany about contemporary peace efforts and the role of war victims in them, which approached this topic with a significant amount of pro-German bias and even praised Adolf Hitler for his support of peace.¹¹⁵ As late as March 1938, the leader of Bund, Bernhard Leppin, would still not discuss the contemporary geopolitical situation in Europe when talking about peace; at the meeting in Trnovany/Turn, he merely reiterated the strong desire of Bund to promote peace and understanding among nations.¹¹⁶

Disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans and their organisations played numerous roles in interwar Czechoslovakia. After October 1918, ex-servicemen could be warriors, pacifists, and caregivers, with these roles not being mutually exclusive, as exemplified by a speech given by František Neumeister on the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the orphanage in Načeradec. Within this speech, the Social Democratic member of parliament discussed the need to strive for peace, expressed war victims’ support of the state, and also referred to their 1919 service in Slovakia, only to then finish by declaring that the ‘entire nation’ should use Načeradec as an inspiration and work for the benefit of the republic.

Despite their attempts, disabled Czech and Slovak veterans of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces never became the celebrated heroes of Czechoslovakia. Their extremely marginal position in society in this period was illustrated by a public incident

¹¹³ ‘Nie wieder Krieg!’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 1 Aug. 1934, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter VI.

¹¹⁵ Hans Voigt, ‘Die europäische Aufgabe der Kriegsoffer – und Frontkämpferbewegungen – eine Vorausschau’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, May 1937, pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁶ ‘Um die Rechte der Kriegsoffer gegenüber der Gesetzgebung und der Öffentlichkeit’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 March 1938, p. 1.

between a delegation of disabled ex-servicemen and Andrej Hlinka, arguably the most influential and prominent Slovak politician of the interbellum. During their meeting in 1927, the Slovak member of parliament expressed little respect for these veterans. Far from that, he chose to question the veracity of the disability claims of many of the ex-servicemen, sarcastically proclaiming that his party did not enter the government to support the veterans that had been ‘shot between their fingers’.¹¹⁷ Perhaps even more tellingly as to the position of Austro-Hungarian veterans in the state, this verbal attack by a prominent politician on disabled ex-servicemen elicited practically no reaction from wider Czechoslovak society.

¹¹⁷ ‘Kto sa zas chce vyškriabať po chrbtoch obetí svetovej vojny’, *Naša obrana*, 15 May 1927, p. 1.

Chapter IV: State Care in Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovak Veterans

‘The land reform has been settled. Those who have brought the greatest sacrifice for the liberated state receive so much land that they do need any more, that is [they receive] a rectangle for their grave’.¹

An obituary of a disabled veteran.

Hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovak citizens were disabled veterans of the Great War. In the period before the introduction of universal old age pension and disability benefits, care for ex-servicemen became the largest social welfare project of the young Czechoslovak state. This chapter looks at this project, examining the topic of state care for these men in interwar Czechoslovakia from a number of different perspectives.

Firstly, it discusses legal definitions of veterans’ disability to elucidate who was considered a disabled veteran of the Great War by the Czechoslovak state. Later, it briefly observes the limited participation of nonstate actors in care for disabled veterans before exploring how the republic approached and treated these men. The chapter examines and compares how the three different groups of disabled ex-servicemen, namely Austro-Hungarian veterans, who fell under the remit of the Ministry of National Defence; those under the Ministry of Social Care; and legionaries, were treated and viewed in regard to work by the state. The chapter also analyses how the men themselves perceived the question of employment and what steps and measures they took to provide for themselves and their families.

It is argued that the Czechoslovak state’s approach to the question of disabled veterans’ employment was far from unified or straightforward. The Czechoslovak state established a highly asymmetrical and complicated system of care for disabled veterans,

¹ ‘Naše rovy’, *Nový život*, 31 May 1930, p. 4.

with clear dichotomies between the treatment of the respective groups of disabled veterans with regard to employment. Ex-servicemen and their employment were approached and treated differently according to their previous military service, rank, and severity of disability. Some men could rely on their disability pensions, whereas others had to work to earn their living. In particular, the differences between the positions of veterans of different ranks and also between legionaries and Austro-Hungarian veterans were clearly visible. Former officers, professional NCOs, and some legionaries benefitted from relatively high disability pensions, particularly when compared with other veterans. Legionaries could also apply for many of the positions reserved for them as reliable members of the republic. By contrast, few such privileges were accorded to Austro-Hungarian soldiers. The least privileged but by far the most numerous of the three groups, consisting mainly of Austro-Hungarian veterans, expressed significant discontent with its position as these men sought to obtain a source of income for themselves and their families. They turned to the Czechoslovak state for provision; however, the state only went halfway to meet their demands, refusing to make employment of disabled veterans compulsory.

Whilst it may have been possible to suppress Czechoslovakia's Habsburg past at official events, the state could not ignore its hundreds of thousands of inhabitants who had had their war service indelibly inscribed onto their bodies. For the first few months after the emergence of Czechoslovakia, the state care provided for disabled veterans followed the framework established by its Austro-Hungarian predecessor. As observed by Ke-chin Hsia in his PhD thesis, 'war welfare in WWI Austria was a complex "system" haphazardly patched together with outdated laws and new regulations as well as existing institutions

and improvised agencies'.² Under the Dual Monarchy social care for war victims, which evolved considerably throughout the conflict as the issue of war victims became increasingly more exigent, it relied on private charities, semi-official organisations, and the labyrinthine state welfare system.³ Indeed, to illustrate the convoluted and confused nature of Austro-Hungarian state care, we can examine the situation by the end of the monarchy, when the responsibility for war victims fell within the remit of a plethora of different ministries – those of social care, national defence, public health, agriculture, public works, interior, commerce, and education, with the first two in particular being heavily involved.⁴

The tangled character of the state care,⁵ which was considered by many veterans to be woefully inadequate and incapable of fulfilling their needs,⁶ was one of the first issues addressed by the government of the newly created Czechoslovakia, in a period which also saw the introduction of many other social reforms, such as the introduction of the eight-hour-working day, in an attempt to assuage the growing fears of civil unrest.⁷ The first relevant Czechoslovak law, which replaced some of the existing Austro-Hungarian regulations, was issued less than six months after the emergence of the republic, to be followed over the next three years by a further flurry of laws and government decrees.⁸

² Ke-chin Hsia, 'War, Welfare, and Social Citizenship: The Politics of War Victim Welfare in Austria, 1914-1925' (University of Chicago PhD thesis, 2013), p. 72. Unfortunately, an equivalent analysis of this topic for the Transleithanian part of the monarchy is not available.

³ See the official newspaper for disabled veterans published in the Kingdom of Bohemia, *Péče o vojiny válkou poškozené*. Notice, for example, the call for the public to donate clothes, shoes, and money, 'Pomozte válečným invalidům!', *Péče o vojiny válkou poškozené*, 1 June 1917, p. 65. See also the extensive list of local offices helping Bohemian war victims in R. Marschner, 'Zřízení, po případě vybudování místních úřadoven pro péči o vracející se vojiny', *Péče o vojiny válkou poškozené*, 1 Oct. 1917, pp. 178-179.

⁴ Václav Nedoma, *Péče o válečné poškozence: Příručka pro sociální pracovníky* (Prague, n.d), pp. 1-13.

⁵ For a description of the system used in Czechoslovakia immediately after the war, with the involvement of no fewer than six ministries, see 'Rok práce „Družiny čs. válečných poškozenců“', p. 2.

⁶ See, for example, *Protokol o sjezdu Družiny českoslov. válečných poškozenců (invalidů, vdov a pozůstalých) konaném ve dnech 28. a 29. června 1919 v Obecním dome v Praze-Karlíně* (Prague, 1919), p. 30.

⁷ Václav Průcha et al., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918-1992* vol. 1 (Brno, 2004), pp. 64-70.

⁸ These were the laws and government decrees 199/1919, 224/1919, 561/1919, 142/1920, 346/1920, 48/1921, 310/1921, 39/1922, 76/1922, 181/1922, 363/1922, and 186/1923 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

After their implementation in the early 1920s, these radically reconfigured the existing structure and nature of state care.

Indeed, the system of care for disabled veterans and other war victims was put together in impressive time, particularly when compared with other post-Habsburg states, such as Yugoslavia; the first comprehensive Yugoslav law to deal with the question of disabled veterans was only passed in 1925.⁹ However, few changes and improvements were inaugurated by Czechoslovakia after the immediate postwar years, during which the state also passed the progressive law 221/1924, which introduced workers' old age pension, disability pension, sickness benefits, and health insurance as well as benefits for widows and orphans of workers.¹⁰ With the exception of the law 133/1930, which is briefly discussed later in this chapter, the Czechoslovak government only passed one law during 1923–1939 that modified the state care for disabled veterans in any meaningful way, and even its impact was very limited;¹¹ the law 67/1936 merely allowed severely disabled ex-servicemen, whose war-related injuries and illnesses had deteriorated, to apply for a new medical examination and in turn receive a higher disability pension, which had previously not been possible due to the original 10-year time limit for such applications.¹²

Definitions of Disability

The definition relevant for most disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans (i.e., nonprofessional soldiers and NCOs) was located in the Czechoslovak law 199/1919. In

⁹ John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903–1945* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 196.

¹⁰ The law 221/1924 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*. See Jan Kotous, Gabriela Munková, and Martin Štefko, *Obecné otázky sociální politiky* (Prague, 2013) pp. 30–31; Anna Falisová, 'Mezivojnové Slovensko z pohľadu zdravotného a sociálneho', *Slovensko v Československu (1918–1939)*, ed. Milan Zemko and Valerián Bystrický (Bratislava, 2004), pp. 412–413; Rákosník, Tomeš et al., pp. 98–100.

¹¹ See also the regulations 87/1932 and 192/1936.

¹² The law 67/1936 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

accordance with much collective silence and unease regarding the imperial prehistory of Czechoslovaks, the law, which also provided definitions of several groups of war victims such as widows and orphans, did not refer directly to the bygone empire. It simply defined (war) 'invalids' as

Citizens of the Czechoslovak republic, whose work capacity had been temporarily or permanently decreased, or those who have completely lost [their work capacity] due to injury or illness that was suffered or which deteriorated

1. in their military service;
2. due to military-related actions, to which they had been mobilised according to the law no. 236 from 12 December 1912, [236. 'Gesetz vom 26. Dezember [sic] 1912 betreffend die Kriegsleistungen'] or as railway officials;
3. as prisoners of war.¹³

Meanwhile, legislation concerning legionaries was somewhat more complicated. In contrast to the situation of able-bodied Austro-Hungarian veterans, whose status was never explicitly defined by Czechoslovak regulations, the law 462/1919 clearly specified who was deemed a legionary.¹⁴ Ironically, no interwar Czechoslovak law ever specified who would be considered to be a 'legionář-invalida', as disabled legionaries came to be called in later years. Instead, the law 76/1922, which also included provisions for professional Austro-Hungarian soldiers ('gážisté') and some other veterans who became disabled in the war, merely defined who was available for disability pension when it stated the following:

Members of the Czechoslovak Legions who have become incapable of military service and at the same time have lost at least 20% of [their] capability for adequate civilian employment through their service in the Czechoslovak foreign forces [i.e. the Legions] warrant a pension according to regulations valid for professional military persons even if they are citizens of foreign states, if they had not served for these.¹⁵

These two definitions were, in essence, relatively wide-ranging and encompassed most soldiers that became disabled as a result of the conflict. Although Austro-Hungarian

¹³ The law 199/1919 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

¹⁴ See Chapter II.

¹⁵ The law 76/1922 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

veterans incessantly complained about various elements of the welfare system,¹⁶ including strict medical assessments, which resulted in low disability ratings, relatively little attention was given to the legal definition of war disability.¹⁷ The only exceptions were the issues of what precisely constituted ‘military service’ and its equivalents and what injuries and illnesses could be attributed to this service.

The former question was brought up only on a handful of occasions, usually in relation to Austro-Hungarian civilians who became disabled as a result of their wartime internment. For example, in 1925, the application of one Anton Pichl, who had been a waiter in London when the war broke out, was turned down by the Ministry of Social Care. The ministry acknowledged that Pichl’s illness clearly stemmed from his internment in the United Kingdom, yet it argued that this form of detention was not equivalent to military service.¹⁸ It is unclear if Pichl ever received any state welfare; however, by the end of the interwar period, Nejvyšší správní soud (Czechoslovak Supreme Administrative Court), which was the ultimate authority in this matter, had expressed a different opinion. The court declared that both civilians who had been sent to ammunition factories by the Austro-Hungarian authorities and those ‘who had been interned in an enemy state’ as a result of the conflict were eligible for disability pension.¹⁹ In its decision regarding the latter case, the court referred to the Hague Conventions of 1899, according to which civilian internees were to be viewed as POWs. Importantly, a separate law was issued

¹⁶ Occasionally, veterans expressed their discontent in highly unorthodox ways. For example, after his pension had been stopped in 1934, one Josef Moravec set up a camp bed in a square in Brno with the intention of staying there. Three years later, another disabled ex-serviceman threw 250 flyers from the visitors’ gallery in the Czechoslovak parliament to bring the attention of MPs to his penury. ‘Ein Kriegsinvalide stellt sein Feldbett im Zentrum der Stadt auf’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Apr. 1934, p. 4; ‘Presidiu zemského úřadu v Brně’, Zemský úřad – presidium fonds, Inv. no. 1096/38, Karton 274, Moravský zemský archiv v Brně, Brno, Czech Republic. I would like to thank Ondřej Kolář for bringing the latter of the two stories to my attention.

¹⁷ See Chapter VII for complaints of legionaries about the fact that their disability had to stem from the service in the Legions for them to qualify for better treatment under the Ministry of National Defence.

¹⁸ ‘Zivilkriegsbeschädigt’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1925, p. 4.

¹⁹ ‘Der Versorgungsanspruch der Kriegsbeschädigten nach der Rechtsprechung des Obersten Verwaltungsgerichtes’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, July 1937, p. 11.

already in 1920 regarding compensations for former political prisoners, that is, those inhabitants of Czechoslovakia who had been ‘unlawfully ... interned, confined, held in ... [various forms of] detention, killed or [their] bodies and health had been seriously harmed for political reasons’ by Austria-Hungary during the war.²⁰

Moreover, the question of which injuries and illnesses could be ascribed to military service entailed several different considerations. In individual cases, the state sometimes questioned the fact that various mental and physical illnesses and injuries were caused or worsened by the service. Instead, it was argued that the cause of disability had appeared already before the war or that the veterans were genetically predisposed to develop certain illnesses. On some occasions, Czechoslovak psychiatrists also accused their patients of feigning mental issues to acquire a pension.²¹ However, the state would not question the fact that a particular disease or injury could, under different circumstances, be legally attributed to the conflict.

The only exception was sexually transmitted diseases, which had been contracted by thousands of Czechoslovak veterans.²² For obvious reasons, this topic was broached very rarely by the veterans and the state, despite the fact that both the Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of Social Care were painfully aware of it. Conflicting opinions, uncertainty, unease, and awkward silence all surrounded this issue, as manifested by the case of the Russian legionary E.V., who had developed neurosyphilis during the Legions’ return to Czechoslovakia.

²⁰ The law 333/1920 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*. For more information, see František Váhala, *Likvidace škod čsl. občanů, za války světové politicky pronásledovaných nebo v cizině za války poškozených: Ni okovy, ni tmavé kobky žaláře* (Český Brod, 1937).

²¹ Kučera and Leidinger, pp. 26-27.

²² Zikmund Fleischmann, ‘Luetická onemocnění a jejich vztah k zákonodárství o váleč. poškozených’, *Sociální služba*, May 1922, pp. 162-164.

The few regulations of the Ministry of National Defence that dealt with STDs demonstrate that the ministry addressed the issue of venereal diseases from the perspective of public health protection. According to its 1919 decree, men who had been previously treated for an STD during their military service were eligible for free treatment within two years of their demobilisation.²³ Another decree from 1921 emphasised that those men who exhibited clear symptoms of syphilis or gonorrhoea could not be demobilised. Instead, they were supposed to be sent to a military hospital, where they were to stay until being cured. However, the very same decree showed little understanding for the individual soldiers as it explicitly observed the following:

Syphilis is not a consequence of military service; instead, the disease has been caused by the sufferer himself, because he had not followed guidance, which every soldier has received. If the military command allows claims for subsequent treatment of demobilised luetics [to be made], it does so [only] voluntarily in the interest of public health.²⁴

Meanwhile, the panel of experts at the Ministry of Social Care, which was supposed to decide the case of the legionary E.V., struggled to find a clear consensus. Some members of the panel strongly disagreed with the 1921 decree of the Ministry of National Defence. They described the matter as being of ‘immense consequences’ and emphasised that this decree had ‘decided the fate of numerous individuals and families’.²⁵ Individual members of the panel referred to the destabilising effects of the recent conflict and also stressed that ‘from the scientific point of view, the question as to what extent an adult male can go without sexual intercourse has not been decided at all’.²⁶ In turn, it was argued that this issue could not be assessed

²³ Ibid., p. 162.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 163

through the use of any moral standards, ‘which [even] in normal life and in simple conditions are followed by so few’.²⁷

Fascinatingly, even this case became ultimately linked to the state narrative about Czech resistance to Austria-Hungary. Importantly, it was observed by members of the committee that the question of E.V.’s responsibility was entirely irrelevant as none of the existing disability laws addressed the matter of veterans’ culpability. The more sympathetic members of the panel quickly added that the status quo had to be maintained; otherwise a great number of soldiers, who had apparently performed acts of passive resistance to Austria-Hungary such as lifting their hands above the parapet in order to be wounded, would also lose their pension.

Nevertheless, even this reasoning could not persuade other experts who sat on the panel. They put the blame squarely on the disabled legionary and expressed the opinion that he should not receive any pension. In this difficult situation, the medical expert who was present made a sagacious decision that allowed the panel to decide the awkward case without ever having answered the underlying question. The doctor opined that the conditions of wartime service had caused the deterioration of the syphilitic illness and in turn classified the legionary as being fully disabled as a result of the war.²⁸ The rest of the panel agreed with this decision.

Nonstate Actors and Disabled Veterans

It is difficult to gauge precisely to what extent nonstate actors participated in care for disabled veterans both during and after the conflict in the territory of what became, after October 1918, Czechoslovakia. Due to the lack of secondary sources, painstaking

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

research focused specifically on this topic would be required to answer this question. However, some tentative observations can be made. Importantly, as Ke-chin Hsia's thesis amply shows, the difference between state and nonstate actors was not always clear in wartime Austria-Hungary. Hsia argues that when it came to the Red Cross, as a result of its constantly expanding scope of work and 'intensifying coordination with or on behalf of the authorities ... we may have to see its activities as civil society resources being willingly coordinated to complement and even sustain official war efforts'.²⁹ In his thesis, Hsia provides several examples of how the Red Cross helped wounded and ill servicemen; its participation was so large in scale that it became 'essential and ubiquitous in delivering the care provisions that the Austrian state had promised to its soldiers if they became wounded or disabled'.³⁰ Meanwhile, volunteers also staffed new state organisations for war victims, which relied at least to some extent on private donations, as exemplified by Kaiserlich und königlich Arbeitsvermittlung an Kriegsinvaliden (Imperial and Royal War Invalid Job Placement Service).³¹ Unfortunately, no scholarly work has explored in detail the topic of religious groups in Austria-Hungary and their participation in care for war victims; in turn, we can only presume, based on brief observations in some of the existing studies, that similar to other parts of civil society they used their structures to help fellow citizens of the monarchy.³²

²⁹ Hsia, p. 108.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 101. The work of the Red Cross during the war has also been briefly discussed in the works of Marek Růžička, Marek Jukl and Jana Majrichová, and Zora Mintalová. Růžička, p. 153; Marek Jukl and Jana Majrichová, *Století s Červeným křížem: 100 let Československého a Českého červeného kříže* (Prague, 2019), pp. 18-19; Zora Mintalová, 'Červený kříž na Slovensku – významná súčasť medzinárodného hnutia Červeného kříža a Červeného polmesiaca v medzivojnovom období', *Červený kříž, Alica G. Masaryková a Slovensko: Pri príležitosti 40. výročia smrti PhDr. Alice G. Masarykovej ...*, ed. Zora Mintalová (Martin, 2006), pp. 15-18. The wartime help of the Red Cross was also retrospectively recognised by one of the Czech leaders of Družina, Josef Šíma, who, in his 1921 article, emphasised that this organisation had supported tens of thousands of Austro-Hungarian war victims through donations of clothing and other means. J. Šíma, 'Čsl. červený kříž', *Nový život*, 6 March 1921, p. 1.

³¹ Hsia., p. 108.

³² See Růžička, p. 146.

After the immediate postwar period, in which Československý červený kříž (Czechoslovak Red Cross) helped various groups of former soldiers,³³ an important shift seems to have taken place. Whilst for the Czechoslovak state, war victims remained a distinct group within its population with a separate system of care, few, if any, nonstate actors appear to have continued focusing their efforts specifically on these people. Indeed, it is difficult to trace the work of nonstate actors with disabled veterans in interwar Czechoslovakia. None of the veterans' associations established close ties with any of the charities or religious groups, with the obvious exceptions of Svaz československých válečných poškozenců křesťansko-sociálních (Union of Czechoslovak Christian Social War Victims) and its splinter organisation Svaz lidových válečných poškozenců (Union of People's War Victims), which were closely affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church.³⁴ We can only presume that charities such as the Czechoslovak Red Cross and Masarykova liga proti tuberkulóze (Masaryk's League against Tuberculosis) and various religious organisations also worked with disabled veterans.³⁵ However, they most probably approached these former soldiers simply as disadvantaged citizens in need of help rather than as wounded and ill ex-servicemen.

Two possible explanations for this lack of interest can be identified beyond the obvious observation that the end of the war and growing temporal distance from the conflict gradually made war victims less conspicuous. As repeatedly observed in this thesis, after October 1918, most Czechs and Slovaks would no longer associate the Austro-

³³ For a brief statistical overview of the work of the Czechoslovak Red Cross with returning soldiers, POWs, and disabled veterans in this period, see *Statistická příručka II.*, p. 356. See also Ondřej Kypr, 'Několik slov úvodem', *Tři roky boje proti následkům války: Zpráva o činnosti Zemského úřadu pro péči o válečné poškozence v Praze za léta 1919, 1920 a 1921*, ed. J. K. Skala, (Přerov, n.d.), p. 4.

³⁴ See Chapter VI.

³⁵ Jukl and Majrichová, pp. 30-33; Zora Mintalová and Bohdan Teglársky, *Červený kříž na Slovensku v letech 1919-1938* (Martin, 2005), pp. 70-79, 138-148. For brief overviews of the work of the influential Masaryk's League against Tuberculosis, see Mintalová and Teglársky, pp. 111-113 and Milan Kubín, 'Začátky a konce Masarykovy ligy proti tuberkulóze. I. díl', *Kazuistiky v alergologii, pneumologii a ORL*, 10.1 (2013), pp. 26-30.

Hungarian war effort with any positive connotations; former soldiers were not seen as heroic warriors who paid a price for their service. In turn, there was no particular social pressure to support the Austro-Hungarian war victims with any donations or other forms of help. However, it must be observed that although disabled legionaries and German veterans found themselves in a different position within society, as the importance of their service was recognised more explicitly, it appears they were also not objects of any particular attention on the part of nonstate actors.

Therefore, this hesitant attitude towards charity and the dominant role of the Czechoslovak state can perhaps be better explained by ‘the 1917-18 social offensive’³⁶ of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which sought to introduce centralised and expanded state welfare policy. We can presume that these wartime steps also influenced expectations towards state-provided care for war victims in the new republic. From its very beginning, the Czechoslovak state does not appear to have expected any significant amount of support from the public; state care was regularly seen and discussed as the only option that would be available to war victims. Not surprisingly, public interest did not increase throughout the interwar years as the conflict gradually became more remote. By 1938, the Ministry of Social Care could only observe that ‘private care for war and postwar victims has almost completely disappeared and is [now] basically limited to self-help for war victims in their own organisations’.³⁷

Two/Three Welfare Systems

In a somewhat complicated manner, responsibility for disabled ex-servicemen and their care were divided between two separate Czechoslovak ministries. Importantly, the

³⁶ Hsia, p. 132

³⁷ Jaromír Nečas et al., *20 let sociální péče v Československé republice* (Prague, 1938), p. 96.

way these two ministries worked mirrored the different attitudes towards disability pensions and the employment of disabled veterans. The Ministry of National Defence was responsible for providing care for the less numerous – but considerably more privileged – of the two groups of veterans. Included within the ministry's remit were all the disabled Austro-Hungarian officers and professional NCOs (*'důstojníky'* and *'děle sloužící poddůstojníky'*) as well as their postwar, Czechoslovak counterparts, pre-1914 disabled veterans, and also female nurses.³⁸ Furthermore, it looked after those legionaries whose disability had been classified by the ministry to have reached at least 20%. Importantly, this disability had to be related to their service in the Legions, as opposed to their earlier service in the Austro-Hungarian ranks.

In other words, the ministry predominantly dealt with a relatively small group of officers and NCOs, who had earned the right to a disability pension through their employment and class status.³⁹ This cohort was supplemented by a small number of legionaries who were also allocated to this ministry, with its more generous provisions as a sign of gratitude to these liberators of Czechoslovakia. As one of the Czech MPs behind this decision observed,

particularly important is the question of the members of the Czechoslovak Legions. For that reason I particularly welcome the passing of this law [76/1922], which brings advantages to these members of our national military which [i.e. the military] established the republic and wreathed our nation with eternal glory.⁴⁰

Indeed, there was no separate legal regulation for the disabled officers, NCOs, and legionaries; their benefits were encompassed in the law 76/1922, which more broadly

³⁸ See § 89 of the law 76/1922 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

³⁹ The pensions of disabled reserve officers were somewhat lower than those of their professional counterparts. Ferdinand Pacák, 'Nedostatky péče státu o válečné oběti z řad gážistů, záložních obzvlášť', *Sociální služba*, Dec. 1923-Jan. 1924, pp. 96-98.

⁴⁰ Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky, 'Pátek 27. ledna 1922', accessed 18 March 2018 at <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/stenprot/128schuz/s128001.htm>.

defined pensions of professional soldiers. In essence, disabled veterans of the Great War who fell within the remit of the Ministry of National Defence received a substantial income, which was on the same scale as pensions allocated to retiring officers and NCOs. The way this pension was calculated was far from straightforward and differed considerably from that utilised by the Ministry of Social Care. It reflected the specific status of these military veterans who were exempt from the provisions for former members of the Austro-Hungarian mass conscription army.

According to this law, both disabled professional soldiers and reserve officers received the base pension (*‘výslužné’* – literally ‘the-served-out’), which was also allocated to nondisabled retired professional soldiers and depended on several factors, such as the length of service, rank, and last military salary. Furthermore, disabled veterans were given injury supplements, which reflected the severity of their disability.⁴¹ The pensions, which were sufficient to cover their life expenses, were significantly more generous than those allocated to disabled veterans by the Ministry of Social Care.⁴² For example, whilst a fully disabled private (*‘vojín’*) unable to perform any kind of remunerated work would receive only around Kč 3,600 a year until 1930, his counterpart under the Ministry of National Defence scheme, a professional soldier with a rank somewhere between an NCO and an officer (*‘gážista mimo hodnostní třídu’*), would be paid around Kč 10–11,000.⁴³ Surprisingly, this division, which privileged some of the veterans over others, received relatively little attention and criticism.⁴⁴

⁴¹ For more information regarding welfare support provided by the Ministry of National Defence in the early postwar years, see the study produced by the chairman of the association of disabled officers, Bohumil Kubík, *Sociálně hospodářská péče prováděná vojenskou správou o válečné a vojenské poškozence* (Prague, 1922).

⁴² See Lukeš, ‘Péče o válečné invalidy podle zákona č. 142/20 a 39/22 Sb. z. a n.’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, 1 Jan. 1929, pp. 4-5.

⁴³ Fr. Neumeister, ‘Upřímné slovo v pravý čas’, *Nový život*, 26 Sep. 1925, p. 2.

⁴⁴ For a rare example of such criticism, see the article of the legionary František Šifter in the newspaper *Československý legionář*. In this article, Šifter argued that many members of the Czech intelligentsia failed to become Austro-Hungarian officers as a result of their loyalty to the Czech cause. According to Šifter, the

Indeed, the Ministry of Social Care bore the brunt of providing care for disabled ex-servicemen as it looked after the vast majority of disabled veterans: it was responsible for all the remaining ex-servicemen, be they disabled Austro-Hungarian soldiers or nonprofessional NCOs. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, it also dealt with several thousand of their postwar Czechoslovak counterparts who became disabled whilst performing their military service in the Czechoslovak armed forces and whose benefits were not any different from those of Austro-Hungarian veterans.⁴⁵ Confusingly, it was also responsible for the remaining legionaries with impairments, namely those who had failed to reach the 20% disability threshold at the Ministry of National Defence. This group included both men whose injuries and illnesses were deemed less serious and those who joined the Legions already disabled, with their disability stemming from their Austro-Hungarian service. These legionaries underwent further, and allegedly more lenient, medical reassessments at the Ministry of Social Care, which supposedly often resulted in legionaries being assessed as having a higher disability rate. As the journal of disabled legionaries noted, ‘we are aware of cases when an invalid received 45% and even 85% [at the Ministry of Social Care after] he had been awarded less than 20% at the Ministry of National Defence’.⁴⁶

It is impossible to analyse the evaluation process for disabled legionaries without any detailed statistics from the Ministry of National Defence. Nevertheless, it can be noted that this ministry rejected a highly disproportionate number of veterans compared with the Ministry of Social Care. At said Ministry, approximately 74% of all applicants reached at

Czechoslovak provisions meant that these Czech veterans would again be punished for their loyalty – this time by the less favourable treatment on the part of the Czechoslovak state.

F. Šifter, ‘Osnova zákona o požitcích válečných poškozců’, *Československý legionář*, 24 Jan. 1920, p. 1.

⁴⁵ See the law 41/1922 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*. ‘§ 29. prodloužen’, *Nový život*, 21 March 1936, p. 1; ‘Zrušit úřady pro válečné poškozence?’, *Nový život*, 7 Jan. 1939, p. 2.

⁴⁶ ‘Konečně’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, March 1933, p. 3.

least the 20% disability threshold, which was the most basic requirement for the state pension;⁴⁷ by contrast, this band was met in the case of only 13% of legionaries who applied to the Ministry of National Defence.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it should be noted that this process, in which legionaries were reassessed if they did not meet the original criteria, spoke once again of their privileged position amongst war victims; no other group of veterans was treated this way.

Compared with the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Social Care espoused a very different view on the employment of veterans. The disability pension of ex-servicemen under the Ministry of Social Care was not expected to provide the vast majority with a sufficient income to render any other work on their part unnecessary. Instead, it was supposed to serve as ‘the mere supplement for the factual loss of earning ability’.⁴⁹ That is, it was meant to cover only that part of veterans’ theoretical earnings that had been lost due to their disability. However, even this proclaimed notion was not reflected in the actual disability pensions. According to 1927 data from the International Labour Office, the pension of an unmarried disabled veteran who was unable to perform any kind of remunerated work reached only 26% of the income of a skilled worker and 43% of an unskilled worker in Czechoslovakia.⁵⁰

The law 133/1930 did bring significant changes for the most seriously disabled veterans, namely men whose disability reached at least 85%. Their pensions were doubled by this regulation and additional payments for veterans requiring constant care were also introduced. However, most ex-servicemen were not affected by the raise and their disability benefits remained unchanged from the early 1920s onwards, despite officials’

⁴⁷ *Statistická příručka II.*, p. 472.

⁴⁸ ‘Našim příznivcům’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, 20 Dec. 1932, p. 1.

⁴⁹ O. Kypř, ‘Upřímné slovo v pravý čas’, *Sociální služba*, Sep.-Oct. 1925, p. 1.

⁵⁰ ‘Tafel IV. Die Vollrente der Kriegsbeschädigten verglichen mit den Arbeiterlöhnen’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 19 May 1928, p. 2.

public acknowledgements of the insufficient nature of provisions for war victims and hints that further improvements would follow.⁵¹ According to a report of the parliamentary social-political committee, which preceded the law 133/1930, the committee was

aware that the passing of this law will not settle the issue of war victims [in Czechoslovakia] and that the question of provisions for war victims will have to be tackled in the near future. The state fulfils first its duty to the most seriously disabled [veterans], adjusts their disability pensions[;] although they will not reach the same level as [pensions] in other states, they will come close to them. Pensions of our most seriously disabled invalids will now form the basis of [their] existence.⁵²

Payments that ex-servicemen received from the Ministry of Social Care consisted of three parts: the pension, which was based on the level of disability; the so-called cost-of-living bonus (*‘drahotní přídavek’/‘die Teuerungszulage’*); and a further 10% allowance for a veteran’s spouse/partner and each child under the age of 18 or 21 with no income.⁵³ There were no extra payments for NCOs’ ranks, military awards, or for frontline injuries. Furthermore, these pensions were identical for the entire territory of Czechoslovakia as no regional variations were ever introduced.

Needless to say, the 10% bonus for each family member clearly reflected the idea that veterans were expected to be the breadwinners in their families and the recognition that this role was made more difficult or simply impossible due to their war-related disability. As for the cost-of-living bonus, this was calculated as 50% of the disability pension itself and was awarded to every veteran who was to receive said pension. After the early years, when the bonus had to be extended annually by the parliament, this payment became a permanent part of the welfare provision. It perhaps speaks volumes about the

⁵¹ See Fr. Neumeister, ‘První etapa’, *Nový život*, 19 Apr. 1930, p. 1.

⁵² ‘Novella zákona o požitcích válečných poškozenců uzákoněna’, *Sociální služba*, Oct.-Nov. 1930, p. 110.

⁵³ J. K. Skala, *Požitky válečných poškozenců v Československu: Zákony, vládní nařízení ...* (Prague, 1931), pp. 66-69.

insufficient nature of pensions that even in the period of severe cuts in the state budget during the Great Depression, the state would not dare to abolish the cost-of-living bonus.

In turn, veterans were expected to earn the remaining money through labour. This conception of pensions as a mere supplement to income rather than a reward for wartime service was further reflected in other aspects of the Czechoslovak system of care; for example, if the earnings of disabled veterans surpassed a relatively low income threshold, their pension would be automatically stopped in full. Similarly, only those state employees whose disability reached at least 50% were eligible for welfare support; however, even then they received only half of the usual disability pension. As a result of these and other more obscure conditions, a significant number of Czechoslovak veterans did not receive any disability pension. For example, out of 160,248 ex-servicemen with impairments living in Bohemia in 1934 who fell under the remit of the Ministry of Social Care, 100,720 former soldiers were theoretically eligible for disability pension as their disability had been adjudged to have reached at least 20%. However, due to the various aforementioned reasons, it was paid out only to 45,930 of them.⁵⁴

This attitude, which emphasised the importance of re-employment for disabled veterans, had been espoused already by authorities in Austria-Hungary, as exemplified by wartime Bohemian publications.⁵⁵ These suggest that the focus of the fragmented care was centred primarily on the re-employment of ex-servicemen in their prewar fields of expertise,⁵⁶ with the provision of inadequate regular pensions being treated as ‘a last

⁵⁴ ‘Péče o válečné poškozené v roce 1934’, *Sociální služba*, Feb. 1935, p. 14.

⁵⁵ For a detailed analysis of the interaction between authorities and disabled veterans, see Thomas Rohringer, ‘Trust and National Belonging: Welfare for Disabled Veterans in Bohemia (1914–1918)’ trans. Simone Heller, *Administratory: Journal for the History of Public Administration/Zeitschrift für Verwaltungsgeschichte*, 3.1 (2018), pp. 218–234. See also Thomas Rohringer, ‘Arbeitsfreude und Selbstvertrauen: Die moralische Ökonomie der Re-Integration Kriegsbeschädigter in Cisleithanien (1914–1918)’, *Moral Economies*, ed. Ute Frevert (Göttingen, 2019), pp. 163–186.

⁵⁶ Jaroslav Hromádka, *Královská česká hospodářská akademie v Táboře v péči o vojenské invalidy* (Tábor, 1916), p. 3.

resort’,⁵⁷ an option only available to those who were physically incapable of performing any type of work.⁵⁸ The Austro-Hungarian state was of the view, which it fostered in the veterans themselves, that the wartime heroics of these disabled veterans did not entitle them to remain idle or to expect undemanding jobs from the state in peacetime.⁵⁹

Although training could be used to improve one’s qualifications, authorities repeatedly rejected attempts of soldiers to obtain more prestigious jobs, often in nonmanual sectors. In July 1916, Státní zemská ústředna pro království České pro péči o vrátivší se vojíny (State Provincial Central Office for the Kingdom of Bohemia for Returning Soldiers) published a leaflet for disabled veterans who had been agricultural workers. Apart from other information, the publication gave ex-servicemen clear instructions:

You shall not request a place at the post or railways and [you will] long again for the countryside, for a nice home, where through your own work, ploughing, sowing and harvesting, growing of vegetables and trees you will feel again joy from nature and you will gain directly what can be obtained in towns only expensively.⁶⁰

Since work was seen to be an integral part of achieving the aforementioned ‘return to society’, those who would remain unemployed were perceived as being in grave danger. As one Austro-Hungarian official, who had presumably never witnessed the horrors of Great War battlefields, argued, ‘the greatest devastation which can ever be wreaked in the soul of the human being is caused by pension psychosis (*‘rentová psychosa’*)’.⁶¹ Whilst wider social factors and public perception of disability were occasionally mentioned as being vital for veterans’ re-employment, it was the self-confidence of these men and

⁵⁷ ‘Vybudování péče o válečné poškozence po demobilisaci’..., *Péče o vojíny válkou poškozené* 1 Nov. 1917, p. 209.

⁵⁸ Robert Marschner, ‘Péče o osleplé bojovníky’, *Péče o vojíny válkou poškozené*, 1 Aug. 1917, p. 117.

⁵⁹ Robert Marschner, ‘Porada o povolání’, *Péče o vojíny válkou poškozené*, 15 Aug. 1918, p. 150.

⁶⁰ Robert Marschner, *Válkou poškozeným vojínům-příslušníkům polního a lesního hospodářství* (Prague, 1916), p. 6.

⁶¹ Stanislav Špaček, *Péče o invalidy a jich pracovní výchova* (Prague, 1915), p. 13.

particularly their will and determination that were to play the most important roles in the process. As a leaflet for veterans informed them,

The assumption that you have fulfilled your life role through heroic performance of [your] duty and that after a serious injury and with disability looming it is solely the duty of the state, municipality, and public to look after you is untrue, unwise, and yes, for you even damaging.

[By behaving in such manner] You would lose respect, favour, and compassion of people around you and of all citizens.⁶²

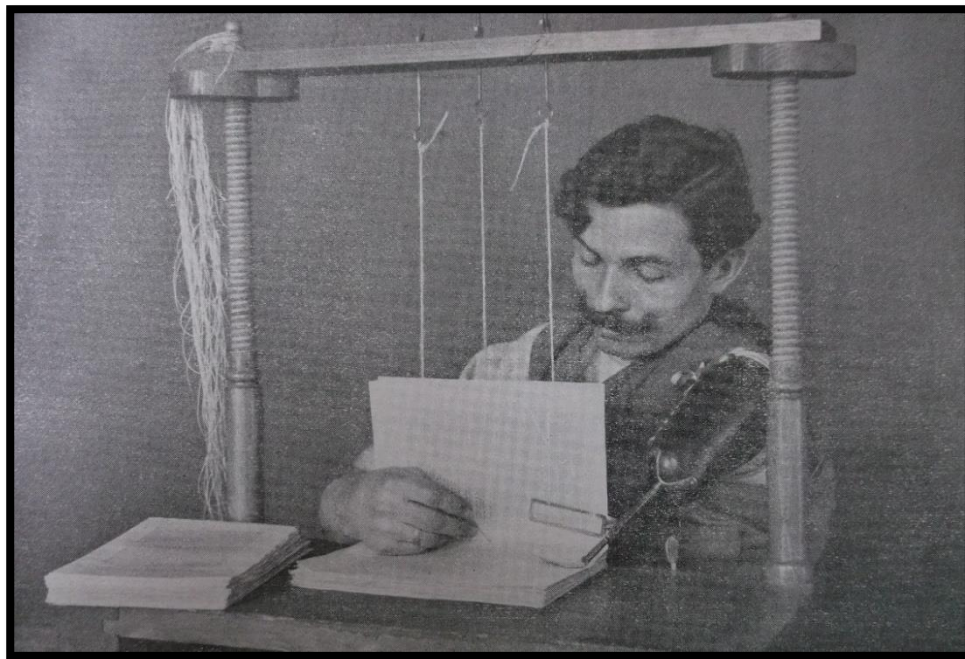


Fig. 5. A wartime photograph showing a disabled veteran practising for his new employment.⁶³

Instead, Austria-Hungary encouraged the ex-servicemen to believe that they only had to work hard enough to overcome their disability and find suitable employment. Similarly, the state underlined the importance of rehabilitation and in aid of this organised a vast number of courses and much training for disabled veterans to teach them skills and techniques for adjusting to their impairment and learning to work with, or in spite of, their disability.⁶⁴

⁶² 'Výcvik invalidů', *Péče o vojiny válkou poškozené*, 15 Aug. 1917, p. 126.

⁶³ Jiří Václav Klíma, *Výchova mrzáků, zvláště vojinů - invalidů ku práci výtěžné* (Prague, 1916), n. pag.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the extensive offer of courses for disabled veterans in 1916. Robert Marschner, *Připomínky pro ošetřovatelky a lékaře: Jakým způsobem vrátíme válečné invalidy jich povolání?* (Prague, 1916), pp. 13-30.

The provision of training that would help the men to readjust to life and work with an impairment was continued by the Czechoslovak state. In the early postwar years, it was one of the several ways in which the republic sought to support the employment of Austro-Hungarian veterans; these also included loans and grants for individual veterans and cooperatives of war victims; prioritising them in the distribution of land partitioned during the land reform; and the allocation of licences for various state monopolies, such as cinemas, tobacco shops, and train station restaurants. Furthermore, the state helped disabled ex-servicemen by providing them with medical treatment for their war-related injuries and illnesses, one-off donations of money and clothes, and through other means. Moreover, various other ad-hoc measures were taken to find jobs for these men; for example, the rarely used government decree 141/1920 stipulated that the state could demand its contractors to employ war victims.⁶⁵ In addition, even a law providing for compulsory employment was prepared by the Ministry of Social Care in the early 1920s;⁶⁶ however, the state ultimately stopped short of introducing any form of employment quotas for disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans.

Whilst the employment of disabled Czechoslovak veterans was viewed in highly pragmatic terms, particularly towards the end of the interwar period, it should not be forgotten that work was also seen to play an important nonpecuniary role in the lives of both the disabled veterans and wider society. Work was perceived to possess important therapeutic qualities that would facilitate the reintegration of these Austro-Hungarian

⁶⁵ Sixteen years later, on 6 August 1936, the Czechoslovak Chamber of Deputies passed a resolution that demanded the state and municipal offices prioritise war victims when seeking employees. The resolution apparently met with little understanding. 'Vůle N. S. není respektována', *Nový život*, 19 June 1937, p. 1.

⁶⁶ The Ministry of National Defence employed a number of these men in the immediate postwar period. 'Slavnostní sjezd svazu stát. zaměstnanců-invalidů R. Č. S.', *Naše směry*, 15 July 1924, p. 15; 'Povinné zaměstnání váleč. poškozců', *Nový život*, 12 Apr. 1924 p. 1.

veterans into civilian life. As the interwar head of Czechoslovak care for disabled veterans, Ondřej Kypr, who had himself been wounded in the Great War, observed in 1922,

The basic principle of our work has been and always will be to return invalids [back] to life and work. Work is the sole source of human happiness, [it is] the moral spring leading to contentment in all of life. Even the most seriously [disabled] war invalids find only in work [their] previous joy of life and this marvellous determination, which in countless cases can [serve] as an example to fully fit people.⁶⁷

By contrast, the situation of disabled legionaries was considerably different to that of their Austro-Hungarian counterparts. As referred to above, a small number of them benefitted from the generous provision of the Ministry of National Defence. However, even those that found themselves within the remit of the Ministry of Social Care were also able to enjoy several privileges that stemmed from their heroic status in Czechoslovak mythology. Throughout the interwar years, the republic issued a number of regulations that advantaged legionary veterans, regardless of whether they were disabled.⁶⁸

Arguably the most important and well-known of all legionary regulations was the law 462/1919. This law effectively earmarked 50% of numerous entry-level state jobs for legionaries, as well as prioritised legionaries over other applicants for some of the better paid (but still relatively minor) state positions. Moreover, a year's service in the Legions equated to three years spent in a job in the civil service; this was of great importance to legionaries employed by the state, whose promotions as well as pensions were calculated based on the length of their employment. The legionary member of parliament Prokop Maxa, who was largely responsible for the law, justified it with the following observation:

This law – and I explicitly state that – does not grant legionaries any privileges or advantages [as they still have to be eligible for these positions]. ... Firstly, this law is only supposed to provide the state, municipalities, and

⁶⁷ Kypr, 'Několik slov úvodem', p. 3.

⁶⁸ See *Příručka československého legionáře. Ročník I.* (Prague, 1921), pp. 171-274; *Příručka československého legionáře. Ročník II.* (Prague, 1922), pp. 167-256. See also Natália Krajčovičová, *Slovensko na ceste k demokracii* (Bratislava, 2009), pp. 131-145.

state-owned enterprises with a reliable workforce, and secondly to help legionaries to secure a decent existence for themselves and their families as soon as possible.⁶⁹

Further, albeit less significant, legal changes followed in the next few years, which served to reinforce this highly asymmetrical and unbalanced system, in which the legionaries were awarded privileges that were not available to other war veterans.⁷⁰ Indeed, the Czech historian Ivan Šedivý, in his comprehensive study of this topic, adumbrated several ways in which the legionaries benefitted from their service, such as through dispensations from various requirements for state jobs.⁷¹ Other examples of this preferential treatment include the establishment by the state of Kancelář československých legií (Office of the Czechoslovak Legions), which was supposed to help legionaries with business licences, land reform, pensions, medical care, loans, and other aspects of daily life.⁷² Moreover, three different institutes for disabled legionaries – the same number as those provided for the numerically far superior Austro-Hungarian veterans – were operated by the state; and Sociální ústav legionářský (Legionary Social Institute) was founded to look after the well-being of legionaries and their families.⁷³

In addition, a separate business college was established for disabled legionaries in a castle in the village of Studénka in Silesia. By all accounts, the training of these men was approached in a considerably different manner compared with that of Austro-Hungarian veterans. The privileged education, which legionaries were to receive in Studénka during the one-year course, was clearly supposed to help them climb the social ladder quickly.

⁶⁹ Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky, 'Čtvrtek 24. července 1919', accessed 18 March 2018 at <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/ps/stenprot/068schuz/s068003.htm>.

⁷⁰ In total, the following laws and decrees addressed the question of legionaries – 282/1919, 462/1919, 28/1920, 151/20, 166/1920, 12/1921, 117/1922, and 202/1922. See the respective laws and decrees in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

⁷¹ Ivan Šedivý, 'Legionářská republika? K systému legionářského zákonodárství a sociální péče v meziválečné ČSR', *Historie a vojenství*, 51.1 (2002), pp. 158-184. See also Thunig-Nittner, pp. 185-195.

⁷² Michl, pp. 27-28.

⁷³ Josef Svatoš, *Příručka členů Čsl. obce legionářské pro věci organizační a sociálně-humanitní* (Prague, n.d.), pp. 52-54.

The legionaries who learned business at the college could also take typing classes and study French, English, and Russian.⁷⁴ Specialised extracurricular lectures were also offered to the students, who were helped to find employment after the end of the course.⁷⁵

Indeed, benefits, which served to provide legionaries with at least a minimal income and support to prevent their destitution, can hardly be described as particularly excessive or overindulgent. However, as the Czech historian Jan Michl observed, the legionaries were the only group in the republic that could rely on such a social safety net.⁷⁶ By contrast, hundreds of thousands of able-bodied Austro-Hungarian veterans, who found themselves in a very similar position, never received any comparable level of support.

Furthermore, as the above-cited speech of the member of parliament Prokop Maxa suggests, the employment of legionaries served another purpose. The wartime service of legionaries, unlike that of the Austro-Hungarian veterans, was interpreted as evidence of their loyalty to Czechoslovakia, which was much needed in the difficult postwar times. Thus, the state would sometimes treat legionaries more favourably than other Czechoslovak citizens because they were perceived to be a more reliable and dependable work force; one example of this attitude was the prioritisation of legionaries when applying for gendarmerie positions.⁷⁷

However, this perception of legionaries as a loyal and state-supporting group can also be discerned in the actions of the state undertaken in respect of the interwar land reform, as argued by Mark Cornwall in his illuminating article on the topic.⁷⁸ According to the law 81/1920, legionaries – be they able-bodied or disabled – were to be prioritised

⁷⁴ 'Škola legionářů-invalidů ve Studénce', *Československý legionář*, 6 Sep. 1919, p. 4.

⁷⁵ 'Škola legionářů-invalidů ve Studénce', *Československý legionář*, 15 May 1920, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Michl, p. 9.

⁷⁷ The government decree 202/1922 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

⁷⁸ Mark Cornwall, 'National Reparation? The Czech Land Reform and the Sudeten Germans 1918-1938', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 75.2 (1997), pp. 259-280.

when applying for land. As Mark Cornwall's article observes, the state had an ulterior motive in allocating land to the legionaries; through the agrarian reforms the republic sought to bring about not only a social but also a national revolution, as they helped and encouraged the legionaries to settle in predominantly German areas, in an attempt to keep those parts of Czechoslovakia under state control.

Somewhat more surprisingly, the law 81/1920 also prioritised Austro-Hungarian war victims regardless of their ethnicity.⁷⁹ In their case, the republic clearly intended to use the land reform to solve the pressing economic issues of many of them. Furthermore, by making war victims more prosperous, the state presumably aimed to extricate itself from paying out at least a part of hundreds of millions of crowns that were allocated to them in means-tested benefits.⁸⁰

Veterans vis-à-vis the State

The employment of disabled veterans was a complicated process, which the ex-servicemen and their perceptions of work helped to shape as much as the acts of the officials. The rhetoric of the majority of ex-servicemen was notable for its focus on three intensely pragmatic and interconnected issues from their everyday lives. Firstly, veterans often portrayed themselves and their families as living in abject poverty. The blame for this was placed with unfair and harsh medical-administrative assessments, which supposedly awarded them only very low disability ratings, meagre pensions, a low upper income limit for their pensions, or a combination of all of these factors.⁸¹ In turn, they argued the income given to them by the state was often insufficient for veterans to provide

⁷⁹ See Chapters V and VI for complaints of disabled German and Czech veterans.

⁸⁰ See O. Kyrp. 'Poznámky k rozpočtu ministerstva sociální péče pro rok 1922', *Sociální služba*, Dec. 1921, p. 1-2.

⁸¹ 'Výkrik sociální biedy', *Naša obrana*, 1 Sep. 1927, p. 2.

for themselves and their families, particularly for those men without full-time jobs; according to their observations, unemployment was common amongst veterans, who often struggled to find reasonably paid work due to their disabilities, especially during the Great Depression.⁸²

Secondly, disabled ex-servicemen believed the solution to such poverty lay in compulsory employment, which would allow them to support themselves and their families.⁸³ Veterans frequently spoke about their intense desire to work;⁸⁴ they depicted themselves as unwilling to rely on pensions unless severely disabled. Similar to the official discourse, the men also associated employment with their return to and full participation in society. Such attitudes are exemplified by the words of Bernhard Leppin, the secretary general of Bund, who observed the following at the all-Czechoslovak rally of the German organisation in 1922:

We have said to ourselves from the very beginning that we wanted to work (hear, hear!) in order to be able to provide for us and our families. We want [to return] back into human society, to join the ranks of the working [citizens], we do not want to stand aside as outsiders ... because we had once ourselves been movers and doers [*Schaffende waren*] and because only the life that creates and works is worth living. (Applause).⁸⁵

Indeed, a law which would force employers to hire disabled veterans was incessantly clamoured for by various organisations of war victims, which repeatedly voiced their strong discontent with the status quo.⁸⁶ Disabled men regularly drew attention to the more favourable conditions in other European states, where their counterparts had the benefit of secure employment.⁸⁷ As one of the veterans' leaders remarked with

⁸² Jirout, 'Hospodářská krise a invalidé', *Nový život*, 16 May 1931, p. 2; 'Nový útok!', *Nový život*, 22 Oct. 1932, p. 1.

⁸³ J. R., 'Kategorie invalidů nejbídnější', *Nový život*, 29 Sep. 1928, pp. 2-4.

⁸⁴ Rudolf Šindelář, 'Zaměstnávání vál. poškozených', *Nový život*, 17 May 1930, p. 2.

⁸⁵ 'Rede des Kameraden Leppin am Bundestage in Karlsbad', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 July 1922, p. 3.

⁸⁶ See, for example, 'Tätigkeitsbericht des Bundesvorstandes des Bundes der Kriegsverletzten'..., *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Aug. 1924, p. 2.

⁸⁷ 'Naše pravda musí zvítězit', *Nový život*, 4 Nov. 1933, p. 1.

frustration in 1923, ‘we are trailing behind even the poorest nations in Europe’.⁸⁸ This attitude was further exemplified in an obituary published by an organisation for war victims about one of its members who had killed himself:

[He] was a 75% invalid unable to work so he was forced to rely solely on his pension which was not enough even for his victuals. How difficult it must have been for Mr. Voňka, when he had to watch how his wife had to work to provide for him throughout her entire life. He had himself applied for less strenuous jobs in factories and offices but he was always turned down because of his disability. Quite natural: will the gentlemen [*páni*] look after lame people, when they have plenty of the young and healthy? It is impossible to achieve the compulsory employment law and so Mr. Voňka could do nothing else, but to end his misery this way.⁸⁹

As a result, the veterans turned their attention to the only forms of employment provided by the state that were slightly more readily available to them: the so-called *trafiky* (i.e., newsagent’s shops), which were also allowed to sell tobacco products; tobacco warehouses (*‘sklady tabáku’*), which resold cigarettes and products to individual retailers; cinemas (*‘biografy’*); and train station restaurants (*‘nádražní restaurace’*), all of which provided a source of income for disabled men. These were all licensed enterprises, which meant that the republic could decide to whom and how many licences it would allocate, and it could also further regulate the market through taxation and various other mechanisms.

The scheme of cinema licences, together with the state monopoly on the sale of tobacco products with the system of *trafiky* it engendered, were relics from the Habsburg times. Originally introduced by the ruler Joseph II in the 18th century,⁹⁰ by 1918, *trafiky* in particular had become a recognised source of income for many people. Subsequently, the Czechoslovak state continued this Austro-Hungarian practice into the interbellum; on 1

⁸⁸ Fr. Neumeister, ‘Úprava důchodů válečných poškozců’, *Nový život*, 14 July 1923, p. 2.

⁸⁹ ‘Přítel Voňka mrtev’, *Nový život*, 13 Oct. 1928, p. 5.

⁹⁰ ‘Z historie tabákového monopolu’, *Nový život*, 7 July 1934, pp. 3-4; Růžička, pp. 285-292.

August 1919, the Ministry of Finance issued a decree that instructed its local offices to remove trafiká licences from those who were not dependent on the income from them. This decree became one of the cornerstones of the veterans' justification for their demands in the following years,⁹¹ when the state used both cinemas and trafiky as regulated and protected forms of employment and income for disabled veterans and other war victims.⁹²

A directive passed by the Czechoslovak government in 1922, which defined the hierarchy for the allocation of licences, shows that the state combined preferential treatment of legionaries with social considerations when deciding who would receive a licence.⁹³ According to the decree, applicants were supposed to be prioritised in the following order – to disabled legionaries, then to disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans, followed by relatives of legionaries and Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen who died in the war, then to relatives of deceased disabled legionaries and disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans, and finally to other, able-bodied legionaries. Importantly, the directive stipulated that disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans could still be prioritised over their legionary counterparts if the disability of the former was understood to be more severe.

Indeed, approximately 25,000 of all the licences issued for these stores (i.e., slightly more than half of all trafiky) were allocated to war victims.⁹⁴ Similarly, cinema licences were assigned to war victims and their organisations, albeit on a smaller scale, presumably due to the high financial demands of establishing such enterprises.⁹⁵ In turn,

⁹¹ Boh. Cetkovský, 'Honička za trafikou', *Nový život*, 29 Jan. 1927, p. 1.

⁹² 'Aby nakonec nemuseli žebroti', accessed 18 March 2018 at <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/archiv/1164067-aby-nakonec-nemuseli-zebrati>.

⁹³ 'Ministerstvu sociální péče v Praze', Ministerstvo sociální péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 298, Folder Normálky: Legionáři P-3135, NA.

⁹⁴ 'Pro požadavky prodávачů tabáku', *Nový život*, 12 Dec. 1931, p. 4.

⁹⁵ 'Biografie v Čechách', *Sociální služba*, Feb.-March 1928, p. 37.

this led to war victims establishing their own organisations and newspapers, which dealt specifically with the interests of people involved in these areas of business.⁹⁶

It is tempting to see these enterprises as some sort of deviation from the state's policy of not rewarding disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans with more than what they had lost. This anomaly was no doubt the case for the few who were lucky enough to have received their licences for busy stores and cinemas in large towns. However, trafiky – much like cinemas and restaurants – could simply not provide for all the veterans who found themselves in dire straits. The application criteria supplied by the state for the allocation of trafika, cinema, and restaurant licences were vague, so veterans could not take these jobs for granted. Furthermore, many trafiky were located in remote villages where there was little demand for their products, or in places with fierce competition where very little profit could be made. One owner from central Bohemia observed that 'some of those war victims, who had received a small trafika, are in the same position as if they had none'.⁹⁷ Moreover, in other areas, those with more profitable shops had to share their businesses with other needy citizens.

The perennial fixation on and strong feeling amongst disabled veterans about these stores suggest that for many ex-servicemen, who could not hope to be prioritised for a job or receive a pension that would cover their living expenses, state-granted licences constituted by far the most appealing feature of Czechoslovak social care. In turn, those trafiky and cinemas that did generate a sizeable income quickly became hotly contested enterprises, the allocation of which was closely and consistently scrutinised by war

⁹⁶ See the Czech journals *Trafikant a skladník tabáku, Zájmy trafikantů*, the German *Der Trafikant und Tabakverleger* and *Der kriegsbeschädigte Trafikant*, and the bilingual *Der Tabakverkäufer: Fachblatt des Verbandes d. Tabakverkäufer in der Č. S. R. mit dem Sitze in Reichenberg/Prodavač tabáku: Odborný časopis Svazu prodavačů tabáku Č. S. R. se sídlem v Liberci*. Also, see the journal briefly published by owners of Kino Invalid in Nitra, *Nitrianské kinové noviny*.

⁹⁷ B. Kadeřábek, 'Náš poměr k spolku tabáčních prodejen', *Nový život*, 12 May 1928, p. 7.

victims.⁹⁸ The Czech and Slovak veterans distinguished between those trafika and cinema owners whom they considered deserving of this form of state aid and those who were not.⁹⁹ The former group consisted of impoverished war victims who were portrayed as being loyal to the Czechoslovak state; these citizens were starkly juxtaposed against the latter group, which comprised all those they perceived to be enemies such as the rich and well-connected, Jews, and those who had supported the Habsburg monarchy. This attitude is perhaps best encapsulated by an article entitled ‘Augean Stables’ from 1921, in which the author frames his complaint about the trafiky situation in the context of citizenship rights and loyalty:

It is no secret that small trafiky are re-allocated, but large trafiky and tobacco stores are left in the hands of earlier [i.e. pre-1918] owners, mostly [war] profiteers and Jews. ... We also have a right to live; we are citizens of the republic, which we built.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, perhaps no interwar piece of literature exemplifies this competition for licences better than the play written by the disabled veteran Jaroslav Kolman-Cassius, *Jak nás poznamenala*.¹⁰¹ This dark comedy, one of the few published works of disabled veterans which depicts and discusses disability, portrays the bittersweet return of a double amputee, Josef Valta, to his home village after many years away. Valta, who had previously been seen as a short-tempered and mean-spirited character, returns a changed man: ‘knock a dog’s teeth out and you’ll get a comedian’, Valta says to describe his altered position, and one is left wondering how much of Valta’s bitterness and sarcasm directly channels that of the author, Kolman-Cassius, himself.

⁹⁸ See also Stegmann, ‘Kriegsdeutungen’, pp. 134-153.

⁹⁹ See Chapters VI and VI.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Augiášův chlív’, *Nový život*, 6 Nov. 1921, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Jaroslav Kolman-Cassius, *Jak nás poznamenala: Komédie o třech dějstvích a epilogu* (Prague, 1926), p. 48. In 1934, Kolman-Cassius published an edited version of the play entitled *Voják z fronty*. Jaroslav Kolman-Cassius, *Voják z fronty: Komédie o čtyřech dějstvích* (Prague, 1934).

The cynical treatment of disability reaches its apex with the arrival of Valta's acquaintance Wenke, who is highly excited about Valta's disability: 'Jesus Christ, if I didn't have hands, I'd be a millionaire in no time! ... It would be a gold mine', he immediately quips.¹⁰² A somewhat irreverent, but humorous character, Wenke sees Valta's disability as nothing more than a means of enriching himself; he tries to persuade Valta to join him in this enterprise so that they will be granted a cinema licence. What follows is a number of absurd statements which nonetheless reflect, albeit with a degree of hyperbole, the interbellum struggle for licences, and its economic ramifications:

We need a first-class invalid for our cinema licence. And you, Mr. Valta, you are such a wonderful specimen. I honestly do not want to flatter you, but that's you for this county. Blind Tomášek who lives down the road, poor thing, for such an enterprise he's missing too much - without eyes, that is too much, - just simply too much [i.e. he is too severely disabled]. But without hands, that's just right. Trust me, Mr. Valta, when I first saw you I immediately told myself – great, we've won it! He's a genuine godsend! ... Let the others chase the lame Rosůlek. *Laughter*. [We will see] if the office will allocate them anything.¹⁰³

Indeed, the play's focus does not lie with the issue of the trafika allocation; the theme at the heart of the drama is the veteran's psychology, with the trafika question accorded a far less prominent and peripheral role. Nevertheless, Kolman-Cassius does eventually return to the trafika in this comedy and, in line with much of the rhetoric of other disabled veterans, emphasises the corruption endemic within this business. As the unscrupulous mayor of the village informs Valta that he will obtain the licence for himself, the disabled man is reduced to the following bitter observation: 'I am still something more than a disability assessment for the cinema licence application. I still have legs, heart, eyes, soul'.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Kolman-Cassius, *Jak nás poznamenala*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

In Slovakia, the fierce hunt for trafiky, which was by all accounts also perceptible to those who were not war victims, was satirised by the writer Štefan Letz. In his short story, a disabled ex-serviceman suddenly becomes an object of considerable female attention, much to the surprise of the young boy who serves as Letz's narrator.¹⁰⁵ The veteran, who is far from attractive, is approached and wooed by numerous local women 'as if he were the most beautiful youth in town'.¹⁰⁶ Only after the man's unexpected death does the narrator discover that the women were interested in the disabled veteran solely because of the prospects of him becoming a trafika owner.

The system of state care for disabled veterans in interwar Czechoslovakia was far from unified and straightforward. The way in which the men who qualified as disabled and their welfare were approached depended on a number of different variables. Furthermore, some elements of state care were far from guaranteed, and veterans never enjoyed any legal entitlement to them. Despite the hopes of disabled veterans and others, who set their sights on licences for state monopolies, there were simply not enough profitable enterprises for all war victims and other needy applicants. For example, in 1936, there were 83,840 disabled veterans and 36,897 war widows living in the regions of Moravia and Silesia, many of whom found themselves in dire straits just like thousands of other locals. However, only 8,015 trafiky, including those in small villages and remote parts of towns, and 121 tobacco warehouses ('*sklady tabáku*') were licensed for this territory.¹⁰⁷ Concomitantly, all of this often resulted in a cacophony of confusion, competition, and complaints, as well as a precariously uncertain and economically unstable way of life, which achieved literary expression in works such as Kolman-Cassius's masterful play.

¹⁰⁵ Štefan Letz, 'Metál invalidu Krchniača', *Slovenské pohľady*, Nov.-Dec. 1930, pp. 761-765.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 763.

¹⁰⁷ 'Péče o válečné poškozené v r. 1936 (Pokračování)', *Sociální služba*, June 1937, p. 58.

Chapter V: Ethnicity and Veterans¹

‘We have always wanted to lead the fight for
[our] existence side by side and shoulder to shoulder
with the Czech comrades’.²

Bernhard Leppin, secretary general of Bund der
Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen

As the previous chapters have shown, Czechoslovakia was anything but a homogeneous country. Even if some strata and regions of the future state of Czechoslovakia were hit by the war less than others,³ it would be impossible to find a social, religious, or ethnic group that was not affected by the destruction of the Great War. In turn, disabled veterans came from a number of different backgrounds; some were Czech, while others identified as German, Slovak, Hungarian, Ruthenes, Jewish, or Polish. Whilst some were university-educated, many others, particularly those from Ruthenia, could not even read. Similarly, veterans were members of many different churches and denominations; they could be Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, or belong to one of several protestant churches, not to mention a substantial minority of atheists living in Bohemia.⁴

Indeed, Czechoslovak veterans possessed a wide spectrum of diverging identities. To an extent, these differences were then also reflected in the numerous organisations of war victims that emerged during this period. Disabled veterans’ associations varied considerably in their ideological beliefs and aims and covered a number of different interest groups. This chapter closely focuses on ethnic affiliations of these organisations to

¹ Parts of this chapter have been used in the following article: Lupták, ‘Vojenská invalidi rakúsko-uhorských ozbrojených síl’, pp. 94-104.

² L., ‘Ein Schrei der Opfer des Weltkrieges’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Nov. 1922, p. 2.

³ See casualty rates for different parts of Austria-Hungary in Anatol Schmied-Kowarzik, ‘War Losses (Austria-Hungary)’, 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, accessed 5 March 2020 at https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/war_losses_austria-hungary.

⁴ *Statistická příručka III.*, p. 276.

understand what role ethnicity played in the lives of disabled veterans. The chapter explores the rhetoric of organisations of war victims regarding the Czechoslovak state, fellow war victims, and citizens of other ethnicities.

It observes that significant differences existed between these organisations in terms of how they approached veterans of other ethnicities. Whilst some associations were open to all the different ethnic groups, whom they encouraged to join, *Družina československých válečných poškozců* in the Bohemian lands expressed strong anti-German sentiments in the early 1920s. By contrast, its Slovak section espoused interethnic cooperation and sought to attract Slovaks, Hungarians, and Germans alike. Nevertheless, this branch of *Družina* voiced strongly anti-Semitic views in this period. Meanwhile, the German organisation *Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen* focused predominantly on Czechoslovak Germans in the Bohemian lands, Austria, and Germany⁵ and presumably recruited veterans of other nationalities only in relatively small numbers;⁶ nevertheless, it still repeatedly called for cooperation amongst war victims in order for them to achieve their goals.

Towards the late 1920s, *Družina československých válečných poškozců* began opening itself to closer cooperation with German veterans. In 1927, several organisations of war victims, including disabled legionaries, established *Říšský svaz organisací válečných poškozců v Československé republice* (Imperial Union of Organisations of War Victims in the Czechoslovak Republic), which operated as an overarching structure that allowed its members to cooperate in their attempts to influence the Czechoslovak state. Cooperation between Czech and German veterans then continued into the 1930s.

⁵ For more information about Czechoslovak organisations of war victims in Germany and Austria, see Chapter VI.

⁶ Throughout its existence, *Bund's* newspaper *Der Kriegsverletzte* never referred to any branches in Slovakia or Ruthenia.

However, relations between Družina, which also expanded into Carpathian Ruthenia, and Bund ultimately floundered over the attempts of the former to attract German members into its ranks.

Early Years of the Republic

In the immediate postwar years, ethnicity played an important role in the rhetoric of Czech and Slovak veterans. Newspapers of different organisations of war victims depicted the ex-servicemen dealing with the new, post-1918 political reality, which meant that the previously Austro-Hungarian territory would be ruled by the Czechoslovak nation. In turn, disabled Czech and Slovak veterans appear to have been eager to settle scores with their past enemies and construct a brighter, nation-oriented (i.e., Czech/Slovak) future. Such attitudes are perhaps best exemplified in various newspapers of Družina československých válečných poškozců, by far the largest interwar organisation of war victims.

In the first few interwar years, the journals of Družina from the Bohemian lands repeatedly attacked German inhabitants of Czechoslovakia.⁷ Their lack of loyalty to the new republic, anti-Czech stance, and past support for the bygone Habsburg monarchy were often implied both directly and indirectly by Czech veterans, who suggested that it was now their turn to enjoy the benefits of dominating the state. In turn, other ethnic groups who had been more privileged than the Czech man would have to give way. Thus, in the run-up to a demonstration of Czech war victims in Brno in early 1920, the *Nová republika* journal, which was published by Družina, informed its readers that the event would be inspired by and permeated with tenets such as ‘Take away [licences for] trafiky of

⁷ See, for example, ‘Otevřený list Petru Ehrenfeldovi, vládnímu komisaři zemského hlavního města Brna’, *Nová republika*, 17 Apr. 1920, p. 2.

Germans and war profiteers', 'Take away [licences for] Jewish biography [i.e. cinemas]', and 'Speed up [the process of] nationalisation of aristocrats' land'.⁸

Furthermore, not only Germans in general⁹ but specifically German war victims were depicted as hostile to the republic. As one veteran observed in *Nová republika*, unlike their Czech counterparts, disabled Germans 'really fought for Austria-Hungary and possibly even now despair [because of longing] for their 'majesty' [i.e., the Emperor]'.¹⁰ Similarly, after the peace treaties granted Czechoslovakia the territories of Vitorazsko/Weitraer Gebiet and Hlučínsko/Hultschiner Ländchen from Austria and Germany, respectively, one of the leaders of Družina begrudged the fact that

pensions will be received ... by the enemies of our republic whom we took over together with the territory awarded to us ... although they will always work against our nation and state.¹¹

Such attitudes towards Germans were also reflected in Družina's unwillingness to accept German members into its ranks and the maintenance of a clear division between Czechs and Germans. This stance was perhaps most clearly and viscerally expressed at a meeting of Czech and German war victims in Liberec/Reichenberg. At this gathering in 1921, a representative of Družina strongly rejected the claim of Bernhard Leppin, the secretary general of Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen that a 'great number' ('*celá řada*') of Czechs had joined the German organisation instead of Družina. In his diatribe, the Czech representative claimed the following:

Up until this point, [cooperation] has not been possible as the German comrades cannot get used to belonging to the Czechoslovak republic[. They] cannot forget the period of Austrian dictatorship, [in] which they had ruthlessly participated[. They] did not conceal even to people equal [to them] in [their] misfortune [i.e. other war victims] that they were Germans first and only then war victims. ...

⁸ 'Demonstrace válečných poškozenců Vel. Brna!', *Nová republika*, 31 Jan. 1920, p. 1.

⁹ 'Menšinové území', *Nový život*, 11 Jan. 1920, p. 3.

¹⁰ Roman Šicho, 'Veřejnost, která neví nebo vědět nechce', *Nová republika*, 29 Nov. 1919, p. 1.

¹¹ Josef Šíma, 'Nové práva – nové povinnosti', *Nový život*, 20 June 1920, p. 2.

[regarding alleged Czech members in Bund] This statement is wrong, because these are not Czechs, but the so-called bastards [‘t. zv. *bastarti*’]. A Czech knows where he belongs and such people, who have in the run of time learned some broken German and have forgotten Czech, we declare to be traitors [‘*poturčenci*’].¹²

Whilst showing strong animosity towards German veterans based on their ethnicity and perceived lack of loyalty to the republic, this speech also points to the wider spectrum of archetypes that Družina considered hostile. In between accusing Germans of being complicit in the Habsburg dictatorship and calling some of the war victims ‘bastards’, the Czech representative also made sure to conflate Germans and capitalists and thus employ a multi-dimensional binary division of ‘us’ and ‘them’; according to the author, ‘even the most radical Germans ... would stand against war victims, when their demands are to be satisfied from capitalists’ pockets, who are in the Czechoslovak republic represented by the Germans’.¹³

Similar spiteful arguments between Czech and German war victims occasionally surfaced on the pages of the Bohemian and Moravian newspapers of Družina until around 1926–1927, with the Czechs criticising German discontent with the new republic. For example, when Bund and Družina clashed in 1924 over the number of their representatives in a paid committee of the Ministry of Social Care, Vilém Knebort, one of the few prominent right-wing members of Družina and the future member of parliament for the Czech nationalists, commented with frustration that,

It is difficult for the blind to talk about colours and the Germans will always, regardless of all the facts, claim that injustice is done to them [‘*že se jim děje křivda*’]. Because displeasure with our republic is their strongest trait.¹⁴

¹² cký, ‘Nenapravitelní’, *Nový život*, 7 Aug. 1921, p. 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Vilda Knebort, ‘Zemská dovolací komise a přátelství Bundu’, *Nový život*, 24 May 1924, p. 2.

However, it must be observed that whilst Družina, as the strongest organisation of Czech war victims in the Bohemian lands, was largely hostile to their German counterparts, some degree of cooperation between the two ethnic groups had formed already in the immediate postwar period.¹⁵ At times, Germans and Czechs would unite on various levels to bolster their demands. Sometimes representatives of Bund were sent to Družina events and vice versa,¹⁶ while at other times meetings and rallies would be attended by Czechs and Germans alike.¹⁷ Some Družina and Bund groups would even collaborate over an extended period of time in the ethnically mixed territory.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, Družina's reports about such activities stressed shared economic and social demands of war victims and glossed over any ethnicity-related grievances.

Indeed, unlike leaders of Družina, those at the helm of Bund already openly called for cooperation with war victims from other ethnic groups in the early days of the republic.¹⁹ As Bernhard Leppin observed in 1920, 'nothing should separate us, the war victims; neither class distinctions, nor political differences; neither language nor religion'.²⁰ Similarly, when German war victims joined Czechs in their Prague demonstration for the improvement of care in December 1920, the German representative Dr. Lederer called for 'war victims to create a united front regardless of their nationality' to fight for their rights.²¹

¹⁵ Notice the presence of the representative of disabled German veterans at one of Družina's earliest rallies, held in June 1919. *Protokol o sjezdu Družiny českoslov. válečných poškozenců (invalidů, vdov a pozůstalých) konaném ve dnech 28. a 29. června 1919 v Obecním domě v Praze-Karlíně* (Prague, 1919), p. 8.

¹⁶ Fr. Neumeister, 'Náš sjezd', *Nová republika*, 4 Sep. 1920, p. 2; 'Ossegg', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 5 March 1920, p. 5.

¹⁷ 'Teplice', *Nový život*, 25 Aug. 1923, p. 3; 'Mohutný manifestační projev válečných poškozenců v Plzni', *Nový život*, 18 Apr. 1925, p. 2.

¹⁸ 'Svornost – naše síla', *Nový život*, 29 May 1921, p. 4.

¹⁹ 'Zur Nachahmung!', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 July 1921, pp. 8-9. It is unclear how many non-German war victims were members of Bund. *Der Kriegsverletzte* referred to such members on very few occasions. For an example, see 'Der Bundestag in Tetschenam [sic] 31. Mai und 1. Juni 1924. Schluß', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Sep. 1925, pp. 4-5.

²⁰ B. Leppin, 'Die Einheitsfront', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 5 Feb. 1920, p. 5.

²¹ 'Oběti války na ulici', *Nový život*, 18 Dec. 1920, pp. 1-2.

However, in the early 1920s, Bund often criticised Družina for its perceived lack of support and unwillingness to put pressure on the Czechoslovak government.²² Indeed, in this period, when few – if any – Germans felt loyalty to the newly emerged Czechoslovak state, Bund pulled no punches in its interaction with the administration and called for more generous provisions for war victims compared with Družina.²³ The frustration that these differences between Družina and Bund caused amongst the Germans are perhaps best exemplified by a speech of Leppin at a rally of Družina in 1922. At this event, he demanded with exasperation that Družina ‘first protect interests of war victims, because others are already taking care of the interests of the state’.²⁴

Although Bund did not usually broach the topic of German self-determination and Czechoslovak borders,²⁵ the veterans still expressed little satisfaction with the republic in this period. Apart from their criticism of state care,²⁶ disabled ex-servicemen also repeatedly expressed their discontent with the perceived discrimination against Germans. The pages of *Der Kriegsverletzte* provide us with a vast number of varied complaints; these focused mainly on the lack of Germans working at the Ministry of Social Care and in its offices for war victims and the poor treatment of Germans by Czech officials;²⁷ the pro-Czech bias of the state administration when allocating licences for trafiky;²⁸ and the anti-German character of the Czechoslovak land reform.²⁹

²² L., ‘Auf dem Wege nach Aufwärts’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 5. Feb. 1921, p. 1.

²³ ‘Aus der Budget-Debatte des Abgeordnetenhauses’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 5 Jan. 1921, pp. 1-2; Ant. Geisler, ‘Zur Novellierung unseres Versorgungsgesetzes’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1921, p. 8.

²⁴ ‘Von der Hauptversammlung der Družain [sic]’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Feb. 1922, p. 3.

²⁵ For a rare exception, see the previously mentioned article, ‘Die Versorgung der Kriegsoffer in der tschechoslow. Republik’. See also ‘Leitmeritz’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 20 Apr. 1920, p. 7.

²⁶ ‘Die Fürsorge der demokratischen Republik’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 July 1921, p. 8.

²⁷ Bert., ‘Die Beamten und wir’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Sep. 1921, pp. 3-4; ‘Nationale Hetze des Landesamtes für Kriegsbeschädigtenfürsorge in Prag’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 July 1923, p. 3.

²⁸ ‘Die Vergebung von Tabaktrafiken eine nationale Frage’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1922, p. 6.

²⁹ ‘Auch eine Bodenreform’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1923, pp. 3-4; ‘Die Bildung von Beratungsausschüssen für die Durchführung der Bodenreform’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Feb. 1924, p. 11.

Indeed, Bund was not the only organisation with German members. Unlike its namesake, Družina oslepených vojinů československé republiky included both Czech and German blinded soldiers from the beginning of its existence. Indeed, we can already see evidence of German participation in this organisation, albeit perhaps in smaller numbers, in the election of a separate representative for German members on the leading 10-man committee in May 1920.³⁰ Two years later, Družina oslepených vojinů československé republiky even acquiesced to the demands of the German members who did not speak Czech, by publishing German summaries of the most important news on the last page of its journal *Válečný slepec*.³¹

This willingness on the part of the organisation to incorporate and work with the Germans of the Bohemian lands, which presumably stemmed from both veterans' shared type of wartime injury and the specific societal perception of blindness as a unique and most deleterious of disabilities,³² gained perhaps most unequivocal expression in February 1922. At this point, a prominent member of Družina oslepených vojinů, Josef Rejř, called for the establishment of a new group specifically for the 'German brothers' ('*němečtí bratři*') in one of the predominantly German towns of northern Bohemia.³³ In turn, he believed this would yield

the sympathy, moral and material support of the German public, to which we have a full right, taking into account our full impartiality and work for the good of the local members.³⁴

³⁰ 'Valná hromada „Družiny oslepených vojinů československé republiky“ dne 2. května 1920 v Praze', *Válečný slepec*, 15 May 1920, p. 22.

³¹ 'Upozornění německým bratřím!', *Válečný slepec*, 15 June 1922, p. 4.

³² See Chapter IX.

³³ 'Slovenská skupina D. O. V. v Trenč. Teplé', *Válečný slepec*, 15 May 1922, p. 4. To put these plans into context, we should consider that the 'Slovak brothers' ('*slovenští bratři*') had to wait until as late as April 1922 for the creation of a group specifically designed to safeguard their interests.

³⁴ Rejř, 'Zakládáme skupiny', *Válečný slepec*, 15 Feb. 1922, p. 1.

Such perception was once again expressed in 1923 when Družina oslepených vojáků československé republiky clashed with Bund over the issue of disabled veterans-cum-travelling salesmen who operated in the predominantly German territory. The organisation of blind ex-servicemen was quick to point out that it was ‘strictly impartial both in the national and religious sense’ and that money generated by this activity was also used to help German veterans.³⁵ To support its claim of inclusivity, this Družina offered an ethnic breakdown of its membership: out of 517 members, 373 were Czechs, 98 described themselves as Germans (including Družina’s first vice-chairman), 40 were Slovaks, and six belonged to the Magyar minority.

Observations of the organisation’s first vice-chairman, Anton Schmiedl, constitute a rare German voice within the predominantly Czech organisation. However, even Schmiedl did not ever address the question of ethnicity at any great length and instead focused on social demands of blind veterans, which were shared by the men regardless of ethnicity. This attitude is perhaps best exemplified in his article entitled ‘Our Aim and Objective’, in which Schmiedl mentioned not a single demand unique to German-speaking veterans.³⁶ In a rare piece in which he did explicitly speak about ethnicity, he merely emphasised the importance of cooperation between different ethnic groups: ‘Only a large and cohesive organisation’ can achieve veterans’ goals, he observed.³⁷ For this reason, Schmiedl asked fellow members to ‘prevent any fragmentation, for God’s sake’.

However, it was not only the German presence in the organisation that was discussed in *Válečný slepec*. In 1922, Družina oslepených vojáků československé republiky also addressed blind veterans in Slovakia as it sought to dispel fears stoked by an unnamed

³⁵ ‘Žebrové obcházení se zbožím českých válečných poškozců v našem pracovním území’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 Aug. 1923, p. 2.

³⁶ Anton Schmiedl, ‘Unser Zweck und Ziel’, *Válečný slepec*, 15 Jan. 1923, pp. 3-4.

³⁷ ‘Nach Schlesien u. Mähren’, *Válečný slepec*, 15 Apr. 1924, p. 8.

organisation of war victims, which presumably questioned the political, ethnic, and religious beliefs of Družina. In turn, Družina reacted in an almost identical way as it would in the German case in 1923. The organisation emphasised the common fate and experience that bound this group of men and underlined its willingness to help the blinded veterans regardless of national and religious allegiances. In an attempt to allay fears of ex-servicemen, some of whom would see the predominantly Czech organisation as a potential threat to their own identity, the unknown author of the article assured its readers in Slovak that

for us, the national and religious beliefs of our brothers have been and will even further have to be a sacred and untouchable thing, for us, our common fate and common trust have to be the only bond.³⁸

Despite these attempts to unite blind veterans, internal fissures within the movement eventually led to the emergence of several rival groups. Thus, some 600 blind veterans living in the republic could eventually choose from a number of other organisations apart from Družina.³⁹ Brno became the home of two organisations, including Svaz čsl. oslepených vojínů, which was established by a splinter group from Družina already in 1924.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the former chairman of Družina Josef Rejřř founded his own Spolek válečných slepců československých in Prague at the beginning of the 1930s. Despite Rejřř's failure in Družina, the new association would soon proudly announce that it had apparently managed to attract to its ranks at least some of the blinded German veterans, who had been seeking someone to 'protect their rights honestly, justly, and without partiality'.⁴¹ Moreover, some of the blind German ex-servicemen established

³⁸ 'Naším členom na Slovensku', *Válečný slepec*, 15 June 1922, p. 1.

³⁹ 'V našem čs. státě žije okrouhle 600 válečných slepců', *Válečný slepec*, 15 July 1925, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁰ 'Všem bratrům', *Válečný slepec*, 1 Aug. 1924, pp. 1-2. For more information about this organisation, see '3. Svaz Čsl. oslepených vojínů v Brně', *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, 15 June 1932, p. 1.

⁴¹ 'Autonomistické snahy německých válečných slepců', *Maják slepců*, Sep. 1932, p. 7.

various associations and committees in Žatec/Saaz, Cheb/Eger, Ústí nad Labem/Aussig, and Teplice/Teplitz.⁴²

Meanwhile, the pages of the Slovak veterans' newspaper *Naša obrana* of Družina československých válečných poškodencov painted a picture somewhat similar to that in the Bohemian lands, of one ethnic group making the most of its newly acquired mastery and dealing with its former enemies, whilst conflating ethnic minorities with many of the ills of the past Austro-Hungarian monarchy.⁴³ However, certain crucial differences between the Bohemian lands and Slovakia can be observed. Firstly, Slovak war victims do not appear to have been as strongly opposed to Hungarians as Czechs were to Germans. If anything, Magyar war victims were encouraged to join Družina from the early postwar years. In their appeals to Magyars, Družina in Slovakia emphasised the shared legacy of the war, which negatively influenced people regardless of their ethnicity, as exemplified by a 1921 bilingual Slovak–Hungarian article published in *Naša obrana*. Its author Jozef (Josef) Šíma, the Czech head of Družina in Czechoslovakia, called on disabled Magyar veterans, observing that

[you] are now standing outside our organisation. Why? Were we not in one army, did we not stand numerous times next to each other in the trenches, did we not suffer together in the same military hospitals? Is it our fault that we were born from different-speaking mothers than you were? We are all people of one mother-land [*matky-zeme*']. We became victims of one war, victims of the same hatred [*nesnášanlivosť lásky*'] and should we even now hate and fight one another?⁴⁴

⁴² 'Nové spolky válečných slepců', *Válečný slepec*, Nov. 1932, p. 10; 'Verein deutsche Kriegsblinde, Saaz', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1933, p. 2.

⁴³ Indeed, whilst ex-servicemen in the Bohemian lands could express their opinions, grievances, and observations in a number of different journals, no established organisation of war victims other than Družina would regularly give space to war veterans from Slovakia. This situation makes it almost impossible to find and explore any alternative sources of war victims' rhetoric. Furthermore, at the end of 1927, Družina merged its Moravian *Nová republika* and Slovak *Naša obrana* into the existing Bohemian journal *Nový život*. Although the Slovak branch of Družina was afterwards allocated a whole page within the newly created 'Slovak supplement', it lost roughly 75% of its previous publishing space. As a result, it is almost impossible to trace attitudes of Slovak war victims to many issues and topics after this point.

⁴⁴ Jozef Šíma, 'Maďarským válečným poškodencom v republike československej. Bratia v utrpeniu!', *Naša obrana*, Nov.-Dec. 1921, p. 2.

Similarly, another article from the same issue entitled 'United Line' implored the disabled men to 'like each other [as] real brothers [do]. What separates us from each other? Only the language, but nothing else'.⁴⁵ Such words were supplemented with other steps that encouraged minorities' presence in this association. For example, Družina's regulations from 1922, which were published in *Naša obrana* both in Slovak and Hungarian,⁴⁶ authorised the use of 'any language' ('*bárs ktorý jazyk*') between its members.⁴⁷ In the mid-1920s, the organisation even briefly published a bilingual German–Hungarian edition of its journal for the two largest ethnic minorities in Slovakia.⁴⁸

The newspaper mostly brought articles to its readers translated from its Slovak and Czech counterparts and discussed only broader social demands of war victims, which they would find relevant regardless of ethnicity or religion. As the first issue stated, 'And what do we want? Nothing more and nothing less than the right to an existence worthy of a human being'.⁴⁹ Somewhat similar to the aforementioned article of the blind German veteran Anton Schmiedl, this newspaper also spoke little of the attitudes and demands of minorities in this region. However, numerous bits and pieces of information found occasionally in the pages of *Naša obrana* suggest that Magyar as well as German–Slovak war victims did find their way into Družina.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Aug. Drobný, 'Jednotná čiara', *Naša obrana*, Nov.-Dec. 1921, p. 2.

⁴⁶ 'Alapszabályok. A Čechoslovák hadi rokkantak, özvegyek és hátramaradottak kerületi egyesülete', *Naša obrana*, Feb.-March 1922, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁷ 'Stanovy okresnej družiny čs. válečných invalidov vdov a pozostalých', *Naša obrana*, Feb.-March 1922, pp. 5-6. These regulations were then reprinted in Hungarian on the following two pages of the newspaper.

⁴⁸ See *Naša obrana: Zeitschrift zur Wahrung der Interessen der Kriegsbeschädigten in der Slowakei/A szlovenszkói hadikárosultak érdekeit szolgáló folyóirat*.

⁴⁹ 'An Euch Alle, unsere Freunde!'/ 'Összes barátainknak!', *Naša obrana: Zeitschrift zur Wahrung*, Jan. 1924, p. 1.

⁵⁰ When Družina sought a new secretary for the area of Košice, it explicitly demanded command of Slovak, German, and Hungarian. 'Súbeh', *Naša obrana*, 1 Dec. 1925, p. 3.

After a Hungarian-led organisation had been abolished in 1921,⁵¹ Družina was, apart from Svaz československých válečných poškozených křesťansko-sociálných, the only established association of war victims in Slovakia. As a result of this near-monopoly, many Magyar war victims had no other choice but to join Družina if they were seeking to protect their rights. However, the significant level of active engagement of ethnic minorities in Družina is illustrated by the fact that its branches were not only established and operated in villages where Germans or Hungarians represented a majority,⁵² but Hungarian even came to be commonly used at regional and even all-Slovak levels, as speeches at meetings of the association were translated from Slovak for the Hungarian functionaries.⁵³ This cooperation between Slovak, Hungarian, and German war victims appears to have lasted throughout the interwar period, with Hungarian veterans in particular retaining a visible presence in Družina.⁵⁴

Secondly, Slovak veterans differed from their Czech counterparts in regard to the level of anti-Semitism present in their respective journals. Both groups of ex-servicemen at times associated disloyal members of German and Magyar ethnic minorities with Czechoslovak Jews to tarnish them. Moreover, Jews themselves were often objects of vitriolic criticism, in particular in relation to their ownership of valuable trafiky and

⁵¹ It remains unclear to what extent this was caused by authorities' fear of revisionist tendencies possibly present in this organisation of war victims. 'Upozornenie!', *Naša obrana*, July 1921, p. 2.

⁵² In 1926, *Naša obrana* went so far as to claim that 'all German groups from the area of Nemecké Pravno/Deutsch Proben [a commune in central Slovakia with a substantial German population] can be counted amongst the best of our organisations'. 'Tužina', *Naša obrana*, 1 March 1926, p. 3. See also, 'Výčap. Opatovce', *Naša obrana*, 15 Sep. 1923, pp. 3-4; '14. febr. 1925 obec Mehenice', *Naša obrana*, 15 March 1925, p. 3; 'Vricko', *Naša obrana*, 15 Dec. 1925, p. 3; 'Dunajská Streda', *Naša obrana*, 15 Feb. 1926, p. 3.

⁵³ 'Východné Slovensko prehovorilo', *Naša obrana*, 1 Jan. 1925, pp. 1-2; 'Po sjazde Družiny na Slovensku', *Naša obrana*, 1 Apr. 1926, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁴ 'Po sjazde Družiny na Slovensku', *Nový život*, 30 June 1928, p. 3; 'IX. sjazd Družiny čl. vál. pošk.', *Nový život*, 15 Nov. 1930, p. 3; 'Vlastní silou vpřed!', *Nový život*, 17 Dec. 1932, p. 3; V. D., 'Vianoce invalidov v Bratislave', *Nový život*, 7 Jan. 1933, p. 3; 'Co chýba v našom organizačnom živote?', *Nový život*, 4 July 1936, pp. 2-3; 'VIII. riadny sjazd Družiny na Slovensku', *Nový život*, 28 May 1938, p. 2.

biografy.⁵⁵ However, anti-Semitism did not feature as prominently in the Czech rhetoric as it did in that of Slovak war victims. For years, disabled Slovak ex-servicemen associated the perceived privilege of Hungarians and Jews as if the two were inseparable confederates. However, whilst at least some of the Hungarians, mainly the war victims, were viewed without virulent hatred, as manifested above, this cannot be said about Jews. Particularly in its early years, the journal *Naša obrana* often attacked members of this minority. Tellingly, when one of the prominent members of Družina attempted to dissuade fellow war victims from entering what he described as a clandestinely Hungarian-led association, he wrote down the following purportedly Jewish names, as if the very presence of these people in an organisation should be enough to discredit it:

And I will tell you the truth [about] what your organisation is and who its leaders are: Kunnossy Mór, Dikman Gyula, Marko Sándor, Spitzer Izsi, Soos Ferenc, Missinyi Jenő, Rosenberg Hedvig etc. all from the tribe ['*pokolenie*'] of Aaron or Abraham.⁵⁶

Indeed, when disabled Slovak veterans did attack Hungarians, it was usually the stereotypical rich Magyar-Jew figure that was the object of hatred. The pages of *Naša obrana* are replete with stories of cooperation between these two minorities to the detriment of Slovaks. In particular, it was the Jews who were fervently and frequently abused by the journal.

As has been discussed in Chapter IV, various licences for state monopolies became the bone of contention, with many war victims hoping to receive them. In turn, Jewish businesses were often attacked as the disabled veterans suggested that the time had come for loyal Slovaks to take over from those hostile to the republic. As the journal of Družina noted in 1920, when the process of reallocation of various tobacco-selling and restaurant

⁵⁵ Jan Vavroušek, 'Jak dlouho ještě? (Úvaha o pražských biografech)', *Válečný slepec*, 6 Aug. 1920, pp. 27-29.

⁵⁶ Imrich Tileš, 'Hl'a – vlk v rúchu ovečky', *Naša obrana*, Jan. 1921, p. 2.

licences was taking place, 'Jews will get licences in such numbers as required by economic and social interests of the Slovak people, at most [though] proportionally to their numbers'.⁵⁷ A couple of years later, the newspaper published a letter of a '50% invalid, non-pub landlord' Jozef Bártek, who strongly attacked Sväz hostinských (Union of Pub Landlords), which was operating in Slovakia. In his letter, Bártek argued that the union was aiming to help 'kikes ['*židáci*]' to keep their pub licences in their hands (so that those leeches could suck our blood even further).⁵⁸ However, the veteran, who presumably wanted to obtain a valuable business enterprise himself, was far from rejecting drinking en masse as may be inferred from this quotation. Instead he focused on explaining why loyal Slovak veterans should be given this business opportunity, as he claimed that

every brother legionary or invalid understands the current situation in the Czechoslovak republic and attempts to spread the patriotic spirit as much as possible. If Jews are given cafes, they will not have such an opportunity and when the kikes have cafes, even if they do not Magyarise, they will still maintain the Magyar spirit amongst people as much as they can.⁵⁹

It is much more difficult to examine how disabled Czech and Slovak veterans perceived the respective roles of their ethnic groups in the republic, which, according to official theory made up the often disputed and vaguely defined constituent Czechoslovak nation. Despite being in constant communication with one another, the Czech and Slovak sections of the organisation rarely discussed their visions of their respective positions in the new state beyond fairly unspecific proclamations of unity and brotherhood.⁶⁰ At most, the newspapers of Družina tended to emphasise the need for positive relationships between the two ethnic groups and the equality of the Slovaks, as exemplified by a 1920 article in

⁵⁷ 'Ešte o licenciach', *Naša obrana*, July 1920, p. 4.

⁵⁸ 'Odpoved' „Gastronomu“ (Píše 50% invalid, nekrčmár Jozef Bártek)', *Naša obrana*, Feb.-March 1922, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ For more information about the relations between the two nations in this period, see Jan Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations, 1918-1939', *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe*, ed. Cornwall and Evans, pp. 13-25; Dušan Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska* (Prague, 1998), pp. 187-188.

which its Czech author proclaimed that Czech war victims want to be ‘true friends [of Slovaks] and will be only glad, if their relationship with us will be most cordial’.⁶¹

However, in some contrast with the wider Czech vision of a cohesive and collective unitary Czechoslovak state, the structure of *Družina československých válečných poškozců* reflected a less centralistic approach. The organisation, which was in the Bohemian lands divided between the Bohemian branch and the Moravian and Silesian branch, also allowed Slovak war victims the same level of self-government.⁶² Thus, the Slovak section of the organisation possessed its own chairman, secretary, as well as its newspaper entitled *Naša obrana*. This went so far as to translate Czech articles from other journals of *Družina*, already intelligible to their Slovak readers, into Slovak.⁶³ Similarly, even after the merger of the organisation’s newspapers in 1927, the Slovaks were allocated a separate section on the second page of each issue of the joint *Nový život* for themselves, a practice that was religiously adhered to until 1939. Interestingly, even Jan Bezšlezina, who appears to have been the only disabled veteran from the Bohemian lands to have held an influential position in the Slovak section of the organisation, reverted from the use of Czech to Slovak upon his arrival from Moravia.⁶⁴

Despite these attempts, the Czech origin of *Družina* and the existing connections of the Slovak branch with its Bohemian and Moravian counterparts provided fuel for Slovak leaders of various short-lived rival associations to lead a virulent campaign against *Družina*. These organisations, at least one of which had close ties with the nationalistic

⁶¹ ‘Slovensko’, *Nový život*, 11 Jan. 1920, p. 3.

⁶² For an insightful contemporary analysis of the role of Slovak Catholic nationalists in the early period of the Czechoslovak state, see R. W. Seton-Watson, ‘The Religious Problem in Slovakia’, *Slavonic Review*, 2.6 (1924), pp. 519-532.

⁶³ Compare František Neumeister, ‘Šťastné vyřešení’, *Nový život*, 24 Oct. 1925, pp. 1-2 with František Neumeister, ‘Šťastné vyriešenie’, *Naša obrana*, 15 Nov. 1925, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁴ Compare Jan Bezšlezina, ‘České veřejnosti k novému roku’, *Nová republika*, 3 Jan. 1920, p. 1 with Ján Bezšlezina, ‘Ty mrtvý lež a nestávaj!’, *Naša obrana*, Aug. 1922, pp. 2-3.

Slovak People's Party⁶⁵/Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (SLS/HSLŠ),⁶⁶ repeatedly accused Družina of favouring the Czechs and discriminating against the Slovaks, thereby keeping their own rhetoric in accordance with that of the wider party.⁶⁷ In turn they promised ethnic purity and loyalty to the Slovak cause in their own organisations; for example, an official of one of these organisations apparently claimed in 1928 that it would preclude every last 'Czech or kike [židak']' from joining, admitting instead 'only Catholic Christians and Slovaks'.⁶⁸ However, none of the organisations ever reaped any significant success amongst war victims, despite the fact that they were backed by one of the most powerful parties of interwar Slovakia.

Moreover, the paucity of sources makes it very difficult to examine whether the rhetoric of Jewish war victims differed in any way from that of other groups. Although two explicitly Jewish organisations did operate in Czechoslovakia, one of them in Prague⁶⁹ and another in Ruthenia,⁷⁰ they left behind very few traces of their existence. At most, it can be observed that they do not seem to have participated in most of the hundreds of events organised by other associations of disabled veterans. Although individual Jewish veterans do occasionally appear in journals of different organisations, particularly in Ruthenia,⁷¹ it is impossible to infer anything based on these very isolated cases. In turn, it remains

⁶⁵ During the interwar period, the party that had originally been known as the Slovak People's Party changed its name twice. However, for the sake of convenience, the thesis continuously refers to it by its first, original appellation.

⁶⁶ Ján Drobný, the honorary chairman of Občianske sdruženie, which was established in 1927, also came to be the first krajinský prezident (provincial president) of Slovakia for this party. Janko, 'Zo VI. riadneho snemovania Družiny na Slovensku', *Nový život*, 30 May 1931, p. 3.

⁶⁷ 'Slováci prehovorili', *Naša obrana*, Sep. 1922, pp. 3-4; 'Zpráva predsedy k sjazdu Družiny na Slovensku', *Nový život*, 9 June 1928, p. 3.

⁶⁸ As reported by a member of Družina in J. Z., 'Čo nám píšu členovia', *Nový život*, 10 Aug. 1929, p. 4.

⁶⁹ Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, pp. 112-113. *Nový život*, the only newspaper of disabled veterans to ever mention this Jewish organisation, did so only twice in the entire interwar period. 'Smuteční tryzna za padlé židovské vojíny', *Nový život*, 21 May 1932, p. 6; 'Oznámení', *Nový život*, 7 May 1938, p. 4.

⁷⁰ Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky, 'Středa 24. října 1928', accessed 19 May 2015 at <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/stenprot/169schuz/s169017.htm>.

⁷¹ 'III. zaglavnii zizd voen. poshkodzhents'ov Podk. Rusi, zgurtovanykh v T-vi Nadiya', *Nasha obrona*, 1 Nov. 1925, pp. 1-2; 'Pôda invalidom!', *Nový život*, 18 Feb. 1928, p. 5.

unclear whether most of the Jewish disabled veterans, whose allegiances may have been informed by a wide spectrum of possible identities, and some of whom may have considered themselves to be either Czech, German, or Slovak,⁷² participated in other associations of war victims or simply abstained from joining any of the aforementioned groups.

War Victims in the Late 1920s and 1930s and Říšský svaz organisací válečných poškozců v Československé republice

Suspicious attitudes of the predominantly Czech organisation, Družina československých válečných poškozců, towards German war victims began to markedly change in the late 1920s. Gradually, disabled Czech veterans started to place more emphasis on the cooperation of all Czechoslovak war victims to achieve their goals. Already in May 1927, the representative of Družina František Neumeister observed at the rally of the German Bund that

the same way that we had been forced to fight next to each other at the frontline against our will, we are now fighting, hand-in-hand, side by side, for our human rights.⁷³

These words reflected a considerable shift amongst Czechoslovak war victims and their organisations, which came to be expressed even more clearly only a few months later. In September 1927, Říšský svaz organisací válečných poškozců v Československé republice/Reichsverband der Kriegsbeschädigtenorganisationen in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik (Imperial Union of Organisations of War Victims in the Czechoslovak Republic), a confederation of several Czechoslovak organisations of war

⁷² For a detailed study of the plethora of potential identities of Bohemian Jews, see the following work: Kateřina Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé? Národní identita Židů v Čechách, 1918-1938* (Prague, 2005).

⁷³ Lád'a Neškrabal, 'Sjezd německých vál. poškozců', *Nový život*, 18 June 1927, p. 2.

victims, was established.⁷⁴ Despite its quiet origins, this union could theoretically boast of considerable influence and importance as it succeeded in bridging many divides; it brought together a panoply of organisations which encompassed various groups of war victims. The membership of Říšský svaz entailed disabled veterans from different ethnic groups and ranks, those from the Austro-Hungarian armed forces and legionaries, as well as many other war victims. This all-encompassing nature of the organisation, which campaigned on behalf of the demands of some 225,000 to 250,000 war victims,⁷⁵ also possibly elucidates its somewhat unusual name. Although it was never explained in detail, the word ‘říšský’ (‘imperial’) was presumably supposed to reflect the pan-Czechoslovak character of the confederation.

Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that the union was established when the Ministry of Social Care was under the aegis of the much-criticised Catholic priest Jan Šrámek,⁷⁶ who had very strained relations with the largest of the war victims’ associations, Družina československých válečných poškozených.⁷⁷ Almost immediately after the union’s inception, the organisations used this new network to stage simultaneous demonstrations in many Czechoslovak cities and towns, at which they together voiced demands for better treatment.⁷⁸ This mutual effort of war victims and its importance were accentuated by

⁷⁴ The founding organisations of Říšský svaz were Družina československých válečných poškozených, Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen, Svaz invalidů československých legií, Svaz československých válečných poškozených křesťansko-sociálních, Spolek vdov po padlých a ve válce zemřelých záložních důstojnících, and Organizace československých válečných invalidů-důstojníků. The union was later also joined by Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů v republice Československé. ‘Říšský Svaz organizací válečných poškozených v ČSR’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, 15 Oct. 1927, pp. 11-12; ‘Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, 3 Jan. 1928, p. 12.

⁷⁵ ‘O jubilejní známky’, *Nový život*, 12 May 1928, p. 2; Pavel Janko, ‘Siedmé snemovanie medzinárodnej konferencie vál. poškodencov v Paříži’, *Nový život*, 8 Aug. 1931, p. 3.

⁷⁶ After its initial interest, Svaz československých válečných poškozených křesťansko-sociálních, which was closely linked to Šrámek, did not participate in the union. The Communist member of parliament Jozef Kopasz argued that this was due to direct orders from Šrámek’s Christian Socialists. ‘Z řeči posl. pr. Kopasza dne 27. X. 1928 v parlamentu’, *Nový život*, 10 Nov. 1928, p. 3.

⁷⁷ F. N., ‘Do školy’, *Nový život*, 27 Aug. 1927, p. 1.

⁷⁸ ‘27. november 1927’, *Naša obrana*, 1 Dec. 1927, p. 1; ‘Den 27. listopadu 1927’, *Nový život*, 10 Dec. 1927, pp. 2-3.

many of their leaders. For example, Bernhard Leppin noted that his ‘long-cherished wish’ of a ‘united front’ of Czech and German war victims had been fulfilled.⁷⁹ Similarly, Bohumil Cetkovský, a prominent member of Družina, emphasised the newly established cooperation of war victims by means of a military metaphor, which foregrounded the shared wartime experience of the veterans and their siege mentality in the following claim of his:

just like at the front ... when it was a matter of life and death, one would find a friend [*druh*], today we meet at the new [front]line, where an enemy attack on our lives has been once again undertaken. We can only regret that Říšský svaz had not been established earlier ...⁸⁰

This heterogeneous union of associations, which was in existence until the mid-1930s, when its work was taken over by the Czechoslovak Committee of CIAMAC,⁸¹ operated as an overarching structure that facilitated closer cooperation amongst the leaders of its member organisations. These, however, were not subsumed into an anonymous whole, but retained their distinct, individual identities whilst simultaneously working together to defend the interests of war victims. The union was steered by its executive committee, which contained two members from the largest organisations, Družina československých válečných poškozenců and Bund, and one member each from other associations.

The large combined membership gave the leaders of Říšský svaz a stronger bargaining position through demonstrations and public gatherings organised by the

⁷⁹ ‘Der 27. November ein historischer Tag für die tschechoslowak. Kriegsbeschädigten’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1927, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Boh. Cetkovský, ‘Masy válečných poškozenců v pohybu’, *Nový život*, 3 Dec. 1927, p. 3.

⁸¹ See Chapter III. ‘Für eine Verbesserung in der Kriegsbeschädigtenfürsorge’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Dec. 1935, pp. 1-2; ‘Sind die Kriegsinvaliden keine ehemaligen Kriegsteilnehmer?’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Sep. 1937, p. 3.

union,⁸² as well as in meetings with journalists⁸³ and public officials,⁸⁴ including Czechoslovak MPs⁸⁵ and ministers.⁸⁶ At these, its leaders voiced the various social demands and grievances of the disparate groups of war victims. Furthermore, throughout its membership in CIAMAC, Říšský svaz also allowed Czechoslovak organisations of war victims to present their claims on an international level and to cooperate with their counterparts from other countries.

In the early 1930s, another significant ethnicity-related change occurred in Družina československých válečných poškozců: the Czech veterans altered their original vision of Družina as an organisation that was not open to German war victims. The first signs of such a shift in attitude can be discerned in the literature concerning Svaz trafikantů a skladníků tabáku válečných poškozců, a semi-autonomous part of Družina protecting the interests of tobacco sellers (*‘trafikanti’*) which was revived in 1928 after it had ceased to operate a few years earlier.⁸⁷ From 1931 onwards, the section of *Nový život* dedicated to the Svaz repeatedly mentioned the inclusion of Germans as members of this Union. In January 1931, it in fact even boasted of its ability to attract specifically German members, claiming that ‘all trafikanti of German nationality have an endless trust in our Svaz and all of them are becoming our good workers’.⁸⁸ By November 1934, approximately 600 of its 7,000 members were Germans, for whom the union even published a separate German version of its newspaper.⁸⁹ Although even trafikanti who were not war victims were

⁸² ‘Naše projevy’, *Nový život*, 26 May 1928, p. 5.

⁸³ See, for example, the meeting of the representatives of Družina and the Bund with the Czech and German journalists from Prague. ‘Naše opatření’, *Nový život*, 21 Jan. 1928, p. 6.

⁸⁴ ‘Ze sekretariátu Svazu státních zaměstnanců invalidů’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, 1 Feb. 1928, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁵ Fr. Neumeister, ‘Nechtí znát pravdu’, *Nový život*, 24 March 1928, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁶ ‘Naše zákroky’, *Nový život*, 18 Jan. 1930, pp. 4-5.

⁸⁷ In 1924, an article published by Družina refers to the presence of German members in Svaz. However, this is the only piece of evidence pointing to German participation in the organisation shortly after the war. ‘Nová hvězda na obzoru’, *Nový život*, 6 Sep. 1924, p. 4.

⁸⁸ ‘Most’, *Nový život*, 17 Jan. 1931, p. 5.

⁸⁹ ‘Durch eigene Kraft vorwärts’, *Der Trafikant und Tabakverleger*, Nov. 1934, p. 1.

allowed to join, the explicitly declared presence of the Germans in this section of Družina suggests that Družina was open to a far closer level of inter-ethnic cooperation than ever before. As the German newspaper of the union observed, unity was required to achieve their goals:

We are a trade association [*‘Standesorganisation’*]. For this trade association to fully accomplish its purpose, all trafikanti, regardless of ethnicity or party [affiliation], must join.⁹⁰

As Natali Stegmann observed, the regulations of Družina from 1931 allowed the use of the Hungarian and German languages in the organisation,⁹¹ suggesting that even Družina itself was now open to Germans and other ethnicities. This new attitude towards the presence of minorities in the Bohemian section gained more unequivocal expression a year later, after yet another argument between Družina and Bund. In stark contrast to its view from 10 years ago, Družina now took pride in its ability to attract even German war victims ‘in no small numbers [*‘v nemalém počtu’*] ... because they see that Družina works for war victims regardless of their nationality’.⁹² Although the lack of detailed statistics of the ethnic composition of Družina’s membership makes it impossible to draw any precise conclusions in terms of German participation, it is clear that Družina was at least highly willing to include this ethnic group in its ranks. This desire is further confirmed by Družina’s claims from May 1933 (i.e., after the Nazi takeover in Germany) that

our Družina also deals with matters of invalids of German nationality. Even Germans from the Reich visit us to ask for support and we do not send them to Liberec [the seat of the Bund] and even if we did so, war victims do not want to have anything to do with Liberec. Our friends from the Bund in Liberec seem to have strange problems. In fourteen years of their activity, they have not realised that the activity of Družina pertains to our entire republic.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, p. 100.

⁹² ‘Nenapravitelní’, *Nový život*, 23 July 1932, p. 4.

⁹³ ‘Nerayonujte válečné poškozence’, *Nový život*, 20 May 1933, p. 1.

Indeed, this shift in the attitude of the Družina of the Bohemian lands from being a solely Czech and Slovak organisation to a pan-Czechoslovak one in the early 1930s, which endured for the remainder of the interwar period, served as a microcosmic example of veterans' more inclusive vision of the republic in general, as was also manifested in the few articles that dealt with the topic of German state employees. For example, an article written by disabled Czech veterans from the Bohemian town of Most/Brüx in 1933, defended a Czech-speaking German official from accusations of ethnicity-based nepotism and, in stark contrast to the atmosphere of suspicion and hostility that was pervasive in the organisation in the early 1920s, claimed that

if [an official] is targeted mainly because he is German, although he has a full command of the state language [i.e. Czech] and he is objective especially towards the Czech sides [*'strany'*], then war victims cannot identify themselves with such [accusations].⁹⁴

The Final Years of the Republic and War Victims

The rhetoric of Czech war victims became even more inclusive in the final years of the interbellum, as the shadow of Nazi Germany began to loom over Czechoslovakia. In this period, the issue of the membership of German war victims in Družina again re-emerged as a cause of disagreement between Družina and Bund, tarnishing the relatively positive relations that had been achieved between the two organisations for several years beforehand. However, much had changed since the aforementioned argument of 1921. When Bund attacked Družina for its attempts to attract German war victims in 1936,⁹⁵ *Nový život* proudly proclaimed that 'a few hundred members of the German nationality' were members of the predominantly Czech organisation, which in its activities did 'not

⁹⁴ 'Stranické přidělování trafik', *Nový život*, 2 Dec. 1933, p. 3.

⁹⁵ 'Die „Družina“ wirbt', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, July 1936, p. 3.

differentiate between Czech and German war victims'.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the unknown author of the article calmly reminded Bund that the ranks of this largely German association also included Czech war victims in areas where there were no branches of Družina, emphasising that such members should not be seen as anything extraordinary or problematic.

Even in the dying embers of the first Czechoslovak republic, in which *Nový život* strongly condemned the perceived disloyal and anti-Czech behaviour of German supporters of Konrad Henlein's Sudetendeutsche Partei,⁹⁷ the organisation did not *a priori* oppose the participation of members of this ethnic group in Družina. Instead, it emphasised the importance of a united Czechoslovakia, which included loyal Czechoslovak Germans. Thus, in June 1938, almost two months after the Carlsbad Program demanding German autonomy was issued, *Nový život* denounced information about Henlein's men and Bund trying to coerce 'many' German war victims, who either had memberships to both Družina and Bund or to just the former, to become members of Bund only.⁹⁸ Similarly, one of the last issues of *Nový život* before the Munich Agreement contained a report from a group of Družina located in Ústí nad Labem/Aussig, which praised the group's ability to attract new members, including 'democratically thinking' Germans, to the organisation even in this difficult period.⁹⁹ Although we cannot verify Družina's claim from the former article that the German war victims apparently disregarded the pressure from Bund, these examples nonetheless demonstrate Družina's continued desire to retain its German membership,

⁹⁶ 'Družina verbuje', *Nový život*, 6 Sep. 1936, p. 3. See also 'Naši němečtí přátelé píší', *Naše obrana*, 14 May 1935, p. 5.

⁹⁷ 'Jeden z postižených – Slast válečných poškozenců trafikantů', *Nový život*, 16 July 1938, p. 3.

⁹⁸ 'Hm . . .', *Nový život*, 11 June 1938, p. 4. See also 'Endfrist für die Aufnahme deutscher Kriegsbeschädigter in unsere Organisation aus den Reihen der „Družina“', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1938, p. 6.

⁹⁹ 'Ústí n. L.', *Nový život*, 23 July 1938, p. 5.

even in the final moments of the first Czechoslovak republic when rifts and tensions in society were becoming all the more fraught.

Similar inclusive attitudes can also be found in the rhetoric of Slovak veterans from 1938, when it was expressed amidst the uncertainty surrounding the future of the republic. In March, Jozef Kopasz, a member of parliament for the Czechoslovak Social Democrats and the bilingual Slovak–Hungarian chairman of the Slovak branch of Družina, claimed in his parliamentary speech that the organisation was ‘the defender of everyone, be it a Czech, a Slovak, a German, a Magyar, or a Ruthene, regardless of nationality or religious beliefs’.¹⁰⁰ This sentiment was echoed by one Jozef Ölvedský from Nové Zámky/Érsekújvár when he claimed at a Slovak rally of Družina that

we, the war victims of the Hungarian nationality, have not been content with the treatment [of war victims] so far and with social care in general, but that does not mean that our Czech or Slovak friends are doing any better. There are no legal differences in the treatment of veterans [. B]ut I must declare that we are doing better than our friends in Hungary. We will defend the republic. If it comes to the worst, we will take our crutches, artificial limbs, rifles on our shoulders and [we] will all defend the Czechoslovak republic.¹⁰¹

The rhetoric of the Slovak branch of Družina towards the Czechs only appears to have undergone considerable change from late 1938, after the Slovak nationalists’ rise to power in this part of the republic as a corollary of the events of the Munich Agreement, the First Vienna Award, and the subsequent granting of autonomy to Slovakia. The strongly anti-Czech and anti-Semitic feelings espoused by the authoritarian politicians of the former Slovak People’s Party quickly infiltrated wider social discourse,¹⁰² and even made their way onto the pages of the Slovak section of *Nový život*, which radically modified its rhetoric. This appears to have been the result of personnel changes amongst the authors of

¹⁰⁰ Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky, ‘Čtvrtek 17. března 1938’, accessed 19 May 2015 at <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1935ns/ps/stenprot/141schuz/s141007.htm>.

¹⁰¹ ‘VIII. riadny sjazd Družiny na Slovensku’, *Nový život*, 4 June 1938, p. 2.

¹⁰² See Zdeněk Kárník, *Malé dějiny československé (1867-1939)* (Prague, 2008), p. 406.

the Slovak articles, although most of these were written anonymously. Thus, in the period of a few weeks, the outlook of the disabled Slovak veterans lurched from a position that underscored the unity of Czechoslovakia and the need for the Czech and Slovak peoples to cooperate with one another to form a functional, cohesive whole,¹⁰³ to one that instead upheld the belief that many of their economic problems were exacerbated and even directly caused by the Czechs.¹⁰⁴ Such opinions were further voiced in Družina's Slovak newspaper *Naša obrana*, re-established in early 1939, which now published the views of the previously abhorred veterans associated with the Slovak People's Party. These frequently spoke of the Czechs in strongly negative and nationalistic terms, accusing them, for example, of 'stealing our bread under the cloak of fraternity ... and letting Slovak invalids perish'.¹⁰⁵

War Victims of Carpathian Ruthenia

Carpathian Ruthenia (Podkarpatská Rus), the easternmost region of the republic, which eventually joined months after the state had been established, proved to be considerably different from the rest of Czechoslovakia. This mountainous, forested, and sparsely populated region, which was located hundreds of miles from Prague and inhabited mainly by impoverished¹⁰⁶ members of various ethnic groups,¹⁰⁷ came to be a part of the new republic as a result of the existing geopolitical situation rather than because of any close cultural, economic, or historic ties. The exceptional position of Ruthenia as a distinct

¹⁰³ 'Bude katastrofe zabráneno?', *Nový život*, 1 Oct. 1938, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ '30. október', *Nový život*, 5 Nov. 1938, pp. 2-3; 'Odkaz mrtvych!', *Nový život*, 17 Dec. 1938, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ For example, Augustín Drobný, who had been depicted as a vile slanderer in *Naša obrana* in 1927, came to write for the very newspaper that had once criticised him in 1939. 'Najúhlavnejší nepriatelia válečných poškodencov', *Naša obrana*, 1 Nov. 1927, pp. 1-3; Augustín Drobný, 'Nová nádej nášho života', *Naša obrana*, March 1939, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ For a brief overview of the economic situation of the region in the interwar period, see Peter Švorc, *Zakliata Krajina: Podkarpatská Rus 1918-1946* (Prešov, 1996), pp. 52-64.

¹⁰⁷ See Paul R. Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848-1948* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 191-211.

appendage to Czechoslovakia was also reflected in its autonomy, originally stipulated in the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. That this autonomy never came to fruition is another story, more related to the nature of the Czechoslovak state and administration than to any close Czech relationship with Ruthenia.

In his invaluable analysis of the Czech perception of Ruthenia, the scholar Viktor Budín argues that its incorporation into Czechoslovakia was met by baffled ambivalence on the part of the Czechs. He asserts that very little was known about the far-away region, particularly in the early postwar years.¹⁰⁸ Although this changed to some extent in the later period, Ruthenia continued to attract Czech attention largely only due to its perceived remote and mysterious nature and poverty.

Indeed, this distant location of Ruthenia within Czechoslovakia, in terms of both geography and public discourse, was also manifested in the unique position of war victims and their organisations. In the first decade after the war, many disabled veterans joined the Ruthenia-based association *Nadiya - Tovaristvo voennykh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpatskoi Rusi* (Hope - Society of War Invalids, Widows and Orphans of Carpathian Ruthenia). *Nadiya* itself was a reflection of the specific nature of the region and its administration; in the first years of the republic, this organisation operated under the guidance of the Ministry of Social Care as a substitute for *okresní úřadovny* (state district offices) for war victims, which had been established by the state elsewhere in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁹

Although *Nadiya*'s role in the political life of Ruthenia is discussed in more detail in the following chapter, it should be noted that its leaders did potentially use the

¹⁰⁸ Viktor Budín, *Podkarpatská Rus očima Čechů* (Prague, 1996), pp. 26-27.

¹⁰⁹ 'Referátu ministerstva sociální péče pro Podkarpatskou Rus', Ministerstvo sociální péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 513, Sign. B, Folder 1921 7a-2 Užhorod, NA.

organisation and the political influence it wielded over war victims for their personal benefit. The dubious nature of Nadiya and its role as a tool of its officials is reflected in their claims about its membership. Despite being situated in a region with isolated settlements, high illiteracy rates, and rampant poverty, up to 16,000 war victims out of approximately 36,000 who lived in this territory, including orphans, apparently opted to join the organisation.¹¹⁰ It is unclear whether Nadiya's leaders, to achieve such astonishing statistics, took advantage of its semi-official position in state administration to put pressure on war victims to join their ranks or simply grossly inflated their figures to impress Czech administrators of the region. Either way, Nadiya supposedly achieved membership figures unparalleled by any other organisation of war victims in Czechoslovakia. The fact that the other organisations also probably exaggerated their own figures makes this purported success of Nadiya even more extraordinary.

In turn, we should perhaps approach the rhetoric of this heavily top-down organisation, which repeatedly sought to make its loyalty to Czechoslovakia abundantly clear,¹¹¹ as a reflection of what its leaders considered right and reasonable vis-à-vis both local war victims and the state. Nadiya attempted to create an image of its members being a part of the larger Czechoslovak family of war victims, with whom they shared issues and demands. Thus, for example, following a demonstration of Czech war victims in far-away Prague in 1920, Nadiya's newspaper *Nasha oborona* opined that

invalids, widows, and orphans of Carpathian Ruthenia join the demonstration of their Czech brothers and sisters in Prague with their full heart. Their demands are our demands.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid; *Statistická příručka II.*, p. 472.

¹¹¹ 'Khmary', *Nasha oborona*, 25 Oct. 1921, p. 1.

¹¹² 'Velika demonstratsiya (tüntetés) ches'kikh" invalidov", vdov" i sirot" v" Prazi', *Nasha oborona*, 25 Dec. 1920, p. 2.

Furthermore, from its inception, the society repeatedly emphasised its inclusivity towards all the different groups inhabiting Ruthenia, whilst retaining its ‘Russian [i.e. Ruthene] [‘*ruskii*’] character’.¹¹³ The openness to all war victims ‘regardless of [their] nationality, religious and political allegiances’, was repeatedly expressed both in its newspaper *Nasha oborona*,¹¹⁴ sections of which were even written in Hungarian, as well as in its communication with the Ministry of Social Care.¹¹⁵ This inclusive attitude, which, however, did not prevent *Nasha oborona* from occasional anti-Semitic remarks,¹¹⁶ was also elucidated in the rhetoric of one of the leaders of Nadiya, Stepan Klochurak, who maintained at a local rally held in Užhorod in 1925 that

not only Ruthene invalids, but also Jews, Hungarians, and Czechs ... [who attended the rally could see] that there are no ethnic disagreements between war victims, but that they are all the same victims of the world war ... [and] that they all need to fight together for their existence because otherwise they will lose that fight.¹¹⁷

Družina československých válečných poškozců expanded into Ruthenia in 1920 when it established its first group in the town of Užhorod.¹¹⁸ Indeed, no direct evidence exists that the branch was founded by some of the ‘thousands [of Czech] officials, soldiers, teachers, doctors’¹¹⁹ who were sent to the region after the war by the central government. However, the swiftness with which the group was established in the administrative capital of the province, where many of the Czech emigrants would have been likely to work, suggests that the organisation was disseminated by representatives from the newly dominant nation. Nevertheless, in stark contrast to its fortunes in Slovakia, the Ruthene

¹¹³ M. Tvoridlo, ‘Istoriya tovaristva „Nadiya“ v Uzhgorodi za chas od dnya 30 maya 1920. r. do dnya 21 yanuara 1923 r.’, *Zvit z diyal'nosti tovaristva voennykh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpat. Rusi „Nadiya“ za chas od dnya 30. maja 1920 r. do dnya 21. yanuarya 1923 roku* (Uzhhorod, 1923), p. 11.

¹¹⁴ ‘Shho to e tovaristvo „Nadiya“ i yaka ego tsil’?', *Nasha oborona*, 25 Nov. 1920, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ ‘Memorandum’ panovy ministrovi sotsiyal'noi opiki Dr. Gruberovi’, Ministerstvo sociál'ni péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 513, Sign. B, Folder 1921 7a-2 Užhorod, NA.

¹¹⁶ See ‘Narady v Prazi’, *Nasha oborona*, 25 March 1922, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Stefan Klochurak, ‘Do pratsi za sebe i svoiu rodinu!’, *Nasha oborona*, 1 Nov. 1925, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ ‘Protokol o sjezdu Družiny’, *Nový život*, 10 Oct. 1920, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Ivan Pop, *Podkarpatská Rus* 2nd edn. (Prague, 2014), p. 130.

section of Družina failed to prosper and disappeared entirely soon after its inception.¹²⁰

This failure may encourage us to suppose that this branch of Družina might have been Czech-only; that is, the organisation may have been run with the secondary intention of uniting Czech emigrants who found themselves far from their homeland in a little-known, foreign territory.

Indeed, Družina only returned to the ‘the land of eternal hunger and poverty’, as Ruthenia was once described by Jozef Kopasz,¹²¹ in 1933¹²² after a power struggle had broken out in Nadiya.¹²³ Although Družina never explained its policies towards the war victims of the province in detail, it seems that their 1930s inclusive stance towards minorities elsewhere in Czechoslovakia was obtained in multi-ethnic Ruthenia as well, as all local inhabitants were considered to be potential members of the organisation, regardless of their individual national allegiances. Thus, the same article in *Nový život* that had reported the failure of the local organisation Nadiya enthusiastically forecast that ‘shortly, all war victims from Ruthenia will be in Družina’.¹²⁴ Družina’s first Ruthene rally held two years later further confirmed the openness of the organisation to ethnic minorities, with representatives of war victims from both the local Slavic-speaking population as well as the Magyars, who formed the second-largest ethnic group in the province, in attendance.¹²⁵ Although *Nový život*’s interest in the region began to wane in later years, the province once again came to feature in the wider consciousness of Družina when rising international tensions and fears over the future of the Czechoslovak state

¹²⁰ See Fr. Neumeister, ‘800.000!’, *Nový život*, 10 Nov. 1923, pp. 1-2; ‘Preliminar vydaje’, Ministerstvo sociální péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 513, Sign. B, Folder 1922-23 7a-2 Užhorod, NA.

¹²¹ See the speech of Kopasz, at the time a member of the Czechoslovak Communist party, in the parliament in October 1928. Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu České republiky, ‘Středa 24. října 1928’, accessed 19 May 2015 at <https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1925ns/ps/stenprot/169schuz/s169017.htm>.

¹²² ‘Podkarpatská Rus’, *Nový život*, 4 March 1933, p. 5.

¹²³ ‘Zmatky ve Spolku podkarpatských vál. invalidů’, *Nový život*, 21 Jan. 1933, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ ‘Podkarpatská Rus’, *Nový život*, 20 Apr. 1935, p. 5; *Statistická ročenka republiky Československé* (Prague, 1935), p. 7.

emerged. In a display of Czechoslovak unity and resoluteness, Družina even made reference to Ruthenia in its literary propaganda, such as in the poem ‘Přátelská láska’, which proclaimed the following in 1937:

We are all brothers of the same fate,
Should be bound together by love tightly
From the Bohemian Forest to Jasiňa [Yasinia] through the beautiful Tatras,¹²⁶
To follow our aim manfully and faithfully.¹²⁷

Indeed, as this chapter has shown, in the immediate postwar period, many disabled veterans expressed a large degree of hostility towards their counterparts from other ethnic groups. However, cooperation gradually developed between these ex-servicemen as they were brought together by shared social demands. After the mid-1920s, the largest Czech and German associations worked together with no suggestions of animosity between their members. In the 1930s, Družina even refashioned itself into an organisation open to all Czechoslovak war victims regardless of their nationality. In the tense political atmosphere, the main criterion for membership in this staunchly pro-Czechoslovak association came to be loyalty to the republic. As *Nový život* declared in 1937,

in our organisation, we do not encourage or tolerate any ethnic hatred; complete ethnic freedom and tolerance reign in our [association]. But we want every member of our organisation to be fully aware [of the fact] that we are members of one [only] state – the Czechoslovak republic – and therefore it would be unwise to squint elsewhere.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ The Bohemian Forest and the Tatras are mountain ranges located in south-western Bohemia and central Slovakia, respectively, whilst the town of Jasiňa (Yasinia) was the easternmost major settlement in the Czechoslovak province of Ruthenia.

¹²⁷ Rudolf Kreisl, ‘Přátelská láska’, *Nový život*, 9 Jan. 1937, p. 3.

¹²⁸ ‘B. d. K. se aktivisuje’, *Nový život*, 19 June 1937, p. 4.

Chapter VI: Politics and Disabled Veterans

‘That is today’s system, to save money on the poor, to give more to the rich’.¹

František Neumeister, secretary general of Družina in 1928.

As previous chapters have shown, disabled veterans did not constitute a homogenous group within Czechoslovak society. This was not any different in regard to politics; veterans supported and were members of various political parties through which they participated in interwar public life. However, none of the disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen ever became prominent political figures in Czechoslovakia. Devoid of any heroic aura, the past military service of these men appears to have elicited little to no additional support from fellow citizens in electoral competitions. Instead, several of the few disabled Czech and Slovak ex-servicemen who became MPs in the interwar period did so on the back of their work in Družina československých válečných poškozců.

For example, Ondřej Kypr, the founder and wartime leader of Družina, who had worked as a journalist and publisher before the conflict, benefitted from his newly acquired expertise in the spring of 1919 when he became the head of Zemský úřad pro péči o válečné poškozcence (Provincial Office for Care for War Victims) in Prague; only a few months later, he was nominated to the revolutionary parliament by the Czechoslovak Agrarians. Jozef Kopasz became the head of the Slovak branch of Družina in 1924; he was elected to the parliament for the Communist Party in 1925 and for the Social Democrats in 1935. Similarly, František Neumeister became the Bohemian secretary of Družina in the early 1920s; he then also served in the Czechoslovak parliament as a Social Democratic representative from 1929 onwards.

¹ F. Neumeister, ‘Tuze rád by přidal těžkým invalidům . . .’, *Nový život*, 22 Sep. 1928, p. 1.

This chapter examines the political behaviour of disabled veterans' organisations, such as Družina československých válečných poškozenců and Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen. Through doing so, it explores to what extent disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen and their associations became politicised and what role these ex-servicemen played in Czechoslovak politics. Firstly, the chapter discusses the close ties of Družina československých válečných poškozenců and Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů with Czechoslovak socialist parties and the concomitant hostility of Družina towards the political right. The chapter then examines the considerably different political identity of Svaz československých válečných poškozenců křesťansko-sociálních, which was closely linked to Moravian Catholic politicians. The chapter also mentions the disillusionment of many of the Czech and Slovak war victims, which, however, did not prevent them from admiring President Masaryk.

Afterwards, it investigates political attitudes and behaviour within the German organisation Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen. Although the historians Natali Stegmann and Václav Šmidrkal have previously linked Bund to German-Czechoslovak Social Democrats,² this thesis posits that such ties were at best very subtle and the organisation largely steered clear of politics until 1938, when it became visibly radicalised. The chapter then explores the role of Nadiya - Tovaristvo voennykh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpatskoi Rusi within Ruthenia, where it served as a tool for both local politicians and Prague administrators. Finally, it discusses the position of the Communist Party amongst war victims. As this chapter will manifest, political identities of individual veterans' organisations varied considerably. Whilst most associations of war victims developed close ties with individual political parties, be they the Social Democrats or

² Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, p. 170; Šmidrkal, p. 95.

Christian Socialists, the German Bund remained politically neutral for most of the interbellum.

This chapter avoids examining political affiliations of organisations of able-bodied veterans. To some degree, these were analysed in Václav Šmidrkal's recent article, which primarily explores the question of veterans' (re-)mobilisation in the 1930s. Nevertheless, Šmidrkal identified several largely unsuccessful attempts of Czech Fascists and Communists to attract ex-servicemen into their respective organisations.³ Furthermore, he observed the Sudetendeutsche Partei's courting of German veterans following its 1935 electoral success and the cooperation between various associations tied to the journal *Kamarádství* and the right-wing *Nezávislá jednota československých legionářů* (Independent Union of Czechoslovak Legionaries).⁴

Družina československých válečných poškozců and Other Czech Organisations of War Victims

Throughout the interwar period, Družina československých válečných poškozců portrayed itself as a strictly politically neutral organisation that united war victims regardless of their political beliefs.⁵ Indeed, in the 1920s, the largest Czechoslovak organisation of war victims was at least nominally open to cooperation with all mainstream Czech political parties. Not surprisingly, every one of them expressed interest in Družina and its large membership, which reached tens of thousands of war victims.⁶ Events of Družina thus regularly attracted representatives of various political parties. For example, the 1923 pan-Czechoslovak rally of the organisation in Prague was attended by the

³ Šmidrkal, pp. 91-92.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 94, 96-97.

⁵ 'Organisace', *Nová republika*, 22 May 1920, p. 1; jdr, 'Základy Družiny čsl. válečných poškozců', *Nový život*, 12 Oct. 1935, p. 1.

⁶ 'Rok práce „Družiny čs. válečných poškozců"', p. 2; František Neumeister, 'V novém roce do nové práce', *Nový život*, 3 Jan. 1931, p. 1; 'Nebojíte se božího trestu?', *Nový život*, 1 Aug. 1936, p. 3.

Communist MPs Blažek and Kučera, the Agrarian member of parliament Molík, the National Socialist member of parliament Podzimková and senator David, the National Democratic member of parliament Navrátil, the Christian-Socialist senator Karas, the Social Democratic member of parliament Novák and senator Ackerman, as well as the left-wing senator Charvát who had previously resigned from the Social Democratic party.⁷

Despite this interest of political parties, Družina toyed with the idea of running independently in the 1920 and 1925 parliamentary elections.⁸ In 1925, this proposal was even discussed at its pan-Czechoslovak rally, where, however, it was eventually rejected by the vast majority of representatives.⁹ Indeed, it appears that most members of Družina had realised already by 1920 that it would struggle to amass sufficient support with its limited range of potential voters.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the Greater Brno branch of Družina ventured independently into the 1920 municipal elections, apparently against the will of the rest of the organisation.¹¹ In the run-up to the elections, war victims from Brno argued that only they could help themselves by re-attracting the attention of the general public, which had forgotten them only too quickly.¹² The war victims vigorously avoided any political labels; in *Nová republika*, they explicitly proclaimed that their goals were limited solely to the ‘representation of interests of [their] estate’.¹³ It appears such proclamations appealed little to the electorate. The party list of war victims, which included 19 disabled veterans and six

⁷ František Neumeister, ‘Naše tři dny!’, *Nový život*, 17 Nov. 1923, p. 1.

⁸ Josef Šíma, ‘My a volby’, *Nový život*, 20 March 1920, p. 1; ‘Otázka dosiaľ nezodpovedaná’, *Naša obrana*, 1 May 1925, pp. 2-3.

⁹ ‘Po sjezdu’, *Nový život*, 17 Oct. 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰ Šíma, ‘My a volby’.

¹¹ ‘Volby v Brně’, *Nový život*, 13 March 1920, p. 3.

¹² ‘Váleční poškození a volby do Velkého Brna’, *Nová republika*, 17 Jan. 1920, pp. 1-2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

widows, received only 2,406 out of 115,889 votes.¹⁴ This granted Družina two councillors in the municipal body, which consisted of 90 representatives.

Despite its claims about political neutrality, closer examination of the rhetoric of Družina, saturated in demands for social justice and criticism of the rich and right-wing parties, reveals the pervasive ideological influence of the Czech left, which only grew with the passing years. It was an open secret that Družina developed close ties with the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party; by the beginning of the 1930s, few observers could have doubts about the political leanings of this organisation. As *Der Kriegsverletzte* noted in 1930, 'Družina has already for a long time unofficially abandoned its neutral position and has turned itself more and more towards the Social Democratic Party'.¹⁵ As a result of this openly pro-Social Democratic behaviour of Družina, most of the other political parties gradually reduced their contact with the organisation.

Indeed, Družina as well as the closely related Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů adopted a highly positive and supportive approach when it came to dealing with the actions of socialist politicians. In contrast to its open attacks on the right-wing political parties and criticism of the social situation in Czechoslovakia during their rule, which even resulted in *Nový život* being censored on several occasions during 1926–1929,¹⁶ Družina often endorsed the work of both Czechoslovak Czech and also German socialist politicians in the post-1929 governments.¹⁷ The organisation repeatedly praised the work of left-wing politicians who led the Ministry of Social Care, be it the Czech politicians Winter, Habrman, Meissner, and Nečas, or the German socialist Ludwig Czech. Indeed, Ludwig

¹⁴ 'Volte ...', *Nová republika*, 28 Feb. 1920, p. 2; 'Brněnské volby', *Nová republika*, 6 March 1920, p. 2.

¹⁵ 'Die zweite Novelle. Zur Lage der tschechoslowakischen Kriegsopfer!', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1930, p. 2.

¹⁶ Boh. Cetkovský, 'Týrání válečných invalidů', *Nový život*, 14 July 1928, p. 1; Fr. Neumeister, 'Blahobyť', *Nový život*, 13 Oct. 1928, p. 1.

¹⁷ See, for example, the praise lavished upon the Czech Social Democrat Jaromír Nečas. 'Byly to slavné chvíle ...', *Nový život*, 10 July 1937, p. 4.

Czech, the longest serving interwar Minister of Social Care, came to be celebrated in particular, in part due to his support for German political activism, which espoused the positive participation of this ethnic minority in the republic.¹⁸ For example, when the German-Jewish politician attended one of Družina's rallies in 1931, *Nový život* enthusiastically wrote the following:

The citizens of the state are not to be divided between the Germans and the Czechs, but between citizens good and bad ... We need Germans in the parliament and in the government not only so that it will be quiet at home and [we will leave] a good impression abroad. Germans have thousands of industrious hands and good heads and we need those to help look after the state and the well-being of [its] citizens... Better a good, skilful, and energetic minister – German, than 10 Czech profiteers, weaklings, or idle chatterers.¹⁹

The gradual shift of Družina towards the Social Democrats was also reflected in the organisation's rhetoric before parliamentary elections. Unlike the rebellious *Nová republika*, which openly promoted its leaders,²⁰ albeit without explicitly mentioning their respective political parties, *Nový život* made no attempt to directly influence members of Družina before the 1920 elections.²¹ By contrast, five years later, *Nový život* and *Nová republika* both called on war victims to vote 'in a Czechoslovak manner' and steer clear of reactionary parties;²² the Slovak *Naša obrana* issued an almost identical statement with the notable omission of the expression 'in a Czechoslovak manner', presumably in a bid to avoid alienating Slovak nationalists.²³ However, in 1929, *Nový život*, with which the other two newspapers had merged by then, was even more specific. On its front page, one of the

¹⁸ See Eva Broklová, *Politická kultura německých aktivistických stran v Československu, 1918-1938* (Prague, 1999).

¹⁹ 'Dojmy z našeho sjezdu', *Nový život*, 11 Apr. 1931, p. 6.

²⁰ 'Volby do nár. shromáždění', *Nová republika*, 17 Apr. 1920, p. 1.

²¹ Šíma, 'My a volby'.

²² Ústřední výkonný výbor Družiny čsl. válečných poškozených, 'Provolání k válečným poškozeným', *Nový život*, 14 Nov. 1925, p. 1; Ústřední výkonný výbor Družiny čsl. válečných poškozených, 'Volební provolání k válečným poškozeným ústředního výkonného výboru Družiny vál. poškozených!', *Nová republika*, 14 Nov. 1925, p. 1.

²³ Ústřední výkonný výbor Družiny čsl. vál. poškod., 'Prevolanie k vál. poškodencom', *Naša obrana*, 15 Nov. 1925, p. 1.

leaders of Družina asserted that ‘war victims in the entire republic [will] vote for party no. 10’ (i.e., the Social Democrats) and their secretary general František Neumeister, who was on the party list.²⁴ Furthermore, the Social Democrats were promoted by the journal *Naše obrana*, which was published by Družina in Plzeň/Pilsen.²⁵



Fig. 6. The front page of the journal *Nový život* before the 1935 elections.²⁶

on the members to ‘vote for number 2’ (i.e., the Social Democrats) and explained to them the importance of Družina’s cooperation with this party, which granted war victims

Nevertheless, the starkest evidence of Družina’s ties with the Czechoslovak Social Democrats was provided by the parliamentary elections of 1935. Already in March 1935, delegates of Družina agreed that the organisation would cooperate with this party in the upcoming elections.²⁷ As a result, in the run-up to the event, the journal of the purportedly apolitical organisation told its readers in no uncertain terms who to support. The front page of the last issue published before the elections explicitly called

²⁴ Boh. Cetkovský, ‘Jdeme do voleb - zvítězit’, *Nový život*, 19 Oct. 1929, p. 1.

²⁵ Představenstvo III. kraje Družiny československých válečných poškozených v Plzni, ‘Válečným poškozeným’, *Naše obrana*, 24 Oct. 1929, p. 1.

²⁶ *Nový život*, 17 May 1935, p. 1.

²⁷ ‘Za demokraciu a sociálnu spravodlnosť’, *Nový život*, 9 March 1935, p. 2.

favourable positions on its party list.²⁸ The front page of *Nový život* also included a photograph of the secretary general of Družina and Social Democratic member of parliament František Neumeister, who was hoping to be re-elected. Similarly, *Naše obrana* from Plzeň encouraged war victims to vote Social Democrats in several articles,²⁹ listing on its front page 13 leading members of Družina who were running in the elections for this party.³⁰

The favourable treatment of Social Democratic politicians by *Nový život* continued after the elections, which resulted in three members of Družina coming to serve in the parliament for Czech Social Democrats, whilst another became a member of parliament for the nationalistic, right-wing National Unification.³¹ Tellingly, the success of the former three, František Neumeister, Jakub Polach, and Jozef Kopasz, was celebrated on the front page of the newspaper *Nový život*. By contrast, the article about the new member of parliament Vilém Knebort was relegated to the penultimate page.³²

Nevertheless, in accordance with Družina's avowed political neutrality, the rank-and-file membership of the organisation did include adherents to all the various political parties, albeit with a highly disproportionate involvement and amount of power held in socialist hands. To see the numerical dominance of Czechoslovak socialists in the lower strata of the organisation, we can examine statistics of Družina from 1936. According to these, 368 out of 627 members who were on village councils in the Bohemian lands represented the Czechoslovak Social Democrats and 91 belonged to the ideologically

²⁸ 'Váleční poškození k volbám', *Nový život*, 17 May 1935, p. 1; '19. květen 1935', *Nový život*, 17 May 1935, p. 1.

²⁹ Václav Koleč, 'Zastupitelstvo Družiny rozhodlo!', *Naše obrana*, 14 May 1935, p. 1.

³⁰ 'Naši členové na kandidátkách', *Naše obrana*, 14 May 1935, p. 1.

³¹ See Jan Mařica, *Od Československé národní demokracie k Národnímu sjednocení* (Brno, 2018), pp. 177-181.

³² 'Také přítel Josef Kopasz poslancem', *Nový život*, 1 June 1935, p. 1; 'Oznamujeme, že př. Vilém Knebort' ..., *Nový život*, 1 June 1935, p. 5. See P. T., 'Redakcia „Slovenský Východ“', *Naša obrana*, 15 Apr. 1927, p. 2.

related National Socialists.³³ By contrast, only 42 members stood for the prominent right-wing Agrarian party, which had achieved roughly similar electoral results to those of the Social Democrats. Similarly, at county level, 14 out of 21 council members who belonged to Družina were Social Democrats, and five represented the National Socialists.³⁴



Fig. 7. A photograph from *Nový život* showing disabled Czechoslovaks celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in 1938.³⁵

Indeed, the rich were an object of constant attacks from Družina československých válečných poškozců throughout the entire interwar period. The socialist-influenced Družina continually targeted the affluent in the context of different types of demands and grievances. Not only were their profligate lives juxtaposed against the widespread penury of the war victims, especially at Christmas time,³⁶ but the rich were also depicted as misusing their power and influence to protect their interests at the expense of the oppressed working class. This was particularly the case in relation to the land reform, jobs,

³³ *Zpráva k XIII. sjezdu Družiny českoslov. válečných poškozců ve dnech 5. a 6. prosince 1936 v Obecním domě v Praze*, (Prague, 1936), p. 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ 'Úsek z průvodu z neděle 5. června 1938', *Nový život*, 11 June 1938, p. 5

³⁶ Jan Kolář, 'Vánoční úvahy', *Nová republika*, 25 Dec. 1926, p. 1.

and various commercial enterprises, previously mentioned in Chapter IV, be it the state regulated newsagent's shops with tobacco products ('*trafiky*'), cinemas ('*biografy*'), or train station restaurants ('*nádražní restaurace*').³⁷ It appears that particularly in the 1930s, the period when ethnic inclusivity was espoused by the organisation, this severe hostility towards the wealthiest echelons of society took precedence over any other potential existing divides in Družina's rhetoric. This was made abundantly clear in an article from 1937, which argued the following:

The powerful, rich, and their henchmen will be telling you with pleasure about national, religious and racial differences, in order to avert your attention from their troughs ['*od jejich koryt*']. There are no such differences, or if there are, they are only petty, [and] should not be taken into account. If there is a difference, then [it is] between the oppressors and the oppressed, between people with good and bad tendencies. Terrible is the abyss between these two camps.³⁸



Fig. 8. A caricature from the German illustrator Thomas Theodor Heine, which was published by *Nová republika* and given the title 'Us and Them, or the Eternal Wisdom of Heine'.³⁹

³⁷ 'Chudáci – potřební trafik', *Nová republika*, 15 May 1920, p. 3; Jozef Švehlík, 'Výkrik biedy váleč. poškodencov!', *Naša obrana*, Apr. 1921, p. 1. See Chapter IV.

³⁸ Němeček, 'Konejte svoje povinnosti!', *Nový život*, 15 May 1937, p. 4

³⁹ 'My a oni, aneb věčně časový Heine', *Nová republika*, 30 Oct. 1926, p. 3.

Furthermore, the disabled Czech and Slovak ex-servicemen contended that many of the rich were war profiteers and presented them as their most bitter enemies. The veterans alleged that the rich had denigrated them as ‘devourers of the republic’ (*‘vyžírači republiky’*) in an attempt to deprive them of their pensions and other benefits.⁴⁰ Ironically, despite the veterans’ widespread avowal that their own wartime service had been forced and involuntary, this did not stop them from attacking the rich for being able to avoid conscription to the Austro-Hungarian forces through the purchase of war bonds and bribery.⁴¹ In turn, this suggests that the service itself was perceived by the veterans as being a rite of passage, albeit an unwanted one, which apparently accorded them the moral high ground over those who had avoided involvement in the conflict.

What is more, the wealthy were also often associated in the collective imagination of Družina members with other groups who were typically considered to exploit the state apparatus for their own benefit. Such groups included the omnipresent horde of bureaucrats and other ideological opponents of the Czech socialists, such as the Catholic Church and the right-wing parties. These were amalgamated in the rhetoric of Družina into an axis of abusers who diminished the resources available to war victims, in part through the Ministry of Finance and the local administration. Among others, the organisation commonly criticised the Agrarians,⁴² Karel Kramář’s National Democrats,⁴³ Jan Šrámek’s Moravian Christian Socialists,⁴⁴ as well as the strongly nationalistic, anti-Czech Slovak People’s Party led by the priest Andrej Hlinka.⁴⁵ All the above were considered to abuse –

⁴⁰ ‘Váleční poškozenci – váleční zbohatlíci. Váleční poškozenci na obtíž státu, kdežto váleční zbohatlíci státu pomáhají’, *Nový život*, 16 July 1932, p. 3.

⁴¹ See the article in which one of the leaders of Družina, František Neumeister, goes as far as calling these men ‘shirkers’ (*‘ulejváci’*). Fr. Neumeister, ‘Nejsnadnější opatření’, *Nový život*, 18 July 1925, p. 1.

⁴² ‘Ako je to s tými subvenciami roľníckymi a neroľníckymi’, *Nový život*, 14 March 1936, p. 2.

⁴³ František Neumeister, ‘Zvýšení a odbourávání’, *Nový život*, 12 Apr. 1930, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Kubáček, ‘Memento mori, a Monsignore!’, *Nový život*, 30 Aug. 1930, p. 3.

⁴⁵ ‘Hlinkova nenávisť’, *Nový život*, 13 June 1925, p. 2.

and were subsequently represented as abusing – their power by allocating unfair advantages and affording preferential treatment to their supporters.⁴⁶

From the beginning of the process of land re-allocation, which was supposed to prioritise low-income groups of legionaries and war victims in accordance with the Czechoslovak law 81/1920,⁴⁷ Družina expressed disagreement with the way in which the land was being redistributed both in political and social terms.⁴⁸ In the years that followed the passing of the law, disappointment with the reform, often considered to favour the rich and well-connected, in particular those with ties to the local administrators and the Agrarian party,⁴⁹ became a common grievance expressed in *Nový život*. Numerous reports about land allocation in villages in the 1920s found on the pages of war victims' newspapers provide us with examples of corruption and nepotism inherent within the process of the land reform, which caused considerable frustration amongst war victims.⁵⁰ Furthermore, they illustrate the significant animosity and suspicion of Družina towards the wealthy and the political right. For example, in 1923, one of the war victims even drew parallels between the ancien régime and Czechoslovakia when he asked in anger, 'To pay, to serve and to be quiet, was the fate of the Czech in Austria; has anything changed for the poor Czech man?'⁵¹

Numerous scholarly works have already extensively investigated the precise nature of the Czechoslovak land reform, which affected more than one-quarter of all the land in

⁴⁶ Kubáček, 'Ben-Akibo-farár chce mať trafiku?', *Nový život*, 21 Feb. 1931, p. 3.

⁴⁷ The law 81/1920 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

⁴⁸ 'Chcete půdu?', *Nový život*, 16 June 1923, p. 2.

⁴⁹ This perception of the reform as being exploited by the Agrarian party is also shared by some Czech historians. See, for example, Lubomír Slezák, 'Pozemková reforma v Československu 1919-1935', *Československá pozemková reforma 1919-1935 a její mezinárodní souvislosti: Sborník z příspěvků z mezinárodní vědecké konference konané ve dnech 21. a 22. dubna 1994*, ed. Ivo Frolec (Uherské Hradiště, 1994), p. 7.

⁵⁰ 'Chcete půdu?', *Naša obrana*, 1 July 1923, pp. 3-4; P. J., 'Čoho sa ešte nedočkáme!', *Nový život*, 29 June 1929, p. 3; 'Pôda patrí ľudu!', *Nový život*, 4 Sep. 1937, pp. 2-3.

⁵¹ 'Jak zdražuje půdu S. P. Ú.' *Nový život*, 16 June 1923, p. 3.

the state.⁵² In his study of this topic, the British historian Mark Cornwall emphasised that the reform worked as a vehicle ushering in both social and national change. According to Cornwall, ‘most Czechs viewed land reform as one method of consolidating a democratic, but also a Czechoslovak national, state’.⁵³ Indeed, both of these at times overlapping visions of the reform were frequently articulated by the war veterans themselves in their various newspapers, which repeatedly discussed the land reform and its perceived injustice, particularly in the 1920s and early 1930s. An article in *Nový život* from the very beginning of the redistribution process suggests that at least some of the war victims perceived the reform solely in nationalistic terms. Thus, in 1921, an unknown author vociferously argued the following:

It would not be possible to deem our revolution finished ... we are calling on villages in which the owners of large estates operate in German, be it as farmers or industrialists, to protest against this firmly and cut from its centre centuries-old ulcers reminding us to this day of the serfdom of the Czech nation and of the Czech language.⁵⁴

However, it appears from later articles that *Družina* gradually subsumed the national understanding of the land problem into its class-based vision of the world. Thus, when *Nový život* discussed the land reform some four years later, there was a conspicuous lack of reference to the ethnicity of the upper-classes involved. Instead, the journal brought a new, pointed focus on class, arguing that the Czech nation had been deprived of its land by the Habsburgs and their aristocratic henchmen.⁵⁵ As we can see, this subtly and suggestively obfuscated the divide between the ‘aristocracy’ and ‘non-Czech others’, conflating the two into a single amorphous, vaguely delineated ‘enemy’. In the process, the

⁵² Slezák, p. 3.

⁵³ Cornwall, “National Reparation?”, p. 280; Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars, 1918-1941* (Hamden, 1962), pp. 79-80.

⁵⁴ ský, ‘Velkostatky a jazyková otázka’, *Nový život*, 19 March 1921, p. 4.

⁵⁵ ‘Pozemková reforma – Dokončete dílo naší revoluce’, *Nový život*, 8 Nov. 1924, p. 2; František Roda, ‘Parcelace’, *Nový život*, 16 May 1925, pp. 1-2; Kachel, ‘Slezané a náš stát’, *Nový život*, 11 Oct. 1924, p. 4.

article puts forth its own vision of the Czech nation, one which consisted of working-class people and excluded their social superiors.

Svaz státních zaměstnanců-invalidů, which was originally established as a section of Družina in the Bohemian lands,⁵⁶ occupied a similar political stance to that of Družina before it ultimately merged with other left-wing organisations of state employees.⁵⁷ Svaz, whose membership consisted primarily of petty state officials, repeatedly and explicitly expressed its adherence to socialist principles and its desire for a 'socially just' republic.⁵⁸ Thus, for example, on Labour Day of 1922, the front page of its newspaper, *Naše směry*, spoke, with impassioned zeal, of the need for a 'united, world front of brotherly adherents [‘vyznavači’] of work and socialism’, that would stand against the offensive of capitalists.⁵⁹ Similar to Družina, the independent Svaz closely cooperated with the Social Democratic member of parliament and later senator Antonín Novák.⁶⁰ After the 1929 elections, when the leader of Družina František Neumeister became a Social Democratic MP, Svaz also worked with him to further its political goals.

By contrast, some rival organisations of disabled veterans, such as Svaz československých válečných poškozců křesťansko-sociálních, professed considerably different political attitudes. Indeed, the very creation of Svaz is evidence itself that political divides had already initiated the fragmentation of the Czech movement of disabled ex-servicemen during the war. The first steps to launch Svaz were taken in the summer of 1918 at the initiative of the aforementioned Moravian Christian-Socialist

⁵⁶ ‘Slavnostní sjezd Svazu stát. zaměstnanců-invalidů’.

⁵⁷ ‘Jubilejní sjezd Svazu státních zaměstnanců-invalidů v Praze konaný ve dnech 30. listopadu, 1. a 2. prosince 1929’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, 20 Dec. 1929, pp. 3, 9; ‘VII. řádný sjezd Svazu veřejných zaměstnanců v Praze’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, June 1933, p. 12.

⁵⁸ ‘Vzpomínáme ...’, *Naše směry*, 1 Nov. 1922, p. 1.

⁵⁹ -ář, ‘1. máj 1922’, *Naše směry*, 1 May 1922, p. 1.

⁶⁰ ‘Protokol ze VII. řádného sjezdu Svazu státních zaměstnanců invalidů, konaného dne 7. a 8. dubna 1928’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, 3 May 1928, pp. 5-8; ‘Jubilejní sjezd Svazu státních zaměstnanců-invalidů v Praze konaný ve dnech 30. listopadu, 1. a 2. prosince 1929’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, 20 Dec. 1929, p. 9; ‘Vlastní sjezdové jednání’, *Veřejný zaměstnanec*, June 1933, p. 12

politician Jan Šrámek, who soon after became the leader of the newly established Czechoslovak People's Party.⁶¹ Svaz portrayed itself as the Christian-Socialist alternative to other existing societies, in particular to Družina, which it frequently maligned for its leftist credentials and its perceived anti-Christian stance.⁶²

However, the relationship between Svaz and Šrámek turned sour in 1929. When the Czechoslovak People's Party splintered into two factions, Svaz abandoned its cooperation with Šrámek and joined forces instead with the fellow Moravian politician Antonín Čuřík.⁶³ This decision resulted in the emergence of a rival Catholic organisation under the patronage of Šrámek, called Svaz lidových válečných poškozců. The few extant issues of the earlier association's newspaper *Lidumil* from this period reveal an organisation which retained its distinctly political and religious character even in the 1930s, sustaining its two-pronged focus, heavily saturated in Christian rhetoric, on the poverty of the war victims, and on the criticism of the socialist ideals of their rival, Družina.⁶⁴

Regardless of their political and organisational allegiances, there was a common strand amongst all the various opinions voiced by the different Czech and Slovak war victims in relation to their contemporary position in Czechoslovak society. Even in the first few postwar years, disabled ex-servicemen had already begun to express their disillusionment with their republic and fellow citizens, disappointed by what they felt was insufficient social care and a widespread lack of appreciation and recognition of their service.⁶⁵ This was an observation perennially reiterated by many of the various

⁶¹ *Pět let práce Svazu čsl. válečných poškozců křesťansko-sociálních* (Brno, n.d.), pp 11-12.

⁶² 'Snížení platů státních zaměstnanců a důchody válečných poškozců', *Lidumil*, Sep. 1932, p. 1.

⁶³ 'XII. valná hromada Svazu čsl. válečných poškozců křesťansko-sociálních v Brně', *Lidumil*, June-July 1932, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Jan Urbánek, 'Zůstaneme věrni', *Lidumil*, Jan. 1930, p. 1.

⁶⁵ 'Panu dr. Ed. Benešovi, ministerskému předsedovi', *Nový život*, 10 Dec. 1921, p. 1.

organisations throughout the remaining years of the interbellum,⁶⁶ as is exemplified by an article in *Nový život*, which went so far as to identify a vague feeling of resentment towards disabled servicemen on the part of the wider Czechoslovak population. It noted that

here [in Czechoslovakia] we are not people but something halfway between beggars and idlers [*'darmojedý'*] ... nothing is known about us, spoken [about us], written [about us], we are known neither to the government nor the general public... Yes, you have forgotten us for good.⁶⁷

Despite their acute disillusionment with social provisions, Czech and Slovak Austro-Hungarian war victims continually expressed admiration for the republic and its symbols.⁶⁸ In particular, Czech veterans adored the interwar presidents T. G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš,⁶⁹ who were also widely celebrated by other parts of Czech society.⁷⁰ Masaryk, who was also dubbed 'President Liberator' (*'President Osvoboditel'*) or 'Daddy Masaryk' (*'Tatíček Masaryk'*), was constantly mentioned by disabled veterans; his work and ideas were praised ad infinitum as veterans expressed their devotion and loyalty to him.⁷¹ Organisations of war victims remembered his birthdays, sent him greetings telegrams from their rallies, and ultimately deeply rued his death.⁷² The most extreme expression of this veneration came in 1924, when a disabled ex-serviceman, who could not

⁶⁶ 'Komu verit?', *Naša obrana*, 15 July 1923, p. 1; 'Zapomíná se', *Naše směry*, 10 Sep. 1924, pp. 3-4; F. Chytil, 'Křížů bílé řady ...!', *Lidumil*, Dec. 1932, p. 2.

⁶⁷ J. R., 'Smysl pro zodpovědnost', *Nový život* 15 Dec. 1928, p. 2.

⁶⁸ 'Pro republiku, presidenta, mír a demokracii!', *Nový život*, 23 Dec. 1933, p. 1.

⁶⁹ 'Eduard Beneš 53 roků', *Nový život*, 29 May 1937, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Dagmar Hájková and Pavel Hořák, 'Narozeniny prezidenta republiky', *Sláva republice! Oficiální svátky a oslavy v meziválečném Československu*, ed. Dagmar Hájková, Pavel Hořák, Vojtěch Kessler, and Miroslav Michela (Prague, 2018), pp. 137-176.

⁷¹ Boh. Cetkovský, 'Prezident Masaryk', *Nový život*, 5 March 1927, pp. 2-3.

⁷² Ant. Mnoh. Daněk, 'První prezident čs. republiky dr. T. G. Masaryk sedmdesátníkem', *Nová republika*, 6 March 1920, p. 1; 'K 80. narozeninám pana presidenta republiky T. G. Masaryka', *Lidumil*, Feb. 1930, p. 1; 'XII. valná hromada Svazu čsl. válečných poškozenců křesťansko-sociálních v Brně', *Lidumil*, June-July 1932, p. 4; 'Prezident Osvoboditel T. G. Masaryk zemřel', *Lidumil*, Oct. 1937, p. 1.

walk, apparently shot himself because he was unable to see the president during Masaryk's visit to Ostrava.⁷³

By contrast, Masaryk paid very little attention to Austro-Hungarian war victims in his official function, particularly when compared with his treatment of the legionaries.⁷⁴ It appears that Masaryk spoke little about war victims, did not attend any of their events and only ever officially met with their representatives once apart from his visit to a disabled veterans' cooperative mentioned in Chapter II.⁷⁵ Even the attempts of Czechoslovak war victims to arrange an audience for the representatives of CIAMAC in 1931, when the organisation held its international rally in Prague, were futile.⁷⁶ Only in March 1934 would Masaryk receive a disabled veteran again. On his 84th birthday, Masaryk met with a double leg amputee, who had spent previous seven weeks walking in cold weather a distance of more than 200 kilometres from Brno to Prague on his prosthetic legs and collecting birthday wishes for the beloved president.⁷⁷

Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen

Meanwhile, attitudes of disabled German veterans towards the republic appear to have been much more ambiguous. In the immediate postwar period, their journal *Der Kriegsverletzte* expressed veterans' considerable frustration with the incorporation of predominantly German-speaking areas into Czechoslovakia and with the republic and its leaders. For example, at a meeting of Bund der Kriegsverletzten in November 1919, the

⁷³ X. Rebliš, 'Včera a dnes', *Nový život*, 5 July 1924, p. 2; 'Tragický los válečných invalidů', *Nový život*, 19 July 1924, p. 4.

⁷⁴ See, for example, the following brochure: Josef Kudela, *U našeho vůdce: Návštěva legionářských rodin u presidenta T. G. Masaryka v Židlochovicích dne 29. června 1930* (Brno, 1930).

⁷⁵ 'Warum wir eine Beteiligung an der Vorsprache beim Präsidenten der Republik ablehnen mußten', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Jan. 1923, p. 8.

⁷⁶ 'Říšský svaz organizací válečných poškozenců v Č.S.R. v Praze', protokol A (audience), (1918) 1919-1938 (1950), Inv. no. 512, Sign. A 726/31, Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky (AKPR), Prague, Czech Republic.

⁷⁷ 'Brněnský invalida presidentu republiky', *Nový život*, 24 March 1934, p. 5.

chairman of the organisation Bernhard Leppin first rebuked the Allies for fraudulently claiming to be guided by the nations' right to self-determination and then described Czechoslovakia with displeasure as 'this state, in which we have to live'.⁷⁸ Similarly, the revolutionary Czechoslovak parliament, which ruled until 1920 and consisted only of Czech, and to a much lesser extent Slovak MPs, was an object of fierce criticism due to its undemocratic nature.⁷⁹

After the early months of the republic, such attacks gradually ceased. However, even in the remaining part of the interwar period, German war victims would still occasionally bemoan the postwar peace agreements. For example, in 1925, the regional secretary of Bund der Kriegsverletzten described the treaties of St. Germain and Versailles as 'dictated peace' ('*Gewaltfrieden*').⁸⁰ Similarly, the speaker at a 1930 meeting of war victims in the town of Aš/Asch boldly proclaimed that 'millions of whites were made slaves at Versailles against any [notions of] humanity and reason'.⁸¹

Throughout the interbellum, Bund der Kriegsverletzten largely treated Czechoslovak public holidays, leading political figures, and state events with indifference. The 10th anniversary of the republic was mentioned in their journal *Der Kriegsverletzte* only in connection with the state's jubilar expenditures and veterans' hopes and demands that the republic would improve its social provisions on this occasion.⁸² Similarly, for most of his rule, T. G. Masaryk received little attention from disabled German veterans. However, this situation began to change in the mid-1930s. Whereas previously Bund had treated Masaryk at best as a recipient of their various pleas, who could potentially help war

⁷⁸ 'Die Versorgung der Kriegsoffer in der tschechoslow. Republik', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 5 Nov. 1919, p. 1.

⁷⁹ 'Leitmeritz', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 20 Apr. 1920, p. 7.

⁸⁰ 'Jägerndorf', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Jan. 1925, p. 11.

⁸¹ 'Asch (Zur Abrüstungsfrage)', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 July 1932, p. 9.

⁸² 'Das Jubiläumsjahr und die Kriegsoffer', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1928, p. 2; 'Zlabings', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1928, p. 12.

victims,⁸³ the organisation changed its rhetoric in 1935 when Masaryk was celebrating his 85th birthday. At the rally of Bund held in Opava/Troppau, its chairman Ferdinand Pfeifer described Masaryk as an ‘outstanding representative [‘*Repräsentant*’] whose efforts are led by the principle of humanity’.⁸⁴ According to Natali Stegmann, this sudden transformation in the perception of Masaryk in this period was brought about by the efforts of German activist parties and the Czechs for closer cooperation as a result of the electoral victory of the Sudetendeutsche Partei in 1935.⁸⁵

Indeed, *Der Kriegsverletzte* continued to espouse this novel perception of Masaryk in subsequent years. In March 1937, Bund observed Masaryk’s birthday by publishing a short article, in which the newspaper called him ‘our former president’ (‘*unser Altpräsident*’), and sending him a congratulatory telegram.⁸⁶ When Masaryk passed away in September of the same year, *Der Kriegsverletzte* dedicated its front page to him, declaring that

Tireless work [‘*Arbeiten und Schaffen*’] was the life of this man, whom we should all always keep in mind as a shining example.⁸⁷

Furthermore, Masaryk was afterwards remembered at a number of local meetings of Bund despite the tense international situation and fraught relations between Germany and Czechoslovakia. His death continued to be brought up for months as groups belonging to the organisation convened in various parts of the Bohemian lands, such as Brno/Brünn

⁸³ ‘Wird er den Kriegsbeschädigten helfen?’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Nov. 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *Verhandlungsschrift über den am 8. und 9. Juni 1935 im „Drei-Hahnen-Saal“ in Troppau (Schlesien) stattgefundenen 8. ordentlichen Bundestag des Bundes der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen, Sitz Reichenberg* (n.p., n.d.), p. 9.

⁸⁵ Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, p. 172.

⁸⁶ ‘Zum 87. Geburtstag unseres Altpräsidenten’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, March 1937, p. 3.

⁸⁷ ‘Thomas Garrigue Masaryk †’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1937, p. 1.

and Opava/Troppau.⁸⁸ In Litoměřice/Leitmeritz, the local branch of Bund apparently commemorated Masaryk even as late as 20th March 1938.⁸⁹

In contrast to Czech organisations, the German Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen remained politically neutral until 1938. Indeed, throughout the interbellum, Bund utilised different tactics compared with Družina, which aligned itself closely with a particular political party to promote the goals of war victims. By contrast, the German organisation believed that it should aim to cooperate with all the existing German political parties in Czechoslovakia to obtain as much political support as possible. As the newspaper of Bund observed in 1929, after the leader of Družina, František Neumeister, had been elected to parliament, ‘war victims cannot be helped with one member of parliament position only; we need all [parliamentary] votes for us when we are demanding an improvement of legal provision’.⁹⁰ Moreover, leaders of Bund expressed the idea that all German political parties were obliged to protect their interests;⁹¹ it appears that members of Bund believed that by virtue of being war victims, they could expect and demand help from all the different parts of German-Czechoslovak society.

The decision to not align itself with any political party allowed Bund to be in contact and negotiate with various parts of the political spectrum. Bund events were regularly attended by representatives of various political parties; for example, guests at the pan-Czechoslovak meeting of Bund in 1931 included the member of parliament Keibl from the German Nationalist Party, German Social Democratic member of parliament Schweichhardt, one of the leaders of the German Agrarians Peterle, Communist politician Hünigen, Senator Eichhorn from the German Traders’ Party, and German National

⁸⁸ ‘Brünn’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1937, p. 10; ‘Troppau’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1937, p. 10.

⁸⁹ ‘Leitmeritz’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1938, p. 9.

⁹⁰ ‘Kamerad Neumeister – Abgeordneter!’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1929, p. 2.

⁹¹ ‘Dank!’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 March 1934, p. 1.

Socialist member of parliament Jung. The German Social Democratic member of parliament Anton Schäfer was also present as a representative of Zentralgewerkschafts-Kommission (Central Trade Union Committee).⁹² Needless to say, after 1933, politicians from Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront/Sudetendeutsche Partei also attended Bund's events.⁹³

However, the strict political neutrality of the organisation also meant that it found itself in an awkward position after German Christian Socialists and Agrarians together with the Traders' Party entered the government in 1926. Despite their earlier promises, the three parties did not introduce any significant changes to state care for war victims. Whilst previously Bund could often criticise Czechoslovak governments en masse because they did not include any German representatives, it suddenly had to be more nuanced in its rhetoric as it was forced to carefully weigh the responsibility and culpability of the German MPs. After observing no improvement in social care, Bund issued several reproving calls in which it expressed its disappointment and specifically admonished the German parties.⁹⁴ However, this criticism never reached anything near the same intensity as attacks of Družina on some of its Czech and Slovak political opponents.

Similarly, Bund expressed praise for German-Czechoslovak politicians only very carefully, lest the organisation be accused of political partisanship, as exemplified by Bund's treatment of Ludwig Czech. Indeed, the tenure of the Social Democratic leader, who became the first and only interwar German Minister of Social Care, was commended by organisations across the whole of the political spectrum. Even the Czech Catholic Svaz československých válečných poškozenců křesťansko-sociálních, which fervently opposed

⁹² 'Unser Bundestag in Tetschen a. E.', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 May 1931, p. 1

⁹³ 'Gablonz a. N.', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Apr. 1935, p. 4; *Verhandlungsschrift über den am 8. und 9. Juni 1935 ... stattgefundenen 8. ordentlichen Bundestag*, p. 8.

'Kriegern', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Dec. 1936, p. 8.

⁹⁴ 'Das Verhalten der deutschen Regierungsparteien', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Apr. 1927, p 2; 'Offenes Schreiben unserer Organisation an die deutschen Regierungsparteien', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 22 March 1928, 1.

the socialist parties in the government after 1929, ‘had to observe with pain that [the improvement of care] is taking place during the tenure of a socialist minister [as opposed to the tenure of his predecessor, Msgr. Šrámek]’.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Bund never openly eulogised Czech or emphasised his political allegiances, although the German-Jewish minister was clearly admired by many German veterans.⁹⁶ Instead, Czech was portrayed as a member of the German community, who was expected to help war victims. Such attitudes were clearly expressed in a 1930 article from *Der Kriegsverletzte*. In this article, which stressed positive changes since the arrival of Ludwig Czech at the Ministry of Social Care, the author argued that

as an organisation which stands above parties and adheres to its neutral, apolitical stance, we do not see in Minister Dr. Czech a German Social Democrat, but instead a German, who is willing to represent our interests the way that his party had most bindingly promised to the war victims before the elections.⁹⁷

Indeed, in the 1930s, Bund and its journal *Der Kriegsverletzte* strictly avoided any public discussion of the political situation in Germany and Austria. In its adherence to strict political neutrality, *Der Kriegsverletzte* also never talked about implications that the end of democracy in the two countries had for local war victims and their organisations. Unlike *Družina*, which furiously decried the post-1933 persecution of left-wing leaders of war victims in Germany and Austria,⁹⁸ *Der Kriegsverletzte* never denounced the new political regimes in the two states for their actions. Despite years of Bund interacting with disabled Austrian and German veterans, mainly through branches of Bund in the two countries, the organisation did not so much as mention any of the issues suddenly faced by

⁹⁵ ‘Referát místopředsedy Svazu’, *Lidumil*, May 1930, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁶ ‘Mähr.-Trübau’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1932, p. 11; *Verhandlungsschrift über den am 8. und 9. Juni 1935 ... stattgefundenen 8. ordentlichen Bundestag*, p. 2.

⁹⁷ ‘Die zweite Novelle. Zur Lage der tschechoslowakischen Kriegsoffer’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1930, p. 2.

⁹⁸ ‘Hrůzy v Německu’, *Nový život*, 5 Aug. 1933, p. 4; ‘Úděl funkcionářů’, *Nový život*, 3 March 1934, p. 4.

their counterparts.⁹⁹ The journal merely informed its readers in a matter-of-fact tone about the transformation and unification of local war victims' associations without providing any comments.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the German and Austrian branches of Bund and Družina, which had been established in the 1920s to bring together Czechoslovak war victims living abroad,¹⁰¹ found themselves in an uneasy position during this period. Czechoslovak citizens and their organisations Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen der Tschechoslowakischen Republik in Österreich, Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen der Tschechoslowakischen Republik in Deutschland, Svaz válečných poškozenců v Rakousku, and Svaz československých válečných poškozenců v Německu were expected to be simultaneously loyal both to Czechoslovakia and their resident states. It is difficult to estimate precisely how many war victims this concerned. However, according to *Der Kriegsverletzte*, membership figures of Bund in Germany had a declining tendency; in 1924, the organisation possessed more than 3,000 members, whereas by the end of 1927 its membership had decreased to around 2,300 war victims.¹⁰² In September 1934, Bund in Germany had only 1,140 members.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ 'Der Zentralverband und wir', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 20 Nov. 1919, pp. 4-5; 'Der Bundestag unserer Bruderorganisation in Deutschland', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1926, pp. 4-5; '10 Jahre Bund der Kriegsverletzten', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1927, p. 1; 'Verhandlungsschrift über die 8. ordentliche Hauptversammlung des Bundes der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen der Tschechoslowakischen Republik in Österreich, Sitz Wien', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Jan. 1931, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ 'Von der Kriegsoferbewegung in Deutschland', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 May 1933, p. 2; 'Aus Österreich', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 July 1934, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ See 'Achtung Auslandinvaliden, Witwen und Waisen', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1922, p. 8; 'Wichtig für die tschechoslowakischen Kriegsbeschädigten in Österreich', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1923, p. 8; 'Po sjezdu', *Nový život*, 17 Oct. 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰² 'Der Bundestag in Tetschen am 31. Mai und 1. Juni 1924', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1924, p. 2; 'Verhandlungsschrift über den am 3. und 4. November 1928 im Thaliahaus, Chemnitz, Sonnenstr. stattgefundenen III. Bundestag', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1928, p. 10.

¹⁰³ 'Verhandlungsschrift des Bundes der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen der Tschechoslowakischen Republik in Deutschland, Sitz Chemnitz, vom 6. Bundestag am 7. Oktober in Plauen im Vogtland (Fortsetzung)', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1934, p. 6.

Not surprisingly, the organisations carefully avoided any involvement in politics and tacitly accepted the new status quo. The head of Bund in Germany spoke of this conundrum in October 1934 when he observed that Czechoslovak war victims had had to ‘bring themselves into line [*anpassen*’] with contemporary conditions in Germany’; at the same time, they had had to ‘take into account regulations in Czechoslovakia’ to avoid causing ‘damage’ to Bund in their home country.¹⁰⁴ ‘It cost us many a troublesome night to resolve these questions’, he noted.¹⁰⁵ Similar observations were made by Bernhard Leppin during his visits to Germany and Austria, when he implored Czechoslovak war victims to steer clear of politics and follow rules and regulations of their host states.¹⁰⁶ It appears that the two Czechoslovak organisations in Austria and the Czechoslovak–German association in Germany, which was apparently joined by groups associated with Družina in 1935,¹⁰⁷ were ultimately able to strike the right balance as they were all allowed to operate until the very end of the first Czechoslovak republic.

Due to its public silence, an analysis of political attitudes present within the organisation after 1933 must rely on isolated political incidents and events, which occasionally percolated into *Der Kriegsverletzte*. Indeed, a note from the pages of the journal suggests that at least some of the Czechoslovak war victims living in Germany might have possibly been drawn to Nazism. At a pan-German meeting of Czechoslovak war victims in Chemnitz in 1936, the head of Bund in Germany referred to instances of war victims losing their Czechoslovak pensions after they had applied for financial help from a Czechoslovak welfare fund. These war victims, whose political behaviour was

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Verhandlungsschrift des Bundes ... vom 6. Bundestag am 7. Oktober in Plauen im Vogtland (Schluß)’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Aug. 1935, p. 7; ‘Hauptversamlungsbericht’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Dec. 1935, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Verhandlungsschrift des Bundes ... vom 6. Bundestag am 7. Oktober in Plauen im Vogtland (Fortsetzung)’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Dec. 1934, p. 6.

reviewed as a part of the application process, apparently lost their pensions as a result of 'defamatory statements', which spoke about their purported membership of far-right organisations banned in Czechoslovakia, such as the Sudetendeutsche Heimatbund.¹⁰⁸ The head of Bund in Germany then explained to those present that disabled veterans would lose their pension if it could be proven they were members of organisations that acted in a manner hostile to Czechoslovakia. He then asked members of Bund to think twice before submitting their applications; he insisted that war victims needed to consider whether they would not cause themselves more trouble than it was worth. The speaker ultimately concluded this topic by asking war victims to stay on the safe side and avoid any politically active associations and organisations.

Nevertheless, it seems that relations between Czechoslovak Bund and Nazi Germany were by no means cordial, as suggested by the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Bund in 1937. On this occasion, a special issue of *Der Kriegsverletzte* was published with celebratory letters from fellow organisations of veterans and war victims. These letters had come from near and far; CIAMAC and the legionary head of its Czechoslovak section Lev Sychrava as well as associations from France, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria all sent their messages.¹⁰⁹ Despite being former enemies, French war victims and their organisations were represented particularly strongly; even Albert Rivière, the French Minister of Pensions and a disabled veteran himself, contributed with his greetings. However, other organisations were conspicuous by their absence. *Der Kriegsverletzte* did not mention any letters from either Družina československých válečných poškozenců, with

¹⁰⁸ 'Verhandlungsschrift des Bundes der Kriegsverletzten, W. und W. in Deutschland, Sitz Chemnitz, vom 7. Bundestag in Leipzig (Fortsetzung)', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Feb. 1937, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ 'Unsere Kameraden aus dem Auslande', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, July 1937, pp. 15-18.

which Bund had strained relations at this point, or from any association from Nazi Germany.

Soon afterwards, Bund was lambasted in the journal *Der Kämpfer* for the lack of representation of the latter group of war victims within the special issue.¹¹⁰ The subsequent reply of Bund to this criticism reveals the existence of only very tenuous links between Bund and Nazi Germany, which in turn perhaps explains why some sources could describe the association as left-leaning. Furthermore, the reply also points at the aforementioned circumspect, middle-of-the road approach to politics that the organisation chose and adhered to in public until 1938. According to *Der Kriegsverletzte*,

We also wrote to our German comrades in Berlin, just as [we wrote] to all other comrades; we were truly sad that we received no answer despite prompting [them]. Our relation to our foreign comrades and most of all to German war victims is not burdened by any political bias ... thus, the impression that [we acted] as if we did ‘not want to burden ourselves with a missive from Berlin due to [our] excessive loyalty’ [to Czechoslovakia] is completely wrong.¹¹¹

Political neutrality and the caution with which the organisation had approached political parties and any commitment to them vanished entirely in 1938. Nazi terms, such as ‘people’s community’ (*Volksgemeinschaft*) suddenly became commonplace in the rhetoric of some of Bund’s leaders, as exemplified by speeches of its chairman Ferdinand Pfeifer.¹¹² Days after MPs from two German parties, Agrarians and Christian Socialists, joined the Sudetendeutsche Partei in March 1938, Pfeifer, who had praised President Masaryk less than three years previously, spoke with excitement about ‘a colossal change in Sudetengermanness [‘*Sudetendeutschtum*’]’.¹¹³ Indeed, when the journal *Die Zeit* of the

¹¹⁰ ‘Man zielt zuerst, bevor man schießt, weil man sonst ins Blaue trifft’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1937, pp. 3-4.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 4

¹¹² ‘Gesamtleitungssitzung unseres Bundes’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 May 1938, pp. 1-2; ‘Sudetendeutscher Soldatenbund und BdK’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 May 1938, p. 2.

¹¹³ ‘Gesamtleitungssitzung unseres Bundes’, p. 1.

Sudetendeutsche Partei claimed in July 1938 that Bund adhered to the ‘movement of Konrad Henlein’, the organisation did not protest and defend its neutrality as it would have done in the past.¹¹⁴ Conversely, *Der Kriegsverletzte* reprinted the article in its next issue without a single remark.

Nadiya - Tovaristvo voennykh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpatskoi Rusi

Meanwhile, the limited nature of sources about the Ruthenian organisation Nadiya - Tovaristvo voennykh invalidov, vdov i sirot Podkarpatskoi Rusi, precludes any detailed analysis of the allegiances of this purportedly apolitical organisation and its members.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, it can be observed that in the 1920s, Nadiya was largely controlled by two prominent local figures, who at times clashed with each other over power within the organisation.¹¹⁶ At the helm of Nadiya stood the pro-Ukrainian Ruthene politicians Yuliy Brashchaiko, who was involved in the Agrarian party, and Stepan Klochurak, who was at first a member of the local Social Democratic party but switched his allegiances to the Agrarians in the 1930s.¹¹⁷ This alliance of pro-Ukrainian politicians, which incidentally had to compete in this territory with pro-Russian and pro-Ruthene factions, begs the question of whether Nadiya was ultimately utilised as a tool for proselytising purposes. In a region where half of the population could neither read nor write and many lived in remote villages, this society, which appears to have operated in a top-down manner, offered Brashchaiko and Klochurak invaluable public exposure for themselves and their ideas. Indeed, in 1921, the fellow Ruthenian politician Iosif Kaminskiy even accused

¹¹⁴ ‘Der Kriegsverletzte – Ehrenmitglied der Volksgemeinschaft’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Aug. 1938, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ *Statut "Tovaristva voennykh" invalidov", vdov" i sirot" Podk. Rusii Nadiya v Uzhhorodi* (Uzhhorod, 1921), p. 3.

¹¹⁶ ‘Az összes Podkarp. Rusi hadirokkantakhoz, özvegyekhez és árvákhoz’, *Nasha oborona*, 15 Nov. 1925, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ Ivan Pop, *Podkarpatská Rus* 2nd edn. (Prague, 2014), pp. 108, 123-124; Ivan Pop, ‘Osobnosti našich dějin – Kločurak Štěpán’, accessed 27 Dec. 2019 at <https://www.rusyn.sk/ivan-pop-osobnosti-nasich-dejin-klochurak-stepan/>; *Zvit z diyal'nosti tovaristva voennykh invalidov*, p. 12.

Nadiya of spreading pro-Ukrainian propaganda in Ruthenian villages.¹¹⁸ However, no visible steps were taken against the organisation by the Czechoslovak authorities, which had described Nadiya as apolitical only a few months earlier.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, its newspaper *Nasha oborona* was clearly used for political purposes in November 1925 when it explicitly endorsed the electoral campaign of Stepan Klochurak, who was at the time the chairman of the organisation.¹²⁰

The political potential of Nadiya was also recognised by Czechoslovak authorities. As archival sources show, Nadiya received considerable subventions from the government in the early 1920s. In part, the money was allocated to Nadiya due to its social and administrative work because, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the organisation was effectively used in place of okresní úřadovny (state district offices) for war victims in Ruthenia. However, the republic also had an ulterior motive for financing the organisation, which operated in a newly acquired region, where few felt any degree of loyalty to their Prague rulers. As the Ministry of Social Care disclosed in a letter to the Ministry of Finance in July 1921, the organisation was

also being led by [Brashchaiko in] political [matters] and it can be said, in a manner loyal [to Czechoslovakia]. As a result, war victims in Carpathian Ruthenia have not become adherents of Communism, which would have [otherwise] certainly found its breeding ground amongst them. ... The Ministry of Social Care considers it necessary for both social and political reasons that the subvention is granted to the society...¹²¹

Two years later, such observations were repeated by the Ruthenian department of the Ministry of Social Care in relation to yet another subvention for Nadiya. In an internal

¹¹⁸ 'Zle lyude', *Nasha oborona*, 25 Dec. 1921, pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁹ 'Ministerstvu sociální péče v Praze', Ministerstvo sociální péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 513, Sign. B, Folder 1921 7a-2 Užhorod, Národní archiv (NA), Prague, Czech Republic.

¹²⁰ 'Shho to yest partijna, chy fakhova orhanyzaciya y yakyj z nei khosen?', *Nasha oborona*, 1 Nov. 1925, p. 6; 'Bajtársak! Bajtársnök!', *Nasha oborona*, 15 Nov. 1925, p. 4.

¹²¹ 'Ministerstvu financí v Praze', Ministerstvo sociální péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 513, Sign. B, Folder 1921 7a-2 Užhorod, NA.

document sent to one of the senior officials in Prague, a local representative of the ministry distinctly emphasised the political importance of Nadiya. He noted that ‘the local ruling circles count with the aforementioned society as one of the decisive factors in the upcoming [municipal] elections’.¹²² The official in Ruthenia then continued by praising Nadiya for its political utility to the state; according to him, ‘the society has been successfully influencing its members so that they would be loyal citizens of the Czechoslovak republic’.

Indeed, the leaders of Nadiya, Yuliy Brashchaiko and Stepan Klochurak, appear to have been fully aware of the desperation of local administrators and the government in Prague to win over the population of this remote region, as manifested by a 1923 letter to the Ministry of Social Care. In this letter, the two men, who were trying to obtain financial support from the state, explicitly played the loyalty card, when they stressed the importance of Nadiya in turning war victims into loyal members of Czechoslovak society. According to Brashchaiko and Klochurak, Nadiya had ‘nurtured thousands of loyal and devoted citizens, which will have a great impact on political conditions in Carpathian Ruthenia in future’.¹²³

Significant changes took place in the leadership of Nadiya in the early 1930s, after its original leaders had been forced to step down due to Nadiya’s suspicious financial conduct.¹²⁴ Control over the organisation was grasped by Автономній земледільський союз (Autonomous Agricultural Union), a local political party that vociferously pursued autonomy for Ruthenia, and the ranks of which mostly comprised people with a pro-

¹²² ‘Ministerstvu sociální péče, odbor V.’, Ministerstvo sociální péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 513, Sign. B, Folder 1922-1923 7a-2 Užhorod, NA.

¹²³ ‘Vysokému ministérstvu sociální péče’, Ministerstvo sociální péče 1918-1951 fonds, Inv. no. 367, Karton 513, Sign. B, Folder 1922-1923 7a-2 Užhorod, NA.

¹²⁴ ‘Vozzvanie k" vsim" voenn. invalidam", vdovam" i sirotam" Podk. Rusi’, Krayove upravlinnya tovarystva viys'kovyx invalidiv ‘Nadiya’ m. Uzhhorod, fonds, Inv. no. 1137, State Archives of Transcarpathian Oblast, Berehove, Ukraine.

Russian or pro-Hungarian orientation.¹²⁵ The aforementioned politician Iosif Kaminskiy, who was one of the key men in this party, came to the helm of Nadiya, whilst the member of parliament Andriy Brodiy, the party's leader, became the vice-president.¹²⁶

Unfortunately, the few extant issues of the organisation's journal from this period provide little information about the actual political situation within Nadiya. Therefore, we can only presume that the organisation might have continued to possess a distinct political role for both its new leaders and Czechoslovak officials alike.

War Victims and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia held a unique position in the political world of disabled veterans. As the only supranational political force in Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party vied for support for war victims regardless of their nationality.¹²⁷

Mentions of Communist politicians courting these potential voters can be found in sources from all the different parts of Czechoslovakia, be they German-speaking areas in Bohemia in the west of the country or Ruthenia in the very east. Communist politicians attended various events of Bund throughout almost the entire interwar period; a Communist representative appeared at a meeting of Bund together with his counterparts from other political parties as late as March 1938.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the German organisation treated Communists with little enthusiasm, with information about various disagreements between Bund and the party occasionally surfacing on the pages of *Der Kriegsverletzte*.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Jan Rychlík and Magdaléna Rychlíková, *Podkarpatská Rus v dějinách Československa 1918–1946* (Prague, 2016), p. 83.

¹²⁶ 'Obshhestvennyye dila', *Tovarishh*", 15 Dec. 1934, p. 4; Ivan Pop, 'Osobnosti našich dějin – Bródy Andrej', accessed 27 Dec. 2019 at <https://www.rusyn.sk/ivan-pop-osobnosti-nasich-dejin-brody-andrej/>.

¹²⁷ According to Marek Růžicka, communist war victims established their own organisation called Svépomoc (Self-Help) in 1920. However, it does not appear to have attracted any significant number of members. Růžicka, p. 138.

¹²⁸ 'Um die Rechte der Kriegsopfer gegenüber der Gesetzgebung und der Öffentlichkeit', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 March 1938, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Bernhard Leppin, 'Kriegsinvalide, laßt Euch nicht belügen!', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, June 1936, p. 3.

Relations of Communists with Družina československých válečných poškozenců were considerably more complicated. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Družina in the Bohemian lands largely sided with Czechoslovak Social Democrats. In turn, the organisation clashed multiple times with the Communist Party in the interwar period, with both sides regularly spouting various accusations and insults at each other.¹³⁰ For example, in 1930, František Neumeister, who had by then become a Social Democratic MP, described Communists, together with fascists, with utter contempt as ‘completely irrelevant echelons of society’.¹³¹

Nevertheless, many influential members of Družina were Communists. For example, the war widow Zuzana Holanová, who was one of the interwar leaders of Družina both in Slovakia and Moravia, joined the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. During its short existence, she worked as an official in Budapest, only to be imprisoned after the fall of the republic. Holanová eventually managed to flee to Slovakia where she resumed her work for the Communist Party and later became the editor-in-chief of the newspapers *Proletárka* and *Nómunkás*.¹³² In 1922, Holanová even attended the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern in the USSR. However, she did not remain a

¹³⁰ ‘Proti demagogii’, *Nový život*, 26 July 1924, pp. 2-3; ‘Prohlášení’, *Nový život*, 23 Aug. 1924, p. 4; František Neumeister, ‘Upřímná pomoc’, *Nový život*, 26 Feb. 1927, p. 2; Jan Tupý, ‘Přehlídka práce’, *Nový život*, 12 March 1932, p. 1.

¹³¹ Fr. Neumeister, ‘Hold osvoboditeli’, *Nový život*, 15 March 1930, p. 1.

¹³² šk, ‘K 60 letům př. Holanové z Olomouce’, *Nový život*, 20 Dec. 1951, p. 2; Eva Škorvanková, ‘Otázka regulácie pôrodnosti na stránkach ženskej komunistickej tlače na Slovensku’, *Populačné štúdie Slovenska* 10, ed. Pavol Tišliar (Bratislava, 2017), p. 23.

Communist throughout the entire interwar period; in the 1935 parliamentary elections, Holanová was a candidate of the Social Democratic party.¹³³



Fig. 9. Jozef Kopasz (back row, third from right) standing in the same row as the future Communist president of Czechoslovakia Klement Gottwald (first from left) in a picture from a 1924 conference of the Communist Party.¹³³

Similarly, the head of the Slovak branch of Družina Jozef Kopasz was a Communist politician and a member of parliament for this party during 1925–1929. Later, he also switched camps and joined the Social Democrats, whom he represented in the parliament between 1935 and 1939. As a result of Kopasz's ties with the Communist Party, competing organisations of war victims repeatedly accused the Slovak section of Družina of being controlled by Communists and steeped in their ideas.¹³⁵

Družina in the Bohemian lands treated Kopasz's Communist allegiances with a considerable degree of unease. Although his political work for war victims was recognised

¹³³ 'Naši členové'.

¹³⁴ 'Vrútky: KSČ – konferencia slov. funkcionárov', Zbierka fotodokumentov miest, Vrútky, Sign. PV 64/69, Slovenská národná knižnica (SNK), Martin, Slovakia.

¹³⁵ 'Kto sa zas chce vyškriabať po chrbtoch obetí svetovej vojny?'; J. B., 'Preveliká starosť', *Nový život*, 28 July 1928, p. 3.

by *Nový život*, Kopasz received incomparably less attention from the organisation than did František Neumeister, who succeeded him in parliament. Indeed, one of the articles that celebrated the 1929 electoral success of Neumeister and his arrival in parliament was tellingly entitled ‘On the Verge of a New Epoch’. Apart from praising Neumeister and expressing hope for a better future of war victims, its author also exculpated Kopasz, whilst simultaneously tarnishing the Communist Party when he observed that

as a result of the politics of sheer negation [‘*naprostá negace*’], which has been conducted by the Communist Party, [Kopasz’s] position was already difficult [‘*pochybné*’] [before any parliamentary work of his had even begun] and his efforts for our benefit were greatly constrained, despite his good will.¹³⁶

Despite the precarious position of many of their members, major Czechoslovak associations of war victims largely avoided radicalisation. Instead, most became closely affiliated with various mainstream parties and their rhetoric, as exemplified by Družina and its leader/member of parliament František Neumeister. Ironically, the German Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen remained politically neutral throughout most of the interbellum and, in the 1930s, even expressed certain activist, pro-Czechoslovak tendencies. As late as August 1938, an exasperated long-time leader of Bund in Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad, who had become tired of people asking every day about the situation in the organisation, sought to explain to war victims from the area that Bund had not become subordinated to anyone and remained neutral just as it had been for the past 20 years.¹³⁷ By then, this veteran was, with his beliefs, in a minority amongst Germans in Czechoslovakia; however, his story is one of many that suggests the fact that Bund was eventually drawn towards Nazism was far from a foregone conclusion.

¹³⁶ J. Rail, ‘Na prahu nové epochy’, *Nový život*, 16 Nov. 1929, p. 1.

¹³⁷ ‘Karlsbad und Umgebung. An alle Mitglieder!’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Aug. 1938, p. 10.

Chapter VII: Legionaries and the “Others”

‘[If disabled legionaries are affected by cuts in the state budget] even a future historian will have to be ashamed of this [episode in history] because we [i.e. the legionaries] are here only once; we were not here for centuries and we will not be here ever again’.¹

Vít Suchánek, one of the leaders of disabled legionaries.

As previous chapters have suggested, the position in which Czechoslovak legionaries found themselves differed markedly from that of Austro-Hungarian veterans. Whilst Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen were largely perceived as an awkward legacy of the war, legionaries were venerated by the Czech narrative as Czechoslovakia grafted the ‘legionary tradition’ onto its national mythology. This allowed the state to legitimise itself by emphasising the valiant military resistance of Czechs and Slovaks against the tyrannous Austria-Hungary, and by drawing attention to the deeply-rooted patriotism of these men.

Indeed, legionaries formed not only a very vocal but also highly diverse stratum of the population. A separate thesis would perhaps be required to adequately analyse all the various legionary groups that existed in interwar Czechoslovakia – Czechs, Slovaks, Catholics, Protestants, state employees, agrarians, national democrats, social democrats, fascists, communists, and others. This chapter has a much more modest aim. It focuses specifically on disabled veterans and their Svaz invalidů československých legií (Union of Invalids of the Czechoslovak Legions), which largely brought together legionaries with impairments regardless of their political or religious affiliations. The chapter examines how the public and other legionaries treated disabled veterans of the Legions and how these men portrayed themselves and their wartime service. It then explores relations between Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen with impairments and both able-bodied and

¹ ‘Členská schůze’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Dec. 1935, pp. 2-3.

disabled legionaries. The chapter examines the rhetoric of Svaz invalidů as well as various organisations of Austro-Hungarian veterans to investigate how the two groups of ex-servicemen perceived and interacted with each other.

This chapter observes that relatively little attention was paid to disabled legionaries by both fellow veterans of the Legions and other citizens. Nevertheless, disabled legionaries and Svaz repeatedly stressed their historical importance as they believed that the republic stemmed from their sacrifice. In turn, they asked the state to prioritise their demands and provide them with better treatment compared with Austro-Hungarian veterans.

Not surprisingly, the privileges of able-bodied legionaries often irked disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen, who also occasionally expressed discontent with the preferential treatment of their disabled counterparts from the Legions. Nevertheless, the fraught relationship between Czech and Slovak Austro-Hungarian veterans and legionaries which developed in the 1920s, improved significantly in the 1930s, when these Austro-Hungarian veterans drew themselves closer to the legionary narrative. However, even then most legionaries expressed little interest in their Austro-Hungarian counterparts. One of the few exceptions was the disabled legionary writer Jan Karel Geringer, who cooperated with *Družina československých válečných poškozců* in the 1930s.

Similarly, relations between German war victims and legionaries, which had been far from cordial in the immediate postwar period, improved with time. By the mid-1930s, German representatives had largely put aside previous grievances and begun interacting with legionaries. Unfortunately, due to the paucity of sources, it is impossible to say how the attitudes of Ruthenian war victims developed throughout the interbellum; we can only

observe that similar to Germans, they also often criticised the privileges and preferential treatment of legionaries in the 1920s.

Disabled Legionaries

To achieve their goals, legionaries established a vast number of different associations throughout the interwar period. Some sought to merely protect very specific demands of certain sections of society, such as Sdružení vysokoškolských studentů-legionářů (Association of University Students-Legionaries), or to unite particular groups of veterans, such as Kruh starodružiníků (Circle of Old Fellows), which was open only to the very first volunteers from Russia, France, and Serbia. Others brought together legionaries who shared similar political opinions. The largest of these organisations came to wield significant power and influence in the state, in which many of the leading politicians had close ties to the Legions.² In particular, the primarily right-wing Nezávislá jednota československých legionářů (Independent Union of Czechoslovak Legionaries) and especially the predominantly left-wing Československá obec legionářská, which brought together tens of thousands of legionaries, played crucial roles in the republic.³

Svaz invalidů československých legií stood out from amongst legionary associations as the only one to focus its attention specifically on victims of war.⁴ Throughout the interbellum, Svaz found a number of allies amongst members of fellow legionary organisations, particularly as it espoused neutrality both in political and legionary matters. Furthermore, Svaz, which focused solely on issues related to disability,

² In his work, Michl even describes Československá obec legionářská as the ‘de facto mouthpiece of the Castle’ (i.e., the ruling political elite surrounding President Masaryk, who ruled from Prague Castle). Michl, p. 107.

³ Ibid., pp. 73-75, 91-93.

⁴ Despite its name, the organisation also allowed relatives of deceased legionaries to become members from 1926. According to its regulations, one relative was able to join for each deceased legionary. Ústřední výbor, ‘Spolek invalidů čsl. legií’, *Legionářský týden: Příloha „Národního osvobození“*, 18 Apr. 1926, p. 2.

allowed its members to also join other larger and more politically-minded legionary organisations. Although conflicts and disagreements emerged occasionally, such as in the 1930s when Československá obec legionářská established its own section for disabled veterans, the elderly, and pensioners,⁵ Svaz cooperated to some extent with all the prominent groups of legionaries. Thus, one could find at its rallies representatives from a wide range of associations, be it Československá obec legionářská, Nezávislá jednota československých legionářů, Kruh starodružiníků, or even the far-right Družina dobrovolců československého zahraničního vojska (Fellowship of Volunteers of Foreign Czechoslovak Forces).⁶ In turn, it can be argued that the rhetoric of Svaz and its newspaper *Věstník Svazu invalidů čs. legií* was palatable to all the different strands amongst veterans.

Several thousand Czechoslovak legionaries returned home with various injuries and illnesses. Upon their arrival in Prague in 1919, disabled Russian legionaries were greeted by none other than President Masaryk and the French Chief of Staff of the Czechoslovak Army Maurice Pellé.⁷ However, it appears that in the subsequent years, disabled legionaries occupied a fairly marginal place both amongst legionaries and in Czechoslovak society. The almost infinite number of legionary speeches from various meetings and gatherings and dozens of newspapers, brochures, books, and memoirs mean that this question would require deeper research; however, it can be tentatively argued that disabled legionaries failed to attract any significant attention. If anything, they were conspicuous by their absence; they were rarely mentioned by fellow citizens, be they legionaries or not. For example, reports from the three colossal pan-Czechoslovak rallies

⁵ L. Hedl, 'ČsOL zakládá novou zájmovou skupinu', *Legionářský týden: Příloha „Národního osvobození“*, 10 March 1935, p. 2; Jeden z nadšených, 'Č. O. L. zakládá novou zájmovou skupinu', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, March 1935, p. 6; Jos. Svatoš, 'Svaz invalidů čs. legií na scestí', *Legionářský týden: Příloha „Národního osvobození“*, 22 March 1936, p. 2.

⁶ 'Naše valná hromada', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, June 1937, pp. 1-3.

⁷ 'Zaznamenáváme', *Československý legionář*, 2 Aug. 1919, p. 3.

of Československá obec legionářská barely spoke about these men.⁸ Similarly, when thousands of legionaries, including members of Svaz invalidů čsl. legií, gathered in Prague to wish President Masaryk a happy 80th birthday, disabled veterans who attended the event were not an object of any particular attention.⁹ As a result, it does not perhaps come as a surprise that the attempt of disabled legionaries to have a street named after them in Prague met with no support from councillors.¹⁰

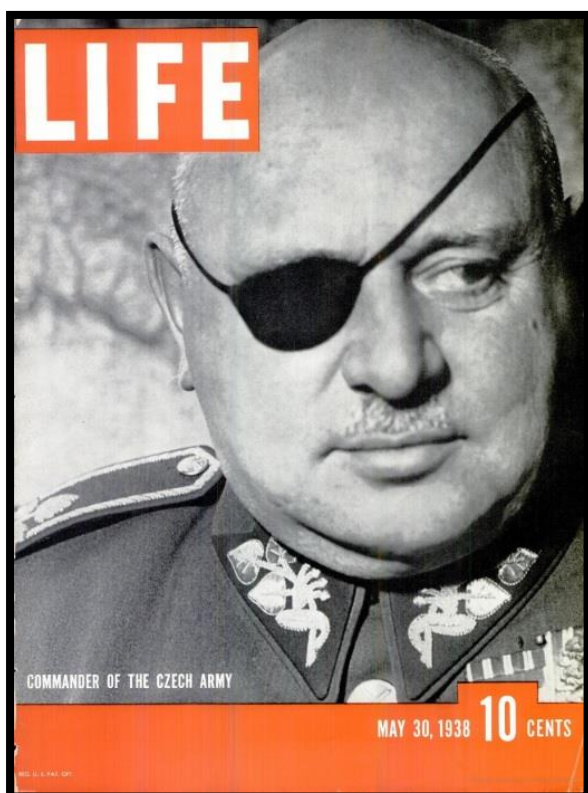


Fig. 10. Jan Syrový on the cover of the *Life* magazine, incorrectly described as the 'commander of the Czech army'.¹¹

No disabled Czechoslovak man was celebrated the way the fellow Little Entente state Yugoslavia recognised its heroic Lujo Lovrić.¹² Indeed, with the exception of General Jan Syrový, no wounded legionary ever achieved any particular prominence. It is difficult to point to the precise reason behind this lack of prominence and veneration of disabled legionaries – whether this situation was caused by their relatively small numbers; by the existing discourse which already

elevated all legionaries, regardless of their injuries, into heroic positions; by the emphasis on Czechoslovak victory and able-bodied legionaries; or a combination of all these factors.

⁸ 'Pan president návštěvou v pavilonu legionářů-živnostníků a obchodníků', *Národní osvobození*, 30 June 1924, p. 3; 'Na Staroměstském náměstí', *Národní osvobození*, 2 July 1928, p. 2.

⁹ 'Tisíce legionářů šly Prahou blahopřát svému vůdci', *Národní osvobození*, 6 March 1930, p. 1.

¹⁰ 'Mimořádná valná hromada', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Jan. 1935, p. 3; 'Náš rozhlas', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Feb. 1938, p. 4.

¹¹ 'LIFE. 30 May 1938', accessed 6 June 2020 at

https://books.google.sk/books?id=3EoEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=sk&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

¹² Newman, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 200-201.

However, even Syrový's injuries were not celebrated per se; his loss of an eye at the Battle of Zborov was not significant primarily because it would represent a bodily sacrifice for the nation. Instead, as argued by the historians Jiří Fidler and Jan Michl, it meant that Syrový was suddenly turned into a lookalike of the venerated one-eyed Hussite leader Jan Žižka.¹³ Apparently, it was this accidental resemblance to Žižka, combined with his opportunism and loyalty to the Castle, which helped Syrový rise all the way to the position of Czechoslovak Prime Minister during the Munich Crisis.

As numerous statements of disabled legionaries made obvious, these veterans believed that the new republic emerged as a result of their service and sacrifice, which stemmed from their love for the nation.¹⁴ They eagerly emphasised the voluntary nature of their involvement in the conflict, which separated them from both fellow POWs and disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans.¹⁵ In their newspaper, they proudly pointed out that in contrast to purportedly as many as four-fifths of Czech POWs, who decided to stay in camps, legionaries actively chose to risk their lives and fight against Austria-Hungary.¹⁶ By doing so, the injuries and illnesses of these men became semiotically different from those of their Austro-Hungarian counterparts, 'who went to fight against their will ... and did not deserve their fate, but could not have avoided it either'.¹⁷

However, as has been explained in Chapter IV, according to the law 76/1922, the state provided more generous military pensions only for those legionaries who had lost 'at least 20% of their ability to work in an adequate civilian occupation ... through their service in Czechoslovak foreign forces'.¹⁸ In turn, legionaries whose injury or illness was

¹³ Michl, p. 49; Fidler, pp. 260-265.

¹⁴ A. S., 'Legionářské výhody', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Oct. 1929, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ In his work, Jan Michl mentions a number of examples of legionaries who were, to some extent, forced to join the forces. Michl, pp. 21-23.

¹⁶ Bedřich Bleha, 'Amnestie pro legionáře', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Nov. 1928, p. 2.

¹⁷ B-ý, 'Legionáři-invalidé ve státní službě', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, May 1929, p. 7.

¹⁸ The law 76/1922 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

ascribed to their service for the monarchy, or those who failed to reach the required 20% disability threshold at the Ministry of National Defence, but later reached it at medical examinations of the Ministry of Social Care, received significantly smaller payments from the Ministry of Social Care.

By 1928, a total of 10,345 Czechoslovak legionaries had been recognised as being disabled.¹⁹ However, only 1,478 of these men fell under the remit of the Ministry of National Defence and as many as 7,717 legionaries belonged to the Ministry of Social Care.²⁰ Throughout the interwar years, legionaries stressed in vain the need for all disabled legionaries, including those who suffered their injuries during the service in the Austro-Hungarian ranks, to be transferred to the Ministry of National Defence.²¹ Disabled men claimed that such preferential treatment was justified by their legionary actions. According to them, it was their legionary service, not the Austro-Hungarian origin of their injuries, which should have been considered.

We cannot understand that the Ministry of National Defence has excluded so many invalids from its care only because according to [the ministry] an illness or an injury did not originate in the legionary service, but in the Austrian army. Would such an invalid not deserve a[n even] greater reward because of [the fact] that despite being ill or wounded he did not hesitate to voluntarily go to fight for the independence of his homeland?²²

Indeed, despite legionaries forming an important part of the national narrative, disabled veterans repeatedly voiced strong discontent and disappointment with their position in the republic and their treatment by the state. On numerous occasions, they spoke about their abject poverty and the omnipresent institutional nepotism in a way

¹⁹ 'Kolik je legionářů invalidů?'.
²⁰ Six-hundred other legionaries possessed 'no claims to state care'; that is, they presumably did not reach the 20% disability threshold for the pension even at the Ministry of Social Care, and 460 had died by then. Confusingly, these figures only add up to 10,255.

²¹ 'Vládě republiky Československé a zákonodárným sborům Národního shromáždění', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Nov. 1935, p. 2.

²² 'Čeho se domáháme', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Jan. 1935, p. 4.

reminding them of their Austro-Hungarian counterparts.²³ However, unlike former soldiers of the monarchy, legionaries could also draw on promises made specifically to them in recognition of their service. Wartime words of military leaders, including general Štefánik, who apparently pledged to them that the nation would never forget their sacrifices, as well as later assurances of Czechoslovak politicians, were juxtaposed with the uneasy situation of many disabled legionaries.²⁴ Legionaries further argued that not only was their sacrifice not recognised but also they were being discriminated against for their service, which made their lives even more difficult. As disabled legionaries observed in their memorandum in 1935,

in the liberated homeland, this Czechoslovak soldier-volunteer is subjected to new suffering, which is worse than [that] in POW camps [for Austro-Hungarian soldiers], where he often ... had to greatly suffer after applying to [the Legions]. However, he suffers by far the most at home, he has to suffer poverty, hatred, and injustice and 15 years on, he has to listen to [people] comparing his fight to Scouting.²⁵

Austro-Hungarian Veterans and Legionaries

Relations between the disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans of Czech ethnicity and legionaries were intricate, often contradictory, and constantly evolving over time. However, it seems fair to say that in general some level of cooperation appears to have been established between the two groups already in the early interwar period. The separate legionary section, which lauded ‘our boys’ in the issues of *Družina československých válečných poškozců*’s *Nová republika* from 1919, suggests that already from the very beginning, Austro-Hungarian war victims expressed respect and appreciation of the legionaries.²⁶ The disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans acknowledged the service that the

²³ E. C., ‘Naše bída’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Jan. 1929, pp. 2-3.

²⁴ ‘Pozvání na mimořádnou valnou hromadu’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Oct. 1934, p. 3; ‘Mimořádná valná hromada’, p. 2.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ čk, ‘Sibiřští chlapi’, *Nová republika*, 22 Nov. 1919, p. 3.

legionaries had rendered to the state, and often associated their own plight with the legionary one, perhaps in a bid to bask in some of their popular glory.²⁷ Subsequently, there were a number of examples of local cooperation between disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen and the legionaries, with both those who had been affected by and those who had escaped injury or disability during the fighting.²⁸

Similarly, the presence of Svaz invalidů československých legií in the aforementioned union of war victims' associations, Říšský svaz organisací válečných poškozců v Československé republice, and its participation in numerous events, suggest that already in the 1920s, Austro-Hungarian veterans cooperated with the legionaries also at the highest and most official level.²⁹ Nevertheless, this cooperation does not appear to have been much more than a token gesture on the part of Svaz, into which the organisation might have felt forced by the significant numerical inferiority of disabled legionaries. Despite the fact that the association of legionaries became a member of Říšský svaz, legionaries still kept Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen at arm's length. Although the newspaper *Věstník Svazu invalidů čs. legií* occasionally mentioned both groups' presence at each other's events, disabled legionaries usually paid little attention to Austro-Hungarian war victims and were keen to emphasise the privileged nature of their position and the priority of their demands.

Despite Družina československých válečných poškozců's openly expressed positive stance towards the legionaries, it nonetheless repeatedly opposed what it perceived to be the state's creation of a 'privileged caste' in the granting of special rights

²⁷ Jan Vavroušek, 'Jak dlouho ještě? (Úvaha o pražských biographech)', *Nový život*, 23 May 1920, pp. 1-2.

²⁸ For examples of cooperation from 1920, see 'Docela správně', *Nový život*, 1 Aug. 1920, p. 4; 'Protestní tábor lidu', *Nový život*, 26 Sep. 1920, p. 5. Furthermore, see the brochure published in 1937 to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the alliance between the legionaries and war victims of Brno, *15 let Pomocného fondu československých legionářů a válečných poškozců v Brně* (Brno, 1937).

²⁹ 'Den 27. listopadu 1927', *Nový život*, 10 Dec. 1927, p. 2.

to the able-bodied veterans of the Legions.³⁰ The disabled Czech ex-servicemen of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces argued instead that healthy legionaries should aim to support themselves without help from the government, and even claimed that the privileges conferred upon the legionaries were incongruously at odds with their noble tradition. As one of the leaders of Družina publicly stated in 1920, ‘the one who receives a reward for his deeds, is then a mercenary and not a hero’.³¹

Furthermore, disabled Czech ex-servicemen sought to portray their own service as an act of struggle against the empire. They repeatedly stressed their patriotism as apparently manifested by their passive resistance both during their conscripted military service and also after returning disabled from the frontline.³² According to these men, it was only fortuitous circumstances that allowed the legionaries instead of them to join the Allied forces.³³ Journals of Družina provide us with several examples of its leaders bemoaning the existing discrepancies between the state care provided for disabled legionaries and that offered to other veterans with impairments. As one of the Austro-Hungarian veterans observed, in Czechoslovakia,

not all invalids are equal [*není ... invalida jak invalida*], much more is measured out to those who had by good luck made it into the Legions ... [than] to those who performed very important [acts of] resistance in the ranks of the Austrian army and did not have an opportunity to join the other side.³⁴

However, such grievances in regards to inequality and favouritism gradually disappeared at the beginning of the 1930s. After the rise of Adolf Hitler to power in Germany in 1933, Czech veterans from the Austro-Hungarian forces drew themselves closer to the dominant, legionary-centred narrative of the republic. Družina became even

³⁰ J. S. Sázavský, ‘Patriciové?’, *Nový život*, 10 Apr. 1920, p. 1.

³¹ ‘Rok práce „Družiny čs. válečných poškozců“’, p. 1.

³² Alex. Benhard, ‘Dubnica’, *Naša obrana*, Oct. 1920, p. 2; ‘Váleční poškozcenci v domácím odboji: Posl. př. Fr. Neumeister 5. ledna 1938 v rozhlase’, *Nový život*, 5 Feb. 1938, pp. 5-6.

³³ See Jozef Joza, ‘Trafiky a slavná protekce’, *Nový život*, 26 Jan. 1924, p. 3.

³⁴ František Roda, ‘Nová invalidovna’, *Nový život*, 12 July 1930, p. 2.

more influenced by omnipresent legionary-related motifs and events and began to cooperate much more closely with the similarly left-wing *Československá obec legionářská*. For the remainder of the interwar period, Czech veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Empire portrayed both themselves and the legionaries as two groups which safeguarded the Czechoslovak state, both of whom had made great and heroic sacrifices on its behalf during the war.³⁵

Despite obvious potential for cooperation, *Družina*'s first significant act of collaboration with ČsOL came only after the legionary association had also become a member of CIAMAC.³⁶ In July 1934, *Družina* and ČsOL prepared up to 200 major public speeches to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War.³⁷ Tellingly, despite their significant numbers, Czech and Slovak Austro-Hungarian war victims had to move towards the rhetoric and actions of ČsOL rather than meeting legionaries halfway. For example, on 29th March 1935, *Družina* became a member of *Svaz národního osvobození* (Union of National Liberation), an association closely affiliated with ČsOL, which was supposed to 'fight ... for the legionary program and spread ideas of the leaders of resistance in the nation'.³⁸ Only a few months later, more than 4,000 disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans and widows marched at the third pan-Czechoslovak rally of ČsOL as legionary guests in the opening part of the event, which also included Czechoslovak teachers, men from the paramilitary *Národní garda* (National Guard), the legionary youth, and others.³⁹

³⁵ 'Naše aktuality', *Nový život*, 19 Dec. 1936, p. 1; 'Děkujeme všem!', *Nový život*, 5 June 1937, pp. 1, 3.

³⁶ 'Konference legionářů Malé dohody zahájena', *Národní osvobození*, 27 Feb. 1934, p. 1.

³⁷ vtk, 'Naše spolupráce s Družinou válečných poškozených', *Legionářský týden: Příloha „Národního osvobození“*, 29 July 1934, p. 4; Fr. Neumeister, 'Českoslovenští bývalí vojáci ...', *Nový život*, 4 Aug. 1934, p. 1; 'Nová etapa práce', *Nový život*, 10 Aug. 1934, p. 1. See the following brochure published jointly by ČsOL and *Družina*: *Po 20 letech vzpomínáme padlých za svobodu, vládu lidu a mír* (Prague, 1934).

³⁸ ald, 'Nový bojovník – Družina válečných poškozených', *Národní osvobození*, 30 March 1935, p. 4; 'Hosté a vojáci domácího odboje', *Národní osvobození*, 8 July 1935, p. 1.

³⁹ 'Slavný pochod pražskými ulicemi dne 6. července', *Nový život*, 13 July 1935, p. 4.

The significant improvement in official relations between legionaries and disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans was further manifested a year later, when Družina enthusiastically announced the founding of Obec přátel legionářů (OPL - Society of Friends of Legionaries) on its frontpage.⁴⁰ This new organisation, which was also closely connected to ČsOL, aimed to bring together citizens loyal to the wartime 'revolutionary ideals'.⁴¹ It sought to work towards the protection of Czechoslovakia and preservation of the memory of the Czechoslovak struggle for independence, and also to safeguard legionary rights and support legionaries and their families.⁴² Družina immediately expressed interest in cooperating with OPL and called on its members to liaise with ČsOL to establish local branches of OPL. By contrast, for legionaries, Družina was just one of many associations eager to associate themselves with the Legions and their legacy, and as such the organisation did not receive any particular attention. The newspaper of ČsOL, *Národní osvobození*, dedicated precisely seven words to the participation of Austro-Hungarian veterans in OPL, when it merely mentioned that the Social Democratic member of parliament and leader of Družina František Neumeister had attended the founding meeting of OPL.⁴³

These changes in the rhetoric and attitudes of Czech veterans of Austria-Hungary became even more apparent in 1937, when the republic was celebrating the 20th anniversary of the legionary victory at the Battle of Zborov. Unlike in 1927, when Družina largely ignored the event, this time Austro-Hungarian veterans directly linked their wartime experiences and their purported resistance to the empire to Zborov and the

⁴⁰ 'Obec přátel legionářů ustavena', *Nový život*, 14 Nov. 1936, pp. 1, 4.

⁴¹ 'Ustavující sjezd. Obce přátel legionářů', *Národní osvobození*, 12 Nov. 1936, p. 5.

⁴² *S legionáři pro republiku a demokracii: Co jest a co chce Obec přátel legionářů?* (Prague, 1936), p. 14.

⁴³ 'Ustavující sjezd. Obce přátel legionářů'.

Legions. At the pan-Czechoslovak rally of Družina, which was organised to commemorate the 20th anniversary of its existence, František Neumeister proudly proclaimed that

[during the war] the spirit of our famous Legions ... had already [permeated] so many [invalids] and especially the founders of Družina ... it was no coincidence that our Družina vál. invalidů ze zemí koruny svatováclavské [the original name of the association] was founded only a few days before the Battle of Zborov on 2 July 1917.⁴⁴

By contrast, cooperation between members of Družina and disabled legionaries remained very limited. Although Družina and Neumeister occasionally spoke about the plight of disabled legionaries in the 1930s,⁴⁵ the two groups of Czech veterans with impairments remained relatively distant. One of the few men to have straddled the divide was the disabled Italian legionary Jan Karel Geringer. After his return to Czechoslovakia, Geringer, who benefitted from being assigned as a partner in a tobacco warehouse by the state, wrote a number of articles as well as several books in which he discussed the lives of disabled veterans.⁴⁶

His novels *Ztracenci: Román válečného invalidy* and *Zapomenutí hrdinové* and the play *Zapomenutí hrdinové: Bývalí bojovníci*, which were published in 1929, 1932, and 1936, respectively, all use the same semiautobiographical plot;⁴⁷ they narrate the love story of the disabled legionary and writer Jan Radimský and the charming Jiřina Plojharová, who comes from a wealthy bourgeois family. Geringer portrays the bitterness and despair of disabled veterans and attacks the faux morality of the rich, which he contrasts with the

⁴⁴ 'Byly to slavné chvíle ...', p. 4.

⁴⁵ E. Culka, 'Výňatek z řeči posl. Fr. Neumeistera o nás ve schůzi poslanecké sněmovny při projednávání rozpočtu', *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, Feb. 1932, p. 2; 'K pokusům o odebrání rent invalidům do 34 procent', *Nový život*, 24 March 1934, p. 1; 'Neutěšené postavení legionářů-invalidů', *Nový život*, 15 May 1937, p. 3.

⁴⁶ 'Geringer, Jan Karel', *Biografický slovník českých zemí. Sešit 19*, (Prague, 2016), pp. 607-608; 'Jan Karel Geringer - Orlický (1883-1960)', accessed 4 June 2020 at <https://www.prostor-ad.cz/pruvodce/praha/sporilov/spisovat/geringer.htm>.

⁴⁷ Jan K. Geringer, *Ztracenci: Román válečného invalidy* (Prague, 1929); Jan K. Geringer, *Zapomenutí hrdinové* (Prague, 1932); Jan Geringer-Orlický, *Zapomenutí hrdinové: Zapomenutí hrdinové: (Bývalí bojovníci): Hra ze života bývalých bojovníků o 3 dějstvích s předehrou* (Prague, 1936).

honesty of Jan. In his works, the plot is often pushed aside to allow the author to express his ideas and beliefs and teach the audience several invaluable lessons.

Firstly, Geringer attempts to show his fellow disabled veterans, be they legionaries or Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen who struggle with doubts and disillusionment, that these can be overcome with tenacity, perseverance, and hope in a better future. Secondly, as he explicitly proclaims in the foreword to *Zapomenutí hrdinové*, he attempts to bridge the gap between people with impairments and those without, which he does by showing the latter the lives and ‘psychology’ of the former.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Geringer’s works, which expose the horrors and destruction of the war, promote pacifist values, which only become more pronounced with the passing years, despite Geringer’s growing willingness to also emphasise the importance of Czechoslovak self-defence in the increasingly precarious international situation of the 1930s.⁴⁹

The works and changes in them also mirror Geringer’s developing cooperation with Austro-Hungarian veterans from *Družina československých válečných poškozenců*. A disabled Austro-Hungarian ex-serviceman named Karel is added into the plot of the second book from 1932. Although this character is turned into a legionary in Geringer’s third work, the 1936 play also includes a blind Austro-Hungarian veteran called Václav, whose loss of sight is attributed to his service in the ranks of *Družina* during the 1919 military campaign of Czechoslovakia against the Hungarian Soviet Republic.⁵⁰

It is no coincidence that Geringer added this particular detail into the story. By the time the play came out, he had become the head of *Družina*’s newly established Culture

⁴⁸ Geringer, *Zapomenutí hrdinové*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁹ See Geringer, *Zapomenutí hrdinové*, pp. 184-189; Geringer-Orlický, *Zapomenutí hrdinové: (Bývalí bojovníci)*, pp. 75-80.

⁵⁰ Geringer-Orlický, *Zapomenutí hrdinové: (Bývalí bojovníci)*, p. 78.

Column in *Nový život*.⁵¹ Indeed, Geringer's influence is clearly visible in the column's introductory article, which differed little from his published works, both in terms of wording and the aims it presented. Although this prominence of Geringer on the pages of *Nový život* did not last long, the Italian legionary apparently remained a member of *Družina* for the remaining part of the interwar period.⁵²

Not surprisingly, relations between legionaries and disabled Germans appear to have been considerably more strained, particularly in the 1920s. In the immediate postwar period, the German organisation of war victims Bund was deeply critical of legionaries and the preferential treatment they received from the state. German war victims, who could not and did not adhere to the state narrative about the Legions bringing freedom to the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia, spoke about legionaries with little veneration. In their understanding, these men were simply no better than any other veterans in the republic.

This perspective resulted in a number of fascinating observations, which clearly stand out compared with the dominant narrative and Czech rhetoric towards legionaries. For example, in 1919, when Czechs impatiently awaited and closely followed the lengthy voyage of their Russian legionaries to Czechoslovakia, an article was published in *Der Kriegsverletzte*, in which its author condemned the way legionaries were returning home. In the article, Bernhard Leppin, one of the leaders of Bund, argued that the Czechoslovak prioritisation of legionary transports meant that many German, Hungarian, and Slovak-speaking POWs, who were also in Russia, were unable to come back home. As the author observed,

⁵¹ 'Kulturní hlídka. Řídí Jan K. Geringer', *Nový život*, 31 March 1934, p. 6.

⁵² jdr, 'Zapomenutí hrdinové', *Nový život*, 6 Nov. 1937, p. 3.

[the fact] that the state does not protect their interests and only ever speaks about the legionaries [constitutes] new evidence that there are first and second-class citizens in the Czechoslovak republic.⁵³

Although the rhetoric gradually became less scathing, many other grievances emerged in the early 1920s. On numerous occasions, Bund attacked extended rights of legionaries and their perceived preferential treatment compared with Austro-Hungarian war victims.⁵⁴ In particular, the republic was repeatedly criticised for helping able-bodied legionaries to find employment by reserving numerous state jobs for them, whilst failing to do the same for disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans.⁵⁵

However, similarly to Družina, Bund also appears to have found its way towards legionaries, perhaps in part through their cooperation in Říšský svaz organisací válečných poškozců v Československé republice. Criticism of legionaries and their privileges became less common with the passing years and by 1931 relations between disabled legionaries and German war victims had improved to the extent that Svaz invalidů československých legií was even invited to attend a pan-Czechoslovak meeting of Bund in Těšín/Teschen.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in the latter years of the interbellum, Bund also developed ties with ČsOL. Not only did the influential legionary Lev Sychrava give a speech at the large meeting of Bund in Troppau in June 1935,⁵⁷ but German representatives also attended the third pan-Czechoslovak rally of ČsOL, which was held a month later in

⁵³ L., 'Unsere Kriegsgefangenen', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 20 Dec. 1919, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Die Bundesleitung, 'Zum neuen Versorgungs-Gesetz', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 20 Apr. 1920, p. 4; 'Leitmeritz', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 20 Apr. 1920, p. 7; Oswald Lang, 'Unsere Gagisten und die kriegsbeschädigte Mannschaft', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Oct. 1921, p. 5; 'Keine Staatsanstellung für deutsche Kriegsverletzte', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Nov. 1921, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁵ See Chapter IV.

⁵⁶ 'Verhandlungsschrift über den am 1., 2. und 3. Mai 1931 im „Schützenhaus“ in Teschen a. E. stattgefunden 7. ordentlichen Bundestag', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 May 1931, p. 4

⁵⁷ *Verhandlungsschrift über den am 8. und 9. Juni 1935 ... stattgefundenen 8. ordentlichen Bundestag*, pp.69-72.

Prague, with *Der Kriegsverletzte* expressing hopes that ‘fruitful cooperation’ would develop between the organisations in the future.⁵⁸

Similar to their counterparts in other regions of Czechoslovakia in the 1920s, Ruthenian war victims also expressed frustration with the privileged position of legionaries. The few issues of *Nasha Oborona* published in this period contain several articles in which the newspaper criticised the preferential treatment of predominantly Czech legionaries who received jobs, land, and licences for state monopolies in Ruthenia instead of local disabled veterans.⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, war victims expressed the belief that disadvantaged locals should have been helped before outsiders, who were seen as taking their potential sources of income; as an unnamed disabled veteran from Teresva/Taracköz asked in anger in 1925, ‘is our man [‘наш чоловік’] no longer allowed to live because legionaries have to get everything?’⁶⁰

Indeed, although legionaries represented a privileged group of Czechoslovaks, disabled veterans of the Legions received relatively little attention. Despite this lack of interest in them, the veterans believed that the republic emerged from their sacrifice. Not surprisingly, the belief in the superiority of legionaries and their privileges met with criticism from Austro-Hungarian veterans in the postwar period; for example, in 1921, *Der Kriegsverletzte* opined that nothing was available for disabled veterans because the state ‘care[d] only about the ‘valiant’ legionaries’.⁶¹

However, significant changes occurred in the 1930s. In this period, relations between Austro-Hungarian war victims and legionaries improved considerably,

⁵⁸ ‘Zum Legionärkongreß in Prag’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, Aug. 1935, p. 2.

⁵⁹ ‘Zayava chsl. legionerov’, *Nasha oborona*, 15 Nov. 1923, pp. 2-3; ‘Zemel'na reforma II’, *Nasha oborona*, 29 Feb. 1924, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁰ Invalid, ‘Yake pershinstvo mayut nashi invalidi’, *Nasha oborona*, 15 Apr. 1925, p. 3.

⁶¹ ‘Keine Staatsanstellung für deutsche Kriegsverletzte’, *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 Nov. 1921, p. 7.

particularly as disabled Czech veterans and Družina drew themselves ever closer to the legionary narrative. The singing of the song 'Hoši od Zborova', which speaks of the fallen legionaries and their sacrifice, to commemorate the dead at the 1937 rally of Družina is only one of many examples of this trend.⁶² Nevertheless, legionaries still, by and large, expressed little interest in Austro-Hungarian war victims, who simply never reached the same heroic status as them.

⁶² 'Byly to slavné chvíle ...', p. 4.

Chapter VIII: White Russian Veterans and Czechoslovakia

‘For five and a half years, I have been living in Bohemia and learning how to be an asset to society’.¹

V. Lebedev, a disabled Russian veteran.

The two Russian revolutions, the subsequent civil war, and the establishment of Soviet rule resulted in a mass exodus of former imperial subjects. In the aftermath of these events, hundreds of thousands of people left Russia. Although estimates vary considerably, it can be suggested that around 800,000 émigrés fled to various European countries.² More than 20,000 of these refugees found their way to Czechoslovakia.³

Indeed, it is impossible to say how many Russian émigrés had fought in the Great War or in the subsequent civil conflict. Although we can presume that many had served in these wars, little is known about their Czechoslovak organisation of veterans called Sdružení Rusů – účastníků války (Association of Russians – Participants in the War). Similarly, few sources are available about the monarchist association of soldiers who had been evacuated with General Wrangel entitled Gallipolské sdružení (Галлиполийское землячество/Gallipoli Fraternity), which possessed some 400 members.⁴ Nevertheless, we can explore the topic of Russian veterans in Czechoslovakia through material produced by two organisations of disabled ex-servicemen that operated in the republic during this period. The first, Spolek ruských válečných invalidů v ČSR (Союз Русских Военных Инвалидов в ЧСР/Union of Russian War Invalids in the ČSR), was established in Prague already in 1921. Spolek, which was a member of the overarching international

¹ V. Lebedev, ‘Jak jsem přišel do Československa’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Oct. 1928, p. 3

² Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939* (New York, 1990), pp. 202–203.

³ Tejchmanová, ‘Politická činnost’, p. 3.

⁴ Ibid., p. 16; Lenka Pospíšilová, ‘Spolky ruské meziválečné emigrace v Brně’, *Ruská a ukrajinská emigrace*, ed. Veber, p. 48.

organisation Zahraniční svaz ruských válečných invalidů (Зарубежный Союз Русских Военных Инвалидов/Foreign Union of Russian War Invalids) with headquarters in Paris, was joined by approximately 130–190 people.⁵ However, in 1934, a struggle for leadership of the organisation resulted in the creation of a new, almost identically named association, Svaz ruských válečných invalidů v Československu (Union of Russian War Invalids in Czechoslovakia).⁶ By 1939, Svaz had around 40 members.⁷

Despite their limited membership, both organisations published their own journals. The larger Spolek printed *Ruský invalida v Československu*, while the smaller Svaz produced *Hlas ruských válečných invalidů*. Furthermore, both Spolek and Svaz published several edited volumes authored by disabled veterans as well as other Russian émigrés.⁸ Importantly, although the newspaper *Ruský invalida v Československu* did occasionally feature a text in Russian, these veterans' publications were written predominantly in Czech and thus were mainly oriented towards the Czechoslovak community rather than the men themselves. Some texts were produced by disabled veterans, while others were chosen by editors from other sources based on their perceived relevance.

In turn, these journals and other publications reflect how the ex-servicemen living in Czechoslovakia, who had served neither in the Austro-Hungarian forces nor in the Legions, chose to portray the conflict. This allows us to consider what they perceived as the Czechoslovak national narrative and how they interacted with it. Furthermore, these publications give us a glimpse of views of these men, their ties in the interwar republic,

⁵ According to Spolek, there were 120 disabled Russian veterans living in Czechoslovakia in 1926. 'Invalidy po stranam' sosredotocheny', *Den' russkago invalida 1914-1926: Odnodnevnyaya gazeta*, 9-22 May 1926, p. 6; 'Spolek ruských válečných invalidů v Československu', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1928, p. 5; 'Ruský Spolek válečných invalidů v ČSR', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May-June 1936, p. 6; *Zarubezhnyi soyuz "russkikh" voennykh" invalidov" 1920-1938* (Paris, n.d.), p. 8.

⁶ Confusingly, Spolek ruských válečných invalidů sometimes referred to itself as Svaz, as this was the literal translation of its name ('Союз') from Russian; Bernard Panuš, 'Ruský spolek válečných invalidů v ČSR a jeho odznak', *Drobná plastika*, 44.1-2 (2007), p. 72.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Panuš, p. 76.

and their hopes regarding the future of Russia. Meanwhile, it is much more difficult to glean information about how these veterans were perceived by other inhabitants of Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, sources produced by Družina československých válečných poškozenců reveal to us to some degree disabled Austro-Hungarian veterans' perception of the émigrés and their Russian counterparts.

This chapter observes that disabled Russian veterans, who were seeking help and support from the Czechoslovak public, fully co-opted the legionary narrative of the Great War. They combined this narrative with their own account of Russian bravery and the pivotal role of Russia in the conflict. The war, which was depicted as one of many struggles that Russia led to liberate fellow Slavs, was supposedly won only thanks to the Russian sacrifice on the Eastern front. In turn, the Czechoslovak public was asked to help these unsung heroes, who had been forced to leave their motherland. In their efforts, Russian veterans were supported by Czechoslovak writers, some of the local right-wing politicians, as well as several prominent Czechoslovak legionaries who had fought in Russia. By contrast, attitudes of Czechoslovak war victims towards disabled Russian ex-servicemen and Russian émigrés in general were by no means so positive.

Ruská pomocná akce (Russian Auxiliary Campaign)

Following a plea from General Wrangel in 1921, the Czechoslovak government opted to help the newly arrived émigrés through the so-called Ruská pomocná akce (Russian auxiliary campaign).⁹ In the early 1920s, tens of millions of Czechoslovak crowns were given to the refugees. Such aid was provided to Russian émigrés for a number of reasons. Needless to say, the attempt to help the uprooted Slavic community

⁹ Světlana Tejchmanová, *Rusko v Československu (Bílá emigrace v ČSR 1917-1939)* (Jinočany, 1993), pp. 7-8.

played an important role. However, some politicians, such as Karel Kramář, also hoped that the state could reap significant benefits in the future, when Soviet rule would collapse and these émigrés would return to Russia.¹⁰

To illustrate the level of support granted to Russian émigrés, we can consider education opportunities available to the diaspora. Throughout the interwar period, the Czechoslovak state paid great attention to the education of both young and adult émigrés. Several thousand Russian students joined Czechoslovak universities and high schools.¹¹ Furthermore, the republic supported a wide network of Russian schools and other educational institutions. For example, in the academic year of 1928–1929, 29 Russian kindergartens and 52 elementary schools as well as 37 high schools operated in the territory of Czechoslovakia.¹² The émigrés even established their own Russian Law Faculty, which reached its pinnacle in 1924 when as many as 488 students were enrolled, and Russian People's University, which provided adult education, public talks, and lectures, and also served as a research centre throughout the interwar period.¹³

At first, *Ruská pomocná akce* was greeted with support stemming from ideas of Slavic solidarity.¹⁴ It was originally hoped that linguistic and cultural similarities would result in positive relations between citizens of Czechoslovakia and the Russian refugees. However, in reality, coexistence proved to be much more difficult, as has been discussed by the historian Elena Chinyaeva. Whilst some politicians supported émigrés, Czechoslovak left-wing parties, including Social Democrats, often viewed them with

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹² Ibid., p. 28.

¹³ Catherine Andreyev and Ivan Savický, *Russia Abroad: Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918–1938* (New Haven, 2004), pp. 89–94; Světlana Tejchmanová, 'Ruská lidová (svobodná) univerzita v Praze', *Slovanský přehled*, 80.2 (1994), p. 149.

¹⁴ Elena Chinyaeva, 'Russian Emigres and Czechoslovak Society: Uneasy Relations', *Ruská a ukrajinská emigrace*, ed. Veber, pp. 144–146.

considerable displeasure.¹⁵ According to Chinyaeva, further issues were caused by émigrés' unwillingness to adjust themselves to the local environment as they sought to preserve their distinct identity.¹⁶ In turn, these refugees formed a highly conspicuous community in Czechoslovakia. Russians, and to a smaller extent Ukrainians, founded their own societies and organisations that published several journals and held various rallies and events.¹⁷ Furthermore, the situation was not helped by the gradual establishment of the USSR as a major force in international politics. Step by step, Czechoslovakia developed official relations with the USSR, which had a negative impact on Ruská pomocná akce. In 1935, Czechoslovakia entered a defence pact with the USSR; a year later Ruská pomocná akce was brought to an end.

Russian Veterans and the Great War

Newspaper articles and books published by disabled Russian veterans in Czech clearly manifest the desire of these men to persuade the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia about the importance of Russian Imperial forces in the conflict. In particular, the journals argued that the victory on the Western front would not have been possible without immense sacrifices of Russians. Veterans repeatedly observed the significance of German forces being tied down in the East, which allowed the Allies to win the war in the West. Texts of military historians were chosen to substantiate these claims. For example, in one of the articles, General Golovin, who became a military historian after his escape from Russia, proclaimed that one day it would be observed that

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 144-150.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Helena Nosková, 'Festivity a každodennost ruských „bílých“ emigrantů v pražském exilu v prolínání historie a vzpomínek', *Národopisná revue*, 28.1 (2018), pp. 51-63. For more information about Russians in Czechoslovakia, see the following two volumes: Ljubov Běloševská (ed.), *Kronika kulturního, vědeckého a společenského života ruské emigrace v Československé republice* vol. 1 (Prague, 2000); Ljubov Běloševská (ed.), *Kronika kulturního, vědeckého a společenského života ruské emigrace v Československé republice* vol. 2 (Prague, 2001).

it was not [the Battle of] the Marne, but victories of the Russian army in Galicia in 1914, which forced Germans to change their military plan at its core.¹⁸

The Russian war effort was highly idealised in these sources. Although some problems, such as ammunition shortages, were occasionally recognised, articles in both journals depicted Russian soldiers as fully making up for these shortcomings. Russian esprit de corps was praised by authors such as General Denikin, who also did not fail to observe the enormous heroism and bravery of soldiers.¹⁹ This was supposedly manifested not only on the Eastern front but also in other places where Russian servicemen were deployed; in the 1930s, disabled veterans published two books about Russian units in France, on the Macedonian front, and in the Persian campaign, which portrayed the immense gallantry and pluck of the soldiers.²⁰

Furthermore, ex-servicemen often attributed yet another meaning to the involvement of the empire in the Great War when they claimed that Russians had been seeking to protect fellow Slavs. The conflict was portrayed as a struggle against ‘Germanism’, which eventually resulted in the creation of Slavic Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.²¹ As one of the veterans observed, disabled Russians were united by the ‘blood, wounds, and being physically crippled for Russia, Slavs, and the victory of right and justice’.²²

In turn, the Great War represented only the latest of many Russian attempts to help other Slavic nations in their struggle for liberation and independence. The Russian desire

¹⁸ N. N. Golovin, ‘Ještě několik číslic z minulé války’, trans. B. Baša, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1929, p. 2.

¹⁹ A. Děnikin, ‘Bývalo’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1928, pp. 2-3.

²⁰ V. P. Šapilovský (ed.), *Legie cti 1916-1918: Sborník článků a vzpomínek* (Prague, 1936); V. P. Šapilovský (ed.), *Na spojeneckých frontách: Sborník článků a vzpomínek* (Prague, 1938).

²¹ ‘Bez ruských obětí a slavných činů nebylo by spojeneckého vítězství’, *Hlas ruských válečných invalidů*, May 1934, p. 2.

²² G. Senkevič, ‘Deset let mezi Čechoslováky’, *Deset let mezi Čechoslováky 1921-1931*, ed. G. Senkevič (Prague, 1931), p. 9.

for the freedom of all Slavs had been purportedly manifested already in the 19th century through military involvement of the empire in the Balkans. In particular, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 was repeatedly discussed by veterans, who at times drew direct connections between this conflict and the Great War. For example, according to *Ruský invalida v Československu*, those ‘lucky’ veterans who ended up living in Slavic countries could

see that the blood that their grandfathers and fathers had spilled at Shipka and Plevna, when crossing the Balkans, and [that they themselves] had spilled in the world war was not shed in vain, but that it brought seeds of Slavic states.²³

As such claims could not be made in regard to Russian interaction with the Czechs and Slovaks in the pre-1914 period, even the most tenuous ties and connections were utilised to support the idea of the long-lasting pan-Slavic friendship between Russia and the future inhabitants of Czechoslovakia. Thus, for example, a statement of the Czech writer Karel Havlíček Borovský from 1849, in which he praised the behaviour of Russian troops in Hungary, was brought up by veterans.²⁴ This desire to identify and prove Russo–Czech cooperation is almost tangible in the book *Ruská vojska v Čechách: K 200. výročí, 1735-1935*, which described interactions between Russian soldiers and the Czechs over the last 200 years. The publication, which was issued by Svaz ruských válečných invalidů, depicted Russo–Czech relations as nothing short of ideal. Be it in 1735, 1799, 1813, or 1822, they were apparently always most cordial and correct. As the foreword argued, throughout decades

strong foundations were built not only for the restoration and strengthening of the sense of blood ties of the two nations of one and the same

²³ ‘Ke druhému dni ruského invalidy!’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1927, p. 1.

²⁴ I. Lappo, ‘Ruská armáda a Slovanstvo’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1928, p. 1; Michejev, ‘Několik slov o ruské armádě a ruských invalidech’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Dec. 1929, p. 2.

family, but also for the understanding of shared cultural, economic, and political aims.²⁵

In their rhetoric, the two Russian journals combined the aforementioned account of the Great War with the dominant Czechoslovak narrative of the conflict. Whilst military service of Czechs and Slovaks on the side of Austria-Hungary was ignored or described as involuntary, their resistance to Austria-Hungary was emphasised. As General Sidorin noted in his article,

Already after the first few months of the war, it was clear not only to officers, but also to war masses [i.e. soldiers] that in the ranks of the Austro-Hungarian army we have not only blood-related brothers, but also useful allies against German imperialism in the form of Czechs and Slovaks.²⁶

The service of Czechoslovak legionaries in Russia received particular attention from Russian veterans. Russian journals portrayed the Legions and their role in two overlapping ways. Firstly, both Russians and Czechoslovaks spoke fondly of each other. Veterans praised the military skills and traits of their respective allies such as bravery and leadership.²⁷ Secondly, disabled Russian veterans accentuated the cooperation between legionaries and Russians. At the official level, it was emphasised that Russia chose to support the Czechoslovak cause and made the creation of Czechoslovak units possible.²⁸ However, more importantly, Russians and Czechoslovak soldiers fought side by side in the war against the common enemy, at first Austria-Hungary and Germany, and later the Bolsheviks.

²⁵ V. A. Francev, *Ruská vojska v Čechách: K 200. výročí, 1735-1935* (Prague, 1935), n. pag.

²⁶ V. I. Sidorin, 'Válka rodí hrdiny!', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, June 1933, pp. 1-2.

²⁷ J. V. Novickij, 'Zborov-Tarnopol', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1927, pp. 2-3.

J. Vavroch, 'Ruští důstojníci a náš odboj', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1930, pp. 1-2.

Rudolf Medek, '„Mají však také své lidské právo...“', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Aug. 1934, p. 1.

²⁸ Ladislav Grund, 'Češi a Slováci v Rusku v boji za státní samostatnost', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, 28 Oct. 1938, pp. 2-4.



Fig. 11. The cover of the Zborov volume.²⁹

Not surprisingly, publications of disabled Russian veterans focused on the Battle of Zborov, in which the Czechoslovak brigade fought together with Russian units and under the command of a Russian officer. Significant symbolic value was attributed to this shared military experience; as General Shilling noted, ‘the Battle of Zborov must always unite us inseparably with our Czechoslovak brothers’.³⁰ Furthermore, disabled veterans associated this battle

with the aforementioned struggle of Russia for Slavic liberation. For example, in the foreword to an edited volume, which was published to celebrate anniversaries of both the Battle of Zborov and the Russo-Turkish War, its author opined the following:

From the outside, it seems that these events are not connected. But the inner connection is indisputable: in 1877-78, the army of Tsar Alexander II liberated the Slavic South; in 1917-1918, Czech Legions liberated the Slavic West.³¹

Russian Ex-Servicemen and the Czechoslovak Public

Throughout the interwar period, the cause of disabled Russian veterans was backed by a number of influential Czechoslovaks, who pleaded on their behalf, attended their concerts and balls, and financially helped them. In May 1927, ladies who had been

²⁹ L. N. Čerkes et al. (eds.), *Almanach v upomínku 10. výročí Zborova a 50. výročí rusko-turecké války (za osvobození Slovanstva)* (Prague, 1927).

³⁰ Šilling, ‘Vzpomínky na bitvu u Zborova’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1927.

³¹ Ibid., p. 6.

organising evening parties for the benefit of Russian veterans even established Kroužek přátel ruských válečných invalidů v ČSR (Circle of Friends of Russian War Invalids in the ČSR), which called out to all those ‘inside whom the heart beats for the Slavic idea’ to join.³² Kroužek quickly established no fewer than six branches in Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia.³³

Czechoslovak support for disabled Russian veterans was most visibly expressed in the period preceding the annual commemorative event ‘Den ruského invalidy’, which was organised by Spolek ruských válečných invalidů for the first time in 1926. This event, which was held in Allied countries on Saint Nicholas Day (22/9 May in the Gregorian/Julian calendar) by the local branches of Zahraniční svaz ruských válečných invalidů, was supposed to help disabled Russian ex-servicemen attract the attention of the general public and raise funds for them. People were expected to ‘put down a voluntary, unforced yearly tax – tax of blood for Russian victims of the war’.³⁴ The money was to be used to cover various needs of veterans, be it pensions, prosthetic aids, or medical treatment; with no state structures and social care of their own, disabled veterans had to replicate these themselves. Furthermore, the day was supposed to remind veterans that they had not been forgotten.

In Czechoslovakia, Russian veterans advertised for the event by claiming support of many influential Czechs and Slovaks. Several prominent Czechoslovak writers joined a public declaration, which asked people to help Russian veterans suffering ‘in our land, for the independence of which they had also fought and brought sacrifices’.³⁵ This call, which aimed to ‘show that the Czechoslovak nation is not an ungrateful nation’, included a wide

³² Svolávací skupina, ‘Vyzvání’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1927, p. 1.

³³ ‘Spolek ruských válečných invalidů v Československu’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1928, p. 5.

³⁴ G. Senkevič, ‘Den ruského invalidy’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1930, p. 1.

³⁵ ‘Československé veřejnosti!’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1930, p. 1.

spectrum of authors, with the unsurprising exception of those belonging to the far left.³⁶

Perhaps no other list has ever encompassed the names of Josef Čapek, Karel Čapek, Viktor Dyk, Marie Laudová-Hořicová, Martin Rázus, and Emil Vachek at the same time.

Furthermore, the declaration was also supported by several Russian legionaries-cum-writers: Josef Kopta, František Kubka, and František Langer. Ironically, it was also signed by Ivan Krasko (under his original name Dr. Jan Botto), who had fought on the Eastern front as an Austro-Hungarian serviceman.

Furthermore, 'Den ruského invalidy' was also supported by other prominent Czechs, Slovaks, and even Ruthenes. Over the years, the legionary chief of staff of the Czechoslovak Army (and later Prime Minister) Jan Syrový as well as ministers of national defence Karel Viškovský, Bohumír Bradáč, and František Machník all served as patrons of the event. The honorary committee included further notable figures, such as the politicians Karel Kramář and Václav Klobáček, the governor of Ruthenia Anton Beskid, and the interwar mayor of Prague Karel Baxa. Although the honorary committee embodied a wide range of opinions and beliefs, it should be noted that nationalistically oriented members of public administration and the armed forces, many of whom were Russian legionaries, were represented in disproportionately high numbers.

Indeed, Spolek ruských válečných invalidů developed significant ties with various legionary groups and individual legionaries. Calls for support of 'Den ruského invalidy' included several well-known legionary names such as Rudolf Medek, Stanislav Čeček, Lev Prchala, Josef Patejdl, and Josef Vavroch. By all accounts, this cooperation between the two groups of veterans became even more pronounced as time progressed. After 1933, the annual event came to be supported by all four Czechoslovak organisations of

³⁶ Ibid.

legionaries that were members of FIDAC – Československá obec legionářská, Kruh francouzských legionářů (Circle of French Legionaries), Kruh starodružiníků, and Nezávislá jednota československých legionářů. In their declarations of support in the journal *Ruský invalida v Československu*, which were presumably prepared in collaboration with disabled Russian veterans, these legionary organisations emphasised roughly identical ideas to the Russians themselves. According to these calls, men who had sacrificed themselves for their ‘national and Slavic duty’ were suffering away from ‘the once mighty Slavic empire’ and needed help from those who ‘would never forget [that they had been] fighting together for the great and just cause in the years 1914–1918’.³⁷

Russian veterans established particularly close cooperation with Josef Vavroch, the leader of Kruh starodružiníků. Colonel Vavroch, a Russian legionary who had been living in Russia before the war broke out, was involved in many endeavours and projects of Spolek. Several articles and books of Vavroch that were published by Spolek suggest that he became a Czech mouthpiece and representative of the organisation;³⁸ the fact that a Czech legionary leader pleaded on behalf of Russian veterans presumably helped to justify veterans’ demands and claims. Relations between the organisation and Vavroch became so close that Spolek had his photograph hung in its office and Vavroch even officially opened the 1930 rally of Zahraniční svaz in Prague.³⁹ Indeed, in his texts, Vavroch diverged little from the usual Russian rhetoric. Russian soldiers were idealised and their enormous contribution to the war effort was recognised; as Vavroch wrote,

I have already said it a few times, but I do not hesitate to say it again, we are greatly, greatly obliged to pre-revolutionary Russia that it allowed us to establish Česká Družina, without which there would have been no Zborov, no

³⁷ ‘Českoslovenští legionáři ruským invalidům!’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, June 1933, p. 2.

³⁸ See J. Vavroch (ed.), *Ruští důstojníci v československém odboji* (Prague, 1933); J. Vavroch (ed.), *Sborník vzpomínek na ruskou armádu* (Prague, 1934); J. Vavroch, *U hrobu neznámého vojína* (Prague, 1935).

³⁹ For his contribution and help, Vavroch was even named an honorary member of both Spolek ruských válečných invalidů and Zahraniční svaz ruských válečných invalidů in Paris. ‘Druhý všezahraniční delegátský sjezd Zahraničního svazu ruských invalidů’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Dec. 1930, p. 4.

Bakhmach or the Volga, or Siberia [famous sites of legionary deployment] and possibly even no independent state of ours.⁴⁰

In return for all the help and support, Russian veterans spared no effort or space to express their gratitude and loyalty to the republic.⁴¹ Czechoslovakia was described in highly positive terms, as a success story of the postwar period.⁴² The only grievance of Russian ex-servicemen stemmed from their problems with finding employment; however, even this complaint never reached levels of bitterness that could be found in the rhetoric of Czechoslovak veterans.⁴³ Similarly, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Karel Kramář, a conservative politician who was a staunch supporter of White émigrés, were praised ad infinitum.⁴⁴ For the 85th birthday of the president, Svaz even published a laudatory biography of him entitled *Život a dílo T. G. Masaryka*. The book brimmed with praise despite veterans' at best lukewarm attitudes towards Masaryk's prewar studies of the Russian Empire.⁴⁵ For example, according to the foreword written by Russian veterans, Masaryk's birthday was an occasion of 'universal [*všelidský*]' importance' and in him, 'the family of Slavic nations has produced such an impressive official of a worldwide importance that it will be fully appreciated only by future generations'.⁴⁶

The future was often alluded to by the veterans. Whilst the present was described as particularly oppressive and ex-servicemen with no motherland of their own were

⁴⁰ J. Vavroch, 'Výročí', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May-June 1936, p. 2.

⁴¹ See M. G. Michějěv, L. F. Magerovský, and G. I. Senkevič (eds.), *Zahraniční Rusové Československu* (Prague, 1928).

⁴² '28. říjen 1928', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Oct. 1928, p. 1.

⁴³ A. Filippov, 'Nucená zahálka', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, May 1931, p. 6.

⁴⁴ 'Dr. Karel Kramář (K jeho sedmdesátinám)', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Dec. 1930, p. 1. See also the volume dedicated to Kramář's late wife Nadezhda, which was published by Gallipolské sdružení, *Nadezhda Nikolaevna Kramarzh* (Prague, 1937).

⁴⁵ Sergej Zavadskij, *Život a dílo T. G. Masaryka* (Prague, 1935), pp. 39-40. See Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Zur russischen Geschichts und Religionsphilosophie: Soziologische Skizzen. 1. Band* (Jena, 1913); Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Zur russischen Geschichts und Religionsphilosophie: Soziologische Skizzen. 2. Band* (Jena, 1913).

⁴⁶ Výbor, 'Předmluva', Zavadskij, *Život a dílo*, p. 3.

portrayed as ‘indubitably the most unfortunate of all invalids’,⁴⁷ there was some hope in the future. Veterans repeatedly proclaimed their belief that the Bolshevik rule would collapse and ‘national’ (*‘národní’*) Russia would be reborn.⁴⁸ In turn, Russia would then resume its alleged position of the protector of fellow Slavs. However, apart from obvious anti-Bolshevism, veterans never discussed in detail any precise characteristics of this restored state. Although Spolek did mourn the death of Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich, who happened to be the honorary chairmen of *Zahraniční svaz*,⁴⁹ Spolek and Svaz rarely referred to him or to any other leading political figure of the Russian diaspora. In turn, it appears that both organisations were hoping to appeal to and bring together as wide a spectrum of people as possible.

Unfortunately, available sources offer us little information about relations between disabled Russians and their Czechoslovak counterparts. Neither Austro-Hungarian nor legionary war victims were ever mentioned by Russian veterans. Similarly, Czechoslovak war victims very rarely broached or discussed the topic of disabled Russian ex-servicemen. However, in the few relevant articles available to us, *Družina československých válečných poškozců* spoke with relative understanding about the needs of these men, whilst also expressing the belief that Czechoslovak war victims should be prioritised over them by the state and public. For example, in one of them, which was written in reaction to Karel Kramář’s call for the Czechoslovak public to support the disabled Russians, the author observed that these men were ‘equally destitute and [were] equally waiting like beggars for brotherly help’.⁵⁰ However, at the same time, he emphasised that the Czechoslovak war

⁴⁷ ‘Všezahraniční svaz ruských válečných invalidů (1928-1938)’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, 29 May 1938, p. 5.

⁴⁸ ‘Říjen 1929’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Oct. 1929, p. 1.

⁴⁹ ‘Kronika’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, March 1929, p. 2.

⁵⁰ V. V. Roštinský, ‘Den ruských invalidů’, *Nový život*, 3 July 1933, p. 1.

victims, ‘who shed blood for our present independent state and endured so many sacrifices’ should have been helped first.⁵¹

By contrast, the predominantly socialist *Družina československých válečných poškozců* spoke more often about able-bodied Russians in Czechoslovakia, whom it repeatedly criticised. Articles in *Nový život* presented these émigrés as spongers who were able to lead carefree and comfortable lives thanks to the support of the Czechoslovak republic and its citizens in *Ruská pomocná akce*. The newspaper sharply juxtaposed such lives of the Russians against the penury and dearth that characterised the existence of the Czechoslovak war victims.⁵² In turn, according to *Družina*, local war wounded were to be helped instead of ‘foreign citizens, from whom our republic will never have any profit and any gratitude even less so’.⁵³ Indeed, bearing in mind the aforementioned observations of Elena Chinyaeva,⁵⁴ who argued that the Czechoslovak left tended to oppose the Russian émigrés on political grounds, we are inclined to ask ourselves whether there was not also an ulterior, more political motive behind *Družina*’s ostensibly chauvinistic criticism of the Russians.

Similarly, due to the lack of sources, it is also difficult to examine how inhabitants of Czechoslovakia perceived disabled Russian veterans or the Russian involvement in the Great War. However, the 1938 unveiling of a chapel in the village of Ladomirová (Vladimírová) in north-eastern Slovakia, which had been built to commemorate approximately 2,000 Russian soldiers who had been buried there, suggests that at least some of the Slavic inhabitants of Czechoslovakia recognised the sacrifice of these men.⁵⁵

⁵¹ For a similar opinion, see J. Rail, ‘Kavalíři k cizím – nespravedliví k vlastním’, *Nový život*, 26 Apr. 1930, pp. 1-2.

⁵² František Roda, ‘Šetři a pracuj!’, *Nový život*, 28 Nov. 1925, p. 2.

⁵³ Bohumír Cetkovský, ‘Ruští emigranti a váleční poškozců’, *Nový život*, 22 Jan. 1927, pp. 2.

⁵⁴ Chinyaeva, pp. 148-49.

⁵⁵ ‘Ve Vladimírové. (Vysvěcení pomníku padlým)’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, 28 Oct. 1938, p. 6.

In the tense atmosphere of 1938, the event turned into a demonstration of Russo-Czechoslovak ties. Russian and Czechoslovak banners were carried by schoolchildren; an Orthodox bishop spoke about the sacrifice of Russia and its tsar, who would not abandon the fellow Slavs; the head commissar of the Stropkov county administration reminded the participants of ‘what Russia had done for Slavdom’, only to further declare that ‘these graves [were] the eternal reminder of the brotherly co-existence which [had to] be preserved’.⁵⁶

Indeed, Russian veterans constituted an unusual group of ex-servicemen. Not only did the state that they had fought for ceased to exist, but they also had to flee their homeland and vie for support in a far-away country. In turn, the veterans’ narrative portrayed their service as a part of a long-term Russian effort to liberate fellow Slavs; not surprisingly, this highly coloured account of the war avoided the issue of the Polish struggle for independence. As the newspaper *Ruský invalida v Československu* observed in 1927,

we, the Russian invalids, find solace in [the fact] that our blood had not been shed completely in vain.

Indeed, we did not manage to defend the holy Russia, but we contributed with our sacrifice to the liberation and prosperity of other Slavic nations.⁵⁷

The cause of disabled Russians attracted a large number of Czechoslovak notables, who were willing to associate their names with this group of veterans. Reasons for their support of the Russians were varied; however, the Russian narrative about their sacrifice for the freedom of fellow Slavs was clearly accepted by at least some of the Czechoslovaks, as exemplified by Rudolf Medek’s radio speech in May 1930. In this

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ‘28. říjen’, *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Oct. 1927, p. 1.

speech, Medek, who was at the time the head of Památník osvobození and the leader of
Nezávislá jednota československých legionářů, declared that Czechoslovaks

thank [disabled Russian veterans] for the rare gift of brotherhood ...
[and] for the gift of sacrifice, which they have selflessly brought for our
freedom. Everything in the world can be forgotten, but no one will forget the
love given to them in the most difficult moment of their life.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ 'Projev předního básníka a spisovatele, plukovníka Rudolfa Medka (nynějšího přednosty Památníku Odboje, předsedy Nezávislé jednoty čsl. legionářů). (Proneseno v pražském rozhlase dne 21. května v 9. h. več.)', *Ruský invalida v Československu*, Dec. 1930, p. 3.

Chapter IX: Blinded Veterans¹

‘I would be ashamed to beg; I keep my head up because I am glad that we have gained the republic’.²

A blinded veteran talking about his situation in 1920.

For more than four years, hundreds of thousands of future Czechoslovaks were exposed to horrific wartime conditions; as pension files of individual soldiers suggest, it would have been difficult to find a medical issue that was not either caused or exacerbated by military service. Men’s injuries stemmed from shells, shrapnel, hand-to-hand combat, and explosions, as well as from various accidents, diseases, and even corporal punishment. Furthermore, soldiers often served in severe weather conditions, struggled with malnourishment and contaminated water, and received insufficient medical care. Needless to say, the mental health of these men also suffered. In turn, the war left behind disabled men with a great variety of different injuries and illnesses.

To illustrate this, we can examine a long list of injuries and illnesses of disabled veterans issued by Okresní úřadovna pro péči o válečné poškozence (State District Office for Care for War Victims) in Liberec/Reichenberg in the early postwar period.³ This was one of dozens of such offices established in Czechoslovakia immediately after the end of the conflict and presumably did not differ from other offices elsewhere in the republic in any significant way. According to its data, 272 men had their legs, arms, hands, or fingers removed; 474 were suffering from ‘stiffness’ (*ztuhnutí*) of the legs and feet and 838 from stiffness of the arms; 243 men were affected by leg fractures and three by arm fractures; 53 had one paralysed leg and seven were left with both legs paralysed; 69 men were suffering from head injuries; 40 had spinal injuries; 44 were affected by chest injuries; 40 had

¹ Parts of this chapter have been used in the following articles: Lupták, ‘„Zapadli jsme do ústraní“’, pp. 165-172; Luptak and Newman, ‘Victory, Defeat, Gender, and Disability’, pp. 604-619.

² ‘Manifestace válečných slepců za své požadavky’, *Válečný slepec*, 31 Jan. 1920, p. 1.

³ Skala, *Tři roky boje proti následkům války*, p. 138.

(other) injuries of the lower extremities; 39 were suffering from abdominal injuries; the jaws of 32 others were damaged; 72 soldiers had one eye removed; 75 became deaf; 30 were ‘of unsound mind’ (*‘choromyslní’*); three had tuberculosis ‘of the entire body’; 496 were ill with pulmonary tuberculosis; 27 were suffering from ‘tuberculosis of the throat’; 212 had internal diseases; 148 were left with heart diseases; 46 were suffering from ‘physical weakness’ (*‘slabost tělesná’*); 62 had rheumatism; 82 developed hernias; 142 ‘lost sight’ (to some degree); seven were ‘completely blind’; 22 had one ‘half’ (presumably ‘side’) of their bodies paralysed; 56 were suffering from ‘hysteria’; 152 were ill with ‘neurasthenia’; and 36 were affected by malaria.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the topic of one particular group of disabled Czechoslovak veterans, namely that of blinded ex-servicemen.⁴ To do so, it begins by discussing the perceptions of blindness obtained during the war and in the interwar period. It then goes on to consider state measures that blinded servicemen met with as a result of these attitudes. Afterwards, it examines how these disabled veterans portrayed their condition and considers the two different attitudes towards blindness that prevailed amongst these men in the interbellum. Later, it explores the topic of blind Czechoslovak civilians to be able to examine relations between them and former soldiers and to better understand the position of blind veterans.

As this chapter will argue, this group of veterans stood out from tens of thousands of ex-servicemen because of their disability. Around 600 soldiers who had been blinded in the Great War, including eight Czechoslovak legionaries, were perceived by the public as being much different from other servicemen.⁵ Throughout the period, blindness was

⁴ This topic has already been briefly examined by Natali Stegmann. See Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, pp. 118-119.

⁵ ‘Jak lze válečným slepčům pomoci?’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 Nov. 1922, p. 1.

‘Statistika legionářů-invalidů z mužstva’, *Československý legionář*, 2 Feb. 1923, p. 3.

‘Kolik je legionářů invalidů?’, *Věstník Svazu invalidů čsl. legií*, 1 Nov. 1928, p. 6.

largely perceived to be the ultimate misfortune and the most debilitating diagnosis that could be received in life. As such, blinded veterans received considerable attention from the authorities and the public both during the war and in the postwar period. In spite of their relatively modest number, these ex-servicemen, who were scattered across the Czechoslovak republic, formed a distinct and particularly vocal faction amongst Czechoslovak veterans and disabled people in general. The rhetoric of these blind veterans was marked by two distinct streams, which espoused wildly divergent views towards blindness and the lives of blind people. This chapter also shows that throughout the interwar years, blinded veterans developed certain ties with their civilian counterparts. However, despite their shared disability, the two groups were treated differently by the Czechoslovak state.

Blind People and Blindness before 1918

Indeed, blindness seems to have been perceived as a discrete and identifiable category of disability in the region long before 1914. Bohemian medieval history offers up several exempla of blind figures who appear to have become well-recognised by 19th and early 20th century society. One such story was that of the blind king John of Bohemia who died valiantly at the Battle of Crécy in 1346; another was the legend about the prophecy given to his son, Charles IV, by a blind youth. In this story, which has been reproduced in numerous books,⁶ a common trope is used – the loss of sight is associated with unearthly powers. The enigmatic youth foretells the course of Czech history over the coming centuries, and as a result Charles IV, in awe of his mystical abilities, takes the youth to live

⁶ See, for example, *Proroctví slepého mládence, učiněné o naší milé vlasti Karlu IV., králi Českému a císaři Římskému, léta Páně 1362* (Prague, 1863).

with him at his court. However, arguably the most famous blind Czech was Jan Žižka, who completely lost his sight towards the end of his life.

Although a subtle evolution towards greater understanding and destigmatisation of blind people might be presumed, it appears that public attitudes towards blindness did not change significantly between the turn of the century and World War II. Be it before the Great War, or in the interbellum period, the public largely perceived blind people as some of the most unfortunate human beings. They were often described through disempowering stereotypes and depicted as struggling in life. By contrast, many professionals who worked with blind people sought to dispel these beliefs as they emphasised abilities and skills of people with visual impairment.

This ambiguity that was present in society is perhaps best manifested by a 1913 Czech book about blind people, tellingly entitled *Slepci, čili z nešťastných ti nejnešťastnější* (*The Blind – that is – the Most Unfortunate from the Unfortunate* in English). The book, the proceeds of which went to Deylova výchovna slepců (Deyl's Educational Institute of the Blind) in Prague, offers a medley of texts about blind people. These range from an article about children living in the Deyl's institute to the aforementioned story about the medieval oracle. Indeed, the book appears to play on stereotypes as it seeks to generate funds for the education of blind people. On the surface, one message of the book appears to be clear, as encapsulated in its title; blindness is described by the editor Stáňa J. Bělohradský as 'the greatest misfortune and material loss'.⁷

However, the book also includes a number of voices that contradict this attitude. These stress the importance of education for the lives of blind people. Indeed, even

⁷ Stáňa J. Bělohradský, 'Úvod', *Slepci čili z nešťastných ti nejnešťastnější*, ed. Stáňa J. Bělohradský (Podmoklice u Semil, 1913), p. 3.

Bělohradský himself refers to blind people as ‘these poor things’ only to immediately call for their support, in order for them to obtain ‘suitable education and skills [necessary] for independence and livelihood’.⁸ Similarly, other articles also emphasise not only the perceived extreme misfortune of blind people but also their ability to learn and become independent, if provided with adequate education.⁹

Indeed, prewar Prague was home to a number of institutions that worked specifically with blind people, and which would come to play an important role in the interbellum period as the standard provider of educational opportunities for many blind locals. Two of these institutions, the Soukromý ústav pro vychování a léčení chudých slepých dětí a na oči chorých (Private Institute for the Education and Treatment of Poor Blind Children and the Visually Impaired) and Klárův ústav slepých (Klar’s Institute of the Blind) had already been founded by the first half of 19th century.¹⁰ Prague was even the site of the first Austrian Day of the Teachers of the Blind, which was held in 1889 in the latter of the two institutions.¹¹

However, it should be observed that the capital of Bohemia seems to have been rather exceptional by local standards. According to later sources, there appear to have been a distinct dearth of educational opportunities in many other territories of the future Czechoslovak republic.¹² For example, blind people from what was to become Slovakia only had available to them the choice between attendance at an institute in far-away Budapest or at artisan workshops in the eastern town of Prešov. Similarly, interwar reports from Ruthenia suggest that little work had been done in this field in the region before the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Frant. S. Jaroš, ‘Dům, v němž vychází slunce ...’, *Slepíci*, ed. Bělohradský, pp. 9-13.

¹⁰ A. Tůma, ‘O některých zařízeních pro osleplé vojíny a slepce vůbec’, *Jitřenka válečným slepcům: Kniha slepých* (Prague, 1916), pp. 54-56; *100 roků Klárova ústavu slepců v Praze* (Prague, 1932), p. 19.

¹¹ Josef Libansky and Johann Schillerwein, *Der erste österreichische Blindenlehrer-Tag in Prag am 25., 26. und 27. Juli 1889* (Prague, 1890), p. 13.

¹² V. H. Kurtha, Rudo Magdolen, et. al., *Sociálna starostlivosť o slepcov* (Bratislava, 1944), p. 23.

establishment of the new state.¹³ Even in prewar Bohemia the resources left much to be desired; whilst some German books for blind people were available in the region, it appears that the number of Czech publications was fairly small. Furthermore, the outreach of such books was presumably limited outside of Prague.

Indeed, although the first Czech books for blind people were produced already towards the end of the 19th century, publishing of these works became more systematic only as a result of the war.¹⁴ Soon after the outbreak of the conflict, the influential blind teacher and composer Karel Emanuel Macan,¹⁵ who had been made responsible for the re-education of blinded ex-servicemen, apparently realised that this task required books in Czech braille.¹⁶ This supposedly inspired him to seek the establishment of Odbor pro slepecký tisk český (Section for Czech Blind Publishing) in 1915. In the following year, the society published its first book entitled *Jitřenka válečným slepcům: Kniha slepých*.¹⁷

As the title suggests, this volume was presented as a direct response to the war and its blinded veterans. However, a closer examination betrays another, ulterior motive behind the book. None of the 30 articles in *Jitřenka* were aimed specifically at blinded veterans; instead, the volume was filled with advice as well as short stories that any blind person might find useful or interesting.¹⁸ In turn, it seems that visually impaired Czechs did to some extent capitalise on the opportunity provided by heightened wartime public interest in wounded soldiers to campaign for and push through their long-term goals.

¹³ See 'Péče o slepce na Podkarpatské Rusi', *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, 29 May 1933, p. 2.

¹⁴ Jaromír Doskočil, *Naše slepecké tiskárny* (Prague, 1938), pp. 4-10.

¹⁵ Ladislav Digrin, *Vývoj slepeckého tisku v našich zemích* (Prague, 1993), pp. 85-86.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁷ The first newspaper in Czech braille did not emerge until a year later, and the first braille library was not opened in the territory of Czechoslovakia until 1926. See 'K otázce zřízení státní ústřední knihovny pro slepé', *Válečný slepec*, 15 Feb. 1928, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ For examples of highly positive reactions of blind Czechs to this book, see František Cinger et al., *Karel Emanuel Macan: Hold muži, který nevidomé učil poznávat svět* (Prague, 2008), p. 86.

Indeed, Odbor pro slepecký tisk český laid out in *Jitřenka* a list of its organisational aims and imperatives. According to this list,

1. First of all, we want to help with the lack of good Czech reading, which would be now felt most cruelly especially by our heroes, used to both entertaining and educational reading. ...

4. We consider the current times especially favourable to proceed to the establishment of a printing house for the blind with continuous operation. This [house] would be joined by a circle of devoted workers, who would ensure regular publishing of a newspaper for the blind, as has been done in all advanced nations.¹⁹

Indeed, the public wartime reaction to the emergence of blinded soldiers speaks volumes as to the cultural perception of blindness obtained at the time. Whilst the number of soldiers with other types of injuries and illnesses soon reached hundreds and thousands, there appear to only have been a few dozen blinded servicemen in 1915. However, it was this group that most captivated the attention of local officials.²⁰ By February 1915, the first zemský komitét (provincial committee) dedicated specifically to blinded soldiers had already been established by the Governor of Bohemia Prince Franz Anton von Thun und Hohenstein, bringing together a long list of Bohemian notables and prominent social workers.²¹

Throughout the war, the authorities afforded the men who had ‘sacrificed for [the] fatherland [their] most valuable property, their sight’ more favourable treatment than that offered to soldiers who had sustained other types of injuries and/or illnesses.²² Examples of such preferential treatment include prioritising them when allocating licences for

¹⁹ ‘Doslov’, *Jitřenka*, p. 64.

²⁰ According to detailed contemporary statistics, at the end of 1916 there were 79 blind veterans in Bohemia. *Zpráva o činnosti Výboru pro péči o osleplé bojovníky Státní zemské ústředny pro království České pro péči o vráťivší se bojovníky v Praze za rok 1916* (Prague, n.d.), p. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²² ‘„Péče o válečné slepce v Čechách”’, *Péče o vojíny válkou poškozené: Věstník Státní zemské ústředny pro království České pro péči o vráťivší se vojíny*, 1 March 1917, p. 8.

newsagent's shops or even purchasing homes for these 'blinded warriors'.²³ By a similar token, the privileged position in which these men were held is further evinced in one of the publications of the aforementioned provincial committees, which introduced by name every blinded veteran – be he a working-class ordinary soldier or an officer – and even went on to include a brief synopsis of his injury and the nature of the social aid that he was to receive.²⁴ The unique standing of blind veterans in contemporary society is further encapsulated by the words of arguably the most prominent Czech ophthalmologist and founder of one of the Prague institutes for blind people, Jan Deyl. In February 1918, Deyl captured the fears of people and their perception of blindness as a particularly serious type of disability when he wrote of

the public, which has dedicated so much compassion to the blinded soldiers since the beginning of the war. ... The question regarding their numbers stayed on the minds [of people] everywhere. Already in the autumn of 1914, rumours were spreading that there were hundreds of them; indeed after the outbreak of the conflict with Italy in large mountainous battlegrounds news kept on coming about thousands of soldiers whose eyes had been destroyed by grenades and stone fragments. Alarming news appeared in Pest newspapers and German Prague newspapers, stimulating and promoting sympathies on all sides for the[se] most unfortunate amongst the wounded.²⁵

Blinded Veterans in Interwar Czechoslovakia

This perception of blindness appears to have survived the conflict. Shortly after the war, blinded veterans still encountered a great amount of public support. In July 1919, numerous events were held under the title 'Praha válečným slepcům' over a period of more than two weeks.²⁶ No other effort to help war victims in interbellum Czechoslovakia

²³ Ibid; R. Marschner, 'Péče v roce 1917 o vojíny ve válce osleplé', *Péče o vojíny válkou poškozené: Věstník Státní zemské ústředny pro království České pro péči o vrátivší se vojíny*, Dec. 1918, pp. 209-210; 'Domoviny', *Válečný slepec*, 15 Apr. 1924, p. 6.

²⁴ *Zpráva o činnosti Výboru pro péči o osleplé bojovníky*, pp. 20-24, 38-40, 42-43.

²⁵ Jan Deyl, 'O válečném oslepnutí (Dokončení)', *Deylův obzor*, 10 May 1918, p. 10.

²⁶ 'Praha válečným slepcům', *Národní listy*, 6 July 1919, p. 3; 'Velká Praha – válečným slepcům', *Národní listy*, 18 July 1919, p. 3; 'Velká Praha – válečným slepcům', *Národní listy*, 19 July 1919, p. 3.

ever attracted so much participation and assistance. Czechoslovak armed forces as well as Prague sportsmen and artists all took part in various shows and spectacles which were organised for the benefit of blinded veterans.

For example, on Friday, 11 July 1919, a gala was held for this purpose in the well-known Obecní dům in the city centre and the money generated by this event as well as other cultural events, such as theatre and cabaret performances and cinema screenings, which were held in Greater Prague that day, was given to blind veterans.²⁷ On Saturday, two football matches as well as ‘American sports games’ (*‘americké sportovní hry’*) could be attended at the stadium of AC Sparta Prague. One of the Prague palaces opened its gardens for the visitors who were also treated to a concert. In the evening, a regatta, which was attended by all Prague water sports clubs, was held together with several concerts and fireworks prepared by army engineer units. On Sunday, street collections were organised; at 11 am, spectators could watch rowing clubs of Greater Prague as well as 36 military airplanes. In the afternoon and evening, various shows took place in the former Royal Game Reserve for the benefit of ‘our brothers, the most unfortunate of the unfortunate’.²⁸

Tellingly, none of the newspaper articles mentioned the wartime service of blinded veterans. The Austro-Hungarian military past of these men was flatly ignored. Instead, the first three events of ‘Praha válečným slepcům’ were in fact lectures of American and Russian legionaries who spoke about these Allied units. Thus, the Czechoslovak state narrative was superimposed over the Austro-Hungarian past of blind men.²⁹

Indeed, the fact that the imperial military past ceased to be celebrated or associated with masculine heroism by the state narrative meant that blind Austro-Hungarian veterans

²⁷ ‘Praha válečným slepcům’.

²⁸ ‘Velká Praha – válečným slepcům’, *Národní listy*, 20 July 1919, p. 3.

²⁹ ‘Praha válečným slepcům’.

were by no means exempt from disempowering stereotypes. Rather than being wounded heroes of the recent conflict, blinded veterans became objects of pity.³⁰ Such attitudes towards blind veterans were expressed on numerous occasions and in a number of different ways over the years. They are perhaps best epitomised by the reaction in the press to a 1928 rally of blind veterans in Prague. Reports in Czech and German newspapers alike discussed the meeting and its participants with nothing but profound compassion, interpreting their wounded and maimed bodies as a semiotics of the horrors of the war. Several newspapers spoke with sadness about the difficult lives and suffering of these blind men. For example, *Venkov*, which was the newspaper of the Agrarian Party, described them as ‘the most unfortunate victims of the war’.³¹ Journalistic pity reached its climax in the daily newspaper of the Czech National Socialists; in an article, emotively entitled ‘The Poorest Victims of War Fury are Calling for Help’, the author seeks to conjure a poignant image of pathos:

All rallies of war victims, invalids, and widows of fallen soldiers are sad. As if the terrible curse of the war were hovering above the entire assembly. However, rallies of blinded soldiers are infinitely sadder, because the war has passed on them a possibly even crueller sentence than death.³²

Similar attitudes were also espoused by many state officials involved in care for war victims. Throughout the interwar period, the few blinded veterans were singled out from amongst other disabled ex-servicemen and were regarded as a unique group with specific needs and demands. The official rhetoric surrounding these veterans placed particular emphasis on the gravity of their injuries, according them pole position in the hierarchy of disability. For example, in the early 1920s, the prominent official Josef K. Skala, when summarising the first three years of Czechoslovak state care, began the

³⁰ Kr., ‘Politika a sociální péče’, *Válečný slepec*, 15 May 1929, 4.

³¹ ‘Venkov: Manifestační schůze čsl. válečných slepců’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 July 1928, 6.

³² ‘Nejubožejší oběti válečné litice volají o pomoc’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 July 1928, p. 7.

section of his chapter on blinded veterans, very much in the spirit of the era, with the following quotation: ‘To die is nothing – but to live and not see that is misfortune’.³³ Skala continued by observing that

in the general care for war victims, the care for disabled soldiers holds an entirely unique place. And it is most certainly the first duty of the state to look after those who lost their sight and became blind in military service.³⁴

Similar perceptions of and social expectations towards blindness and blind veterans were also reflected in the contemporary novel *Žena válečného slepce*,³⁵ written for the popular market by the prolific Czech publisher and author František Šupka. Significantly, the book was published as both an independent volume as well as part of the journal *Válečný slepec/Der Kriegsblinde*, which belonged to the leading blind veterans’ association Družina oslepených vojáků československé republiky (Fellowship of the Blinded Soldiers of the Czechoslovak Republic). Arguably, this suggests that ex-servicemen did not find the novel and its presentation of blind people unusually demeaning or problematic. The novel narrates the postwar story of one Professor Vratislav Milič. Through contemporary clichés and one-dimensional characterisation, the narrative follows the character of the humble-born Vratislav, who has succeeded in obtaining his university degree thanks to his hard work and the generosity of the affluent Plaňanský family. As such Vratislav, eternally grateful to the family for their help, decides to accept the invitation of the paterfamilias, Rudolf Plaňanský, to visit his son Bedřich, with whom Vratislav used to be close friends. Bedřich had been injured by an explosion in the war, which has damaged his eyes, lungs, and left hand, leaving him only capable of recognising

³³ Skala, *Tři roky boje proti následkům války*, p. 35.

³⁴ Ibid. Elsewhere, the author described blind veterans in similar terms, qualifying them as ‘the poorest of the poor’. J. K. Skala, ‘Přehled činnosti Zemského úřadu pro péči o válečné poškozence v Čechách’, *Sociální služba*, March-Apr. 1922, p. 134.

³⁵ František Šupka, *Žena válečného slepce* (Hradec Králové, 1929).

the shapes of objects in darkness. As a result of his wartime injuries, Bedřich spends most of his time in the family residence with his wife Milada.

However, as Vratislav makes his way towards the Plaňanský residence, he is confronted by a shocking scene as he witnesses Milada allowing herself to be kissed by a mysterious stranger. The rest of the novel is then spent disentangling the complicated life stories of Milada and Vratislav's former sweetheart Irma, whilst the reader is entertained by ditzy working-class characters and astonished by the generosity of the wealthy. The book eventually reveals to us the faithfulness and sacrifice born by both women, who appear to be the perfect embodiments of feminine middle-class values. The story concludes with a happy ending that entails two weddings and a funeral.

Curiously, although the plot largely revolves around the marriage of Bedřich and his former nurse Milada, the reader never learns very much about the visually impaired character. His military service in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces is mentioned only in passing, in keeping with the collective silence around this issue in public discourse at the time, perhaps merely to make clear that he was not a heroic legionary. It could be argued that the marginalisation of the blind character in this uncomplicated book filled with stereotypical characters has an almost metonymic value, and is emblematic of broader social issues and perceptions of blindness that prevailed at the time. Throughout the entire work, Bedřich is relegated to an object of Milada's care and is largely devoid of his own agency. Whilst his largely platonic love for Milada supposedly rejuvenates him, little of his new will for life is discernible in the narrative. The educated young man from a wealthy family has very few pastimes, not to mention any sort of employment; he suffers from recurrent bouts of ill health at critical points of the novel; and his activities are limited to walking in the family garden and listening to Milada's voice as she reads to him.

Even his marital issues have to be resolved by his father and best friend Vratislav, effacing any vestige of masculine agency and identity in the character.

Moreover, Bedřich's blindness, and indeed his function as a character in the narrative ecology is merely to serve as a 'test' of another character. In other words, he is not so much of interest in his own right; instead, his purpose is merely to allow Milada to prove her wifely virtue as a reliable and loyal carer, in turn dispelling fears of the masculinisation of Czech women as a result of war, an issue alluded to at the beginning of the book.³⁶ By the end of the novel it is established beyond any doubt that Milada is willing to sacrifice her love for her former sweetheart and wealthy lawyer, Alfred, out of loyalty for her blind husband. The blind character, now an impediment after fulfilling his narrative function, is quickly and conveniently disposed of to allow Milada to find her ultimate happiness with the able-bodied Alfred. Bedřich's death is as unremarkable as his previous actions and once again underlines his position as a passive victim of his ill health.

Despite all of Milada's care, [he] began to waste away and being devoured by tuberculosis, he died in Milada's arms on 5 July 1920 . . . She stayed with him until the final moment, alleviating his pain and dispelling his anxieties, which plagued him before death.³⁷

The behaviour and attitudes of other characters in the novel towards Bedřich betray contemporary society's infantilising and emasculating perception of, and attitude towards, blind men. Despite being in his mid-20s and a former officer and veteran from the Italian front, Bedřich is far from the archetypal masculine hero. Instead, numerous characters address and refer to him using the diminutive form of his name, '*Bedříšek*'. Likewise, on numerous occasions, he is referred to as the 'poor thing' ('*ubožák*') with his own father even describing him as the 'helpless cripple' ('*bezmocný mrzák*').³⁸ Similarly, after the

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 3-8.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 199.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

plot has reached its climax in the revelation of Milada's unwavering loyalty to her disabled husband, Bedřich's father, pointedly not Bedřich himself, assures Milada of his son's love for her with the words, 'Little Bedřich [*Bedříšek*] cannot live without you, he is constantly asking about you and he cannot wait for your arrival'.³⁹

Incidentally, the novel *Žena válečného slepce* also betrays an inherent vagueness as to the precise meaning of the term 'war blind' (*válečný slepec*/'*der Kriegsblinde*'), which in turn invites us to consider this question. Although Bedřich's vision is seriously impaired, he is not completely sightless; in this regard, this fictional character very closely resembles the reality in which many of the veterans with vision impairment found themselves. Indeed, wartime and postwar accounts suggest that the Austro-Hungarian (and later Czechoslovak) medical experts also struggled to reach a consensus as to who precisely should be categorised amongst the 'war blind'. During the conflict itself, the aforementioned Professor Deyl sought to prove that the taxonomy of visual impairment was anything but a straightforward task. In his article on blindness caused by the war, this stalwart of Bohemian ophthalmology listed a number of potential conditions that could have a severe impact on the vision of soldiers, and yet could not be described as a total loss of sight.⁴⁰ Deyl recommended an expansion of the existing definition of so-called social or practical blindness, a definition which had previously been put forward by another heavyweight of Bohemian social care, Professor Robert Marschner.⁴¹ This new understanding of the term would be based on a number of factors related to eye injuries and illnesses caused by the military service. However, it is unclear if Deyl's suggestion ultimately met with much success.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 175.

⁴⁰ Jan Deyl, 'O pojmu "válečného oslepnutí"', *Deylův obzor*, 10 June 1918, pp. 4-8.

⁴¹ See 'Péče o osleplé bojovníky', *Péče o vojíny válkou poškozené: Věstník Státní zemské ústředny pro království České pro péči o vrátiší se vojíny*, 15 Apr. 1917, pp. 34-35.

In his handbook for Czechoslovak social workers published a year later, the influential official Dr. Václav Nedoma returned to the original, narrower definition of the concept suggested by Marschner. According to this view, only men who were ‘unable to count fingers on a dark background from the distance of one metre and [who were] unable to orientate themselves in a previously unknown place’ would qualify as ‘war blind’.⁴² However, this claim was by no means the last word on this discussion; the convoluted and vague answer provided in a book written by Josef K. Skala in the early 1920s aptly reflects the professional uncertainty that seemingly continued to reign in this field:

The war blind [‘*váleční slepci*’] are ... those soldiers, who were completely blinded in both eyes whilst performing their military duty. The so-called socially [‘*sociálně*’] or practically [‘*prakticky*’] blind, i.e. those who cannot become able [sic] to earn income, should be put on the same level.

The question of who is blind, is generally and in every individual case the object of expert medical consideration in regards to [their] social jurisdiction and its type.⁴³

Rhetoric of Blinded Veterans

The specific status of blinded veterans was also reflected in the existence of their unique organisations. Unlike the vast majority of other former soldiers in the early postwar years in Czechoslovak society,⁴⁴ blinded men used their impairment as the informing principle around which they structured themselves, as opposed to organising themselves along political, religious, or ethnic lines. By 1919, they had already established the aforementioned representative organisation named *Družina oslepených vojínů* in Czech and *Verband erblindeter Soldaten* in German. *Družina* attracted a large number of blinded veterans and in 1922 possessed more than 400 members, which translates roughly to some

⁴² Nedoma, p. 36.

⁴³ Skala, p. 35.

⁴⁴ The closest to this phenomenon being a small organisation set up for veterans who had undergone amputations and other seriously wounded soldiers. It appears however to have existed only very briefly in Slovakia. See ‘Švehlík zasa na obzore!’, *Naša obrana*, 1 Nov. 1926, p. 2.

70% of all blinded veterans.⁴⁵ Despite several splits in the group later in the interbellum period, which appear to have their source in personal disagreements and rather extraordinarily also in an imprudent investment in a soap factory,⁴⁶ Družina remained the leading voice amongst blinded Austro-Hungarian soldiers until the post-World War II period.

We can extrapolate two competing motifs that emerge in the rhetoric of different groups of blinded servicemen in their journal *Válečný slepec*. The first of these, perhaps unsurprisingly given the general public attitude towards blindness, is a belief in its profoundly incapacitating and debilitating nature as an injury. The majority of Družina's official representatives and leaders appear to have predominantly focused on the negative aspects of their lives and the problems associated with blindness, consistently characterising themselves in the language of superlative misfortune and helplessness, which in turn foregrounded their emasculation. This rhetoric included terms such as 'the most unfortunate victims of the world war', 'the poorest', 'the most miserable', and the emblematising of these men as 'the image of poverty, suffering and oppression'.⁴⁷ Indeed in a rare extended reflection on blindness on the front page of *Válečný slepec*, an anonymous author commented the following in 1927:

What is complete blindness? Fumbling in eternal darkness, helplessness and complete inability to earn. How unfair it is for such a poor thing, who had had a handsome business before the war – which he could oversee himself and to which he could contribute himself with his own work – that today as a result of the war and becoming blind he cannot devote [his attention to it] any further. Instead he has to find a different [and] paid workforce and because he is now completely blind, he has to let others attend to him as to a small child, thus needing a helper solely for himself.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ For more information about the membership of Družina oslepených vojáků, see Chapter V. 'Zpráva o řádné valné hromadě Družiny oslepených vojáků Č. S. R.', *Válečný slepec*, 1 June 1922, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Melichar, 'Kdo zavinil ztráty v továrně?', *Válečný slepec*, May 1931, pp. 4-6.

⁴⁷ Kí, 'Manifestační schůze v Brně', *Válečný slepec*, 15 Nov. 1922, p. 3.

⁴⁸ 'Zákonité výhody', *Válečný slepec*, 20 May 1927, p. 1.

Similar examples can also be found elsewhere; when a breakaway organisation of ex-servicemen entitled Spolek válečných slepců (Society of Czechoslovak Blind Veterans) began publishing its own journal, the article on the front page of its very first issue made sure to describe blind ex-servicemen as the ‘defenceless victims of fighting’.⁴⁹ Equally, when the short-lived Družina slovenských oslepených vojákův Kochanovce (Fellowship of Blinded Slovak Soldiers [in] Kochanovce) wrote to President Masaryk (in Czech), it chose to describe its members as those ‘most damaged by the war’ (*‘nejvíc válkou poškozených’*).⁵⁰ What is more, such rhetoric appears also to have been deployed on an individual level by ex-servicemen in their dealings with the state. For example, when appealing for help to President Masaryk in 1922, four blind ex-servicemen, one of whom was a former Russian legionary, argued that without their cinema licences their life would be ‘unbearable’.⁵¹

Meanwhile, another stream of thought existed that espoused a very different conception of blindness and what it meant to be a blind person, which can be discerned in *Válečný slepec* and elsewhere in this period. *Válečný slepec*, which incidentally was not published in the tactile writing system because many of the blinded veterans could not read braille,⁵² would collate more positive news and information about blind people from all over the world; the journal would report on their achievements; discuss their various issues; and bring to the fore interesting moments from their lives as opposed to merely their hardships. Thus, whilst the first couple of pages of *Válečný slepec* would often be a space devoted to the complaints and grievances of blinded ex-servicemen, subsequent

⁴⁹ ‘Slovo k váženým čtenářům!’, *Maják slepců*, 1 Feb. 1931, p. 1.

⁵⁰ ‘Pane presidente’, Protokol R (žádosti jednotlivců o podporu aj.), Inv. no. 999, Sign. R 2896/25, Folder Družina oslepených vojákův na Slovensku; Tabáček Ignác, zakladatel a správce ústavu slepých v Kochanovicích u Trenčína, Poříčany u Českého Brodu, AKPR.

⁵¹ ‘Opis: Kancelář presidenta republiky došlo dne 3. února 1922’, Protokol R (žádosti jednotlivců o podporu aj.), Inv. no. 762, Sign. R 15240/22, Folder Beneš Rudolf, Frantík Emil, Kousal František, Linek Ladislav, váleční slepci – žádost ve věci licencí na biografy, AKPR.

⁵² ‘Sto let slepeckého tisku’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 Dec. 1925, p. 2.

sections of the journal would sound a more positive note and present a more multidimensional understanding of blindness. Stories from home and abroad, be it from Germany, the USA, or Serbia, would discuss various issues experienced by blind people as well as their successes, sports, cultural events, and important figures. Similarly, when the aforementioned splinter organisation Spolek válečných slepců appeared in 1931, its journal *Maják slepců* utilised the same approach, firstly informing its readers of news related to blind veterans in Czechoslovakia and then writing about blind people in general.⁵³ To illustrate this broader understanding of blindness and the concomitant focus on the abilities and skills of blind people, it is perhaps instructive to turn to an article from *Válečný slepec* about the British newspaper magnate, Sir Arthur Pearson, who became blind in his 40s. In the article, the following was argued:

Sir P.[earson] showed the blind in a completely new, clearer, and more favourable light [to the world]. No one could prove to the public better [than Sir Arthur] and persuade it that the blind man is neither such a marvel nor such a pitiable creature as he has been made out to be by centuries-old superstition and indifference, but [show instead that the blind man] is a completely ordinary human being. [To show] that blindness does not decrease the value of a human in any way, but is instead a negotiable obstacle; that the only real help for the blind is to help them to help themselves, and that what the blind man treasures most is [his] independence.⁵⁴

These international examples also suggest that at least some of the blinded veterans may have felt like a part of a larger, global community of people with visual impairment. After Bulgaria was hit by a devastating earthquake in 1928, *Válečný slepec* reprinted a call for help made by Bulgarian blind Esperantists and added the comment, ‘Brothers! We learn from the said letter what a terrible misfortune [has] struck our brothers and sisters!’⁵⁵ Similarly when Maurice de La Sizeranne, a famous French blind activist, passed away in

⁵³ See, for example, the article entitled ‘Slepí fotbalisté’ (‘Blind Footballers’) about blind men from Sheffield. ‘Slepí fotbalisté’, *Maják slepců*, June 1931, p. 50.

⁵⁴ ‘Sir Arthur Pearson’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 March 1927, p. 3.

⁵⁵ ‘Provolání bulharských slepců’, *Válečný slepec*, 15 Nov. 1928, p. 4.

1924, *Válečný slepec* mourned his passing as the death of ‘one of the most noble, intelligent, and good-hearted friends of the blind’.⁵⁶

The different, more positive rhetoric towards life with blindness is also evinced in works of František Bohuslav. Bohuslav, who had been a Czech theatre actor before the war, was blinded in the conflict less than two months after its outbreak.⁵⁷ Following his return from war, he became a prolific author with an output of numerous plays, collections of poems, and memoirs. Although these have been largely relegated to the periphery of Czech literary culture, Bohuslav’s works offer us a rare glimpse of Czechoslovak blind veterans speaking publicly about their time in the armed forces, the injuries they sustained, and their postwar life. In keeping with the rhetoric coming from most Austro-Hungarian veterans, Bohuslav’s recollections accord little reverence to his service, which instead is treated with an almost weary contempt and sarcasm.⁵⁸

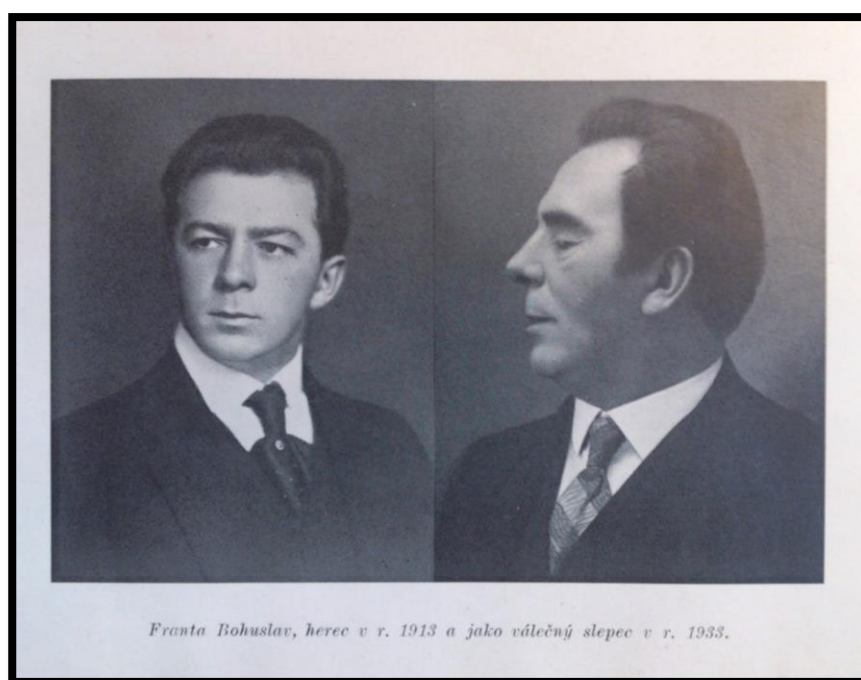


Fig. 12. ‘Franta Bohuslav, an actor in 1913 and as ‘war blind’ [‘*válečný slepec*’] in 1933’.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ ‘Maurice de la Sizeranne’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 Aug. 1924, p. 3.

⁵⁷ František Bohuslav, *Ke konci komedie: Divadelní, životní a válečné vzpomínky* (Prague, 1928), p. 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ František Bohuslav, *Věčné jaro (Ženy květiny a láska): Lidské oči (Nálady a touhy herce vidoucího, později oslepeného)* (Praha, 1936), n. pag.

Nevertheless, his observations and approach to life differed markedly from those espoused by many of his fellow blind men in *Válečný slepec*. Indeed, the war injury yielded seismic change in his life: ‘gone away is the previous freedom’ he observes in an introduction to his volume of poems tellingly titled *V noci* (*At Night* in English).⁶⁰ However, he immediately reinvented himself; although Bohuslav remained indelibly and irreversibly affected by his loss of sight, he was keen to emphasise that he had been able to deal with its consequences through his artistic passion.

And I live no longer sad in black jail!
For theatre I have Poetry beautiful
Which the Muse Thalia shall replace.⁶¹

After his injury, Bohuslav metamorphosed from an actor into an author, one who wrote with much artistic bravado and sarcasm. Although he constantly reminds readers of his blindness, he faces it with a masculine grit; in the period of war shortages, Bohuslav notes that he ‘now has multiple advantages’ as he does ‘not need kerosene ... or [need to] queue for candles’, not to mention that he can write whatever he wants regardless of censorship as he simply cannot see his own pen.⁶² Similarly, his infatuation with women in no way found itself quelled by blindness. Although his volumes show that his love life was not as carefree and spirited as it had been before the injury, they also make it abundantly clear that he did not lose his passion for women together with his sight. For example, in his poem ‘Tobě zpívám’ (‘I sing to you’), he declares his ardour for an unnamed woman with the words, ‘I sing only of your lips/only you are the mistress of my dream soul’.⁶³

⁶⁰ František Bohuslav, *V noci. Hercovy zápisky 1915-1918* (Prague, 1919), p. 3.

⁶¹ Bohuslav, ‘Lidské oči’, *Věčné jaro*, p. 23.

⁶² František Bohuslav, *Literární náhražka. Poznámky prosou i veršem* (Prague, 1917), p. 4.

⁶³ Bohuslav, ‘Tobě zpívám’, *Věčné jaro*, p. 29.

Blinded Veterans and Blind Civilians

As mentioned in the earlier parts of this chapter, Austria-Hungary had left behind a limited number of institutions and organisations that worked with and for the benefit of blind people. These were predominantly situated in the more advanced Bohemian lands in the west, thus leaving even fewer options for those living in Slovakia and Ruthenia.⁶⁴ In Ruthenia, the poorest and most remote region of Czechoslovakia, with a high incidence of trachoma and with more than half a million inhabitants, it was not until 1923 that a school for blind children was established, and even this cared for no more than six students.⁶⁵ Although the situation improved somewhat in Czechoslovakia in later years, as several organisations and institutions for blind people emerged, there was still much to be desired.⁶⁶

However, even the existing institutions often failed to attract blind Czechoslovaks, presumably due to the attitude that prevailed amongst the vast majority of the public towards people with sight loss and towards their potential prospects in life. For example, according to a 1924 report, out of 200 blind civilians in Greater Prague who were not living in various local institutions and poorhouses, 120 (i.e., 60%) had not received an education in any specialised institution.⁶⁷ This included 25 people under the age of 25 years who grew up outside of Prague. The author of the report explicitly attributed the

⁶⁴ See Anna Falisová, 'Vývoj starostlivosti o hendikepované osoby na Slovensku v medzivojnovom období', *Slovensko v labyrinte moderných európskych dejín*, Slavomír Michálek et al., (Bratislava, 2014), pp. 250-253.

⁶⁵ 'Péče o slepce na Podkarpatské Rusi'; Dr. Fgd., 'Slepota', *Válečný slepec*, 1 May 1925, p. 2.

⁶⁶ 'Péče o slepce na Podkarpatské Rusi'. Multiple other changes occurred over the course of the interwar period, which profoundly influenced the lives of thousands of blind people in Czechoslovakia. The most tangible ones included, but were not limited to, the introduction of guide dogs and white canes, or the increasing availability of radio sets, many of which were handed out to blind Czechoslovaks for free. Drásta, 'Pes – vůdce slepců', *Válečný slepec*, 20 May 1927, pp. 5-6; 'Bílé hole', *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, 15 June 1932, p. 1; M., 'Z akce „radio slepcům“', *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, Jan. 1934, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Vladimír Michal, *Statistický přehled poměrů civilních slepců, bydlících ve Velké Praze r. 1924* (Prague, 1925), p. 17.

blame for their lack of education to poor rural parents who, preoccupied with trying to make ends meet, apparently had neither the time nor the understanding to support their blind children, and thus merely left them to their own devices. Furthermore, he argued that some parents were not even aware of the existence of such educational institutions, and even if they were, failed to reapply to enrol their children if they had originally been turned down the first time.

Similarly, 10 years later, Zemský ústav pro výchovu nevidomých (Provincial Institute for the Education of the Visually Impaired) in Brno referred to the lack of interest in the education of blind people when its leaders complained that it was not being used to full capacity. As many as 30 out of 130 spaces in the institute were not taken up, ‘despite the considerable number of young blind in the Moravia-Silesian land’ who, they lamented, had ‘not been persuaded about the usefulness of institutional education’.⁶⁸ The institute attributed these failings both to the parents who did not want to pay for their children, as well as to the towns and villages that were unwilling to cover the fees in those cases where parents could not afford to pay them. One is left to wonder how problematic the situation must have then been outside the Bohemian lands if blind officials and their colleagues at times bemoaned the even ‘greater misunderstanding of the needs of the blind’ in Slovakia and Ruthenia.⁶⁹

This lack of knowledge and apathy towards the education of blind people, which seemingly expected them to do little more than stay within their home communities, presumably stemmed from pre-existing traditional notions about blindness. Such views are perhaps best exemplified by the story of a 20-year-old worker who was blinded in an

⁶⁸ ‘Z výroční zprávy Zemského ústavu pro výchovu nevidomých’, *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, Feb. 1934, p. 2.

⁶⁹ ‘Poradní schůze’, *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, 29 May 1933, p. 1.

industrial accident in the early 1930s.⁷⁰ In the wake of his blinding, his insurance company suggested to him that he be trained at the Klárův ústav. However, officials from one of the leading organisations of the interwar period, Československá ústřední péče o slepé (Czechoslovak Central Care for the Blind), did not meet with much understanding in this instance. The idea of receiving education at the Klárův ústav was flatly rejected by the young man, who argued instead that he would be better off staying at home. In turn, representatives of Československá ústřední péče o slepé could only ruefully note that such opinions from blind people themselves were ‘almost a rule’. By contrast, it was the belief of this semi-official organisation, which included both blind Czechoslovaks as well as their sighted colleagues, that people with visual impairments could and ought to be elevated from their current state through a combination of training and employment. In their opinion,

Regardless of the employment options, which are currently considerably limited, it is training in orientation, touch, and braille which is a boon to the blind, as it will carry them through difficult times of loneliness and boredom.⁷¹

Interestingly, a follow-up of the story of the young worker was published in the same journal half a year later. Despite the attempts of several different charities, including the Czechoslovak Red Cross, to persuade the father of the youth to send him for training, the parent could not ultimately be moved to do so. Československá ústřední péče o slepé could only deplore that not only blind people but also their sighted compatriots required re-education, as they seemed to show little understanding of the needs of visually impaired Czechoslovaks.⁷²

⁷⁰ ‘Nesprávný názor na výchovu pozdě osleplých’, *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, 15 Sep. 1932, p. 2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² ‘Při snaze o přeucení pozdě osleplých’, *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, 30 March 1933, p. 3.

In a similar manner, organisations of blind people clashed with the state over a number of issues that they considered of paramount importance but the state hesitated to address; these issues included the lack of compulsory primary education for blind children; denial of access to higher education for blind people; and the nonexistence of general state benefits for visually impaired Czechoslovaks.⁷³ Whilst these organisations were hoping to see an expansion of the state's social duties towards blind people, the republic appeared to have been eager to delegate this responsibility to a hotchpotch of various semi-official and private organisations and institutions. Thus, for example, the Ministry of Education rejected a proposal that called for all schools for blind people to be run by the state, arguing instead that private schools for blind children existed all over the world.⁷⁴ Calls to introduce a state pension for blind civilians were also not heeded by the state. As a result, those in need who found themselves outside the network of institutes for blind people had no other option but to rely on meagre 'pauper benefits' (*'chudinská podpora'*) distributed by local authorities.⁷⁵

A further example of the state's laissez-faire approach can be inferred from its lack of basic knowledge about people with sight loss; it seems that Czechoslovak officials never even knew how many blind citizens might have been living in the country. Although some pre-1914 polls and local ad-hoc surveys were available, the first more extensive poll to be carried out was only finished in 1934 and covered only the area of Bohemia, which was the richest province in a country with considerable regional disparities. The survey, the results of which were made public without any explanation as to its methodology or approaches, recorded 4,037 blind people living in Bohemia – albeit with the caveat that

⁷³ For an extensive list of the kinds of issues that blind people had to contend with, see 'Poradní schůze', pp. 1-2.

⁷⁴ 'K resoluci, přijaté na poradní schůzi 20. května 1933', *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, Jan. 1935, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Michal, pp. 21-22.

even those may not be complete figures.⁷⁶ As such, it would be very difficult to attempt to extrapolate from this any meaningful numbers for the entire territory of Czechoslovakia, particularly when we take into account the provinces with significantly worse medical care than that in Bohemia.⁷⁷ We can only speculate that if the incidence of blindness in other parts of the country was identical to that in Bohemia, then there would be some 8,431 people with sight loss in Czechoslovakia in 1934.⁷⁸

However, such poverty of care and basic knowledge was in stark contrast to the situation of disabled veterans, especially those who had lost their sight in the conflict. Provincial offices responsible for providing care for war victims regularly published figures of blind veterans living in their territory. Some of them would even name individual deceased veterans or go into further detail about their numbers and lives.⁷⁹ Similarly, although blind veterans were never content with their state pensions, they still received considerably more than their civilian counterparts who were given ‘pauper benefits’. According to the law 39/1922, blind veterans’ pensions could reach 3,600 Kč a year;⁸⁰ by contrast, the city of Prague gave on average only 320–460 Kč a year to its blind inhabitants.⁸¹ Furthermore, after 1932, when the law 133/1930 was eventually implemented, blind veterans received as much as 9,000 Kč a year.⁸²

The attitudes of war veterans towards blind Czechoslovak civilians seem to have been highly ambiguous. On the one hand, very little space in the first few pages of *Válečný*

⁷⁶ ‘Ve statistice Wagnerově’, *Zprávy Československé ústřední péče o slepé*, Nov. 1934, p. 4.

⁷⁷ For a study of medical care in interwar Slovakia, see Anna Falisová, *Zdravotnictvo na Slovensku v medzivojnovom období* (Bratislava, 1999).

⁷⁸ In arriving at this calculation, the author has used figures from *Statistická ročenka republiky Československé* (Prague, 1938), p. 20.

⁷⁹ *Zpráva o činnosti Zemského úřadu pro péči o válečné poškozence v Čechách v roce 1923* (Pardubice, n.d.), p. 13.

⁸⁰ Ota Karman, ‘Naše almužny’, *Válečný slepec*, 15 Sep. 1931, p. 1.

⁸¹ Importantly, after 1924, workers who became disabled were eligible for disability pensions based on the law 221/1924. See the law 221/1924 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení státu československého*.

⁸² ‘Druhá novela’, *Válečný slepec*, July 1932, p. 2.

slepec and *Maják slepců* was given over to blind civilians when discussing general demands and grievances of veterans, which, indeed, differed from the concerns and goals of the civilian population. However, on the other hand, subsequent sections in these journals often did refer to and relay news and information about topics that were not directly related to veterans, such as educational opportunities for blind people at the state conservatory, or blind girls exercising in Sokol.⁸³

Furthermore, it seems that veterans developed positive relations with several of their blind compatriots who had not fought in the war. Indeed, when the aforementioned blind activist Karel Emanuel Macan, who had been heavily involved in numerous projects set up by and for local blind people, passed away in 1925, *Válečný slepec* deeply mourned his death. On its front page, the journal parted with the man who had worked with blinded soldiers in the Klárův ústav during the war with the words,

Master Karel Em. Macan taught us, blinded soldiers, [how] to be blind
... He was the first to give the impulse for the establishment of Družina
oslepených vojínů v Československé republice.⁸⁴

The figure of Captain Rudolf Freszl was also instrumental in aligning the interests of visually impaired civilians with those of the veterans. Freszl, a one-time vice-chairman of Družina and a collaborator for many years, was by all accounts an extraordinary worker who played a leading role in several interwar projects both for and set up by blind people. He became the editor of the only Czech braille newspaper, *Zora*; was heavily involved with Spolek nevidomých intelektuálů „Macan“ (Society of Blind Intellectuals ‘Macan’) and Svaz slepeckých spolků (Union of Societies of the Blind); and took part in numerous other events and actions.⁸⁵ As an Esperanto speaker, he seems to have been the driving

⁸³ ‘Veselé chvíle v životě nešťastníků’, *Válečný slepec*, 1 July 1928, pp. 8-9; ‘Státní konservatoř hudby v Praze přijímá slepé žáky’, *Válečný slepec*, 15 Nov. 1931, p. 4.

⁸⁴ ‘Mistr K. Em. Macan mrtev!’, *Válečný slepec*, 15 Feb. 1925, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Digrin, pp. 86-87.

force behind the translation of articles that relayed information about blind people living abroad.

Confusingly, despite his involvement in Družina and his military rank, Captain Freszl himself did not serve in the Great War; he had lost his sight already before the outbreak of the conflict.⁸⁶ The fact that he, as somebody who was neither a war veteran nor a civilian, held an important position in Družina as well as in several other organisations, provides further indication of how permeable divisions were between blind ex-servicemen and their civilian counterparts. It can perhaps be argued that this absence of any significant boundaries between the two groups stemmed from the previously discussed lack of esteem and reverence of Austro-Hungarian war veterans on the part of the general public.

By contrast, organisations of sighted veterans and other war victims demonstrated very little to no interest in the rights and difficulties of disabled civilians. If at all, most war victims made only cursory reference to disabled civilians, whom they seem to have considered an entirely different and unrelated genus of people to themselves.⁸⁷ We can see this attitude epitomised in the writing of one of the leading members of Družina, Antonín Málek, who published a couple of articles in *Nový život* about his visit to a psychiatric hospital for civilian patients.⁸⁸ In this relatively long piece of work, Málek meticulously details his impressions, observations, and feelings from the hospital. Importantly, he does so without so much as a single reference to disabled ex-servicemen, many of whom were suffering from mental illnesses, almost as though denying any links between the conditions of the civilians and veterans.

⁸⁶ Heřmánek, pp. 239-240.

⁸⁷ For a rare example, see 'Mezinárodní sdružení invalidních žen', *Lidumil*, Feb. 1932, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Antonín Málek, 'Svět duševně chorých', *Nový život*, 6 March 1937, p. 6; Antonín Málek, 'Svět duševně chorých. Dokončení', *Nový život*, 13 March 1937, p. 6.

Similarly, Bund der Kriegsverletzten, Witwen und Waisen broached the topic of disabled civilians only very rarely. In 1934, it briefly cooperated with an association of disabled workers, which advertised itself in the journal of Bund and even asked members of Bund for support.⁸⁹ However, this recognition of and collaboration with disabled civilians was only short-lived. A year later, Bund strongly rejected the purported plans to integrate the state system of care for war victims into the one dedicated to disabled workers. The leader of German war victims in Czechoslovakia, Bernhard Leppin, dismissed the idea as he emphasised the military past of these men, observing that

we have to protest most firmly ... We absolutely do not want to offend [or] demean victims of accidents [*‘Unfallverletzten’*], but we only want to establish that we are no victims of accidents, but instead the war wounded and former frontline soldiers.⁹⁰

There can be little doubt that blindness was perceived in Czechoslovak society as the most deleterious of disabilities, despite the prominent role of Jan Žižka in the Czech national narrative. Indeed, organisations of blind people identified with the medieval commander; the head of Svaz slepeckých spolků even gave a speech at the official commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Žižka's death in 1924.⁹¹ However, this seems to have had little effect on the position of blind people, including Austro-Hungarian veterans. Despite their military past, few Czechoslovaks made a connection between the veterans and Žižka. Instead, the ex-servicemen were largely relegated to being objects of pity, as manifested in the book *Žena válečného slepce*.

Nevertheless, the comparison between blind civilians and veterans suggests that even Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen still found themselves in a somewhat privileged

⁸⁹ Verein der Unfallversicherungsrentner, 'An alle Unfallsrentner!', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 May 1934, p. 4; Unfallsrentnerverein Reichenberg, 'An alle Ortsgruppen und Mitglieder des B. d. K.!', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, 10 June 1934, p. 9.

⁹⁰ 'Unser Sofort-Programm', *Der Kriegsverletzte*, July 1935, p. 4.

⁹¹ F., 'Účast slepců zájezdu k mohyle Žižkově u Přibyslavě', *Válečný slepec*, 15 Feb. 1925, p. 3.

position, particularly before the passing of the law 221/1924, which dealt with the question of workers' disability benefits. In turn, it is tempting to see the favourable treatment of blinded veterans by the state as some sort of latent recognition of the importance of their military service. However, the situation should instead be viewed as a reflection of the asymmetrical development of the Czechoslovak welfare state, which at this stage provided a certain level of income for some of its disabled citizens, but not for others. Already in this period, the contrast did not go unnoticed by the Czechoslovak officials; as Ondřej Kypr observed from his position of the head of Zemský úřad pro péči o válečné poškozené in Prague in the early 1920s:

Not only financial reasons dictate to us the absolute need to centralise social care [in Czechoslovakia]; there are also factual (*'věcné'*) and moral [reasons]. I always feel great injustice when I compare, for example, care for the war blind with care for blind civilians; pauper benefits [given to disabled civilians] with our care for war victims unable to work; care for a war orphan with [care for] an orphaned child whose father or mother fell on the battlefield of work (*'na bojišti práce'*). The enactment of [universal] old age pension and disability pension will be a far-reaching improvement of the current situation; [when such a law is being prepared] we will have to address the issue of the underprivileged [*'sociálně slabých'*] from the unitary viewpoint of justice and protection of all.⁹²

⁹² Kypr, 'Několik slov úvodem', p. 4.

Chapter X: Epilogue

‘We and with us the entire progressive and peace-loving world are celebrating the birthday of [this] great man, brilliant leader, advocate of the working class, and visionary and architect of the world peace’.¹

The final issue of *Nový život* writing about Stalin in 1951.

The end of the 1930s ushered in a series of momentous political and social changes that unfurled across the whole of Europe within a brief space of time. March 1939 saw the disappearance of the rump of the Czechoslovak republic, which had already surrendered a considerable part of its territory to its neighbours in the previous months. Former Czechoslovak veterans suddenly found themselves living under different regimes and in a number of different states: the Third Reich, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, and briefly also Poland all encompassed territories which had once belonged to Czechoslovakia. In the next six years, disabled ex-servicemen were to experience a conflict than was even more destructive than the Great War.

Many of our disabled veterans would survive World War II and in 1945 become citizens of the new Czechoslovak republic, which largely returned to the size of its prewar counterpart, with the notable exception of the Soviet-acquired province of Carpathian Ruthenia. However, whilst the boundaries of the new Czechoslovakia were stabilised in the subsequent years, its people underwent seismic social changes which, together with the shifts brought about by the war, radically reconfigured the face of the Czechoslovak state. Not only had most of the Jewish population disappeared from the territory, but the country had also been largely divested of its German inhabitants, as up to three million of them were expelled by the state in the first months after the end of the war.² Similarly, the local

¹ ‘Narozeniny generalissima J. V. Stalina’, *Nový život*, 20 Dec. 1951, p. 1.

² See Tomáš Staněk, *Odsun Němců z Československa 1945-1947* (Prague, 1991), pp. 365-372.

White Russian community was also destroyed by the events of 1939–1945.³ The regime change of February 1948 was not less significant for the republic and its remaining inhabitants; the Communist takeover initiated a chapter of Czechoslovak history which would last for more than 40 years.

The unravelling of this intricate and interconnected web of momentous changes and events, and their consequences for veterans, and disabled ex-servicemen in particular, lies beyond the scope of this thesis.⁴ Instead, this Epilogue offers a brief overview of the post-1939 history of the disabled Czechoslovak veterans of the Great War. Due to the limited number of other sources, it largely focuses on *Družina československých válečných poškozců* and its Czech and Slovak members. The Epilogue predominantly makes use of *Družina*'s newspaper *Nový život* and its modified wartime incarnations, which provide evidence of the severe curtailment of freedom of expression that took place after 1939, and the accompanying enforced alignment of *Družina*'s rhetoric with that of the undemocratic regimes. The post-1948 sources allow us to witness the end of the disabled veterans' movement, which was brought about by the Communist administration.

The Wartime Years

As has been mentioned already in Chapter V, the rhetoric of the Slovak section of *Družina* changed markedly after the declaration of Slovak autonomy in October 1938. Soon afterwards, this part of *Družina* separated itself from the main office in Prague and reintroduced its own newspaper, *Naša obrana*.⁵ After its emergence, the Slovak state further reinforced these changes by replacing the organisation's leadership; in June 1939,

³ Andreyev and Savický, pp. 196-198.

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the behaviour of both Czech military elites and able-bodied veterans' organisations during the Protectorate, see Martin Veselý, 'Retardace, kolaborace a aktivismus armádních elit v Protektorátu Čechy a Morava' (Univerzita Karlova v Praze PhD thesis, 2013).

⁵ '„Družina“ a jej pretvorenie na Slovensku', *Naša obrana*, Jan. 1939, p. 1.

the Ministry of Interior dissolved all the existing committees within Družina and in their place named its own nominees, led by the sculptor Friso Motoška, who had himself been seriously wounded in the Great War.⁶ The right-wing authoritarian regime later even persecuted the interwar leader of Družina and former Communist and Social Democratic member of parliament Jozef Kopasz, who spent three months in the Ilava prison.⁷

Indeed, *Naša obrana* did little more than praise Slovak independence, exalt the ruling party, and endorse its political visions. Harshly juxtaposed against its socialist rhetoric from previous years, Družina now celebrated the rise of the new world order under the aegis of Slovak Catholic nationalism. The newspaper of the organisation published numerous laudatory articles about the previously abhorred Andrej Hlinka and Jozef Tiso, the political leader of the new state and ‘the ruler of Slovak hearts’.⁸ Similarly, the establishment of the ‘new Europe’ created by the German Reich was greeted with joy.⁹ Not surprisingly, the newspaper, which was now fervently loyal to the regime, also espoused deeply racist values, as exemplified by the article ‘To Colonise Gypsies? The Gypsy Question – Scourge of Our Villages – A Solution Must Not be Delayed’ from 1940.¹⁰

The perception of Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen was also re-evaluated in the bellicose atmosphere of the Slovak state. Already in July 1939, Družina introduced the idea that Slovaks fought valiantly in the Great War, and that they would do so again should another conflict break out.¹¹ The image of Slovaks as brave warriors was also deployed in

⁶ Augustín Drobný, ‘Duch novej doby’, *Naša obrana*, Oct. 1939, p. 1; ‘Motoška, Friso’, *Slovenský biografický slovník (od roku 833 do roku 1990). IV. zväzok M-Q* (Martin, 1990), p. 226.

⁷ *Zpráva ku IX. sjazdu Družiny československých vojnových poškodených v Bratislave* (Bratislava, n.d.), p. 12.

⁸ ‘Dr. Jozef Tiso’, *Naša obrana*, Jan. 1940, p. 1; ‘Vládca slovenských srdiec’, *Naša obrana*, May 1942, p. 2; ‘Päť rokov bez Andreja Hlinku’, *Naša obrana*, Sep. 1943, p. 1.

⁹ Štefan Ňukovič, ‘Vitame novú Európou’, *Naša obrana*, July 1940, p. 1.

¹⁰ Maroš Madačov, ‘Kolonizovať Cigánov? Cigánska otázka – pliaga našich dedín – S vyriešením nemožno otáľať’, *Naša obrana*, Apr. 1940 p. 4.

¹¹ ‘Vojenski poškodenici v Slovenskom štáte!’, *Naša obrana*, July 1939, p. 1.

later years, when *Naša obrana* did not fail to tie the service of Slovak soldiers in the Great War to that of their German counterparts.¹² Although the regime made use of Družina as a tool in some parts of its care for the newly disabled Slovak soldiers of World War II – to facilitate the application process for state benefits, for example¹³ – overall Družina retained its role as an organisation specifically for pre-World War II wounded servicemen and their relatives. These were once again, as they had been during the interbellum, treated as ‘second-class’ war victims by the state; only this time they received less care and support than the disabled Slovak veterans from the most recent conflict.¹⁴

Similarly, the creation of the German-occupied Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia resulted in considerable changes in both the rhetoric and structure of the truncated Družina českých válečných poškozenců, which either absorbed or incorporated within its overarching structure all the other associations of disabled ex-servicemen.¹⁵ The pages of *Nový život* show that the leaders of the organisation, many of whom had been able to keep their interwar positions, were forced to tacitly accept the new status quo and ruling power in order to be able to continue working for Družina.¹⁶ Although its expressions of loyalty to the new regime were considerably more muted and smaller in scale than those of its Slovak counterpart, *Nový život*, which erstwhile had vociferously opposed German

¹² Augustín Drobný, ‘Pochválený národ’, *Naša obrana*, July 1940, p. 3.

¹³ ‘Kedy a ako sa prihlasovať’, *Naša obrana*, Nov. 1943, p. 2.

¹⁴ According to the Slovak law 80/1943, the pensions allocated to disabled veterans of the Great War were to be considerably smaller than those accorded to their newly disabled counterparts. ‘Starostlivosť o vojenských poškodených’, *Naša obrana*, Sep. 1943, p. 3; ‘Starostlivosť o vojenských poškodených’, *Naša obrana*, Nov. 1943, p. 3; *Zpráva ku IX. sjezdu Družiny*, pp. 14-15; *Slovenský zákonník 1943* (Bratislava, 1943), pp. 361-398.

¹⁵ Furthermore, during the war, Družina was apparently forced to join Ústřední svaz bývalých vojáků v Čechách a na Moravě (Central Union of Former Soldiers in Bohemia and Moravia). This was, however, a loose association of veterans’ organisation with highly limited activity, which meant that the accession most probably did not affect Družina and its members in any meaningful way. ‘Sjednocení’, *Nový život*, 29 Apr. 1939, p. 2; Otakar Hollmann, ‘Dvacet pět let Družiny oslepených vojáků’, *Nový život*, 20 Feb. 1944, pp. 1-2; ‘Souručenství válečných poškozených’, *Nový život*, 20 Aug. 1944, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶ For more information about Družina during World War II, see *XIV. valný sjezd Družiny československých válečných poškozených* (Prague, 1948), pp. 31-41.

National Socialism, nonetheless now commemorated Hitler's birthday¹⁷ and eagerly anticipated the impending German victory over Great Britain.¹⁸ Similarly, the once sceptical and inquisitive journalistic rigour of the newspaper, which had frequently criticised the Czechoslovak state, was watered down into a far more insipid brand. At most, *Nový život* was now only mildly critical of the state care for war victims,¹⁹ and served instead as a space to discuss neutral and politically unprovocative topics, such as the importance of work and unity of Czechs and of war victims in particular.²⁰ Importantly, even in the new atmosphere of the Protectorate, the newspaper of *Družina* continued to depict its members in line with its interbellum rhetoric as victims of the war, who proved themselves through their ability to work, rather than as former heroic soldiers.²¹

Nevertheless, some of the Austro-Hungarian veterans attempted to claim a different position for themselves within the much-changed public discourse, as manifested by a book of the pro-German veterans' organisation Svaz vojáku z fronty (Union of Soldiers from the Frontline) published in 1940.²² The introduction of the volume entitled *Bývalí vojáci slouží národu* brims with pent-up frustration of the author, who criticises the rulers of Czechoslovakia for artificially fomenting discord amongst Austro-Hungarian veterans in order to protect legionaries. In stark contrast to the interwar Czechoslovak rhetoric, these are described as an 'entirely negligible element ... which had been wreathed in the glory of 'liberators''.²³ The author then juxtaposes this group with the 'honest [Austro-

¹⁷ 'Vůdcovy narozeniny', *Nový život*, 20 Apr. 1940, p. 1.

¹⁸ 'Anglie v tísní', *Nový život*, 19 Oct. 1940, p. 1.

¹⁹ 'Úcta a povinnost k obětem války', *Nový život*, 27 Apr. 1940, p. 1.

²⁰ 'Úcta k práci', *Nový život*, 23 Sep. 1942, p. 1; 'Pospolitost válečných poškozců', *Nový život*, 20 Feb. 1943, p. 1.

²¹ See Jan Pravda, 'Mít úctu k obětem války', *Nový život*, 20 Feb. 1944, p. 3.

²² Veselý, p. 517.

²³ František Havlena, *Bývalí vojáci slouží národu* (Prague, 1940), p. 9.

Hungarian] warriors' who had protected the Bohemian lands from war and destruction only to suffer 'countless and humiliating injustices' in the interbellum.²⁴

It is unclear how the Czech public reacted to such bold claims of Svaz vojáků z fronty. However, the Protectorate government made a clear decision to honour the Habsburg military past of many of its citizens. Over the years, it introduced special pensions for recipients of several Austrian medals as well as for men who served in the Great War and two earlier Austrian military campaigns from 1878 and 1882 who had reached the age of 70 (or 60 for a one-off payment in 1945) and could prove that they had seen combat.²⁵ Furthermore, the Protectorate government passed between the years 1941 and 1944 no fewer than four decrees that dealt specifically with the question of war victims.²⁶ Overall, these brought a number of improvements such as higher pensions and changes to the income threshold.²⁷ Numerous other benefits granted to disabled veterans during the war included tax exemptions, discounted transport fares, and cheaper tickets to various events.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

²⁵ The government decrees 307/1941 and 350/1942 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení Protektorátu Čechy a Morava*; 'Poskytování čestného žoldu a čestné odměny vysloužilcům býv. rakousko-uherské branné moci', *Nový život*, 24 Sep. 1941, p. 3; 'Čestný žold a čestná odměna vysloužilcům', *Nový život*, 26 Nov. 1941, p. 2; 'Čestná odměna a žold vysloužilcům', *Nový život*, 20 Nov. 1942, p. 1; 'Příspěvek majitelům stříbrné medaile II. třídy', *Nový život*, 20. Jan. 1945, p. 2

²⁶ The government decrees 82/1941, 198/1942, 247/1943, and 222/1944 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení Protektorátu Čechy a Morava*. As Natali Stegmann has observed, the increase in pensions stipulated in the government decree 247/1943 excluded Jewish war victims. Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, pp. 250-251.

²⁷ 'Jak bylo zlepšeno zaopatření válečných a poválečných poškozců vlád. nařiz. ze dne 5. prosince 1940, č. 82', *Nový život*, 28 Feb. 1941, pp. 2-4; J. K. Skala, *Péče o válečné a poválečné poškozcence* (Prague, 1941). 'Pátá novela zaopatřovacího zákona vyhlášena. Nová úprava zákona o požitcích váleč. poškozců', *Nový život*, 13 June 1942, pp. 1-2; 'Reforma péče o válečné poškozcence', *Nový život*, 13 June 1942, pp. 2, 5; J. Skala, 'Nové zaopatřovací předpisy pro válečné poškozcence', *Nový život*, 20 Sep. 1943, p. 1; 'Nová ustanovení a provádění péče pro válečné poškozcence', *Nový život*, 20 Nov. 1944, p. 1.

²⁸ The government decrees 432/1941 and 121/1944 in *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení Protektorátu Čechy a Morava*. See some of the benefits of disabled veterans: 'Povinnost, vydávati snížené vstupenky válečným invalidům', *Nový život*, 22 Apr. 1942, p. 2; 'Výhody válečným invalidům v dopravě na železnicích', *Nový život*, 30 May 1942, p. 1; 'Elektrické podniky hl. m. Prahy pro těžké válečné invalidy', *Nový život*, 19 Aug. 1942, p. 2; 'Osвобоzení válečných poškozců od rozhlasového poplatku', *Nový život*, 20 Feb. 1943, p. 2; 'Daňové úlevy válečným poškozcům', *Nový život*, 20 May 1943, pp. 1-2; 'Výhody pro válečné a vojenské invalidy', *Nový život*, 20 June 1944, pp. 1-2; 'Úlevy a výhody válečným poškozcům', *Nový život*, 20 June 1944, p. 2.

By contrast, German rulers of the Protectorate treated Czechoslovak legionaries with suspicion and hostility, as shown by the historian Jan Michl. In 1939, most of the legionary organisations were abolished and legionaries were forbidden to wear their uniforms and medals.²⁹ Furthermore, in 1941, all legionaries working in the civil service who were over the age of 45 years were retired. Needless to say, this decision affected numerous former ex-servicemen employed by the state. Two years later, the last existing legionary association Národní jednota legionářská (National Legionary Union) was also dissolved. Furthermore, Nazis openly attacked the interwar legionary narrative, as exemplified by an article of one of the most powerful men in the Protectorate, K. H. Frank, from January 1941, in which he questioned and belittled the military importance of the famous legionary battles of Bachmač and Zborov.³⁰ Soon afterwards, other texts written in a similar manner, which criticised and mocked legionaries, appeared in numerous protectorate newspapers.³¹

In his study, Michl also detailed legionary resistance to Nazi Germany, both within the Protectorate and elsewhere.³² Many of the legionaries who had served in the interwar Czechoslovak armed forces, including the Prime Minister of the Protectorate General Alois Eliáš, played crucial roles in various resistance groups in the Bohemian lands. Others fought against the Axis abroad, such as the head of the intelligence service of the Czechoslovak Government in Exile František Moravec and the commander of Czechoslovak forces within the RAF and British Air Marshall Karel Janoušek.

²⁹ Michl, p. 200.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 206.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 206-207.

³² Ibid., pp. 202-217.

Postwar

As noted by Natali Stegmann, the Czechoslovak pantheon of national heroes underwent important shifts following the defeat of Germany and the end of World War II.³³ The Czechoslovak Legions of the Great War, which continued to serve as an important part of the Czechoslovak state narrative until as late as 1950–1951,³⁴ were joined in their privileged position by various groups of antifascist fighters and Nazi victims. Moreover, the very recent past of other Czechoslovaks, who had been involved in or collaborated with wartime regimes, became highly problematic. This new reality was reflected in the comprehensive law for war victims from 1946, which identified and categorised more than two dozen different types of war-related events that could have caused the disabilities of Czechoslovak citizens.

According to the law 164/1946, disabled ex-servicemen of the Great War and civilians whose impairments stemmed from World War II received the same basic pensions as Czechoslovak soldiers who became disabled as a result of World War II and victims of Nazi persecutions and repressions. However, the latter groups were also eligible for certain bonus payments such as the extra 300 Kč added to their monthly pension. Importantly, the sum of 300 Kč did not increase with the level of disability, with the exception of the most seriously disabled ex-servicemen.³⁵ The difference in pensions between Czechoslovak veterans of the recent conflict and others was thus particularly stark amongst less seriously wounded ex-servicemen. For example, whilst a disabled Austro-Hungarian veteran whose disability had been classified to have reached 20% would

³³ Stegmann, *Kriegsdeutungen*, pp. 237–258.

³⁴ Jan Galandauer, 'Československé legie a jejich komemorace', *Česká společnost za velkých válek 20. století*, ed. Gebhart and Šedivý, p. 308.

³⁵ 'Jaká zaopatření a nároky zavádí zákon ze dne 18. července 1946, č. 164 Sb., v péči o vojenské a válečné poškozence a oběti války a fašistické persekuce', *Nový život*, Sep. 1946, p. 2.

receive 120 Kčs a month, his Czechoslovak counterpart would be awarded 420 Kčs.³⁶

Similarly, varying positions of different groups of war victims were also mirrored in the part of the law which stipulated details of the mandatory employment of people who had become severely disabled as a result of the two world wars. Although the state made it compulsory to employ severely disabled victims of World War I and World War II alike, antifascist fighters were still to be prioritised ahead of other applicants with impairments.

Unlike the interwar regulations, the law 164/1946 also specified several groups of citizens who were explicitly denied the state pension. These included Czechoslovaks who had been sentenced for collaboration and fascist crimes, men who volunteered to serve against Czechoslovakia and its allies, and those who showed ‘particular zeal’ during their anti-Czechoslovak military service. Furthermore, those who had harmed themselves to avoid service in the Czechoslovak armed forces and deserters from these units also possessed no legal claim. Moreover, the state could – but did not have any obligation – to grant pensions to the men who had become disabled as mere conscripts in the forces of the Axis and its allies.

Following the end of the war, the tone and substance of Družina’s rhetoric changed yet again within the space of a few years. In the brief period between the end of the war and the Communist takeover in February 1948, the reunited organisation, which was now apparently also joined by ‘second-class’ war wounded from the recent conflict, such as civilian victims of air raids,³⁷ espoused ideas prevalent in wider Czech and Czechoslovak society in this limited democracy.³⁸ For example, in its discourse, which leaned heavily

³⁶ *Průručka vojnového poškodenca* (Bratislava, 1948), p. 103.

³⁷ Josef Šoltész, ‘Ke sjezdu Družiny čs. válečných poškozených’, *Nový život*, 20 Oct. 1945, p. 1; Ladislav Neškrabal, ‘Organizační rozmach Družiny’, *Nový život*, March 1947, p. 2. For information about organisations of World War II veterans in Czechoslovakia, see Josef Pašek, *Živá kronika* (Prague, n.d.).

³⁸ See Václav Veber, *Osudové únorové dny 1948* (Prague, 2008), pp. 6, 29–41.

towards the political Left,³⁹ Družina praised the victorious USSR and its leader Stalin.⁴⁰ The organisation also wholeheartedly supported the mass expulsion of Germans from the republic in articles such as ‘On Cleansing of Borderlands’, an attitude which was in stark contrast to its 1930s inclusivity of German war victims within its ranks.⁴¹ According to *Nový život*, war crimes against the Czech people ‘deprived every single German of any humanness [‘*lidskost*’] and therefore also of any consideration from our side’.⁴² Simultaneously, Družina celebrated the restoration of Czechoslovakia and the re-established unity of the Czech and Slovak nations and by extension of their war victims.⁴³ Wartime separation of the two nations was portrayed as a mere aberration.⁴⁴ As one of the leaders of Družina proclaimed in 1947,

We are walking the same way, and that is not and cannot be any other [way] than that of the unity of hearts and minds for the self-preservation of the nation and fortification of the republic.⁴⁵

Following the end of the conflict, the recent heroic resistance of war victims and their relatives to the wartime regimes in the Protectorate and Slovakia became an integral part of Družina’s narrative.⁴⁶ Indeed, according to Družina, no fewer than 218 of its members were killed by the Nazis in the Bohemian lands alone, not to mention the dead in Slovakia.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the organisation added another component into its discourse; in Družina’s rhetoric, war victims joined others to become ‘builders’ (‘*budovatelé*’) of a new, socially just ‘people’s’ (‘*lidová*’) republic. As an article in *Nový život* idealistically

³⁹ Bohumil Dvorský, ‘Kultura a pracující lid’, *Nový život*, 20 Oct. 1945, p. 4.

⁴⁰ ‘30 vítězných let SSSR’, *Nový život*, Nov. 1947, p. 2.

⁴¹ Antonín Procházka, ‘K očištění pohraničí’, *Nový život*, 20 June 1945, p. 1.

⁴² ‘Nezapomínejme!’, *Nový život*, 20 July 1945, p. 4.

⁴³ ‘Váleční poškození manifestačně prohlásili jednotu Čechů a Slováků v Družině’, *Nový život*, 20 July 1945, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ *Zpráva ke XIV. sjezdu Družiny*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁵ Antonín Procházka, ‘Váleční poškození v československé vzájemnosti’, *Nový život*, Apr. 1947, p. 1.

⁴⁶ ‘Pražané na barikádách’, *Nový život*, 28 May 1945, p. 3; ‘Družina v boji za svobodu, demokracii a mír’, *Nový život*, 28 May 1945, p. 3; ‘Svaz národní revoluce a váleční poškození z první světové války’, *Nový život*, Feb. 1946, p. 1; Rakšány, ‘Družina a odbojové složky’, *Nový život*, 20 June 1949, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *XIV. valný sjezd Družiny*, p. 28.

proclaimed in June 1945, 'we shall build a republic, in which everyone can breathe freely and feel truly at home'.⁴⁸



Fig. 13. Representatives of Družina (centre) standing with fellow Czechoslovaks in recently liberated Prague in 1945.⁴⁹

The so-called third Czechoslovak republic came to an end in February 1948 when the local Communists seized power. By then, the vast majority of German veterans had already been expelled from Czechoslovakia. In its early days, the new regime quickly abolished many of the existing organisations of Czech and Slovak ex-servicemen after reassigning and reorganising their members into state-controlled associations, as was the case with Československá Obec Legionářská (ČsOL), which ceased to exist soon after the coup. As Jan Michl observed, by this point, many of the leading legionary figures were either dead or too tired and resigned to oppose the Communists.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, numerous legionaries were persecuted by the regime. Several were given lengthy prison terms and General Heliodor Píka was even sentenced to death and executed in 1949. Various

⁴⁸ Bohumil Dvorský, 'Budujeme lidovou republiku', *Nový život*, 20 June 1945, p. 5.

⁴⁹ 'Dne 13. května'..., *Nový život*, 20 June 1945, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Michl, p. 239.

reminders of the Czechoslovak legionary past were also removed from public spaces; streets that had been named in legionaries' honour were renamed and many monuments taken away.⁵¹

In the wake of the Communist takeover, Družina came to operate as little more than a mouthpiece reaffirming the views and values of the ruling regime and condemning capitalism and 'reactionary forces'.⁵² Already in March 1948, the frontpage of *Nový život* loyally proclaimed the willingness of war victims to support the new government of Klement Gottwald and work towards prosperity of the people's republic and its inhabitants.⁵³ Indeed, after the events of February 1948, members of Družina continued to present themselves as defenders of peace and builders of the republic and socialism, notwithstanding their injuries and illnesses,⁵⁴ with *Nový život* proudly bringing to its readers stories of disabled veterans who had been honoured as shock workers and innovators.⁵⁵ As the newspaper observed, war victims were 'diligently working towards the success of the Five-Year Plan, despite the fact that they find it more difficult than healthy citizens'.⁵⁶

Similarly to ČsOL, organisations of Austro-Hungarian war victims did not preserve their autonomy after the Communist coup. Svaz invalidů-důstojníků apparently 'decided entirely voluntarily' to be assimilated into the newly created Ústřední jednota invalidů (ÚJI – Central Union of Invalids) in April 1951.⁵⁷ In turn, its interwar leader and former

⁵¹ For more information about the treatment of legionaries during the Communist period, see Michl, pp. 246-258.

⁵² Bedřich Vitásek, 'Nelze stát stranou', *Nový život*, 20 Aug. 1949, p. 1.

⁵³ Jaroslav Hajíček, 'I Družina přikládá ruku k velikému dílu', *Nový život*, March 1948, p. 1.

⁵⁴ 'Zpráva ku X. pracovnímu a mírovému manifestačnímu sjazdu Družiny československých vojnových poškozených v Košiciach 4. a 5. nov. 1950 vo „Veritase“ a v Národnom divadle (n.p., n.d.)', p. 12.

⁵⁵ 'Vzorní pracovníci', *Nový život*, 20 July 1951, p. 5.

⁵⁶ 'Váleční poškození chápou povinnost k budovatelské práci republiky', *Nový život*, 20 July 1951, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Rostislav Korčák, 'Každý bude vítán, kdo chce budovat a spolupracovat', *Zpravodaj Ústřední jednoty invalidů*, Jan. 1950, pp. 1-2; Rudolf Tyl, 'Váleční invalidé do řad ÚJI', *Zpravodaj Ústřední jednoty invalidů*, Apr. 1951, p. 1.

Habsburg officer, now ‘comrade’ Turek, received the position of a vice-chairman in the organisation, which also created a special committee for ‘war and military invalids’.⁵⁸ Soon afterwards, members of *Družina oslepených vojínů* also joined ÚJI. A year later, *Družina československých válečných poškozců* suffered a similar fate despite its best efforts to defend its organisational independence.

In the period before the merger with the association of disabled civilians, *Družina* not only ostentatiously declared its loyalty to the communist cause⁵⁹ but also emphasised differences between war victims and civilians with impairments. For example, in 1949 *Družina* argued that ‘war victims [were] those who had sacrificed their lives and health for the creation and restoration of the republic, and therefore fully deserve[d] to have their own organisation’.⁶⁰ This was all to no avail; the Communist leadership eventually ‘recommended’ the creation of a new organisation, *Svaz československých invalidů* (SČI – Union of Czechoslovak Invalids).⁶¹ SČI would absorb disabled members of both its predecessor ÚJI and the by now dissolved *Družina* and operate as the sole association of people with impairments in Czechoslovakia.⁶² On 7 June 1952, SČI was duly established.⁶³ Thirty-five years after the original creation of *Družina*, the organisation with tens of thousands of members met its end ‘not with a bang but a whimper’.

After joining ÚJI and then SČI, the specific rhetoric and demands of Austro-Hungarian ex-servicemen were diluted in the wider discourse of these more generalised organisations, which did not have these disabled veterans as their focus.⁶⁴ In their rhetoric,

⁵⁸ ch, ‘Ustavení zájmové komise válečných a vojenských invalidů’, *Zpravodaj Ústřední jednoty invalidů*, Apr. 1951, p. 8.

⁵⁹ ‘Může *Družina* být uznána organizací?’, *Nový život*, 1 Oct. 1951, p. 1.

⁶⁰ ‘Písať len čo je pravda’, *Nový život*, 20 Aug. 1949, p. 3.

⁶¹ ch, ‘Váleční poškozců vstupují do SČI’, *Zpravodaj Svazu československých invalidů*, June 1952, p. 4.

⁶² For a publication of Svaz talking about disabled veterans of World War II, see Otakar Bohata, *Bojovali za naši svobodu* (Prague, 1985).

⁶³ ‘Nová jednotná organizace Svaz čs. invalidů’, *Rudé právo*, 8 June 1952, p. 2.

⁶⁴ See this organisation’s brochure, *Kroky kupředu* (Prague, 1959).

both ÚJI and SČI presented their members as a united group of disabled individuals who were all working on the ‘construction of socialism’ (*‘výstavba socialismu’*).⁶⁵ Disabled veterans of the Great War ceased to differ from other people with impairments since the specific nature of their disability and its origin had apparently lost importance as the state was seeking to create a new, united society. As Otokar Turek observed, already after the organisation of disabled Austro-Hungarian officers had joined ÚJI in 1951, ‘it is irrelevant for a person suffering from disability how they acquired [this disability], because [its] consequences and pains are the same’.⁶⁶

Post-1948 changes and the establishment of SČI were a coda to the disabled veterans’ movement. Although in later years names and stories of Austro-Hungarian veterans did occasionally surface on the pages of SČI’s newspaper *Zpravodaj Svazu československých invalidů* and its successor *Elán*, they gradually became increasingly rarer until they eventually ceased to appear at all.⁶⁷ Indeed, most veterans’ leaders had also vanished from public life by the 1950s. The name of František Neumeister had already ceased to appear on the pages of *Nový život* during World War II; the Slovak leader of *Družina* and interwar member of parliament Jozef Kopasz died of a heart attack as a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Social Care in January 1947;⁶⁸ in the same year, Ondřej Kypr published his last book and apparently disappeared from public life;⁶⁹ former official

⁶⁵ *Invalidé v budovatelské práci* (Prague, 1951), p. 6; ‘Vzhůru do tvořivé práce na výstavbě socialismu!’, *Zpravodaj Svazu československých invalidů*, June 1952, pp. 1-2; Rudolf Tyl, ‘Předmluva’, *Nový život a práce československých invalidů*, H. J. Melan (Prague, 1953), pp. 3-4.

⁶⁶ Turek, ‘Vojenští a váleční invalidé na ÚVV’, *Zpravodaj Ústřední jednoty invalidů*, July 1951, p. 2.

⁶⁷ ‘Složení ústředního představenstva SČI’, *Zpravodaj Svazu československých invalidů*, June 1952, p. 4; ‘Vyznamenání umělce’, *Zpravodaj Svazu československých invalidů*, March 1959, p. 1; ‘Obětavý pracovník’, *Zpravodaj Svazu československých invalidů*, Nov. 1962, p. 5; ‘Ladislav Neškrabal’, *Zpravodaj Svazu československých invalidů*, July-Aug. 1967, p. 15; T., ‘Památce Vincence Fischera’, *Elán: Časopis Svazu československých invalidů*, March 1969, pp. 13, 16; M. Kostková, ‘Pětasedmdesátiny St. Zejdy’, *Elán: Časopis Federace československých invalidů*, Nov. 1970, p. 13.

⁶⁸ ‘Kopas, Jozef’, *Zbierka fotodokumentov osobností, Kopas, Jozef, 1887 – 1947*, Sign. SK 193/3, SNK; Ivan Čičmanec, ‘Zomrel Jožko Kopas...’, *Výročná zpráva Štátneho úradu pre vojnových poškodených v Bratislave za rok 1947* (Bratislava, n.d.), pp. 9-10.

⁶⁹ Ondřej Kypr, *Poznámky k výstavbě lidové demokratické republiky Československé* (Prague, 1947).

of Družina and one of the pioneers of Czech science-fiction Metoděj Havlíček passed away in 1950;⁷⁰ the interwar member of parliament Vilém Knebort became a victim of one of the 1950s show trials, in which he received a life sentence and died in prison;⁷¹ and similarly, the legionary general Jan Syrový had to serve more than a decade in prison for high treason before he was released, only to die forgotten and alone in 1970.⁷²

Needless to say, individual veterans could still be found in Czechoslovakia even many decades after the end of the Great War. For example, the photographer Josef Sudek, whose wartime injury was discussed at the beginning of this thesis, was still active in the early 1970s. The legionary Ludvík Svoboda even became the president of Czechoslovakia, which he led during 1968–1975. A small number of ex-servicemen of the Great War also saw the fall of the Communist regime in 1989.⁷³ The death of the last Czechoslovak legionary Alois Vocásek in 2003 was observed by numerous Czech media outlets;⁷⁴ tellingly, it remains unclear who was the last Austro-Hungarian veteran in the Czech Republic or Slovakia.

⁷⁰ Ivan Adamovič, *Slovník české literární fantastiky a science fiction* (Prague, 1995), p. 87.

⁷¹ Petr Anev, 'Procesy s údajnými přísluhovači Zelené internacionály', *Paměť a dějiny. Revue pro studium totalitních režimů*, 6.4 (2012), pp. 23-34. See O. Balaš, *Zelená internacionála – prodloužená ruka imperialistických nepřátel našeho lidu* (Prague, 1952); Petr Kettner, Bruno Spittank, and Jaroslav Ungerman, *Agenti Zelené internacionály: Nepřátelé naší vesnice* (Prague, 1952).

⁷² Fidler, p. 271.

⁷³ See Pichlík, Klípa, and Zabloudilová, pp. 273-274.

⁷⁴ 'Poslední legionář své jméno očistit nestihl', accessed 10 Feb. 2020 at www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/posledni-legionar-sve-jmeno-ocistit-nestihl.A030807_215840_domaci_mad.

Conclusion

‘More than 30 years have passed since the end of World War I. However, we can still feel its consequences’.¹

The 1949 annual report of the State Office for War Victims in Bratislava.

At the end of the Great War, the world was a different place. In East-Central Europe, several new or significantly enlarged states appeared in the territory, which had once been ruled by Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. Most of these states were eager to shed their imperial past and instead introduce their own narratives about themselves and their history; old statues were quickly replaced, streets renamed, new public holidays inaugurated. Perhaps not surprisingly, many did not fit into these narratives, which were often highly selective and reductionist. In Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Poland, the locals were affected by the discrepancy between the imagined past of the states and the actual pre-1918 behaviour of their citizens. Those who had been loyal to the previous regime, such as members of ethnic minorities, former public officials, and also veterans of the Great War, were often treated with ambivalence, suspicion, or even outright hostility.

In Czechoslovakia, the state narrative about the Czechoslovak struggle and victory on the side of the Allies, which focused on the story of a relatively small group of soldiers fighting in the Legions, differed significantly from the reality of the Habsburg war effort, which had been experienced by the vast majority of the population. In other words, the legionary service was an aberration rather than the norm even for most Czechs and Slovaks, not to mention members of ethnic minorities. In no other country in Eastern Europe was the contrast so stark. Indeed, it was the resulting silence of most

¹ *Výročná zpráva Štátneho úradu pre vojnových poškodených v Bratislave za rok 1949* (Bratislava, n.d.), p. 17.

Czechoslovaks and the subsequent disappearance of a large dimension of the Great War from the local public memory that inspired this doctoral project.

As the thesis has shown, the legacy of the conflict for the fledgling state and its inhabitants was complicated and multifaceted. The new, postwar reality, in which the republic attempted to distance itself from its Habsburg predecessor, required many to reinvent their past. Former soldiers inverted most of the values traditionally associated with military service as they sought to downplay their role in the Austro-Hungarian war effort. However, even then, most ex-servicemen did not receive any significant amount of recognition for their service.

Despite this situation, which was further compounded by inadequate provision of social care, few disabled veterans became radicalised. Although the ex-servicemen and their organisations may have often self-censored their statements and activities, it is noteworthy that after the turbulent early 1920s, disabled ex-servicemen largely steered clear of both far-right and far-left. Austro-Hungarian veterans and their disabilities also never became an important political symbol in Czechoslovakia; political parties courted organisations of Austro-Hungarian war victims simply because of the sheer number of their members.

The cooperation that developed between ex-servicemen speaks of a society that was more inclusive and less fractured for a large part of the interwar period than many would imagine. Although the importance of ties between veterans should not be overemphasised, it is clear that after initial hostility disabled ex-servicemen were willing to bridge the differences between them. By the 1930s, different groups of disabled Czechoslovak ex-servicemen had put aside most of their disagreements in the pursuit of their social demands.

Although its care for disabled veterans was often described as highly inadequate, Czechoslovakia spent a large amount of money on war victims in the period when the welfare state was just evolving and developing. Before the passing of the social insurance law 221/1924, war victims formed the largest group of Czechoslovak citizens receiving regular state benefits; in total, expenditures on their pensions constituted an astonishing 96% of the budget of the Ministry of Social Care in 1920.² The Czechoslovak republic's postwar recognition of its duty to provide for citizens who were unable to earn a living was an important step towards the creation of a comprehensive system of social care.

Not surprisingly, the system of care for war victims favoured disabled legionaries over most other veterans. However, the hierarchy of war victims was not always straightforward. Economic and military considerations also played an important role in the state system; the republic clearly sought ways to limit its expenses, whilst also preserving and honouring the distinction between professional soldiers and mere conscripts, even if the former had previously belonged to the Austro-Hungarian armed forces. Thus, as this thesis has shown, the perception of legionaries as the darlings of the Czechoslovak state carries several caveats.

Indeed, the state's approach to care for war victims was positively Machiavellian in the volatile regions of Těšín Silesia and Ruthenia. There, the republic used various official and unofficial means in its pursuit of the locals' loyalty. As the archival sources show, in the difficult postwar period the state was willing to pour money into almost any endeavour that would secure it at least a modicum of public support.

Another topic discussed in this project which further complicates the understanding of social hierarchies and the legacy of the Great War in interbellum society is that of

² Jša, 'Náklady invalidní péče v r. 1920', *Nový život*, 8 Feb. 1920, p. 2.

blinded Austro-Hungarian veterans. The perception of blind people as some of the most unfortunate human beings, which had originated before 1914, resulted in these men receiving a disproportionate amount of attention and help despite their being former soldiers of the Habsburg Empire. Unlike disabled veterans with other injuries, they established relatively close ties with their civilian counterparts. The fact that blind civilians were treated much less favourably than these ex-servicemen serves as another snapshot of the complicated development of the Czechoslovak welfare state.

This thesis has painted a complicated yet somewhat positive image of the interwar republic. Indeed, the project has made it clear that not everything was ideal in Czechoslovakia; care for disabled veterans was often found lacking, as depicted in war victims' journals, which contained endless examples of penury, misfortune, and hopelessness. However, these and other sources also capture a growing sense of cooperation as many of the war victims gradually moved away from the hostility and antagonism of the early days of the republic. These findings must be approached critically; after all, the years 1938–1939 clearly showed that there was more than enough resentment amongst the inhabitants of the republic. Nevertheless, as this thesis has manifested, most of the war victims and their organisations devoted their attention and energy to efforts which had little to do with the political radicalisation of the late 1930s.

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