For the Nation, for the Legion, and for the Castle: Legionary Protectionism and Informal Politicsin the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938)

Tomáš Gecko

ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of the Czechoslovak Legion's attempt to transport raw materials from Siberia to Europe after World War I, this article draws on the concept of legionary protectionism to explore how informal groups impacted the political culture and behind-the-scenes political practice of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). Notably, the "Castle," a cluster of social networks surrounding Czechoslovak President Tomáš G. Masaryk and his successor Edvard Beneš, influenced negotiations regarding the aforementioned "raw materials action." The legionnaires themselves had a direct interest in the matter through the Legion Bank, a major financial institution. The interplay between the Castle and the Legion Bank sheds light on crucial political and socioeconomic issues of interwar Central and Eastern Europe, including political fundraising, the role of informal groups in political practice, and the consolidation of multinational countries through internal colonization.

KEYWORDS: Czechoslovak Legion, the Castle, Legion Bank, informal groups, political fundraising, internal colonization

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In autumn 1920, the last transport of Czechoslovak legionnaires sailed from Vladivostok to Trieste. This concluded the evacuation of the Russian branch of the Czechoslovak Legion formed with the support of the Entente during World War I as part of the Czech national resistance against Austria-Hungary. The Legion's activities impacted the interwar political order of Central and Eastern Europe. Following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Legion advanced into the Russian interior and seized control of the Trans-Siberian Highway. This significantly influenced the course of the Russian Civil War. While the Allies considered military intervention in Russia,[1] the Legion's strategic presence became a valuable diplomatic asset for the leaders of the newly formed Czechoslovak Republic at the Paris Peace Conference.[2] The key figure in the negotiations was Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850–1937), the Legion's commander-in-chief and Czechoslovakia's first president from 1918 to 1935. Masaryk relied heavily on his foreign minister, Edvard Beneš (1884–1948), who later became a leading figure in the League of Nations and succeeded Masaryk as president (1935–1938). Czechoslovak diplomats achieved nearly all their territorial ambitions. The new country included the Bohemian Lands and parts of Upper Hungary (Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia) and had a multinational population of Czechs, Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Jews, and Poles.[3]

The Legion's return to Europe marked the beginning of its second life. Public space in Czechoslovakia soon filled with stories about the Legion's military skirmishes in Russia, known as the "Siberian Anabasis,"[4] inspired by Xenophon's account of ancient Greek mercenaries retreating from Persian-dominated Asia. The legionnaires' close relationship with the political establishment became an integral part of Czechoslovakia's ideological landscape.[5] Daniela

1 BETTY MILLER UNTERBERGER: The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia, Chapel Hill—London 1989, pp. 321–332; JOHN BRADLEY: Allied Intervention in Russia, London 1968, pp. 106–131; VICTOR MIROSLAV FIC: Československé legie v Rusku a boj za vznik Československa 1914–1918 [The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia and the Struggle for the Establishment of Czechoslovakia, 1914–1918], vol. 2–4, Brno 2007–2014.

2 LUBOŠ VELEK: Češi ve víru světová války (1914–1918) [Czechs in the Whirlwind of World War I (1914–1918)], in: DAGMAR HÁJKOVÁ, PAVEL HORÁK (eds.): Republika Československá: 1918–1939, Praha 2018, pp. 48–71, here p. 62.

3 EDUARD KUBŮ, JIŘÍ ŠOUŠA: Nový stát uprostřed Evropy [A New Country in the Middle of Europe], in: HÁJKOVÁ/HORÁK, pp. 76–92, here pp. 89–92.

4 JOSEF PATEJDL: Sibiřská anabase [The Siberian Anabasis], Praha 1923, p. 3; Československá anabase [The Czechoslovakian Anabasis], Praha 1928, p. 7.

5 JAN HÁLEK, BORIS MOSKOVIĆ: Fenomén Maffie: Český (domácí) protirakouský odboj v proměnách 20. století [The Maffie Phenomenon: Czech (Local) Anti-Austrian Resistance in the Changing 20th Century], Praha 2020, pp. 148–149, 165–175; BORIS BARTH: Europa nach dem Großen Krieg: Die Krise der Demokratie in der Zwischenkriegszeit 1918–1938, Frankfurt am Main—New York 2016, pp. 206–209.

Brádlerová aptly coined the term "legionary protectionism"[6] to describe the legionnaires' connections to leading Czechoslovak politicians through patronage. However, her research does not demonstrate how this relationship shaped the country's everyday political culture and practice.

In contrast, this article analyzes how the symbolic dimensions of legionary protectionism framed social interactions among informal groups of politicians and decision-makers that formed the core of the Czechoslovak political system. A suitable case study is the state's rehabilitation of the so-called raw materials action *(surovinová akce*) related to the Legion's withdrawal from Siberia. The evacuation involved 42 ships carrying over 72,000 people and valuable raw materials, including copper, precious metals, and cotton.[7] The Legion amassed these resources due to its unique position during the Russian Civil War. Cut off from regular logistical support, the Legion secured its own supplies, accumulated finances independently, and developed diverse business activities.[8] In 1919, Czechoslovak politicians supported the Legion's decision to transport the accumulated goods to Europe to generate profits and stimulate the postwar economy. However, the raw materials action ultimately failed. The legionnaires incurred financial losses that required state compensation.[9]

Throughout the interwar period, negotiations about the terms of the settlement continued between various state institutions and informal groups at the center of the First Czechoslovak Republic's pluralist democratic system. The main actors were Masaryk's and Beneš's social networks, known as the "Castle" after the seat of the presidential office at Prague Castle, and the Czechoslovak Legion Bank, a major stakeholder in the raw materials action and guarantor of legionnaire interests. The power games of such groups were integral to the political culture and practice of the time, a topic that this article explores. As the legionnaires' symbolic patrons, Masaryk and Beneš supported the bank's demands for financial rehabilitation. Furthermore, they seized this opportunity to repay the bank for its assistance in Czech colonization of eastern regions of Czechoslovakia populated by Slovaks, Hungarians, and Ruthenians. In turn, the bank's management, led by Josef Khyn (1884–?), a former legion-

6 Daniela Brádlerová: Specifika managementu Banky československých legií [Peculiarities of the Management of the Czechoslovak Legion Bank], in: Eduard Kubů, Jiří Šouša (eds.): Finanční elity v českých zemích (Československu) 19. a 20. století, Praha 2008, pp. 379–399, here p. 380–381. For more on this term, see: Tomáš Gecko: Monarchist Crusade for Republican Society: The Legionary Fund and the "Castle" in Interwar Czechoslovakia, in: Slavonic & East European Review 102 (2024), 4, pp. 659–685, here pp. 667–668.

7 Karel Pichlík, Bohumír Klípa, Jitka Zabloudilová: Českoslovenští legionáři 1914–1920 [Czechoslovak Legionnaires, 1914–1920], Praha 1996, p. 251.

8 Daniela Brádlerová: Vojáci nebo podnikatelé? Hospodářské a finanční aktivity československých legií během jejich anabáze v Rusku a na Sibiři [Soldiers or Entrepreneurs? The Economic and Financial Activities of the Czechoslovak Legions during Their Anabasis in Russia and Siberia], Praha 2019, pp. 355, 357–358.

9 Ibid., pp. 197–221, 268–273.

naire, promised the Castle a portion of the rehabilitation funds as "soft money" for discretionary political purposes.

Chapters 1 and 2 elaborate on legionary protectionism and "soft money," unraveling the relationships between the Castle and the legionary institutions overseen by the Legion Bank. Chapter 3 applies these concepts to the raw materials action negotiations, in which the Castle and the Legion Bank played pivotal roles. Chapter 4 analyzes the internal colonization of Czechoslovakia, supported by the Castle and implemented by the Legion Bank. This seemingly marginal case study reveals the power games at the heart of the First Czechoslovak Republic and touches on vital issues of political culture in Central and Eastern Europe, including political fundraising, nation-building through internal colonization, and the role of informal groups, such as the Castle and the Legion Bank, in decision-making processes.

1 Leaning on the Legion while Protecting the Legion

To understand the role of informal groups[10] in interwar political culture and political practice,[11] it is important to explain how the "Castle" operated and its connections with legionnaires. According to Antonín Klimek, Masaryk's political rivals "invented" the term "Castle" to circumvent the "extremely strict barrier of laws and regulations protecting the president's person and office from criticism."[12] Richard Vašek demonstrates how the concept was understood in the interwar media. In addition to positive connotations (philosophy or humanity), words like behind-the-scenes, strings, shadow man, camarilla, mercenaries, henchmen, and intimidation were also indicative.[13] This ambigu-

10 For more on the term "informal group" and its role in forming social networks and navigating political processes, see: ALLAN FIELLIN: The Functions of Informal Groups in Legislative Institutions, in: The Journal of Politics 24 (1962), 1, pp. 72–91, here p. 76; CHRISTINA PRELL, MARK REED, LIAT RACIN, KLAUS HUBACEK: Competing Structure, Competing Views: The Role of Formal and Informal Social Structures in Shaping Stakeholder Perceptions, in: Ecology and Society 15 (2010), 4, article 34, https://ecologyandsociety.org/vol15/iss4/art34/ (2025-12-10).

11 The terms "political culture" and "political practice" describe typical political behavior resulting from the interaction between formal and informal decision-making processes. For details, see: ANDREAS ENDERLIN-MAHR: Kabinettskanzleidirektor Adolf Freiherr von Braun: Bürokratie und Patronage in der k. u. k. Kabinettskanzlei 1865–1899, PhD Diss., Universität Wien, 2023, pp. 5, 12–13. For researching "political culture" in a historical context, see: MAREK SKOVAJSA: Politologický koncept politické kultury a jeho využití v české historiografii [Political Culture: Using a Concept from Political Science in Czech Historiography], in: Historie—Otázky—Problémy 6 (2014), 1, pp. 9–21, here pp. 16–19.

12 ANTONÍN KLIMEK: Boj o Hrad [Battle for the Castle], vol. 1, Praha 1996, p. 165.

13 RICHARD VAŠEK: Hrad a Pětka [The Castle and the Pětka], in: HÁJKOVÁ/HORÁK, pp. 235–244, here p. 244.

ity is typical of historiography,[14] which refers to a place (Prague Castle), a political strategy, or an ideology. Today, scholars often use the term "Castle" as an analytical tool to understand the substance of the interwar Czechoslovak political system.

The metaphor of social networks is particularly useful for understanding the Castle. Masaryk, Beneš, and their colleagues wove a diverse web of social connections that served many purposes. Consistent with their belief that the political system should be navigated from above, they incorporated individuals and organizations of different ideologies and nationalities into this informal, supra-constitutional cluster. Their practices resembled those of the defunct Habsburg Monarchy. The Habsburg state promoted institutions that negotiated cultural differences within its population and set boundaries for rampant nationalism. [15] Similarly, the Castle worked with Czech nationalism, attempting to regulate it while negotiating transnational reconciliations. Another supra-constitutional body, the Committee of Five (*Pětka*), played a comparable stabilizing role. It brought together leaders of the five ruling political parties to mediate disputes and govern effectively, rivaling the Castle. According to Zdeněk Kárník, the Committee of Five was "essentially an oligarchic element." However, without it, "things could have gone badly for Czechoslovak democracy."[16] Although the Committee of Five had disappeared by fall 1926, its principles, such as discussing legislation before presenting it to parliament, were preserved.[17]

First and foremost, the Castle compensated for the shortcomings of the Czechoslovak party system. Since the parties were not regulated by law, they had no privileges and were not subject to significant obligations. Their infighting and inability to form parliamentary majorities could have destabilized

14 In addition to Klimek, see: ANDREA ORZOFF: Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948, Oxford 2009; BRUCE R. BERGLUND: Castle and Cathedral in Modern Prague: Longing for the Sacred in a Skeptical Age, Budapest—New York 2017; KARL BOSL (ed.): Die "Burg": Einflußreiche politische Kräfte um Masaryk und Beneš, vol. 1–2, München—Wien 1973–1974; JAROSLAV PECHÁČEK: Masaryk, Beneš, Hrad: Masarykovy dopisy Benešovi [Masaryk, Beneš, the Castle: Masaryk's Letters to Beneš], München 1984; JIŘÍ KOVTUN, ZDENĚK LUKEŠ: Pražský hrad za T. G. Masaryka [T. G. Masaryk's Prague Castle], Praha 1995; ZDENĚK KÁRNÍK: České země v éře První republiky (1918–1938) [Bohemian Lands in the Era of the First Republic (1918–1938)], vol. 1, Praha 2000; KRISTÝNA KAUCKÁ: "War by Means of Peace": Lucy E. Textor, the Czechoslovak Land Reform, and the Propaganda of the Interwar Castle, in: Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung 73 (2024), 2, pp. 239–275; DAGMAR HÁJKOVÁ: Počátky prezidentské kanceláře [Origins of the Presidential Office], in: JAN HÁJEK, DAGMAR HÁJKOVÁ et al.: Moc, vliv a autorita v procesu vzniku a utváření meziválečné ČSR (1918–1921), Praha 2008, pp. 163–183; IVAN ŠEDIVÝ: T. G. M.: K mytologii první československé republiky [T. G. M.: On the Mythology of the First Czechoslovak Republic], Praha 2022.

15 PIETER M. JUDSON: The Habsburg Empire: A New History, Cambridge—London 2016, pp. 448, 452.

16 KÁRNÍK, p. 141.

17 VAŠEK, Hrad a Pětka, pp. 235–239.

the political system.[18] Adding nationalism to the mix further complicated matters, as parties representing nationalities other than Czechs were often in the opposition.[19]

The Castle successfully navigated these complex waters. According to Michal Kopeček, Masaryk referred to democracy as "a way of life and a worldview" rather than "an organization of state and administration."[20] Along with Beneš, Masaryk employed behind-the-scenes tactics to promote democratic values, form political coalitions, and defend the pluralist system.[21] Eva Broklová argues that Masaryk and Beneš often disregarded legislative rules yet still managed to maintain a functioning democracy until the Munich Agreement in September 1938.[22] During the two interwar decades, Czechoslovakia had eighteen governments and nine prime ministers. Nevertheless, these cabinets demonstrated unusual personnel continuity and an ability to reach ideological and transnational compromises.[23] Notably, the active participation of German parties in the government since 1926 was an almost unprecedented event in Central and Eastern Europe.[24]

The Castle and the Committee of Five played a significant role in this outcome. Informal political alliances such as these were prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe. Similar groups existed in other successor states of Austria-Hungary and operated outside the constitutional system. However, their specific forms, ideologies, and influences differed fundamentally. For instance, Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) established informal social networks within the Polish army. He used these networks to stage a coup in 1926, which effectively ended the democracy in Poland that he had helped create as a charismatic

18 Eva Broklová: Československá demokracie: Politický systém ČSR 1918–1938 [Czechoslovak Democracy: The Political System of Czechoslovakia 1918–1938], Praha 1992, pp. 74–75; Kárník, pp. 97–98.

19 Natasha Wheatley: The Life & Death of States: Central Europe & the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty, Princeton—Oxford 2023, pp. 213–214.

20 Michal Kopeček: Czechoslovak Interwar Democracy and Its Critical Introspections, in: Journal of Modern European History 17 (2019), 1, pp. 7–15, here p. 9.

21 For a theoretical discussion of the measures taken to defend democracy in interwar Czechoslovakia, see: Jan Vondrářek: Die Selbstbehauptung der tschechoslowakischen Demokratie in der Zwischenkriegszeit als Vorbild und Impulsgeber für Karl Loewensteins Modell der Militant Democracy, in: Heidi Hein-Kircher, Steffen Kailitz (eds.): Verflochtene Herausforderungen politischer und gesellschaftlicher Demokratisierung: Ostmitteleuropas Demokratien zwischen den Kriegen, Marburg 2022, pp. 221–237, here pp. 224–228.

22 Eva Broklová: Prezident Republiky československé: Instituce a osobnost T. G. Masaryka [President of the Czechoslovak Republic: The Institution and Personality of T. G. Masaryk], Praha 2001, pp. 21–22.

23 Josef Harna: Střídání vlád a stabilita politického systému první Československé republiky [Changes in Government and the Stability of the Political System of the First Czechoslovak Republic], in: Sborník prací Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity, Řada společenských věd 27 (2013), 1, pp. 64–78, here pp. 77–78.

24 Barth, pp. 164–165.

leader.[25] The Castle was unique in that its chief representative, Masaryk, embraced democracy as his ideological umbrella and sought a functioning parliamentary system, albeit imperfect.[26] Even while leading the national resistance against Austria-Hungary during World War I, Masaryk emphasized democracy, making it an integral part of the myth surrounding the founding of Czechoslovakia.[27]

The Castle brought together numerous non-political associations and mass organizations. At the forefront were the legionnaires, who constituted the "ideological-political, opinion-forming, and spiritual milieu of the First [Czechoslovak] Republic."[28] Unlike soldiers from defeated states such as Germany and Hungary, legionnaires "remained for the most part loyal supporters of the regime."[29] In interwar public discourse, their story was closely linked to the Castle's nation-building efforts. The narrative of legionnaires fighting in distant Siberia to earn recognition from French and British statesmen at the Paris Peace Conference[30] aligned well with the emerging myth of Masaryk and Beneš as the primary contributors to the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic.[31]

The affinity between the Castle and institutions based on legionary traditions is best described as "legionary protectionism," a largely unexplored concept. Legionnaires who held important positions in the new state administration re-

25 MICHAEL BERNHARD: Institutions and the Fate of Democracy: Germany and Poland in the Twentieth Century, Pittsburgh 2005, pp. 78, 110–113.

26 Some scholars argue that Czechoslovakia was either a managed democracy or an oligarchy (ORZOFF, p. 59; BERGLUND, pp. 155–164). Others depict it as a "difficult" democracy (GIOVANNI CAPOCCIA: Legislative Responses against Extremism: The "Protection of Democracy" in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1920–1938), in: East European Politics and Societies 16 (2002), 3, pp. 691–738, here pp. 696–721).

27 BARTH, pp. 163–165, 269.

28 JANA ČECHUROVÁ, IVAN ŠEDIVÝ: Legionáři a sokolové [Legionnaires and Sokols], in: HÁJKOVÁ/HORÁK, pp. 351–361, here p. 351.

29 IVAN ŠEDIVÝ: Legionářská republika? K systému legionářského zákonodárství a sociální péče v meziválečné ČSR [The Legionnaire Republic? On the System of Legionary Legislation and Social Welfare in Interwar Czechoslovakia], in: Historie a vojenství 51 (2002), 1, pp. 158–184, here p. 183.

30 For the topic of the Legion as a diplomatic card, see: EDUARD KUBŮ, JIŘÍ ŠOUŠA: Průkopníky mezinárodní bezpečnosti a odzbrojení [Pioneers in International Security and Disarmament], in: HÁJKOVÁ/HORÁK, pp. 374–390, here p. 376; IVAN SAVICKÝ: Osudové setkání: Češi v Rusku a Rusové v Čechách 1914–1938 [Fateful Encounter: Czechs in Russia and Russians in Bohemia 1914–1938], Praha 1999, pp. 72–75, 139.

31 MANFRED ALEXANDER: Die Rolle der Legionäre in der ersten Republik: Ein politischer Verband und sein Geschichtsbild, in: Vereinswesen und Geschichtspflege in den böhmischen Ländern, München 1986, pp. 265–279, here pp. 270–271, 276. More on the Castle and the dispute over liberation of Czechoslovakia in: JAN HÁLEK, BORIS MOSKOVIĆ: Nekončící příběh: (Historiografické) narativy vzniku Československa v proměnách času a prostoru (1918–1992/1993) [A Story without End: (Historiographical) Narratives about the Foundation of Czechoslovakia in a Changing Time and Space (1918–1992/1993)], Praha 2023, pp. 76–77.

ceived patronage from the Castle. In turn, the Castle benefited from their favors. Masaryk and Beneš tacitly accepted this arrangement, carefully maneuvering between supporting the legionnaires and limiting their commitments to them.[32] Ferdinand Marek, the Austrian ambassador in Prague, summarized this relationship well: "President [Masaryk] and Dr. Beneš are often blamed for pampering the legionnaires, who now insist on preferential treatment at every opportunity."[33] Masaryk employed a civil servant whose task was to maintain contact with the legionary institutions[34] and wore clothes resembling uniforms to honor his legionary past.[35] A former legionnaire always led the department in the president's office responsible for Masaryk's duties as commander-in-chief of the Czechoslovak forces.[36] The guards at Prague Castle, where Masaryk resided, wore legionnaire uniforms.[37] Beneš, on the other hand, surrounded himself with legionnaires at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and offered them careers in diplomacy.[38] Masaryk and Beneš allocated funds to support the legionary press, which helped them wage ideological battles. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Masaryk and Beneš were careful to prevent the radicalization of the legionary movement. They particularly supported centrist legionary organizations.[39]

Apart from diplomacy, many former legionnaires started promising careers in the army.[40] They had good prospects in economic circles, serving as officials and managers of the Legion Bank. Legionnaires, their institutions, and their relatives owned nearly all of the bank's capital stock. Furthermore, legionnaires received preferential treatment when applying for state offices. State authorities, private institutions, and other entities, such as the Castle, supported them

32 JAN MICHL: Legionáři a Československo [The Legionnaires and Czechoslovakia], Praha 2009, pp. 180–183.

33 Confidential report by Ferdinand Marek to A. Grünberger, 1924-09-30, in: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Wien, Archiv der Republik, Neues Politisches Archiv, box no. 682, sign. 2/3.

34 ALAIN SOUBIGOU: Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Praha—Litomyšl 2004, p. 276.

35 ŠEDIVÝ, T. G. M, p. 46.

36 Paměti A. Schenk, kapitola I: Kancelář prezidenta republiky [Memoirs of A. Schenk, chapter I: Office of the President of the Republic], in: Národní archiv (NA) [National Archives], Prague, Antonín Schenk (AS), box no. 1, pp. 70–73.

37 MARTIN ZÜCKERT: Memory of War and National State Integration: Czech and German Veterans in Czechoslovakia after 1918, in: Central Europe 4 (2006), 4, pp. 111–121, here p. 113.

38 JAN HÁLEK: Bedřich Štěpánek: Nepohodlný muž československé diplomacie [Bedřich Štěpánek: An Inconvenient Man of Czechoslovak Diplomacy], Praha 2017, pp. 77–79.

39 JAN ANGER: K postavení armády v pluralitním politickém systému předválečného Československa [The Place of the Army in the Pluralist Political System of Prewar Czechoslovakia], in: Historie a vojenství 39 (1990), 1, pp. 84–106, here pp. 94–99, 102.

40 IVAN ŠEDIVÝ: Legionáři a československá armáda 1918–1938 [The Legionnaires and the Czechoslovak Army 1918–1938], in: JINDŘICH DEJMEK, JOSEF HANZAL (eds.): České země a Československo v Evropě XIX. a XX. století, Praha 1997, pp. 209–230, here pp. 218–223.

financially. Opposing the legionnaire welfare system was politically risky.[41] Some of these benefits were incorporated into legislation, including land reform laws that redistributed the property of the former Austro-Hungarian nobility.[42] One might even ask whether interwar Czechoslovakia was actually a "legionnaire republic."[43] In practice, however, most legionnaires could only take advantage of a fraction of the privileges they were entitled to.[44] Furthermore, local governments, concerned with their constituents, often marginalized legionnaires seeking work and argued with state authorities over the enforcement of legionnaire legislation.[45]

It was crucial for politicians to integrate ex-soldiers into civil society because ignoring them would have created ideological problems. This was particularly important during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when many legionnaires faced difficult living conditions. Without government support, the state's legitimacy with the military and the public would have been jeopardized.[46] However, there were far fewer legionnaires than other veterans who were not entitled to comparable assistance. Radka Šustrová argues that the government's preference for legionnaires who participated in the "heroic story" of the republic's founding only stabilized the country in the short term. In the long run, it fueled political tensions and divisions. This was doubly true when nationality is taken into account, as Czech and Slovak veterans received more benefits than their German or Hungarian counterparts.[47] Consequently, it was not the army as a whole that came to embody the new state and occupy a significant place in its national memory, but rather the Legion—composed of Czechs (and Slovaks).[48]

41 EDUARD KUBŮ, JANA ŠETŘILOVÁ: Hrad a Alois Rašín v letech 1922–1923: Zápas o deflaci a omluvu legionářům [The Castle and Alois Rašín in 1922–1923: The Struggle for Deflation and the Apology to the Legionaries], in: Český časopis historický 93 (1995), 3, pp. 451–469, here pp. 459–460, 465–467.

42 KRISTÝNA KAUCKÁ: "Taková tlačenice na jednom dvorečku" aneb První pozemková reforma na velkostatcích Křivoklát, Plasy a Radnice (1918–1938) ["Such a Crowd in One Little Yard" or the First Land Reform on the Estates of Křivoklát, Plasy and Radnice (1918–1938)], Praha 2018, pp. 139–140.

43 ŠEDIVÝ, Legionářská republika, p. 158.

44 MICHL, pp. 30–33; VÁCLAV ŠMIDRKAL, LAURENCE COLE, HANNES LEIDINGER, RUDOLF KUČERA, JULIA WALLECZEK-FRITZ, RADKA ŠUSTROVÁ: Vanquished & Victorious: World War I Veterans in Austria & Czechoslovakia, 1918–1938, New York—Oxford 2024, pp. 72–79.

45 ERIK DULOVIČ: Osudy a postavenie legionárov na východním Slovensku v rokoch 1919–1929 [The Fate and Status of Legionnaires in Eastern Slovakia 1919–1929], in: Historický časopis 48 (2000), 1, pp. 54–74, here pp. 61–62.

46 ŠEDIVÝ, Legionářská republika, pp. 183–184.

47 RADKA ŠUSTROVÁ: The Struggle for Respect: The State, World War One Veterans, and Social Welfare Policy in Interwar Czechoslovakia, in: Zeitgeschichte 47 (2020), 1, pp. 107–134, here pp. 107–109, 112–114.

48 BARTH, pp. 206–209.

2 Soft Money and Hard Power

Historians often point out that many legionary institutions were associated with the Castle. However, the relationship between the Castle and the most influential legionary institution, the Legion Bank, remains shrouded in mystery.[49] Zdeněk Sládek attempted to investigate the matter. Although he found documents regarding financial transactions between the Legion Bank and the Castle, he did not uncover anything substantial.[50] Sládek suspects that the Legion Bank provided Masaryk and Beneš with money for the "political purposes of the Castle."[51] Similarly, Brádlerová notes the Legion Bank's exclusive ties with the Castle.[52] However, she lacked the necessary sources to contextualize the topic. This article, on the other hand, draws on documents discovered in Prague archives, enabling us to explore this pivotal aspect of the First Czechoslovak Republic's political system in detail.

The "legionary protectionism" between the Legion Bank and the Castle stemmed from their political, symbolic, and financial interdependence when dealing with legionnaires. Legionnaires invoked the founding myth of Czechoslovakia to pressure Masaryk's presidential office and the Castle to intervene in their disputes and supplement the state's veteran welfare programs.[53] The Legion Bank helped the Castle provide the necessary funds while simultaneously exploiting its social networks for business gain.[54] In other words, the

49 See: ANTONÍN KLIMEK: Počátky parlamentní demokracie v Československu [The Beginnings of Parliamentary Democracy in Czechoslovakia], in: JAROSLAV VALENTA, EMIL VORÁČEK et al. (eds.): Československo 1918–1938: Osudy demokracie ve střední Evropě, Praha 1999, pp. 111–122, here p. 120.

50 ZDENĚK SLÁDEK: Evakuační akce československých vojsk v sovětském Rusku (1919–1920) [Evacuation of Czechoslovak Troops in Soviet Russia (1919–1920)], in: Československo-sovětské vztahy, vol. 4, Praha 1976, pp. 97–119, here pp. 116–118; ZDENĚK SLÁDEK: Pět malých příběhů z historie první republiky [Five Short Stories from the History of the First Republic], Praha 1992, pp. 20–23.

51 SLÁDEK, Pět malých příběhů, p. 23.

52 DANIELA BRÁDLEROVÁ: Banka československých legií v letech 1919–1938 [The Czechoslovak Legion Bank in 1919–1938], PhD Diss., Univerzita Karlova, Praha 2005, pp. 353–359. For more detail on the Legion Bank, see: JITKA ZABLOUDILOVÁ: Vojenská spořitelna čs. vojska v Rusku [Military Savings Bank of the Czechoslovak Army in Russia], in: Historie a vojenství 48 (1999), 1, pp. 98–126; JITKA ZABLOUDILOVÁ, DANIELA BRÁDLEROVÁ: Banka československých legií 1919–1925 [The Czechoslovak Legion Bank, 1919–1925], in: Historie a vojenství 49 (2000), 2, pp. 345–377; JOSEF FALTUS: Banka československých legií [The Czechoslovak Legion Bank], in: FRANTIŠEK VENCOVSKÝ (ed.): Dějiny bankovnictví v českých zemích, Praha 1999, pp. 332–336.

53 Dopis od Vojenské Kanceláře prezidenta republiky [Letter from the Military Office of the President of the Republic], 1937-12-16, in: Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky (AKPR) [Archives of the President's Office], Prague, Kancelář prezidenta republiky I, 1919–1947 [Office of the President of the Republic I, 1919–1947], box no. 113, inv. no. 896, sign. 11284.

54 For social welfare for legionnaires from the Legion Bank, see: BRÁDLEROVÁ, Banka, pp. 310, 325.

bank connected legionnaires to Masaryk and Beneš's nation-building efforts through monetary infrastructure, while the Castle provided the bank with social connections and political protection. Additionally, Masaryk and Beneš strove to maintain control over numerous legionnaire welfare institutions, which required the Legion Bank's cooperation. For instance, the Castle exercised considerable influence over the Social Legionary Institute. Masaryk, the former chairman of the Russian branch of the Czechoslovak National Council that had coordinated the Legion in Russia, became its protector. Beneš was to "inherit" his privileges.[55] Masaryk's associates comprised the steering committee of the Legionary Support Fund at the Ministry of National Defense. Vilém Pospíšil (1873–1942), a Castle politician and later governor of the National Bank of Czechoslovakia, chaired the committee. Other members included Beneš, Alice Masaryková (1879–1966), T. G. Masaryk's daughter, and the head of the presidential office, Přemysl Šámal (1867–1941).[56]

Masaryk and Beneš's fundraising procedure, which included the Legion Bank, resembled that of political parties. Like the Castle, political parties were not legal entities at the time.[57] They were not eligible for state budget subsidies and obtained money through unofficial channels. By today's standards, these funds would be categorized as "soft money,"[58] i.e., finances raised from various corporate or public entities, as well as individual donors, outside the purview of regulatory bodies, such as the Czechoslovak Supreme Audit Office. Masaryk and Beneš primarily used soft money to subsidize public figures, media outlets, cultural and scientific institutions, legionnaires, and former members of the national resistance against Austria-Hungary. While some of these transactions would be considered corruption at the highest political levels today, they were normal political practices at the time.[59] Donations to journalists or public officials were not necessarily considered corrupt unless direct favors, such as preferential treatment in government contracts, were involved. However, the gen-

55 Stanovy Sociálního ústavu legionářského [Social Legionary Institute Statutes], 1927-03-08, in: Vojenský historický archiv (VHA) [Military Historical Archives], Prague, Finanční správa (FS) [Financial Administration], box no. 114.

56 Zprávy Podpůrného fondu legionářského z let 1922, 1924 a 1928 [Legionary Support Fund Reports from 1922, 1924 and 1928], in: VHA, Vojenská Kancelář prezidenta republiky [Military Office of the President of the Republic], box no. 90, inv. no. 384; Šedivý, Legionářská republika, pp. 172–179.

57 Eduard Kubů, Jiří Šouša: Podnikání ve službách politické strany: Tiskařské a vydavatelské družstvo českých agrárníků Novina (1897–1938). Prameny, přístupy, interpretace [Business in the Service of a Political Party: The Printing and Publishing Cooperative of Czech Agrarians Novina (1897–1938). Sources, Approaches, Interpretations], in: Hospodářské dějiny 35 (2020), 2, pp. 141–183, here pp. 141–142.

58 David Gill, Christine S. Lipsmeyer: Soft Money and Hard Choices: Why Political Parties Might Legislate against Soft Money Donations, in: Public Choice 123 (2005), 3–4, pp. 411–438, here pp. 413, 434.

59 For problems in drawing a clear line between corruption and standard behavior in a given political culture, see: Leslie Holmes: Rotten States? Corruption, Post-Communism, and Neoliberalism, Durham 2006, pp. 27–31.

eral public viewed these subsidies with disdain. Therefore, it was dangerous to allow any information to leak into the daily press.

Even historians critical of the Castle agree that Masaryk and Beneš used money for nation-building, not for personal enrichment.[60] In the interwar political practice, their fundraising practices were considered effective—and perhaps necessary—tools for consolidating the state and ensuring its stable development. As Klimek notes, the Castle politicians "had a positive effect on the preservation of democracy in the state," though he acknowledges that "the methods of cabinet politics, backroom deals, and agreements [...] used by them, often forced by circumstances, chipped away at the purity of this democracy."[61]

The Castle could not entirely avoid basing its distribution of money on nationality and territory. The core of the decision-making process and the most prestigious institutions were centered in Prague, the capital, and the western regions of Czechoslovakia (the Bohemian lands).[62] Consequently, most of the Castle's funds were allocated to these areas rather than Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia in the east. Furthermore, the Castle primarily raised funds from Czech industrialists and bankers. Slovaks, in particular, donated very little.[63] Thus, behind the scenes, politicians demanded that the Castle not allocate excessive amounts of money to regions and nationalities that did not contribute as much as Czechs living in the Bohemian lands.[64]

Lastly, the Castle strove to establish a state for the Czechs and Slovaks, who had been artificially united under the single "Czechoslovak" nationality. To achieve this goal, the Castle employed various methods, including the use of money. These strategies are evident in the disputes over the raw materials action. The crux of the problem was Beneš and other politicians' decision to purchase raw materials and other goods in Siberia and transport them from Vladivostok with evacuated legionnaires immediately after World War I to bring desperately needed resources to Czechoslovakia. However, by the time the ships reached Europe, prices had dropped. This resulted in sales that brought in less than the purchase price. The government promised to cover the difference so that the losses would not be directly borne by the legionnaires whose institutions had invested capital in the venture. Various state offices gradually negotiated a detailed calculation and agreed that "the total price difference to

60 KLIMEK, Boj, p. 104; PETER BUGGE: Czech Democracy 1918–1938: Paragon or Parody?, in: Bohemia 47 (2007), 1, pp. 3–28, here pp. 19–20.

61 KLIMEK, Boj, p. 179.

62 KÁRNÍK, pp. 110–111, 284, 565.

63 Dopis od Emila Roose [Letter from Emil Roos], 1929-04-19, in: AKPR, Kancelář prezidenta republiky—Tajné, 1921–1944 (KPR—T) [Office of the President of the Republic—Secret, 1921–1944], box. no. 165, sign. T 283-28; Dopis od Přemysla Šámala pro Kornela Stodolu [Letter from Přemysl Šámal to Kornel Stodola], 1928-11-30, ibid.

64 JAN HÁLEK: "Přispět může každý": Národní fond Masarykův a oslavy 70. narozenin prezidenta T. G. Masaryka ["Everyone Can Contribute": The Masaryk National Fund and the Celebrations of President T. G. Masaryk's 70th Birthday], Praha 2018, pp. 11–12.

be paid by the state would be limited to a certain amount to be determined by mutual agreement […]."[65]

The Legion Bank had a large stake in the matter and leveraged its influence with the Castle to advocate for the highest possible compensation.[66] Masaryk, commander-in-chief of the Legion, and Beneš, who had helped to evacuate the legionnaires from Siberia, could hardly refuse. They were symbolic protectors of the former legionnaires and influential political players. Furthermore, the Legion Bank frequently provided the Castle with various discreet services, such as political fundraising. The bank also funded Masaryk and Beneš's plans for the "internal colonization"[67] of eastern Czechoslovakia, which aimed to strengthen the country's unitary political system. Specifically, the bank invested significant capital in unprofitable financial institutions in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, thereby spreading Czech economic (and political) influence. As the next chapter will show, it was only natural that the Legion Bank would demand compensation and favors in return.

3 Entanglements Between the Castle and the Legion Bank over the Raw Materials Action

The Legion Bank was located on Na Poříčí Street in Prague, part of the Czechoslovak "Wall Street." Designed by the renowned Czech architect Josef Gočár (1880–1945), the building is a prominent example of Czechoslovak Rondocubism. Prague Castle was a 40- to 50-minute walk or a much shorter drive away. The geographical proximity of these two informal power groups was important. They coordinated political maneuvers through personal, behind-the-scenes meetings. Documents regarding the raw materials action, delivered to Masaryk and Beneš by the aforementioned Josef Khyn, illustrate the importance of such groups in the country's political culture (Fig. 1).

65 Dopis od Předsednictva ministerské rady pro Ministerstvo financí s přílohami [Letter from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to the Ministry of Finance with Attachments], 1921-01-25, in: VHA, FS, box no. 65.

66 SLÁDEK, Evakuační akce, pp. 99–103, 115–118.

67 For more on the topic, see: FILIP HERZA: Colonial Exceptionalism: Post-Colonial Scholarship and Race in Czech and Slovak Historiography, in: Slovenský národopis 68 (2020), 2, pp. 175–187, here p. 179. For a discussion of internal colonization, see: LIESBETH VAN DE GRIFT: Introduction: Theories and Practices of Internal Colonization. The Cultivation of Lands and People in the Age of Modern Territoriality, in: International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity 3 (2015), 2, pp. 139–158, here pp. 141–142.

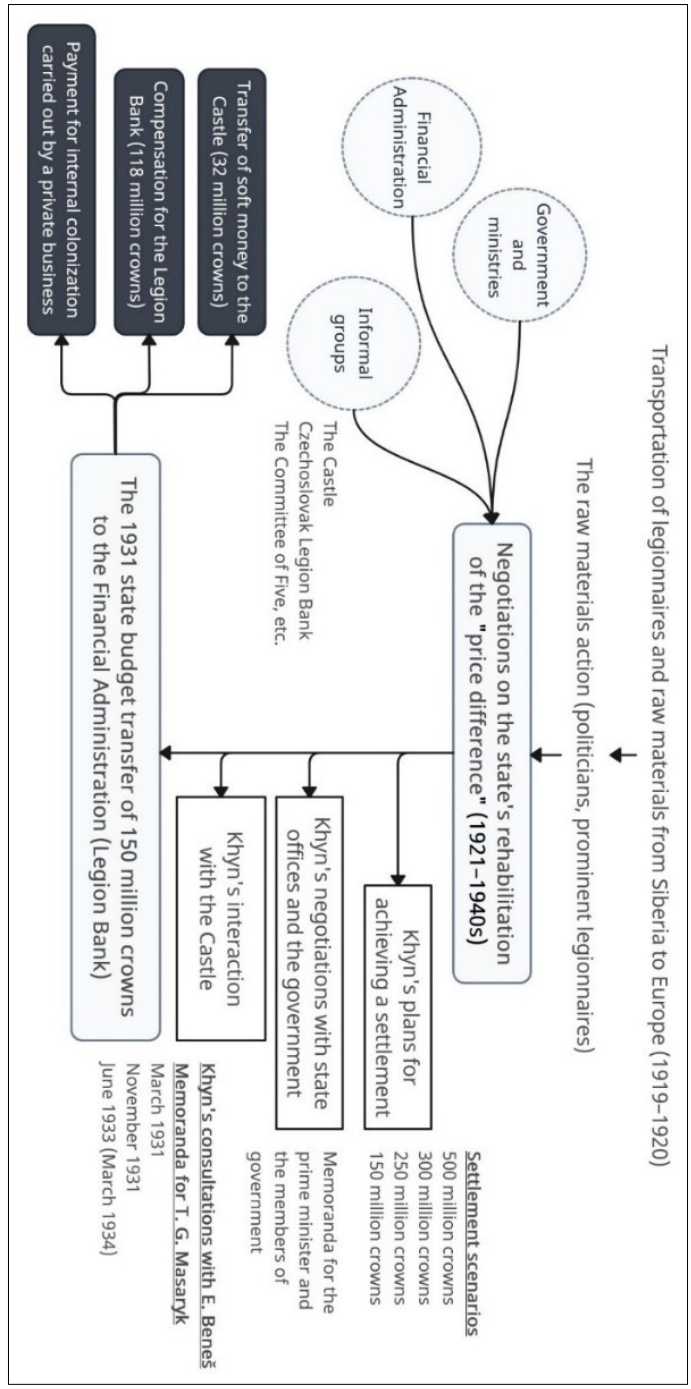

Fig. 1: Negotiations Regarding the State's Rehabilitation of the Raw Materials Action and Its Results (author: Tomáš Gecko)

After evacuating Siberia, Khyn began his career at Legion Bank, eventually becoming its most influential manager. He was also the chief administrator of the Financial Administration of the Liquidation Office of Foreign Troops, which was responsible for settling the former Legion's financial affairs. Although the Financial Administration was officially a state institution under the Ministry of National Defense, Legion Bank controlled it.[68] The Financial Administration's supervisory body was the Commission for the Economic Liquidation of the Russian Legion, consisting of representatives from the Czechoslovak Supreme Audit Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Financial Administration. Khyn was one of these representatives.[69] When the Financial Administration was abolished in September 1929 to reduce government spending, the Commission became solely responsible for settling the former Legion's finances. Thus, the supervisory body became a liquidating body.[70]

The Financial Administration safeguarded the interests of the legionnaires who contributed to the "Siberian Anabasis" by donating their modest bank deposits. Furthermore, the Financial Administration promoted the Legion Bank's demands in settling the raw materials action.[71] Lastly, Khyn was involved in determining the foreign debt owed to the Entente for financing the Legion during World War I. Summarizing all accounts and collecting information about the bills took the Financial Administration many years. In total, Khyn requested hundreds of millions of Czechoslovak crowns from the state budget. In January 1921, the Council of Ministers (the de facto Czechoslovak government), led by caretaker Prime Minister Jan Černý (1874–1959), who was appointed by President Masaryk, confirmed these demands. The government promised to reimburse the Financial Administration (and, by extension, the Legion Bank)[72] for all "justified" expenses incurred to maintain the Legion in Russia.[73]

One sensitive issue was the Financial Administrations demand for "compensation for the price difference" between the purchase price of goods and raw

68 SLÁDEK, Pět malých příběhů, p. 20.

69 Dopis od Ministerstva finance s přílohami č. 1–4 [Letter from the Ministry of Finance with Attachments no. 1–4], 1921-01-31, in: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Archiv Ústavu T. G. Masaryka (MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM) [Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Archives of the Institute of T. G. Masaryk], Prague, Edvard Beneš (EB), box no. 61, inv. no. 260, sign. R 164-2.

70 Likvidace hospodaření zahraničního sibiřského vojska [The Liquidation of the Economy of the Foreign Siberian Army], in: Archiv České národní banky (AČNB) [Czech National Bank Archives], Prague, Banka československých legií (BČL) [Czechoslovak Legion Bank], sign. BČL-87-1.

71 Referát o vydržovacích nákladech sibiřské armády od Františka Šípa [Report on the Maintenance Costs of the Siberian Army by F. Šíp] [1922], in: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, EB, box no. 61, inv. no. 261, sign. R 164-3.

72 Sibiřské doplatky, František Šíp [Siberian Surcharges by F. Šíp], in: Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí (AMZV) [Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic], Václav Girsa, box no. 9.

73 Dopis od Předsednictva ministerské rady (as in footnote 65), p. 6.

materials in Siberia and their sale price in Europe. According to Khyn, this difference amounted to more than half a billion crowns. This was an enormous sum at the time, considering the total state budget was only ten billion crowns per year. Due to the unrealistic nature of the request, Khyn would have been satisfied with a smaller amount. He emphasized that, according to "the statements of the leaders of our resistance in Russia [Masaryk and Beneš]," the state should pay the Financial Administration (and the Legion Bank) at least 318 million crowns.[74] During the negotiations, this figure gradually decreased to 300 million crowns. However, Khyn was afraid that he would not receive even this amount. He wrote to Václav Girsa (1875–1954), Beneš's close aide in charge of the evacuation from Siberia, saying it was "a pity that the Ministry of Finance is not going to give the whole sum." Khyn demanded at least 250 million crowns, promising to use about 100 million to pay off the Legion's foreign debt to the Entente. In return, he wanted guarantees of future concessions to cover the remaining "price difference."[75] Nevertheless, Khyn was unable to push through this plan.

Ultimately, Khyn secured 150 million crowns for the Legion Bank from the 1931 state budget. Finance Minister Karel Engliš (1880–1961), who had close ties to the Castle, considered the matter closed after reaching this "very favorable" settlement. However, for Khyn, the negotiations were far from over.[76] He still hoped to receive 300 million crowns instead of 150 million. He appealed to Castle politicians, citing the worsening social situation of former legionnaires during the Great Depression of the 1930s. He promised that the Legion Bank would allocate part of every reimbursement from the state budget to the Castle for legionnaire welfare.

The first draft of this plan dates from 1931 and is included in Beneš's personal papers.[77] According to Khyn, any future state compensation for the "price difference" should be used in part "to create a special fund that could be used for various purposes, whether national or legionary." Significantly, Beneš or one of his aides crossed out the phrase "special fund" in the document to avoid emphasizing the transfer of money to the Castle. Khyn continued: "The social conditions of the legionnaires are so oppressive and of such nature that the conditions of our legionnaires are deteriorating day by day[...]." According to Khyn, no existing institution could improve the "precarious situation of individual legionary families. [...] Therefore, there is nothing left but to create

74 Informace o účtu cenových rozdílů, březen 1930 [Price Difference Account Information, March 1930], in: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, EB, box no. 61, inv. no. 265, sign. R 164-7.

75 Dopis od Khyna Girsovi [Letter from Khyn to Girsa], 1928-01-19, in: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, Jaromír Smutný, box no. 7, inv. no. 65; Kopie dopisu [Letter Copy], 1929-01-25, ibid.

76 Likvidace hospodaření (as in footnote 70).

77 Strojopis od Khyna, 1931 [Typewritten Document from Khyn, 1931], in: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, EB, box no. 61, inv. no. 266, sign. R 164-8.

larger funds [...].” He promised that one-third of any future settlement for the “price difference” would be used “for legionary purposes” (i.e., at the discretion of Masaryk and Beneš), one-third would be donated to various legionary institutions, and the remainder would be transferred to the Legion Bank.[78]

The three memoranda that Khyn personally delivered to Masaryk contain detailed information about the aforementioned plan. These documents were likely pre-negotiated to align with the Castle’s interests. The first memorandum, dated March 1931, addressed Masaryk as the former chairman of the Czechoslovak National Council in Russia, which coordinated the Legion on the Eastern Front during World War I. Beneš received a copy of the memorandum. Khyn claimed that the Legion Bank would use some of the government’s compensation for the “price difference” for various “national and legionary purposes.” He urged Masaryk “as the former president of the Czechoslovak National Council, on the one hand, to take note of the report and, on the other hand, to work to ensure that our legitimate demands on account of our claim against the state [...] are fully satisfied.”[79]

In November 1931, after consulting with Beneš,[80] Khyn submitted a second memorandum to Masaryk. This time he explicitly stated that some of the 150 million crowns that the government had previously paid to the Legion Bank would be made available to Masaryk as the “former chairman of the Czechoslovak National Council.” In exchange for support from Castle representatives, Khyn promised Masaryk a share of funds from any future negotiated settlement with the government. Beneš could also stake a claim to the money due to his former position as secretary of the Czechoslovak National Council.[81] After reading Khyn’s memorandum, Masaryk told Beneš he had “nothing against it” and wrote Khyn a letter expressing his “agreement.”[82]

Another memorandum, the third in a row from Khyn to Masaryk, confirmed the matter. It was dated 9 June 1933.[83] Khyn officially handed it over during his audience with Masaryk on 23 March 1934. Masaryk may have seen the document in advance, as Beneš sent it to him on an unknown date.[84] The mem-

78 All quotes ibid.

79 Kopie memoranda od Khyna pro Masaryka, březen 1931 [Copy of the Memorandum from Khyn to Masaryk, March 1931], ibid.

80 Draft memoranda od Khyna [Draft Memorandum from Khyn], 1933, in: VHA, FS, box no. 106.

81 Podání od Khyna pro Masaryka [Submission from Khyn to Masaryk], 1931-11-24, in: AKPR, KPR—T, box no. 32, sign. T 76-21.

82 Hospodářská likvidaci ruských legií [Economic Liquidation of the Russian Legion], 1932-01-15, ibid.; Dopis od Masaryka pro Khyna [Letter from Masaryk to Khyn], 1931-12-19, ibid.

83 Podání od Khyna pro Masaryka [Submission from Khyn to Masaryk], 1933-06-09, ibid. For Beneš’s copy, see: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, EB, box no. 61, inv. no. 268, sign. R 164-10.

84 Archived in: MÚA AV ČR, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk—Republika [Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk—Republic], box no. 386, sign. R-6-22a.

orandum was accompanied by "a whole bundle of accounting documents."[85] Khyn again asked Masaryk to lobby the government for compensation for the "price difference," which Masaryk promised to do. Khyn did not demand the money immediately because the state budget during the Great Depression did not allow for it. He just wanted to confirm the legitimacy of the claim so that there would be hope for a future settlement.[86] The primary purpose of Khyn's meeting with Masaryk was to obtain a signed "read and approved" clause to present to the government. However, Masaryk only agreed to sign the "read" clause on the 9 June 1933 memorandum (deposited in the Archive of the President's Office) and the accounting summary (a copy of which is in Beneš's personal papers). Clearly, this was a compromise between Masaryk and Khyn. Masaryk signed the documents without explicitly approving anything. Conversely, Khyn could claim that Masaryk's signature implied consent and include it as an appendix to the November 1934 report on the Legion's economy, likely addressed to the Czechoslovak government.[87]

Subsequently, Masaryk lobbied the government on behalf of the Legion Bank, finding a way to benefit Khyn without making any explicit promises. Masaryk discussed the appropriate course of action with Josef Schieszl (1876–1970), a high-ranking presidential official. Schieszl often frequented the back rooms of parliament and helped Masaryk with political matters.[88] Schieszl received instructions stating that "the whole matter is of great importance to the army and for the satisfaction of some of its branches, and therefore the matter cannot be dealt with only from a fiscal point of view."[89] In Schieszl's assessment, Khyn's third memorandum of 9 June 1933 was unclear and provided little justification for the demands. It also concealed how the money would be handled. Nevertheless, Schieszl added: "It is of course possible that certain sums of money have been used in the past and will be used in the future for serious confidential purposes." He therefore recommended that the president intercede with the government to expedite the matter.[90] On 5 April 1934,

85 Průvodní dopis A. Schenka [Cover Letter by A. Schenk], 1934-03-25, in: AKPR, KPR—T, box no. 32, sign. T 76-21.

86 Strojopis, nedatováno (analýza platby 300 milionů Kč a 150 milionů Kč) [Typewritten Document, Undated (Analysis of the Payment of 300 mil. and 150 mil.)], in: VHA, FS, box no. 106.

87 Zpráva o vzniku a průběhu odboje, listopad 1934 [Report on the Origin and Progress of the Resistance, November 1934], in: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, EB, box no. 61, inv. no. 269, sign. R 164-11.

88 SOUBIGOU, p. 260; RICHARD VAŠEK: "Račte to podepsat libovolnou šifrou": Prezident Masaryk jako anonymní publicista (1918–1935) ["Sign it with Any Nom de Plume You Wish." President Masaryk as an Anonymous Journalist (1918–1935)], Praha 2018, pp. 140–141.

89 Průvodní dopis A. Schenka (as in footnote 85).

90 Likvidace hospodářství, Schieszl [Liquidation of the Economy, Schieszl], 1934-04-06, ibid.

Masaryk spoke with Prime Minister Jan Malypetr (1873–1947).[91] Moreover, Masaryk arranged for Khyn's proposal to be discussed in a parliamentary committee and submitted to the Supreme Audit Office for consideration.[92]

In his 1960s memoirs, Antonín Schenk (1896–1970), the president's personal secretary, explicitly mentions an unspecified audience between Masaryk and Khyn. The context suggests that Schenk is referring to the meeting at which Khyn gave Masaryk the 9 June 1933 memorandum. Schenk does not discuss the details of the audience. However, he links this event to the political tensions and public affairs that often arose from Masaryk's and Beneš's fundraising activities.[93] Schenk was apparently well aware that Masaryk had negotiated something non-standard—perhaps even inappropriate—with Khyn in exchange for considerable sums of money.

Khyn calculated how much money the Castle would receive if the government compensated the Legion Bank with 300 or 150 million crowns.[94] In the former scenario, 50 million would be transferred to Masaryk, and an additional 50 million would be allocated for various "legionary purposes" including pensions, scholarships, and subsidies. In particular, the Social Legionary Institute and the Legionary Support Fund at the Ministry of National Defense, both under the Castle's influence, were considered. Ultimately, however, the second scenario occurred, and the Castle received only 32 million crowns as soft money. According to a report on the closure of the Legion's economy, dated 30 June 1933, this sum was to be given to the Czechoslovak National Council, a front organization for Masaryk and Beneš.[95]

In the late 1930s, a report from the Supreme Audit Office thwarted Khyn's further attempts to reimburse the Legion Bank for the "price difference." The report was supposedly an attack on the Castle, orchestrated by political opponents of President Edvard Beneš. It contradicted Khyn's calculations regarding the raw materials action. According to the Supreme Audit Office, the 150 million crowns already given to the Legion Bank were sufficient compensation for

91 Zpráva od Schieszla [Report by Schieszl], 1934-04-06, ibid.

92 Likvidace hospodaření (as in footnote 70).

93 Paměti A. Schenk, Kapitola XI: TGM a národní hospodářství—technika [Memoirs of A. Schenk, Chapter XI: TGM and National Economy—Technology], in: NA, AS, box no. 1, p. 13.

94 Typewritten Document, Undated (Analysis of the Payment of 300 Mil. and 150 Mil.), in: VHA, FS, box no. 106.

95 Uzávěrka [Closure], 1933-06-30, in: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, EB, box no. 61, inv. no. 268, sign. R 164-10. The sum was initially split into two separate groups. The smaller part (18 million crowns) was transferred directly to the Legion Bank, while the larger part (132 million crowns) was used to pay off its debts. After that, the Legion Bank only gradually collected another 32 million crowns to fulfill its promise to Masaryk and Beneš, see: Přehled příjmů a výdajů, část V: Vysvětlivky [Overview of Income and Expenditure, Part V: Explanatory Notes], 1933-12-31, in: VHA, FS, box no. 101.

the "price difference." The rest had to be "written off as a loss."[96] Khyn protested to Prime Minister Milan Hodža (1878–1944) and President Beneš.[97] He argued that the 150 million crowns were only an "advance" on the total debt of half a billion crowns. However, since a public dispute was not in anyone's interest at the time, the disagreement ended in a stalemate.[98] The liquidation of the raw materials action continued for many years and ended inconclusively after World War II.[99] Ultimately, the Legion Bank received only the aforementioned 150 million crowns, minus the 32 million crowns given to Masaryk and Beneš. What did the Legion Bank do with these funds, and how did its business intentions correlate with the Castle's behind-the-scenes political tactics?

4 Hidden Motives and Long-Term Goals

Throughout the negotiations with the Legion Bank, Masaryk and Beneš knew they were helping Khyn with more than just settling the raw materials action. The funds transferred to the bank from the 1931 state budget were actually intended to compensate for investments in unprofitable Slovak and Subcarpathian financial institutions. The government and Castle considered these investments necessary for consolidating the republic and strengthening Czech economic (and political) influence in eastern Czechoslovakia. Due to the multinational nature of the Czechoslovak Republic, they proceeded cautiously and deemed it prudent to involve private businesses rather than state institutions.

In her unpublished dissertation, Daniela Brádlerová offers valuable insights into the Legion Bank's business strategies in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. However, she leaves out a detailed analysis of the bank's relationship with the Castle.[100] The financial sector in these regions consisted of capital-weak enterprises with poor clientele. Several years after Czechoslovakia's establishment, these companies began to fail, necessitating subsidies from the state budget and restructuring. The government and the Castle then enlisted the Legion Bank to purchase local financial institutions and convert them into its branches and affiliates (Fig. 2).

96 Podání Ministerstvu financí, září 1937 [Submission to the Ministry of Finance, September 1937], in: MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, EB, box no. 61, inv. no. 270, sign. R 164-12.

97 Dopis od Khyna pro Beneše [Letter from Khyn to Beneš], 1937-08-31, ibid.; Dopis od Khyna pro Hodžu, září 1937 [Letter from Khyn to Hodža, September 1937], ibid. A copy of the letter from Khyn to Hodža was received by Beneš.

98 Sládek, Pět malých příběhů, p. 23.

99 Likvidace hospodaření (as in footnote 70).

100 For a brief discussion of this topic, see: Brádlerová, Banka, pp. 336–338, 343, 346.

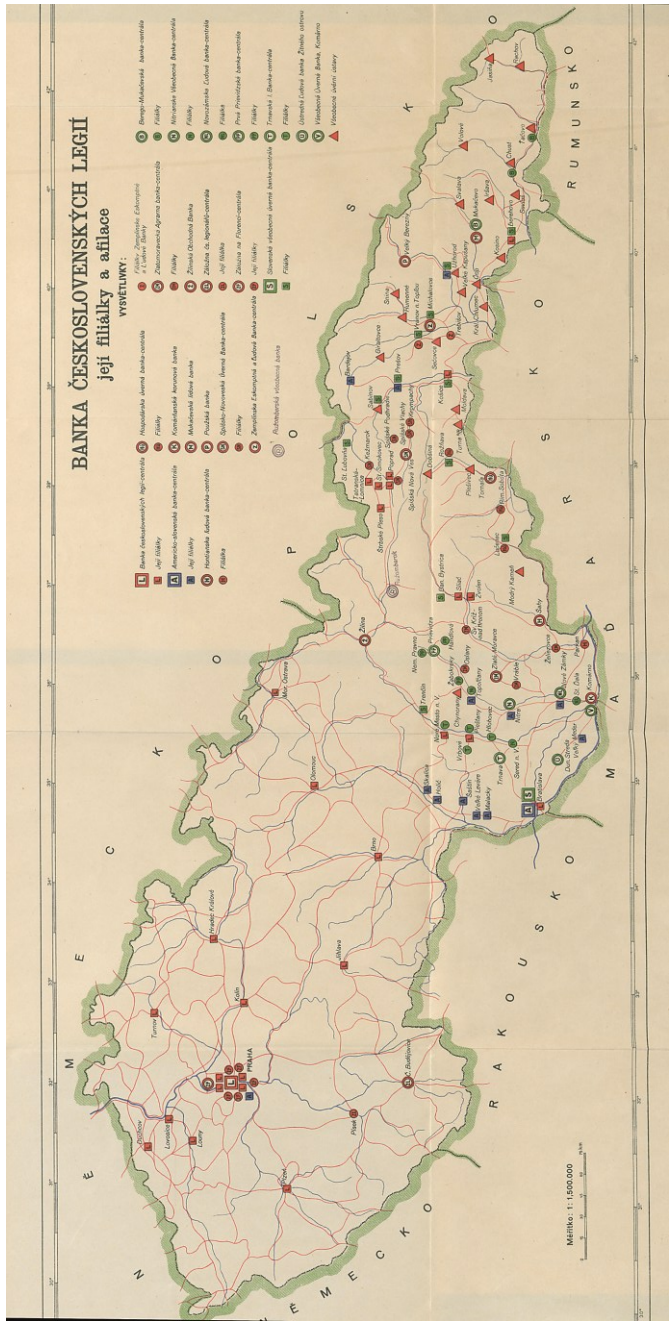

Fig. 2: Banka československých legií: Seznam filiálek a afiliací v ČSR [Czechoslovak Legion Bank: List of Branches and Affiliates in Czechoslovakia], in: AČNB, BČL, sign. BČL-87-1. For a file in higher resolution, see the online version of issue 2/2026 at www.zfo-online.de

Ultimately, the Legion Bank's business presence in the eastern regions of the country made it a unique player in the Czechoslovak financial landscape.[101] Furthermore, since many Slovak and Subcarpathian banks were owned by Hungarian companies before World War I, the Legion Bank effectively helped the Czechoslovak state with the so called "repatriation of capital." Historians commonly use this term to refer to the transfer of company shares and ownership from entrepreneurs in Vienna and Budapest—the financial and economic centers of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire—to Czechoslovakia after 1918.[102]

The Legion Bank's activities in eastern Czechoslovakia align with recent scholarly discourse on internal colonization. Czechoslovakia, a landlocked country on the periphery of European modernity, had no overseas colonies or direct colonial experience. For this reason, Czechs (and Slovaks) believed they could administer hypothetical colonies more democratically than traditional colonial powers such as Great Britain and France.[103] Since Czechoslovakia did not obtain any colonies at the Paris Peace Conference,[104] its elites—according to Filip Herza—turned their attention to "peripheralized parts of the historical Bohemian lands, Slovakia, and above all Subcarpathian Ruthenia."[105] Czechs and Slovaks settled in areas inhabited by other nationalities, such as Hungarians and Ruthenians. Land was often given to former legionnaires to serve as role models and guarantees of security against neighboring Hungary.[106]

The state offices publicly advertised this type of colonization as an essential aspect of nation-building. The Czechoslovak Ministry of National Defense promoted it "for political and strategic reasons," aiming to reinforce "the idea of the state among the indigenous and Hungarian populations."[107] Another important factor was stimulating the regional economy. For instance, a legion-

101 Ibid., pp. 177–241. See: Ľudovít Hallon, Miroslav Sabol: Michal Bosák v zápasoch o národné a kapitálové záujmy bankovníctva medzivojnovej ČSR [Michal Bosák and His Role in the Struggle for National and Capital Interests of Banking Industry during the Interwar Czechoslovakia], in: Linda Osyková, Matej Hanula (eds.): Ideológia naprieč hranicemi: Myslienkové transfery v Európe a na Slovensku v 1. polovici 20. storočia, Bratislava 2015, pp. 137–155, here pp. 153–155.

102 Eduard Kubů, Jiří Šouša: Proměny vlastnických vztahů: Pozemková reforma a nostrifikace firem [Changes in Property Relations: Land Reform and Nostrification of Companies], in: Hájková/Horák, pp. 245–270, here p. 268.

103 Herza, Colonial Exceptionalism, pp. 177–180.

104 Michael W. Dean: Imperial Ambitions: The Campaign for Czechoslovak Colonies on the Eve of the Paris Peace Conference, in: Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung 71 (2022), 1, pp. 81–100, here pp. 85–86.

105 Herza, Colonial Exceptionalism, p. 179.

106 Filip Herza: Colonial Czechoslovakia? Overseas and Internal Colonization in the Interwar Czechoslovak Republic, in: Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies 26 (2024), 2, pp. 338–361, here pp. 339–354.

107 Dopis od Kanceláře československých legií při MNO pro Pozemkový úřad [Letter from the Czechoslovak Legion Office at the Ministry of National Defense to the Land Office], 1923, in: AMZV, IV. sekce [IV. Section], box. no 1150.

naire who settled in Subcarpathian Ruthenia wrote in his memoir: "The whole region was alive with the hustle and bustle of construction, and the hard work of the new colonists transformed the quiet region into a swarming human hive."[108] However, the local population did not always view colonization positively. In border regions especially, state offices had to appease local interests to achieve strategic goals and allocate land to legionnaires.[109]

A typed draft from around 1933, prepared by Khyn for "leading personalities of our economic and political life," outlines the Castle's strategies for involving the Legion Bank in the internal colonization of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The document addresses circumstances "resulting from certain decisions closely related to the liquidation of the finances of the Russian Legion." According to the document, the Legion Bank and the Financial Administration lobbied to settle the "price difference" not primarily for business gain, although that was certainly a factor, but rather to cover its risky investments in the Slovak and Subcarpathian Ruthenian financial sectors at the request of "leading state officials."[110] Khyn mentions two individuals specifically in his handwritten notes: Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš and former Prime Minister Antonín Švehla (1873–1933). Beneš represented the Castle, while Švehla was a leading member of another informal group navigating the Czechoslovak political system: the Committee of Five.

In his draft, Khyn interprets the activities of the Legion Bank as a form of internal colonization. Slovak banks were supposedly just "expositors of their Budapest headquarters," meaning they were branches of major banks based in the former capital of the eastern half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[111] Through the Legion Bank, Prague's leading politicians severed those companies' ties with Hungary, whom they considered a threat. They also spread Czech banking capital to Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, taking important steps toward the republic's economic and political consolidation. In summary, the Castle and the government tasked the Legion Bank

> "to undertake discreetly (in the face of our national opponents) the very difficult, but at that time very topical and from the national point of view necessary task of consolidating economic conditions in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia to secure Czechoslovak political and economic influence. This difficult and long-term task was to be carried out gradually within a national context and essentially as private economic activity, no different from any other private enterprise. The guiding idea was to avoid harming individuals, economic groups, or other national mi-

108 JOSEF KÁPAR (ed.): Svoboda: Její vznik a budování. K desátému výročí osídlení legionářů na Podkarpatské Rusi [Svoboda: Its Origin and Construction. On the Tenth Anniversary of the Legionary Settlement in Subcarpathian Ruthenia], Praha 1933, p. 14.

109 Dopis od Obvodové úřadovny SPÚ v Užhorodě pro SPÚ v Praze [Letter from the District Office of the State Land Agency in Uzhhorod to the State Land Agency in Prague], 1923-06-21, in: AMZV, IV. sekce, box. no. 1150.

110 Draft Memorandum from Khyn [1933], in: VHA, FS, box no. 106, pp. 1–2.

111 Ibid., p. 2.

> norities while achieving Czechoslovak influence throughout Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia in a planned way, if possible.
>
> […] One could aptly call this the economic occupation of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia […] with the important difference that this occupation, carried out discreetly, transforms and merges with the growing Czechoslovak element in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia into a unified economic unit with that in the historical countries [meaning the Bohemian lands]."[112]

Khyn notes that only the first part of this "clearly planned and thought-out process" had been completed by the 1930s.[113] In a January 1936 memorandum addressed to Czechoslovak Prime Minister Milan Hodža, Khyn made similar arguments.[114] Furthermore, a comment by Finance Minister Josef Kalfus (1880–1955) confirms that the Legion Bank indeed played a pivotal role in the internal colonization of Czechoslovakia. According to Kalfus, "under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance, [the Legion Bank] is carrying out numerous actions in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia aimed at consolidating the local financial sector, and it is often forced to make considerable sacrifices in the process […]."[115]

Nevertheless, the Legion Bank did not incur significant losses from its business acquisitions in eastern Czechoslovakia. In fact, they generated profits.[116] More importantly, by supporting the Castle and invoking legionary protectionism, the bank enlisted prominent Czechoslovak politicians' help in multiple business arenas and became involved in decision-making processes at the highest levels of power. The same applied in the opposite direction when the Castle needed assistance from the Legion Bank. This mutually dependent relationship, operated informally within the Czechoslovak political system, was far from unique. For instance, the Castle had similar ties with the Živnostenská Bank, the country's largest financial institution.[117] The Castle's ability to use seemingly non-standard practices to unite diverse interest and business groups under its social networks to engage in nation-building processes, such as internal colonization, symbolized the strengths and weaknesses of political culture in interwar Czechoslovakia.

5 Conclusion

The Castle successfully navigated the stormy political waters of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Backroom deals, such as those involving the Legion Bank and Khyn regarding the raw materials action, were common practices integral to the political culture of the time. These deals aligned with Masaryk

112 Ibid, pp. 2–4 [emphasis in original].
113 Ibid., p. 4.
114 BRÁDLEROVÁ, Banka, p. 228, discovered the memorandum.
115 Ibid., p. 178.
116 Ibid., pp. 180–181, 364–365.
117 F. GREGORY CAMPBELL: The Castle, Jaroslav Preiss, and the Živnostenská Bank, in: Bohemia 15 (1974), 1, pp. 231–255.

and Beneš's vision of unifying the country, strengthening its political and economic cohesion, and ensuring its long-term security. Their strategies to achieve these goals included political fundraising, patronage, and internal colonization. By supporting the Legion Bank and adhering to legionary protectionism, the Castle maintained its influence in military and legionary circles and gained the support of one of the country's most influential businesses. An added benefit was that the Castle received soft money for various civic and legionary activities at its discretion.

This raises the valid question of whether the First Czechoslovak Republic's political system was founded on solid ground, and whether its leaders employed effective long-term strategies to maintain it. Many scholars deconstruct interwar Czechoslovak democracy along these lines, pointing out its rampant clientelism, nationalist tensions, and democratic deficit. Others rightly emphasize that despite these deficiencies, the First Czechoslovak Republic maintained a pluralist system until 1938, and its collapse was due to external rather than internal threats. Nevertheless, there is a lack of synthesis regarding how informal groups, such as the Castle, navigated this outcome. The Castle's sphere of influence extended to the center of political and military power, as well as cultural and media scenes, intelligence services, and the business sector. It encompassed the country's ideological foundations. One stark example of the Castle's pervasiveness is legionary protectionism. Through a wide range of lobbying activities, the Castle reached politicians, bureaucrats, private entities, and various interest groups. Masaryk and Beneš proceeded with caution, being careful not to compromise their position while securing their own benefit. The price they paid for consolidating the republic was allowing informal groups to become an indispensable part of Czechoslovak politics. If the social networks of the Castle were to collapse, the country would be more susceptible to territorial disintegration and a breakdown of the political system, as occurred in the months following the Munich Agreement in September 1938.

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