
P A R A D I G M S

The Death of the Breadwinner As a Factor of Social Mobility in the Civil Service Milieu in Bohemia in the Latter Half of the 19th Century

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In my paper I will focus on situations where a civil servant was survived by his wife and dependent children, who depended on state support in the form of a widow's or orphan's pension.

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Introduction

THE LONG 19th century offers a vast range of topics for research on social mobility. Emerging industrialization, a gradual bureaucratization of public life, rising levels of education, political and constitutional changes related to the involvement of broader classes of people in decision-making processes as well as the emergence of modern parliamentarianism—these are decisive factors which influenced the structure of society and its transformations. At the same time, these changes offered un-

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precedented opportunities for vertical social mobility, for advancement on the social ladder, for a gradual acquisition or loss of social status depending on entrepreneurial success, for getting an education and finding employment in new professions, or pursuing a career in the civil service.

In the decades leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, public administration in Austria and later Austria-Hungary underwent major developments, and especially in the 1850s numerous reforms and changes in the relationship between the state and its employees took place. At that time, Austria definitively abandoned the old patrimonial model of lords and subjects and gradually built a modern civil administration in all its branches throughout its territory. Within a few years, thousands of new civil servants, freshly selected and paid by the state, were employed in the individual Crown lands to ensure the functioning and development of the modern Austrian state. The key branch of the civil service continued to be the so-called political administration, which ensured peace and order at district, regional and provincial level, supervised compliance with legal norms and dealt with all general business not covered by other specialized offices.¹ Its key representatives were the district captains, regional governors or governor's councilors, who were almost always law university graduates with a long administrative experience. In their position as representatives of the government and the emperor, at the head of the most important office of the district, and with wide-ranging powers, they were undoubtedly the administrative elite of their time.

Unlike army officers, whose personal and family life was subject to numerous restrictions, civilian civil servants were allowed to enter into marital unions relatively without restrictions, and their career and movement around the administrative map of Austria thus affected not only their own lives, but also the lives of their wives, children and possibly other relatives.² If we follow the fates of their descendants, we will see that the father's career and the associated social status appear to be one of the crucial factors determining the occupation and social status of the sons and the marriageability and choice of husband for the daughters. It was the uniqueness of their position, the prestige associated with representing the state, their powers continuing those of the former lords, a higher level of professional and general education, and, last but not least, their contacts with other members of the traditional local elites that conferred on the k. k. (imperial-royal) clerks a high symbolic capital, which, however, was directly linked to their clerical post and their position in the civil service hierarchy and did not fully correspond to their financial remuneration. In Austria, the glamour of the civil service and of representing the emperor was offset by a lack of financial security for civil servants, a very slow salary increase, and limited or almost non-existent opportunities for additional income.³ Thus, one of the main advantages of the

civil service seemed to be the security of a state pension, which guaranteed the civil servant—and, by extension, his family—security in old age or illness.

In my paper I will focus on situations where a civil servant was survived by his wife and dependent children, who depended on state support in the form of a widow's or orphan's pension. In my view, these tragic family circumstances were one of the key factors that significantly influenced the intergenerational social mobility of civil servants and their children in the latter half of the 19th century. By examining specific cases from Bohemia as one of the largest Crown lands, I will show to what extent the death of a father and breadwinner could affect the whole family even if the survivors were seemingly protected by the security of a state pension, at a time when social security in old age, illness or in case of the loss of a partner was one of the key benefits of public service.⁴ I will also be interested in the fate of children, especially daughters, whose potential marriage could be presumed to have been significantly influenced by the father's position. In order to better understand the fates of civil servant wives and children, it will be equally important to explain the specificities of the pension system, which prescribed the pension amounts and the conditions for awarding them in the political administration (as well as, in the very same way, in other administrative sectors).

Sources and General Outline

THE MAIN source I used for this study were pension files of officials from the archive of the Bohemian Governor's Office (*Böhmische Statthaltereie*) in Prague from the latter half of the 19th century. Unlike records from earlier or subsequent periods, these files have survived in relatively good condition and can be used to reconstruct not only the official procedures concerning widow and orphan pensions, but also the family and property circumstances of civil servant families. The files concern not only lower-level officials but also include cases of senior officials at district, regional or provincial (Crown land) level. Each file contains a form listing the official's career, his salary, the date of marriage, the wife's name as well as the names and birth dates of their children, all of which gives us a fairly accurate idea of the size of the family. Other documents include pension applications by the widows, other applications for child benefits or gifts of mercy (*Gnadegabe*), or applications for an extraordinary increase in these forms of monetary support, accompanied by detailed comments from the relevant authorities. Although the duty of these authorities was chiefly to assess objectively whether the information contained in the application was

true, they often went further to discuss in detail the assets and income of the survivors, commenting on their housing situation or state of health. How the individual cases were eventually handled can be seen in the rulings of the Ministry of the Interior, which contain the final, positive or negative decisions, but unfortunately do not mention the exact reasons that led the ministerial officials or the emperor to reject certain applications. For the purposes of this study, I have selected those cases where the official, in a senior position at the district or provincial level, died either in service or in retirement and left behind a wife and dependent children.

In total, the sample included nineteen families whose father died between 1860 and 1883. This time frame was chosen with regard to two important developments. The first concerned the legislative framework, which changed significantly in 1896 when the Act on the Provision for Civil Servants, Their Widows and Orphans was adopted.⁵ After a very long time, this Act significantly increased widows' pensions and unified their amount in line with the rank of the deceased spouse. For those widows and orphans whose benefits were calculated according to the old rules the, Act recognized that the earlier arrangements as well as the amounts paid were inadequate and raised the existing pensions by one-quarter across the board. Both the Act and its implementing provisions⁶ modified the pension regulations and abolished a number of outdated principles which, while saving the public treasury, almost negated the purpose of providing for widows and orphans since the sums granted to them were far from sufficient to cover the costs even for basic necessities. The second development that influenced the selection of the cases under analysis was the condition of the preserved archival material. Paradoxically, the best-preserved materials were those from the earliest period of 1855–1883;⁷ in the following years, a large number of files were either completely or partially shredded, making it impossible not only to evaluate the family's financial situation but also to follow the fates of the children in the following decades. I tried to compensate for this disadvantage by concentrating mainly on officials who died in the 1860s and early 1870s, which made it possible to follow the children's fates and the behavior of their widowed mothers for at least another ten years. To do so, it was necessary to find other complementary sources, first and foremost parish registers records, which clearly stated whether the officials' daughters had married or died unmarried, and possibly also their occupation. In the case of families living in Prague, I also made use of residence records kept by the Prague Police Headquarters and the Prague City Council, which also contained information on the exact address. In the next step, for some of the families it was possible to find records from the 1869 or later censuses and verify the data from pension files, police reports and parish registers.

In the nineteen families under study, I followed the life histories of a total of sixty-nine offspring who—at the time of their father’s death—were considered by the authorities to be dependent children, regardless of their age: they were sons and daughters who lived in the same household with their mother, were unmarried, and the sons did not yet have a stable job with a fixed salary. The sons were twenty-four in total, the dependent daughters almost twice as many: forty-five. Among the sons, a strong tradition of civil service was clearly visible when they decided on their future occupation—a quarter of them, following in their father’s footsteps, chose a career as a drafting official (*Konzeptsbeamter*, i.e., a civil servant with university education), a quarter worked in adulthood in a clerical position requiring secondary education, and five sons became officers in the Imperial Army. In the case of the daughters, I tried to find out first of all whether or not they married after their father passed away. Of the forty-five daughters, one third (fifteen women) entered into marriage compared to twenty-five who remained single for the rest of their lives, three others died prematurely shortly after their father’s death, and two could not be traced.

The relatively high number of unmarried daughters of civil servants points to the obstacles which these women encountered after the death of their father and breadwinner, as well as to the shortcomings of the system of providing social security for their survivors, which will be discussed in more detail below. Unmarried daughters from the families of civil servants occupying leading positions faced restrictions concerning their possibilities of employment and livelihood; therefore, a total of twenty daughters were listed in the parish registers and police registration forms under the category of “private person” (*Privatier*), which referred to people who did not engage in any gainful activity, and lived only on their own savings, the proceeds of their property, or were supported by someone else. The remaining five women acquired the necessary qualifications to become a nurse in a kindergarten or a teacher, which again, however, implied—at least for teachers in primary and lower secondary schools—voluntary celibacy.

Pension Benefits for Civil Servants and Their Survivors

THE PENSION system providing social security for imperial officials was established already in the latter half of the 18th century, and in the following decades only a few amendments, in favor of the retired officials and their survivors, were introduced.⁸ In principle, it was always the case that an official became entitled to a pension only after ten years of continuous service, and

only exceptionally after a shorter period of time. After he had served more than ten years, the difference between the pension and the salary started to gradually decrease until the completion of forty years of service, when the retirement benefits reached the same level as the salary in active service. However, until 1907, when this limit was lowered to thirty-five years of service, an official could not automatically retire, but had to prove that from a medical point of view he was no longer fit for duty. If their health allowed it, and if they did not want to lose certain service allowances that did not count towards their pension, some officials could serve considerably longer. After 1848, it was not uncommon to find, in both the political and judicial administration, officials over 60 who could be presumed to have already earned their entitlement to a full pension. A problem which some of them encountered was the recognition of the years spent in non-state service. Changes in the structure of the Austrian civil service, linked to the abolition of the patrimonial system in 1848–1849, meant that a large number of the new posts in the civil service were filled by former land estate clerks or municipal councilors from the pre-1848 period. Although these had previously also performed tasks in the public administration, they were not, strictly speaking, employees of the state, but worked for the local landlord or town.⁹ Until the 1860s, these unfortunate officials, who had often spent decades in those services and then only a few years as proper civil servants, were not allowed by the state to have those decades included in the calculation of their pensions. The state merely increased their pension by several hundred guildens by way of mercy, i.e., on an exceptional basis and without entitlement.¹⁰ However, despite this increase, their pension did not reach the level of a full pension. This system changed only during the 1860s, when the emperor decided that it was possible to count all the years spent in non-state public service under the patrimonial system, but it was again on a non-entitlement basis and on condition the official had a satisfactory personal evaluation and had not been subject to any disciplinary action while in service.¹¹

Thus, as long as the official enjoyed good health and carried out his duties properly and without any misconduct, he could count on the security of a full pension which guaranteed him the same standard of living in retirement as he had enjoyed while he was still in office. This fact was absolutely crucial in the life of civil servants.¹² As it turns out, the meagre salaries paid to them did not allow even those in senior positions to save enough to provide for themselves and their families in old age.¹³ Unless the civil servant or his wife inherited property from their parents, they depended throughout their life on the man's income, whose loss or sudden drop could have serious consequences for all family members. Throughout the period under review, the most common reason leading

to this critical situation was the death of the male breadwinner, especially when the parents were still caring for dependent children. While the pension regulations from the outset envisaged that a retired civil servant should be properly provided for and be able to live in dignity even after leaving the civil service, for widows and surviving orphans the pensions were limited to a mere subsistence minimum, which necessarily meant a noticeable decline in the standard of living and in social status.¹⁴ In this respect, the pension regulations for civil servants were similar to those in the army, which, however, deliberately restricted the numbers of married officers so that in the event of their death (which was a real threat for soldiers even at a young age) the military would not have to pay out huge sums for the upkeep of widows and orphans. For this reason, those officers who wished to get married had to pay relatively large deposits before the wedding to provide for the surviving family should the need occur.¹⁵ The civil regulations were not so strict; for the *Konzeptsbeamter* it was sufficient to notify the marriage to a superior authority, which took note of it. But even here it was true that the state was primarily interested in securing a decent existence for its officials, not for their families. A district captain in the town of Slaný/Schlan in Central Bohemia, describing the situation of the widow of his predecessor Hermann Trage and her daughter, made it clear that “the family was suddenly plunged from the level of an orderly bourgeois existence into genuine poverty, especially since it is not possible, especially in Slaný, for two people to live on an annual 420 guildens.”¹⁶

According to the 1781 standard, which remained in force until 1896, a widow’s pension was derived from her husband’s last salary while in active service and from the rank or position he held in the civil service hierarchy.¹⁷ If we focus on the university-educated officials of the political administration, primarily the district chiefs and district captains, who headed the district offices and represented the government in their respective districts, the amount of the widow’s pension was a fixed 350 guildens, where the official’s pay was 1,050–1,200, i.e. roughly one third or a little less than thirty percent of the husband’s salary. This ratio applied to district chiefs, but, after the 1868 reform, the situation of district chiefs improved and the newly appointed district captains occupied a higher rank, with a salary of 2,000–2,400 guildens. The widow’s pension, however, again remained fixed at 420 guildens, which amounted to as little as 17.5–21% of the husband’s income.¹⁸ Even if we consider that after the husband’s death the family became smaller and some expenses definitely decreased, the need to pay the rent, the heating and to feed and clothe young children remained unchanged, or the expenses even increased as the children grew up.

Support for Surviving Children

THE PLIGHT of widows was compounded by the fact that pension benefits remained the same for decades regardless of rising food prices or rents, and until pension regulations changed in 1896 a very strict limit on the allowance for child-rearing remained in force. According to the regulations dating back to the time of Joseph II, a widow was entitled to a child-rearing benefit (*Erziehungsbeitrag*) only if she had four or more dependent children below the so-called “normal age” living in the same household. The normal age was set at eighteen years for girls and twenty years for boys and did not correspond to the legal age of majority, but rather indicated when offspring were supposed to support themselves without depending on their parents.¹⁹ Clearly, only a small number of civil servant widows automatically qualified for this support, while the rest were forced to apply for the child benefit for reasons of mercy, the so-called *Gnadeerziehungsbeitrag*, and in the case of adult but still dependent children (mostly unmarried daughters) they had to rely on gifts of mercy (*Gnadegabe*).

This rather complicated administrative process was always used whenever the entitlement to a given support was not automatic (as in case of childless widows, for instance), but had to be approved through the so-called process of mercy, in which the monarch had the final say. By his supreme decision, he could grant an exception from the applicable regulations, provided that the application reached him at all and provided it was accompanied by a sufficient number of commendations and arguments in favor. We can speak here of a certain solidarity among officials, since the first place a widow turned to with her request for extraordinary allowances was usually the office of her deceased husband. The style of the text and the mastery of the handwriting suggest that, with the help of her husband’s former subordinates, the widow prepared an application to which the new district chief or a temporary deputy attached a letter of recommendation, often accompanied by an intercession for a more favorable assessment than warranted by the outdated rules.²⁰ The main conditions which each application had to meet in order to have any hope of success were the widow’s judicially established indigence and the absence of an inheritance from her husband. In all the cases examined (only senior officials in managerial positions were considered), the officials had left behind no assets other than clothes and petty cash. Due to frequent medical expenses and funeral costs, the estate generally ended in the negative and the inheritance proceedings were therefore discontinued by the court.

This is also how the judicial inquiry into the estate of district chief Karel Parvonič was concluded. This 65-year-old civil servant, who, following the re-organization of the administration after 1868 was temporarily assigned to the

subordinate post of district commissioner, died in 1873 after 46 years of service. At that time, he and his wife Theresia (*1825), whom he had married in 1846, were still raising ten children, the three eldest of whom, although not entitled to a child benefit, still shared their parents' household.²¹ Originally, the local government granted the widow the maximum allowance for seven children. However, the local officials apparently did not realize that the complex pension rules contained an additional principle stipulating that the widow's income, including her pension and the sum total of the child allowances, could not exceed half of her husband's income. The Land Finance Directorate therefore changed the original assessment and granted the unfortunate widow a child benefit of only 25 gulden per child, despite the fact that her daughter Aloisie was entitled to it for only 5 days before she turned 18.²² In the following years, the widow's other children also reached the normal age, but the amount of the allowance remained the same, so in actual fact the widow's income gradually decreased. Her situation aroused general pity to such an extent that the governor granted the large family an extraordinary assistance and the district captain's office in Domažlice/Taus, with his permission, organized a collection by correspondence among the political administration officials throughout Bohemia, which brought in several hundred gulden.²³

There were other equally important conditions for granting any form of gift or extraordinary support to the widow and her children: the impeccable qualifications of the official and his exemplary behavior both in and out of office, ideally demonstrated by commendatory statements and recognitions. On a general level, the merits of the official were passed on to his family and constituted a key argument as to why the state should support the widow and orphans of its servant. This is also why the applications emphasized the circumstances leading to the official's death if they were directly related to service. The widow of Ernst Rudolph von Wartburg, the district captain of Mělník/Melnik, argued that her husband caught a cold and contracted typhus after he had been in charge of the entire office alone for weeks, and without any subordinates he had to make the administrative preparations for the imperial military maneuvers around the town.²⁴ The district chief in the spa town of Lázně Kynžvart/Königswart died, according to his wife, while taking part in a conscription commission in a place where a smallpox epidemic was raging.²⁵ The district captain, Johann Veith, continued to go to work in the office despite being ill and even attended the funeral mass for Emperor Ferdinand I.²⁶ The widow of the former vice-president of the governor's office Johann Laufberger von Bergheim was also in a strong position. Her husband not only achieved the number two position in the political administration hierarchy in Bohemia, but also received the Knight's Cross of the Imperial Order of Leopold for his work and was subsequently elevated

to the rank of nobleman by the monarch. Thanks to these merits, the widow's pension was exceptionally increased from 630 to 800 guildens and the gift of mercy for each of her two daughters reached 300 guildens, which was otherwise absolutely unimaginable for ordinary district chiefs.²⁷

The last condition mentioned in all the reports is whether the widow and her children were able to support themselves on their own after the husband's death. Here it was necessary to prove with a medical certificate the inability to earn an income, either because of old age or because of health limitations. The widow's application, accompanied by a statement from the local district authority, was then forwarded by the governor's office to the Ministry of the Interior, which could submit it to the emperor. While the staff of the district and the governor's office tried, by their proposals, to alleviate as much as possible the plight of their former colleague's widow, the ministry tended to take into account the state of the treasury and rejected a number of applications without forwarding them to the monarch.²⁸ Since the entire process ran outside the established legal boundaries and was, by definition, not based on entitlement, it is difficult to find any general rules that would apply in the unique cases of individual civil servant families. Each family may have had a different intercessor, and, in some cases, there is evidence that a district captain or governor, above and beyond his official duties, intervened directly with the higher authorities to ensure that the widow's request was granted.²⁹ As a rule, sons who were studying at secondary school or university were the most likely to succeed. If they had excellent grades, it was almost certain that they would keep receiving the child benefit until they graduated, but not when in parallel they were also receiving a scholarship.³⁰ Similarly, where the report implied that the widow and her children had other possibilities of providing for themselves, the chances of obtaining state support declined significantly.³¹ This experience seems to have led the applicants and the assessing authorities to emphasize explicitly the financial circumstances of the widow's parents, her siblings and her deceased husband's siblings,³² which clearly reflected the established practice of the time, where providing for non-earners was primarily the concern of the extended family or the municipality, and not of the state.

Survival Strategies

HOWEVER, IN the latter half of the 19th century, in the case of civil servants, this traditional view of ensuring social security for the individual reached its limits. Unlike village communities, clerical families were usually not concentrated in one place, which made mutual support impossible,

and, at the same time, they often constituted real bureaucratic dynasties. This, however, was not exactly advantageous in terms of financial support; if the official's father was a civil servant, and his wife's father as well, they were not able to accumulate any property during their lifetime which they could pass on to their children. The question of the dowry is symptomatic in this context. For example, the widow of district captain Heinrich Beranek was at the same time the daughter of a district captain and, as the report of the Prague police director stated, her father had seven children and was unable to give his daughter any dowry.³³ It may be rightly assumed that, given the low salaries of civil servants, this was a general difficulty for all civil servants' daughters. Consequently, they married other officials not just because they came from the same social milieu and shared the same opportunities to meet a potential partner, but also because only other civil servants of a junior rank could be interested in what a bride could offer them—instead of a dowry—in terms of her father's influence and official position. In other words, the financial capital could be in this situation substituted by social capital, which was necessarily lost after the father's death.³⁴ Neither the widow's siblings could alleviate the plight of widowed women, since their brothers were often employed in the civil service as well, and their sisters were married to either a clerk or an officer.³⁵

The difficulties described can be illustrated by the story of the widow of Karel Kuchynka, the district chief in Poděbrady/Podiebrad, who was left alone in 1867 with four children, a daughter and three sons, who at the time were studying at a grammar school. As the daughter was 18 years old, only the boys were counted as dependents for the purposes of pension regulations, but since the number of children was less than four, the widow automatically lost her right to receive child benefits from the state and could rely only on her pension of 350 guildens.³⁶ Through her former husband's office, Rosalie Kuchynka (*1826) applied for a child benefit granted as an act of mercy, so that her sons could continue their studies, and also for a gift of mercy (*Gnadegabe*) for her daughter, who, according to a doctor's certificate, was unable to earn an income. The local authorities approved her request and proposed a yearly allowance of 80 guildens for each child. The emperor, however, in the end approved only 60 guildens per year, and then only for the sons.³⁷ In total, the family received a yearly income of 470 guildens, a sum which was not sufficient to provide for the whole family. Therefore, like other women in a similar situation, the widow moved from Poděbrady to Karlín/Karolinenthal in the suburbs of Prague, to join her father, a retired regional governor. They shared living expenses in the same apartment and her sons were able to attend grammar school in Prague. Even so, according to the report of the Prague police director, the family lived very modestly, and their situation further worsened a few years later after the

deaths of the widow's father and brother, who, as an unmarried official, had been helping them financially.³⁸

As it turns out, a widow with children usually chose to move to a larger city, most often to Prague or its suburbs, where she could most likely expect to earn some extra income to supplement her pension. When even the greatest modesty and thrift were not sufficient, the widows or daughters of civil servants took up handiwork, or in the worst case worked as laundresses and almost always rented out part of their flat to better cover the costs of living in a big city.³⁹ Rents were not low, especially in Prague. After the death of her husband, the widow of the district captain of Broumov/Braunau, Heinrich Beranek, moved to Litomyšl/Leitomischel to live with her father, also a retired district captain. However, after in 1866 her father succumbed to a cholera epidemic brought into the country by the Prussian occupation troops, she rented a two-room apartment in the New Town of Prague at no. 1501/II. The rent was 200 guildens, while her widow's pension a mere 350 guildens. She shared the household with her elder unmarried sister, who after their father's death received only a gift of mercy of 60 guildens, and at the same time supported her two sons, one of whom took up a military career and the other, thanks to a child benefit granted by way of mercy, completed his university studies and later died as a ministerial counselor at the Justice Ministry in Vienna.⁴⁰ A very similar strategy was used by the Kuchynka family mentioned above, where one of the sons, after finishing high school, chose a career as an active officer, financially relieving his mother and enabling both his brothers to study at university, where one studied law and the other prepared for a career as a high school professor, all of them thus continuing the tradition of civil service.⁴¹

The Orphans of Civil Servants

THE LACK of money, frugality, and a life of seclusion with limited social contacts must necessarily have affected the career choices of the orphans left behind by civil servants. One of the generally valid reasons for retaining state support, however, was when orphaned sons studied, provided they had excellent academic results. The high number of university-educated sons who completed their studies despite great material hardship and at the cost of many years of sacrifice testifies to the fact that education was perceived as an important value and a key condition for attaining a higher social status in a modernizing society. This is why in civil servant families, whose social status was based on the father's education and the related career in the civil service, it was never the

case that mothers facing a lack of money would make their children engage in a gainful economic activity and contribute towards household expenses from the earliest possible moment. On the contrary, at the cost of their own self-denial and material discomfort, they did everything possible to enable their sons to have at least a comparable starting position to that of their fathers.

After the death of her husband, Anna Sakh (*1829), the widow of the district captain in Mladá Boleslav/Jungbunzlau, lived in a shared household with her father, a retired tax collector, and supported her three sons in their studies. The acting head of the Mladá Boleslav district office acknowledged that “the applicant’s mother lives in total seclusion, and given her indigence, has to struggle to cover the necessary costs of care and education of her three dependent sons from her pension and child benefits.”⁴² In this respect, her situation was made easier by the fact that, shortly after their father’s death, her two daughters married a factory owner and a technical clerk at the sugar mill.⁴³ Two of the three sons eventually completed law school and became judges.⁴⁴ The effort to enable one’s sons to study is also evident in the extreme case of the family of the aforementioned Karel Parvonič, where the widow cared for ten dependent children. Of her five sons, she was able to provide four with at least a secondary education, thanks to which they subsequently found employment as clerks with the railways, the courts or law offices, or as teachers in an elementary school. None of them did manual labor.⁴⁵

For the daughters, however, the child allowance ended without exception at the age of 18, and to qualify for a new gift of mercy the mother had to prove that she was seriously ill and unable to earn a living by herself. Teenage girls who continued to stay with their mother because they were not very attractive on the marriage market were not taken into consideration. The options of the daughters of deceased civil servants were severely limited, as they did not have the necessary financial capital in the form of a dowry, nor the social status, which expired with their father’s death, so they had difficulty finding a suitable groom. And if we are to believe the medical reports repeatedly confirming their physical weakness, shortness of breath, myopia, or attacks of blood coughing, their employment possibilities were limited to light manual work, since both medically and socially it was excluded that they could be employed as factory workers. This is also the reason why the clerical middle classes were among the pioneers of women’s education, since it was the only way of making a living in the absence of state support and at the same time was not detrimental to their social status. The unmarried and unmarriageable daughters of civil servants, having acquired the appropriate qualifications at the teachers’ institute and later at secondary schools, found employment as “industrial” teachers (teaching handicraft) in pri-

mary schools or worked as nurses at crèches and schools concentrated in large cities. Gradually, opportunities in the postal administration also opened up for them. Even so, they usually stayed in the same household with their mother and unemployed sisters, helped cover the rent by their income and assisted with household management.⁴⁶

Most of the unmarried daughters who lived without an income together with their mother depended on her inadequate pension and the unsystematic “gifts of mercy.” After the district chief Josef Pollak died, his wife and four daughters were left with a widow’s pension of 350 guildens, which the local authorities themselves described as “clearly insufficient to provide for the household.”⁴⁷ Although the youngest daughter was already twenty-six years old at the time, according to the doctor’s opinion all four of them were physically weak and unable to earn an independent income, so the emperor granted the widow’s request to receive a mercy gift of 40 guildens annually for at least the two eldest ones. Probably encouraged by this success, a year later the widow asked for the same gift for her two remaining daughters. She argued that their income was insufficient even to buy food, much less for clothing and medical care, which she already needed at her age, but the Ministry of the Interior did not even submit her supplication to the emperor.⁴⁸ This case confirms that the ministry viewed the issue from the opposite side than the governorate, which sought to help “its” officials and their relatives as much as possible. In Vienna, on the other hand, they pursued the interests of the Treasury with the obvious assumption that since the family had been previously able to manage financially, there was no reason to give them more money.

If the daughters did not manage to find their own employment and an independent source of income before their mother’s death, after the loss of the widow’s pension they were left only with the possibility of receiving gifts of mercy. Again, they had to prove that they did not own any property and were medically unable to work. The chances that the emperor would grant them an annual gift of usually 30 to 60 guildens were then quite high. Thus in 1873 the remaining two Pollak daughters received an annual 40 guildens, but together the four of them lived only on 160 guildens a year, which was a noticeable decline compared to when they could rely on their mother’s pension (350 guildens) or even their father’s salary when he was still in active service (1,050 guildens).⁴⁹ This money could not, of course, cover the full cost of living, but it at least ensured that these women of advanced age were not at the mercy of charity or systems for providing for the poor, which would undoubtedly do no good to the positive image of the civil servant and his social status. The emperor granted these gifts for a period of three years, but usually repeatedly, until the applicants were able to find their own livelihood or until they died.⁵⁰

THE DEATH of the breadwinner posed a serious risk of loss of social status for every family. In the traditional bourgeois strata, however, as well as in the case of wealthy farming families, this danger could be reduced by a proper division of the inheritance or by drawing up a will; moreover, the pauperization of peasants was prevented by the rules governing the indivisibility of estates. But in the case of the educated bourgeoisie and especially the civil servants, the security of holding some property was virtually non-existent. The state did not overpay its officials and while the amount of their salaries was sufficient to ensure a reasonable living standard and guarantee the needs of the middle classes, it did not allow them to make significant savings, which in the event of a sudden death or indisposition of the breadwinner would have ensured that the same standard of living could be maintained. For this reason, civil servants were one of the first occupations entitled to old-age or sickness benefits, which were seen as a compensation for a lifetime of dedicated service to the state. It was not until the latter half of the 18th century that the widows and orphans of those officials who died in the civil service also obtained the guarantee of state support. Until the end of the 19th century, however, widows' or orphans' pensions were seen more as an act of mercy, designed to ensure survival but certainly not to maintain the same standard of living. This fact weighed heavily especially on the families of senior civil servants, who, thanks to their father's top position, belonged to the local elite and whose social decline was all the more acute when the breadwinner died suddenly. The fact that the existing pension regulations were insufficient and inadequate was most evident in cases where the official left behind dependent children, who were expected to get an education and employment corresponding to their social status, supported only by the widow's modest pension and small state allowances. As the individual cases show, while a widow could rely on the solidarity of her husband's former colleagues, who did not hesitate to propose an extraordinary increase in her small pension, solving the problem by means of extraordinary gifts and contributions was unsystematic and was more oriented towards supporting the education of sons. Thus, it was the future of the dependent daughters that appeared to be most at risk when the father died. In the cases studied, 55% of the daughters never married and remained in the same household with their mother. It cannot be assumed that this was always a voluntary decision; their celibacy was forced by circumstances, given that with the loss of the father and his official position the daughter lost much of the social capital she could have offered to a potential husband. In the absence of financial resources, it was totally unthinkable that the family would be able to provide a dowry for the unmarried daughters, and unless a suitable groom could be found through the extended family, the young woman remained unmarried and depended on her mother's pension and small

sums of money in the form of gifts of mercy from the state budget. Most of the unmarried daughters of civil servants died as “private persons,” and only a small proportion of them managed to take advantage of the emerging opportunities in skilled occupations that were open to women.



Notes

1. Georg Seiderer, *Österreichs Neugestaltung: Verfassungspolitik und Verwaltungsreform im österreichischen Neoabsolutismus unter Alexander Bach 1849–1859* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2015), 147–177.
2. For the lifestyle of civil servants’ wives in Austria see Waltraud Heindl, “Caroline Pichler oder der bürgerliche Fortschritt: Lebensideale und Lebensrealität von österreichischen Beamtenfrauen,” in *Von Bürgern und ihrer Frauen*, edited by Margret Friedrich and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Böhlau, 1996), 197–207.
3. Waltraud Heindl, *Josephinische Mandarine: Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich*, vol. 2, *1848 bis 1914* (Vienna–Cologne–Graz: Böhlau, 2013), 69–74.
4. For the situation of the widows of middle-class burghers, intelligentsia and senior civil servants see Ursula Machtemes-Titgemeyer, *Leben zwischen Trauer und Pathos: Bildungsbürgerliche Witwen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Osnabrück: Univ.-Verlag Rasch, 2001); Dana Marešová, “‘A přece mě ten krutý osud stihl...’: Ovdovělé pražské měšťanky ve druhé polovině 19. století v odrazu ego-dokumentů,” Ph.D. dissertation, České Budějovice, Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích, 2020.
5. Gesetz vom 14. Mai 1896 No. 74 betreffend Bestimmungen über die Versorgungsgenüsse der Civilstaatsbeamten (Staatslehrpersonen), dann der Diener sowie deren Witwen und Waisen, *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrate vertretenen Königreiche und Länder* 27 (1896): 255–257.
6. Verordnung des Finanzministeriums vom 22. Mai 1896 No. 77 zur Durchführung des Gesetzes vom 14. Mai 1896 (R. G. Bl. No. 74), betreffend Bestimmungen über die Versorgungsgenüsse der Civilstaatsbeamten (Staatslehrpersonen), dann der Diener sowie deren Witwen und Waisen, *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrate vertretenen Königreiche und Länder* 27 (1896): 260.
7. National Archives in Prague (hereafter cited as NA), archive of Bohemian Governor’s Office (hereafter cited as ČM), Signature 7/4/1–7/51/24, Boxes 46–53.
8. Bernd Wunder, “Die Institutionalisierung der Invaliden-, Alters- und Hinterbliebenenversorgung der Staatsbediensteten in Österreich (1748–1790),” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 92, 3–4 (1984): 341–406.
9. For the outline of the patrimonial administration in Bohemia see Ralph Melville, *Adel und Revolution in Böhmen: Strukturwandel von Herrschaft und Gesellschaft in Österreich um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998), 15–60.
10. NA, ČM, Signatur 7/36/160, Box 49, a plea to His Majesty from Karel Kalina, 21 Dec. 1869.

11. Ernst Mayerhofer, *Handbuch für den politischen Verwaltungsdienst in den im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der diesen Ländern gemeinsamen Gesetze und Verordnungen*, vol. 1 (Vienna: Manz, 1875), 101.
12. Therese Garstenauer, “Beamte im Un/Ruhestand: Überlegungen zu österreichischen Staatsbediensteten,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 22, 3 (2011): 81–111.
13. Especially in the early years of one’s clerical career the young bureaucrat was employed as a trainee without a right to remuneration and even later, at lower positions, his income was very modest, so that in important administrative centers most of it was spent on rent and representation. Cf. Pavla Vošahlíková, “Z moci úřední: Úřady a úředníci za vlády Františka Josefa I.,” *Český časopis historický* 92, 3 (1994): 467–468.
14. Karl Megner, *Beamte: Wirtschafts- und sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte des k. k. Beamten-tums* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 174–176.
15. István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 139–148.
16. NA, ČM, Signatur 7/47/36, Box 53, report from the District Captain in Slaný/Schlan to the Governor’s Office in Prague, 9 Oct. 1876. “. . . die Familie plötzlich von der Stufe eines gereglten bürgerlichen Daseins in die wahre Armut gestürzt wurde, zumal es namentlich in Schlan nicht möglich ist, dass zwei Personen von jährlichen 420 zl. leben.”
17. Megner, 171–180.
18. Cf. Mayerhofer, 103–106.
19. Martina Halířová, “Kinderschutz in der Gesetzgebung am Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft auf dem Papier: Konstruktion, Kodifikation und Realisation der Zivilgesellschaft in der Habsburgermonarchie*, edited by Wilhelm Brauneder and Milan Hlavačka (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2014), 171–180.
20. NA, ČM, Signature 7/44/51, Box 52, report of the Deputy District Chief in Pacov/Patzau to the Regional Chief in Tabor, 4 June 1866.
21. Martin Klečáček et al., *Slovník představitelů politické správy v Čechách v letech 1849–1918* (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR—Národní archiv, 2020), 494–495.
22. NA, ČM, Signature 7/41/92, Box 51, report of the Land Finance Directorate to the Governor’s Office, 9 Sept. 1873.
23. *Ibid.*, record of contributions in the collection for the benefit of Theresia Parvonič.
24. NA, ČM, Signature 7/43/79, Box 51, report of the Acting District Captain in Mělník to the Governor’s Office in Prague, 26 Nov. 1877.
25. NA, ČM, Signature 7/38/66, Box 50, a plea to the State Ministry from Berta Miksch, 2 March 1866.
26. NA, ČM, Signature 7/49/8, Box 53, report of the District Captain in Strakonice/Strakonitz to the Governor’s Office in Prague, 20 July 1875.
27. NA, ČM, Signature 7/37/67, Box 50, report of the Governor’s Office in Prague to the Ministry of Interior, 9 Dec. 1880.
28. NA, ČM, Signature 7/31/25, Box 48, report of the District Captain in Lanškroun/Landskron to the Governor’s Office in Prague, 6 Sept. 1869.

29. NA, ČM, Signature 7/43/79, Box 51, letter of the Bohemian Governor to the Minister of the Interior, 19 Oct. 1877.
30. NA, ČM, Signature 7/31/17, Box 48, order of the Ministry of the Interior to the Governor's Office in Prague, 27 Dec. 1881.
31. NA, ČM, Signature 7/41/29, Box 50, report of the Governor's Office in Prague to the State Ministry, 10 Jan. 1863.
32. NA, ČM, Signature 7/38/73, Box 50, a plea to His Majesty from Eleonora Morawetz, 19 Apr. 1867.
33. NA, ČM, Signature 7/28/38, Box 47, report of the Police Headquarters in Prague to the Governor's Office in Prague, 25 Jan. 1871.
34. Vošahlíková, 468.
35. Cf. NA, ČM, Signature 7/45/59, Box 52, a plea to His Majesty from Henriette Schade, 27 Jan. 1874.
36. NA, ČM, Signature 7/36/112, Box 49, report of the Acting District Chief in Poděbrady/Podiebrad to the Regional Chief in Čáslav/Časlau, 21 June 1867.
37. Ibid., order of the Ministry of the Interior to the Governor's Office in Prague, 26 May 1868.
38. Ibid., report of the Police Headquarters in Prague to the Governor's Office in Prague, 20 Feb. 1868.
39. NA, ČM, Signature 7/36/160, Box 49, report of the Police Headquarters in Prague to the Governor's Office in Prague, 28 May 1872.
40. NA, ČM, Signature 7/28/38, Box 47, report of the Police Headquarters in Prague to the Governor's Office in Prague, 25 Jan. 1871.
41. NA, ČM, Signature 7/36/112, Box 49, report of the Police Headquarters in Prague to the Governor's Office in Prague, 20 Feb. 1868.
42. NA, ČM, Signature 7/44/90, Box 52, report of the District Captain in Mladá Boleslav/Jungbunzlau to the Governor's Office in Prague, 4 Jan. 1878. “. . . die Mutter des Gnadenwerbers lebt in voller Zurückgezogenheit, und hat in ihrer Vermögenslosigkeit sehr zu kämpfen, um aus ihrer Pension und den Erziehungsbeiträgen die Kosten für Pflege und Ausbildung ihrer noch unversorgter drei Söhne nur nothdürftig bestreiten zu können.”
43. State Regional Archives in Prague, Collection of Parish Registers of Central Bohemia Region, Parish Mladá Boleslav, Book 64 (Parish Register of Marriages 1865–1885), fols. 122 and 154.
44. Ibid., Parish Mníšek pod Brdy, Book 29 (Parish Register of Deceased 1875–1912), fol. 67; Marie Stupková and Martin Klečacký, *Slovník představitelů soudní správy v Čechách v letech 1849–1918* (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR—Národní archiv, 2015), 335–336.
45. NA, Prague Police Headquarters–Inhabitants Register (PŘ-I/K), Box 442, fol. 691, Theresia Parwonitz registration sheet, 1 June 1876.
46. Cf. Milena Lenderová, *K bráničce i k modlitbě: Žena devatenáctého století* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 2016): 39–71.
47. NA, ČM, Signature 7/41/44, Box 51, report of the District Chief in Český Krumlov/Krumau to the Governor's Office in Prague, 11 July 1868.

48. Ibid., order of the Ministry of the Interior to the Governor's Office in Prague, 24 Oct. 1869.
49. Ibid., order of the Ministry of the Interior to the Governor's Office in Prague, 1 Feb. 1874.
50. NA, ČM, Signature 7/36/182, Box 49, orders of the Ministry of the Interior to the Governor's Office in Prague, 28 July 1876, 28 July 1879, 4 Oct. 1882.

Abstract

The Death of the Breadwinner As a Factor of Social Mobility in the Civil Service Milieu in Bohemia in the Latter Half of the 19th Century

The paper studies the intergenerational social mobility of state officials and their children in Bohemia in the latter half of the 19th century. It focuses on families where the father, working in a senior managing position in the state administration, died leaving behind a wife and children unprovided for. It follows both the structural inadequacies in the state administration pension system and the strategies the widows used in order to cope with the unexpected situation and the sudden drop in their living standards. Based on examples from the pension files of the Governor's Office in Prague, it documents the subsequent life path of children that were still deemed dependent at the time of their father's death, seeking to show the vulnerable position of the daughters that lacked financial or social capital for their eventual wedding, yet were limited in their choices by the strict social limitations imposed on middle-class bourgeois families.

Keywords

social mobility, 19th century, civil servants, pension system, Bohemia