

# STATE STATISTICAL OFFICE – ORGANIZATIONAL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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## Abstract

The Framework Act on the organization of the state statistical service in the new Czechoslovak State was approved shortly after the establishment of the Republic (January 28, 1919), but the statutes of the Statistical State Council (SSC) as an advisory and resolution body and the State Statistical Office (SSO) as executive body were issued in the form of government regulations only 10 months later. SSC started its activity only in March 1920, their members worked in many committees for particular branches of statistics and they were approving annual plans of work of SSO. SSO developed its activity under difficult conditions gradually over the years 1919–1921. In the early years it consisted of a presidium and 7 departments. The contribution briefly evaluates the activity of the most significant representatives of Czechoslovak state statistics in the interwar period. Except for known persons such as Dobroslav Krejčí, František Weyr and Jan Auerhan the paper assesses also the activity of Josef Mráz, Antonín Boháč, Robert Kollar, Josef Ryba and others.

**Key words:** State Statistical Office, Statistical State Council, D. Krejčí, F. Weyr

**JEL Code:** B16, B23, N33

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## Introduction

The history of the statistics on our area are not yet complexly elaborated. Authors of this paper are gradually contributing to the improvement of this situation by a number of partial articles on the development of statistics in the XIX<sup>th</sup> and XX<sup>th</sup> century – Závodský and Šimpach (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019), Kodera, Závodský and Šimpach (2015) etc.

The 100th anniversary of the establishment of the newly established Czechoslovak state statistical service, which Czech and Slovak statisticians celebrated last year, reminded us that the history of the interwar state statistical service has not yet been processed. Among the most important contributions on this topic are a number of works by Jaroslav Podzimek (1933–2011), especially Podzimek (1979) and *70 let* (1989), as same as many journal articles. We try to fill

this gap in the historiography in Czech statistics, so far at least by particular contributions—Závodský (2005), Závodský and Šimpach (2019) and others.

The article concerns the development of the organization of State Statistical Council (SSC) and State Statistical Office (SSO), especially in 20th years of XX<sup>th</sup> century. Among the most important personalities of the "founding generation" of the Czechoslovak state statistical service, we recall mainly the activities of less known but very meritorious statistical experts.

## **1 The beginnings of state statistics in Czechoslovakia**

Fast and non-problematic acceptance of the law of state statistics (No. 49/1919 Coll. I. and r. <sup>1</sup>) relatively early after foundation of Czechoslovakia (28 January 1919) was only the first step to creation of statistical service. Authors of the law (Dobroslav Krejčí and Karel Engliš) decided to speed up the adoption of the law by submitting a brief version of it, which required the subsequent issuance of the statutes of the State Statistical Council (as a quorum) and the State Statistical Office (as an executive body) in the form of government regulations. In this sense, however, the law remained unimplemented for 10 months and also the joint chairman of both bodies was not appointed.

In addition, the government was temporarily considering a revision of the statistical act, which would mean, among other things, a restriction of independence of SSO. The frequent urgings of D. Krejčí and of the parliament (resolution of 18 September 1919, interpellation of deputies on 14 November 1919) did not lead to the issuance of the necessary government regulations for a long time.

Fortunately, the cited statistical act in § 9 entrusted the temporary organization of national statistics to the provincial statistical office in Prague under the leadership of D. Krejčí, who with Jan Auerhan and other enthusiasts under very difficult conditions began to build a new, large statistical office with nationwide coverage.

Only on 12 December 1919 was published (and therefore came into power) in the Collection of Laws and Regulations two Government Decrees of 28 November that define the statutes of SSC (No. 634) and SSO (No. 635). Disappointed "father of Czechoslovak statistics" Krejčí, however, resigned from the leadership of the state statistics in the summer of 1919 and insisted on his resignation. It was accepted only in February 1920 and new chairman of SSC and SSO was appointed František Weyr, professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Brno.

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<sup>1</sup> laws and regulations

Until spring 1920 the activity of Czechoslovak state statistics gradually started. SSC was funded. Particular departments of SSO started to work. Regular publishing activities began. The catastrophic situation with the spatial equipment of the rapidly expanding office has also finally begun to be addressed. The cited law on the organization of the statistical service as well as the statutes of the SSC and SSO applied (here with minor changes) throughout the interwar period, which was certainly to the benefit of the statistical service.

## 2 Statistical State Council

The issuance of the statute of the SSC and the appointment of its chairman finally made it possible to establish the SSC more than a year after its enactment. Its full members were representatives of ministries and central authorities, local governments, universities and technicians, various economic corporations and professional chambers, trade unions and statistical experts, including leading representatives of the SSO. The first (extraordinary) meeting brought together 49 members. Their number gradually increases according to other government regulations.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the year 1921, SSC had 85 members. The membership was for six years, the members worked in 14 committees for various branches of statistics. Full members of SSC were in 20th years almost all important representatives of statistics and related fields in Czechoslovakia.<sup>3</sup>

Plenary meeting of SSC approved the annual work plan each for SSO. Resolution of SSC was binding for all natural and legal persons in the State that were subject to the reporting obligation. The resolution of SSC could have been cancelled only by the government. First (extraordinary) plenary meeting of SSC took place on 24 March 1920 and approved, according to a proposal by SSO vice-president Auerhan, the SSO 's work plan for year 1920. Members of individual SSC committees were also elected, and they systematically began their work in the following weeks. Second (1st ordinary) plenary meeting of SSC took place on 25 June 1920. It discussed and approved the SSO work plan for 1921, when the first Czechoslovak census of population and flats took place (as of 15 February).

In the following years, SSC plenary meetings were held regularly once a year (usually in the spring), and the number of full members was quite stable. Members of SSC worked during the year in various committees (and also in narrower subcommittees), the number and

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<sup>2</sup> No. 493/1920 Coll. I. and r.; No. 149/1921 Coll. I. and r.

<sup>3</sup> According to the § 1, art. "ch" of the Status of SSC could the plenary meeting of SSC vote for the members up to 5 experts, which was done at the first (extraordinary) meeting.

focus of which had gradually changed.<sup>4</sup> Statute of SSC enabled (in § 7) to vote outstanding foreign experts as honorary members of SSC. In year 1927 were voted: Leonard P. Ayres from USA, Josef Buzek from Poland, Ernest Wagemann from Germany and George U. Yule from Great Britain.

### 3 Organization of Statistical State Council

First years of existence of SSO were very difficult. It was a new office of the newly established state. During the Habsburg monarchy, state statistics were concentrated in Vienna and Budapest, with the provincial statistical offices in Prague, Brno and Opava having very limited competences.

As stated above, Land Statistical Bureau in Prague with several experienced professionals became the basis for building of SSO. Catastrophic situation was at the beginning with the lack of rooms. SSO at first worked only in a few rented rooms in the apartment building at Malá Strana (Šeříková No. 4/618) “inherited” from the Land Statistical Office. It was very difficult to get a proper seat for the SSO at the time of the consolidation of the new state, when it was necessary to place the emerging ministries and other central offices, embassies of foreign states, etc. Only in October 1919 was assigned to SSO an object of Institute of the deaf-and-dumb at Smíchov<sup>5</sup> (today Holečkova No. 4/104). However, it was emptied and partially adapted only gradually during two years.

Acquired building with large halls, but with a lack of small working places, was not very suitable for the needs of SSO. Throughout the 1920s, the building of a new building, designed especially for the SSO, was discussed. In 1929, the office moved to the leased back part of the new building of the Workers' Accident Insurance Company (today's headquarters of various offices for Prague 7) with an entrance from today's street Dukelských hrdinů.

The basic organizational structure of the SSO was basically created during 1919:

- Presidium (personal agency of SSO, economy and finance of the office, relations with foreign countries, library, etc.)
- I<sup>st</sup> department (editorial office of Statistical Handbook, information for authorities and the public, translations into foreign languages, etc.)
- II<sup>nd</sup> department (census and demographic statistics, health statistics etc.)

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<sup>4</sup> The last (20<sup>th</sup>) plenary meeting of the SSC took place on 18 May 1938. During the occupation, the SRS was not formally abolished, but ceased to carry out its activities.

<sup>5</sup> Smíchov was by the end of the year 1921 a separate town.

- III<sup>rd</sup> department (statistics on agriculture, industry, trade and transport, financial statistics)
- IV<sup>th</sup> department (foreign trade statistics)
- V<sup>th</sup> department (social and moral statistics)
- VI<sup>th</sup> department (political and administrative statistics - elections, press, public finances, crime and courts, education and awareness statistics was moved from III<sup>rd</sup> Department here)
- VII<sup>th</sup> department was funded only in summer 1921 (price statistics, consumption statistics, statistics of joint stock and other companies). To the VII<sup>th</sup> department was amended Economic intelligence station, established in the summer of 1920 at the initiative of the Minister of Finance English for rapid reporting on production, prices, consumption, etc. The station soon ceased to exist due to the reduction of allocated funds.

During the following years, some agendas were shifted between departments. In the mid-1920s, the current 7 SSO departments were reorganized into 7 units, which always consisted of several specialized departments.

## **5 Personnel development of the State Statistical Office**

Number of permanent employees of SSO was increasing rapidly in the first years of the existence of the office. Already at the end of 1919 it reached 220, a year later 505 and during 1921 (including the census) it reached 804. After that it rather decreased. The SSO had to permanently defend its staff numbers and budget from numerous critics.

Although the newly formed SSO initially had very difficult conditions for its activities, state officials demanded from it quality statistical data for their decision-making. The problem was initially not only the low number of SSO staff, but mainly there was a complete lack of specialists in foreign trade statistics, various branches of economic statistics, price statistics etc. S With the exception of agricultural statistics, during the Habsburg Monarchy, only the Viennese authorities (Central Statistical Commission, Ministry of Trade and others) dealt with economic statistics in the Austrian part.

The problem was the general statistical qualification of professionals. SSO employed usually around 20 officials of “scientific statistical services” (conceptual officials). Most of them were graduates of the Faculty of Law, as the completion of law has been required of civil servants since the times of Austria-Hungary Empire. The national economy and financial

science were studied at Law Faculty, but statistics were only a marginal subject here and no methods were presented at all about the methods of statistical work. SSO officials then had to supplement their knowledge of statistics with a separate study, often after joining the statistical service. After all, D. Krejčí, J. Auerhan and J. Mráz, who came to SSO from Prague Land Statistical Bureau, experienced it already in the pre-war period.

The situation was all the more complicated because statistical science in the first decades of the XX<sup>th</sup> century in the world developed rapidly. At the same time, the necessary publications in Czech, especially on mathematical statistics, have long been lacking. Thanks to SSO in addition to a number of journal articles, two basic textbooks of modern statistical methods were published during the 1920s – Yule and Kohn.<sup>6</sup> This was thanks to, beside others, the important representative of the SSO, J. Mráz, who as a 40-year-old lawyer had previously studied higher mathematics at the university.

Let us remind that according to the status of SSO it was required that conceptual officials, in addition to higher education, also had to have education in statistics or publishing activities in the field (§ 7). At the same time, freedom of scientific research was legally guaranteed: “The heads of department work in terms of administrative activities, according to the instructions and under the supervision of the chairman, in terms of scientific activities, independently.” (§ 4).

In February 1921, a written and oral examination in statistics (and the basics of the national economy and the necessary legal regulations) was ordered for permanent SSO officials of the specified categories.<sup>7</sup> SSO vice-chairman J. Auerhan was appointed (by the prime minister!) as the chairman of the examination commission, and a series of lectures by leading SSO experts for candidates began.

Dobroslav Krejčí, that was still leading Prague Land Statistical Bureau (since year 1905), overtook the leadership of SSO, formally founded on 5 February 1919<sup>8</sup> and gradually constituted. Due to a number of difficulties, Krejčí resigned from the SSO leadership in the summer of 1919. President Masaryk accepted the resignation only on 3 February 1920. He appointed František Weyr (1879–1951) on 19 February. Jan Auerhan, who had been significantly involved in the management of the SSO since resignation of Krejčí, was appointed as SSO vice chairman.

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<sup>6</sup> Yule, G. U. *Úvod do teorie statistiky (Introduction to the Theory of Statistics)*. 7., corrected edition was translated by V. Novák and J. Mráz: Prague, 1926.

Kohn, S. *Základy teorie statistické metody (Fundamentals of the theory of statistical method)*. Prague, 1929.

<sup>7</sup> Regulation of the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic of 9 February 1921 No. 55/1921 Coll. I. and R. on practical statistical exams.

<sup>8</sup> Date of publication of the Statistical Act in the Collection of Laws and Regulations.

F. Weyr resigned from the SSO leadership after 9 years. On 30 March 1929 was appointed as a chairman (following the example of foreign statistical offices, the title of president was also used) Jan Auerhan and his deputy chairman Josef Mráz. After his death (1934) he was replaced by Antonín Boháč. This situation lasted until the occupation of the Czech lands in March 1939.

F. Weyr during his presidency of the SSO, only commuted here from his main place of work – Masaryk University in Brno. At the SSO, he handled only the most important matters and delegated maximum powers to the heads of individual SSO departments and other conceptual staff. Let us recall, in brief, at least some of them.

Doc. JUDr. Jan Auerhan (1880–1942) worked from 1906 in the Land Statistical Office in Prague, from the summer of 1919 for two decades under the leadership of the SSO (1929–1939 as chairman). He specialized mainly in forestry statistics and population statistics, especially in Czechoslovakian minorities abroad.

Doc. JUDr. Josef Mráz (1882–1934) worked in the Land Statistical Office from the end of 1908. As the head, he built III<sup>rd</sup> department (then headed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> section), dealing with economic statistics. Since year 1929 until his untimely death he was deputy chairman (vice president) of the SSO. He lectured statistics at the University of Business and made a significant contribution to the development of mathematical statistics in Czechoslovakia and Czech statistical terminology.

**Fig. 1: F. Weyr, J. Auerhan and J. Mráz**



Source: authors personal archive

Doc. PhDr. Antonín Boháč (1882–1950) is considered the founder of Czech demography. He joined the SSO in the spring of 1919 after returning from a peace conference in Paris, where he worked as an expert on Czechoslovakian delegation. He was long-term head of II<sup>nd</sup> (demographic) department (then the 2<sup>nd</sup> section) at SSO. He played a significant role in the censuses of 1921 and 1930, among others. In 1934 he was appointed vice-president of the SSO.

JUDr. Robert Kollar (1884–1946) joined the newly founded SSO in February 1919. As the head of the presidium, he played a significant role in the organizational construction of the office, where he was one of the most important personalities for two decades. At spring 1934 took over the leadership of the important III<sup>rd</sup> department. In 30<sup>th</sup> years he edited *Statistický obzor* (*Statistical horizon*) (continuation of *Čs. statistický věstník* (*Czechoslovak Statistical Bulletin*)).

JUDr. Jan Náhlovský (1876–1958) was a longtime head of VI<sup>th</sup> department (section), edited the first ten years of *Čs. statistický věstník* (*Czechoslovak Statistical Bulletin*) and other SSO publications, he was also known as a translator. Today, his name is known in connection with the villa in Prague-Bubeneč, which was designed for him at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century by Dušan Jurkovič.<sup>9</sup>

**Fig. 2: A. Boháč, R. Kollar and J. Náhlovský**



Source: authors personal archive

PhDr. Gustav Reif (1884–?) worked throughout the interwar period in the SSO, first as the head of an extensive library, then for a long time as the head of the V<sup>th</sup> department. He has published works on wage statistics.

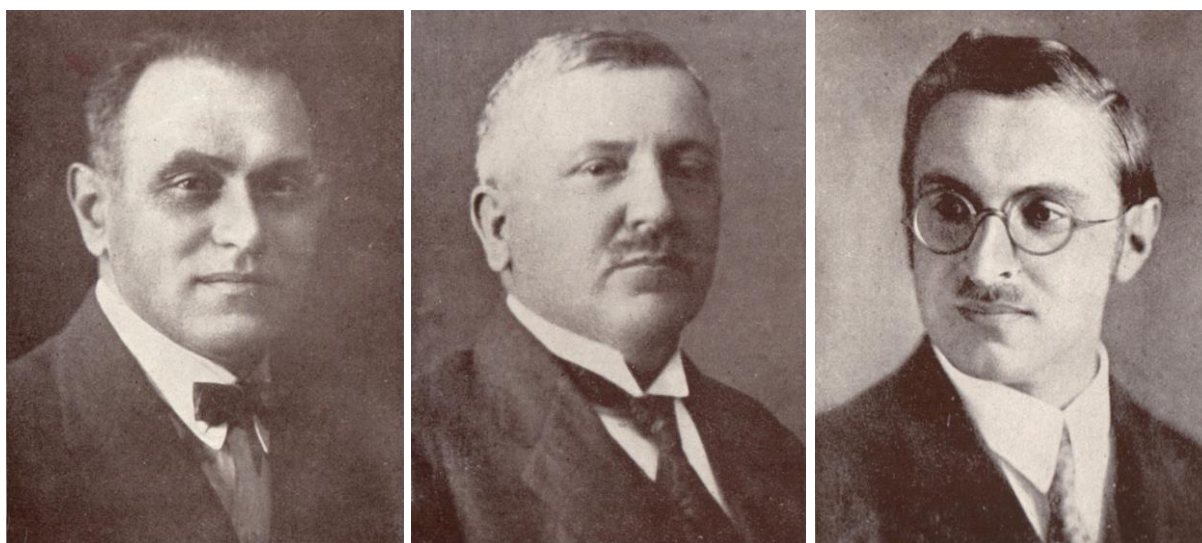
<sup>9</sup> “Vila of Dr. Náhlovský”, Prague 6 – Bubeneč, Suchardova 4/284.



JUDr. Josef Ryba (1880–1960) joined the SSO in November 1919 and became the founder of Czechoslovakian price statistics. In the years 1920–1922 he constructed the first indices of retail and then wholesale prices. At the beginning of 1925 he took over the leadership of IV<sup>th</sup> department and then managed foreign trade statistics.

JUDr. Pavel Smutný (1888–?) joined the SSO as early as 1919. He dealt mainly with financial statistics and economic analysis, for many years he managed VII<sup>th</sup> department of SSO.

**Fig. 3: G. Reif, J. Ryba and P. Smutný**



Source: authors personal archive

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the work of the SSO in the interwar period can be assessed positively. Despite great initial difficulties, it was possible to build a statistical office, which had a semi-scientific character and generally kept pace with the then developed world. This was mainly thanks to the “founding generation” of leading SSO workers. Note that all the named persons were about the same age (born around 1880) and mostly had a similar end of their professional career – they were retired after the occupation, Auerhan (and unnamed here Bohumír Hanosek) became victims of the Heydrichiad.

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