

Call for Papers:

Local Administration during the First and Second World Wars

Organization: Jan Vondráček (Masaryk Institute and Archives of the CAS, Prague)

Venue: Prague, Villa Lanna

Date: 2-4 September 2020

The type of rational, legal administrative staff is capable of application in all kinds of situations and contexts. It is the most important mechanism for the administration of everyday affairs. For in that sphere, the exercise of authority consists precisely in administration.

Max Weber

Local administration has always played a key role in securing, implementing and stabilizing the authority of the modern state. After the outbreak of the First World War, the warring countries were confronted with a difficult supply situation, including famine, disease, refugees and labor shortages. The clerks of the local administration were responsible for implementing new policies and solving problems. They were the ones in direct contact with local populations which were often multi-ethnic and presented a broad variety of needs.

In many cases, local administrations were reorganized to deal with vast and unprecedented tasks and problems. In other cases, the German Empire and Austria-Hungary established military occupation administrations which depended on existing local administration, for example in Belgium, Serbia and Ukraine.

Not only military defeat but also the failure of overtaxed local administrations to solve substantial problems such as obtaining sufficient food supplies for the population led to revolts in the German Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy.

This drastic experience prompted Nazi Germany in particular to undertake a reorganization of local administration shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. Even after large parts of Europe were under German occupation, local administrations remained largely responsible for the daily life needs of local populations, such as organizing production, distribution and rationing of food and other basic goods, such as heating fuel and clothing. Since state food allotments were often insufficient to meet basic needs, local populations reacted with the development of a variety of illegal practices. Farmers evaded compulsory levies of food and sold undocumented, illegally butchered meat. Hidden stores of products, food and ration stamps were traded for other goods as part of a comprehensive black market. Although nominally supervised by German occupiers, the actual prosecution of these new economic crimes generally fell in the responsibility of local administrations and courts. Local courts continued to hear non-political cases and disputes within local populations as well.

Recent research in Holocaust Studies have showed that local administrations not only played an important role in making the mass murder of the European Jews possible, but that it was often local administrations that took the initiative.

This conference aims to bring together scholars who work on specific aspects of local administration in the First World War and the Second World War and analyze and compare a diversity of methodologies, findings and approaches.

We are particularly interested in papers that are dealing with the following historical focuses:

- The relationship between the occupying power and local administration.
- Local administration and the war economy
- Local courts under occupation
- Continuity and change in staffing aspects of local administration under occupation
- Questions of local administration and local interpretation of collaboration

Prof. Jonathan Gumz will give a keynote address on local administration and the First World War.

Prof. Dieter Pohl will give a keynote address on local administration and the Second World War.

At the moment we are able to cover accommodation and parts of the travel costs, we are still looking for funds for travel costs.

The conference language is English.

Please send your abstracts of approximately 500 words by 17 March 2020 to:

Jan Vondráček
vondracek@mua.cas.cz