Socialist Luxury on a Fork

Haute Cuisine in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1969

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The existence of *haute cuisine*, that is, top gastronomy, in Czechoslovakia¹ is part of an interesting and thus far little explored issue of how the Soviet Union and the states of the Eastern bloc related to the category of luxury. I believe that research into this topic will allow us to learn a great deal about the working and structure of society under the conditions of dominant ideology, for which the issue of elites and their self-presentation, as well as status consumption, posed an extremely sensitive problem. This theme was explored in detail by Finnish historian and sociologist Jukka Gronow who in his pioneering work *Caviar with Champagne* showed plebeianization (or we could say democratization) of luxury food products (for example, champagne, chocolate and caviar) and other products (for example, bicycles and perfumes) in the Soviet Union in 1933–1939.² Apart from the production of luxury products, he also explored their distribution networks – the retail sector and top restaurants. This brings us to the theme of this study, even though *haute cuisine* and its protagonists as such were not directly addressed by Gronow. He did, however, examine an extremely important issue for this study, namely who were to be the consumers of luxury products and how “consumer education” in having a refined taste for luxury products was carried out. While many of Gronow’s conclusions are universally valid for the period of Stalinism in the entire Eastern bloc, the situation in the Soviet Union in the late 1930s differed considerably in a number of respects from the situation in

¹ Even though the Czech and Slovak cuisines differed considerably in this period, with regard to *haute cuisine* we can talk about top Czechoslovak gastronomy. At the highest level, it was formed at international events, where Czech and Slovak chefs presented a common style. Initially, *haute cuisine* was solely Czech; this situation changed considerably only in the latter half of the 1960s, especially thanks to the huge success of the Slovak *Koliba* at Expo 67 in Montreal (which was not, however, officially part of the Czechoslovak pavilion). The head chef of the Slovak *Koliba* and the long-term head chef of the Carlton Hotel in Bratislava, Vilém Koprda (1911–2005), was one of the most prominent figures of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine*.

² GRONOW, Jukka: *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia*. Oxford, Berg 2003.

Czechoslovakia at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s. Furthermore, as indicated by Gronow's later research on luxury in the era of Nikita Khrushchev, focusing also on spheres other than gastronomy, major differences resulting not only from the completely different structure of society also persisted in the following decades.

Luxury in the Eastern bloc was also explored in the collective volume *Pleasures in Socialism*, edited by David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, which includes a broad range of contributions on various topics.³ Food and catering, however, is a rather marginal issue in this volume. Still, some of the more theoretical chapters are valuable, such as that by the German researcher Ina Merkel. The issue has also been touched upon in a number of other studies, mainly within research into consumer cultures in the countries of the Eastern bloc.

Recently, public catering in the latter half of the twentieth century in the Eastern bloc has been intensively researched mainly by Bulgarian researchers, such as Albena Shkodrova and Stefan Detchev.⁴ Their works are all the more valuable as they reflect foreign tourism and its influence on public catering in Bulgaria, which is a dimension that plays a rather marginal role in the works focused on the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, similar works by Hungarian researchers are still lacking. Yet, it was in Hungary where high-quality gastronomy and food specialities played an important role in attracting foreign tourists to the country.⁵ Of all countries in the Eastern bloc, Hungary placed the most emphasis on its traditional gastronomic culture, including top gastronomy, for the presentation of the country abroad. Thus, for example, cookbooks offering national specialities were published in many languages, including Czech.⁶

A collective volume focusing on television cooking shows across Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, which is currently being edited by the Slovenian historian Ana Tominc, will certainly contribute to a better understanding of the profession

³ CROWLEY, David – REID, Susan E. (eds.): *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*. Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press 2010.

⁴ SHKODROVA, Albena: *Communist Gourmet: The Curious Story of Food in the People's Republic of Bulgaria*. Budapest – New York, Central European University Press 2021; DETCHEV, Stefan: Public Catering in Communist Bulgaria: 1950s–1980s. In: *Food & History*, Vol. 18, No. 1–2 (2020), pp. 49–74.

⁵ See VARI, Alexander: Nocturnal Entertainments, Five-Star Hotels, and Youth Counterculture: Reinventing Budapest's Nightlife Under Socialism. In: GIUSTINO, Cathleen M. – PLUM, Catherine J. – VARI, Alexander (eds.): *Socialist Escapes: Breaking Away from Ideology and Everyday Routine in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*. New York – Oxford, Berghahn Books 2013, pp. 187–211.

⁶ See, for example, MAGYAR, Elek: *Kuchařská kniha Labužník* [Cookbook Gourmet]. Budapest, Pannonia 1958 (3rd edition).

of the chef and their position in society, especially within the media space.⁷ We can already conclude that television and television commercials also played a key role in promoting top chefs in Czechoslovakia.

The issues of *haute cuisine* and luxury in gastronomy in general have not been explored in detail for Czechoslovakia, not only for the period after 1945 and 1948, but also for the interwar period. There are a number of published texts, but they are often filled with glorifying myths, and they overestimate the position of Czech *haute cuisine* in the international context. A book entitled *Hostili jsme svět* [We Hosted the World] by Miroslav Hříbek, the long-time director of Prague's Alcron Hotel and of the official Czechoslovak restaurants at Expo 1958 in Brussels and Expo 1967 in Montreal, which was published as an expert publication with the aim of providing guidance to future generations, is virtually the only relevant printed source from the period.⁸ Of course, the data included in the book should be approached with caution, in part because of the author's long-term and probably quite active cooperation with the secret services.⁹ What is negative in the context of the focus of this study is that the publication is not a reflection of a career written in the twilight of the author's life, but rather a book which aimed actively to create a myth of the world fame of Czech *haute cuisine* and show younger generations the path to international success. Hence, it is only logical that the publication is anything but a truly in-depth and critical analysis, despite occasional references to errors and (naturally successful) problem solving. Regrettably, apart from this book, the direct actors of Czech *haute cuisine* of the 1950s and 1960s left no relevant testimony, although some of them, mainly Ladislav Koreček and Jiří Hlávka, often appeared in the media and were even seen in some ways as celebrities of the period. Ladislav Koreček was among the more active cookbook authors (together with Antonín Nestával, Antonín Srkala and František Syrový) and we can therefore obtain some ideas regarding his gastronomic style through them.

Some interesting information can also be found in articles published in the journal *Československé pohostinství* [Czechoslovak Catering Industry]. Important sources also include various materials on the television show *Vaří šéfkuchař* [A Chef Is Cooking], broadcast since 1963 as part of the main television

⁷ TOMINC, Ana (ed.): *Food and Cooking on Early Television in Europe: Impact on Postwar Foodways* (in press; Abingdon, Routledge 2022).

⁸ HŘÍBEK, Miroslav: *Hostili jsme svět*. Praha, Merkur 1970.

⁹ For Miroslav Hříbek see MÜCKE, Pavel: *Šťastnou cestu...?! Proměny politik cestování a cestovního ruchu v Československu za časů studené války (1945–1989)* [Bon Voyage...?! Changes in the Traveling and Tourism Policies in Czechoslovakia During the Cold War, 1945–1989]. Pelhřimov, Nová tiskárna Pelhřimov 2017, p. 211.

news. This programme, with hundreds of episodes, was primarily aimed at promoting and advertising specific food products (see below), but it also played a key role in bringing top chefs into public awareness and positioning them as experts on gastronomy. Unfortunately, only very few of the episodes have been preserved in the Czech television archives, and these do not have any audio (although the texts of the scripts are available). However, virtually all the recipes presented on the show were made public in accompanying brochures, in sections of some magazines, as well as in a special publication entitled *Vaří šéfkuchař* [A Chef is Cooking].¹⁰

The issue was also partially addressed in publications on tourism and travelling policy in the former Czechoslovakia. Probably the most comprehensive view was offered by Pavel Mücke in his book entitled *Šťastnou cestu...?!* [Bon Voyage...?!].¹¹

Haute Cuisine during the First Republic and the Protectorate

Without aspiring to a detailed analysis, we can state that in the interwar era Czechoslovakia was clearly on the periphery of the gastronomic map of Europe, trying to adopt, with some success, impulses coming from the centres of world *haute cuisine*. In the first place, there was Paris, dominated by the extraordinary personality of the undisputed king of *haute cuisine*, August Escoffier (1846–1935). More impulses and fashions came from London, as well as from regionally closer and more developed centres, such as Budapest, Vienna, Geneva, the Swiss Alps tourist centres, and partially also from Berlin and Munich. Apart from Prague, top gastronomy developed primarily in spa towns (for example, the Radium Palace Hotel in Jáchymov) and mountain tourist centres, the High Tatras included. There were also local centres in Brno, Hradec Králové and other bigger towns.

Interwar efforts to catch up with the rest of the world in the field of *haute cuisine* are nicely illustrated by the publication *Československý kuchařský lexikon* [Czechoslovak Culinary Lexicon] written by Josef Bittermann, former head chef at the Grandhotel Steiner (later Prague Hotel) in Prague's Old Town. It not only brought descriptions of a variety of international gastronomic specialities,

¹⁰ See *Vaří šéfkuchař*. No place [Prague], Československá televize – Sdružení potravinářského obchodu, undated [1964]; *Vaří šéfkuchař*, Vol. 3: 1965–1966. No place [Praha], Potravinářský obchod, undated [1966]; *Vaří šéfkuchař*, Vol. 7. Praha, Merkur 1970; HEJZLAR, M. – KUDLÁČEK, J. (eds.): *Vaří šéfkuchař*. Praha, Merkur 1970.

¹¹ See the reviews in this journal: SZOBI, Pavel: O ne/cestování za socialismu [About (Not) Travelling under Socialism]. In: *Soudobé dějiny*, Vol. 27, No. 3–4 (2020), pp. 716–721.

but also Bitterman's own creations, often named after famous figures of Czech (and occasionally Slovak) public life.¹² We can thus find in his book, for example, an Antonín Švehla cake or a Tomáš Baťa egg. Mostly, however, these were only minor variations on the classic Escoffier-style, with no major contribution to the overall gastronomic spectrum. Josef Bittermann was also active in the period under study (see below) and his culinary lexicon was republished in 1967.¹³

A decisive blow to the efforts to bring top Czech gastronomy to the level of the developed European centres came with the Second World War, when even the most renowned chefs had to focus on how to maintain gastronomic standards when the supply of many staples was severely limited. Understandably, this became even more complicated when the efforts to have enough to eat prevailed over the desire for refined culinary finesse. According to the majority of contemporary commentators, of all the areas of *haute cuisine* only fish cuisine flourished in the country during the occupation, thanks to the fairly abundant supplies of sea fish from Germany, as well as a rich offering of freshwater species from local sources. The brief period between 1945 and 1948 could not provide any major boost, due to the continuing problems with food supplies, which did not ease in comparison with the war period. Moreover, at that time the space for *haute cuisine* in Czechoslovakia had narrowed considerably due to social changes. Refined gourmandizing was seen as inappropriate for the newly changed times, outdated and contrary to the basic ideas of popular democracy, which were to become the basic ideology of the newly built state. There was also a lack of clientele from the ranks of foreign tourists, who in no way could be replaced by the American and Soviet officers staying at the top hotels.¹⁴

¹² BITTERMANN, Josef: *Československý kuchařský lexikon*. Praha, Rudolf Fiala 1933.

¹³ IDEM: *Kuchařský lexikon* [Culinary lexicon]. Praha, Vydavatelství obchodu 1967.

¹⁴ An interesting description of the notions of what the care for foreign tourists should look like in the leading establishments of the period is given by František Dašek in his book entitled *Pohostinství* [Catering Industry] (Praha, Vydavatelské a tiskařské družstvo 1949). The author describes, among other things, specific characteristics of guests of different nationalities, while at the same time completely ignoring Germans as potential clients. Yet, in 1944, the author republished for the third time a book entitled *Německy s hostem: Česko-německé rozmluvy s hostem v živnosti hostinské s výslovností a slovníkem jídel a nápojů* [In German with a Guest: Czech-German Conversations with a Guest in the Catering Industry, with a Dictionary, Including Pronunciations, of the Names of Meals and Beverages] (Brno, F. Dašek 1944).

The Alcron Hotel in the Whirl of the Times

In the 1930s as well as in the tense period just after the end of the Second World War, the Alcron Hotel in Prague, owned by Alois Krofta, was in a special position. This hotel, probably the most modern and luxurious of the period,¹⁵ accommodated, for example, the Soviet military delegation in 1935 and the infamous Lord Runciman mission in the summer of 1938. During the war, mainly prominent Nazi guests lodged here, but at the same time the hotel hairdressing salon served as a distribution point for the resistance magazine *V boj* [Into the Fight].¹⁶ In May 1945, the Czechoslovak government stayed at the hotel after arriving from exile and some of its meetings were held there.¹⁷ As early as 11 May, the liberator of Prague, Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev, joined them and a reception in his honour took place at the hotel.¹⁸ However, it is difficult to assess its gastronomic quality as at that very moment the Alcron's chef, later one of the biggest stars of Czech *haute cuisine*, Florián Zimmermann (1901–1959), was on his way back from a German prison. The first legal meeting between the Moscow leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (*Komunistická strana Československa*, KSČ) and its fourth illegal Central Committee was also held in the Alcron.¹⁹ In this respect, the British journalist and *The Times* correspondent in Prague, Ralph Parker made the rather curious statement that “in the first months

¹⁵ However, not everybody considered the Alcron Hotel so enchanting – Jan Masaryk's friend, Marcia Davenport, made some unflattering remarks about the hotel, considering the Esplanade Hotel much better and more prominent (see DAVENPORTOVÁ, Marcia: *Jan Masaryk: Poslední portrét* [Jan Masaryk: The Last Portrait]. Praha, Panorama 1991, p. 36).

¹⁶ See POLAVSKÝ, Arnošt: *V boj*. Třebechovice pod Orebem, Dědounek 1946, pp. 29–30.

¹⁷ On the circumstances of the Alcron Hotel's takeover for the government's needs, which allegedly occurred due to the refusal of some of its members to hold meetings at the “bourgeois seat of the former Czech kings”, see SLANINA, Josef – VALIŠ, Zdeněk: *Generál Karel Kutlvašr* [General Karel Kutlvašr]. Praha, Naše vojsko 1993, pp. 64–65. As early as 9 May 1945, the revolutionary radio called on all the Alcron employees to present themselves at the hotel for an important job (see JEŽEK, Vladimír: *Voláme všechny: Čs. revoluční vysílač na vlně 415,5 metru ve dnech 5.–9. května 1945* [Calling All Czechs: Czechoslovak Revolutionary Broadcasting on the Frequency 415.5 metres on 5–9 May 1945]. Praha, Nakladatelství politické literatury 1966, p. 244).

¹⁸ See AMORT, Čestmír (ed.): *Na pomoc československému lidu: Dokumenty o československo-sovětském přátelství z let 1938–1945* [To the Rescue of the Czechoslovak People: Documents on Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, 1938–1945]. Praha, Nakladatelství ČSAV 1960, p. 452. This refers to a press release on the ceremonial meeting of the Czechoslovak government in the presence of Marshal Konev and on his decision to come to the rescue of insurgent Prague.

¹⁹ See SOUKUP, Jaroslav: *Tři procházky Prahou hrdinskou* [Three Walks Through Heroic Prague]. Praha, Státní nakladatelství politické literatury 1960, p. 125.

after the war, the hall of the Prague Alcron Hotel was a dump where everything that was rotten and doomed in Czechoslovak society, all the people driven either by ambition or fear poured into".²⁰ After 1948, the Alcron maintained its position as a highly privileged hotel and restaurant, but it was also under close surveillance by the secret police.²¹ To start with, the seat of the diplomatic mission of the newly founded German Democratic Republic was based here, and the hotel's hall was also mentioned several times in the trial of the KSČ General Secretary Rudolf Slánský and his alleged collaborators in 1952 – if only because one of the alleged Western spies, British pro-communist Labour deputy Konni Zilliacus, lodged here.²²

It was expected that the Alcron's role would be overtaken to a great extent by the new luxurious Hotel International, built in the style of socialist realism in the Prague neighbourhood of Dejvice in the first half of the 1950s. This also manifested itself in the successive generations of chefs at the turn of the 1950s and the 1960s. However, the interior of the Hotel International with clear elements of this architectural style (contemptuously called *sorela*) and its considerable distance from the centre may have contributed to the fact that the Alcron maintained its special position in the following decades and successfully underwent a transformation process in the 1990s.

²⁰ PARKER, Ralph: *Spiknutí proti míru: Zápisky britského novináře* [Conspiracy Against Peace: Notes of a British Journalist]. Prague, Melantrich 1950, p. 98.

²¹ For State security's interest in the Alcron Hotel and its guests see for example, Josef Frolík's memoirs *Špion vypovídá* [A Spy Testifies] (Praha, Orbis 1990, p. 246). See also BITTMAN, Ladislav: *Špionážní oprátky: Pohledy do zákulisí československé zpravodajské služby* [Espionage Noose: A Look Behind the Scenes of the Czechoslovak Intelligence Services]. Praha, Mladá fronta 1992, p. 33. This data is also confirmed by Daniel Povolný in his study "Operativní technika a StB" [Operative Technology and StB] (in: *Securitas Imperii*, No. 10: *Sborník k problematice vztahů čs. komunistického režimu k „vnitřnímu nepříteli“* [Collective Volume on the Czechoslovak Communist Regime's Approach to the "Internal Enemy"]). Ed. Jan Táborský. Praha, Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování zločinů komunismu 2003, pp. 73–145, here p. 81). For a similar practice in the hotels of the GDR and Bulgaria, see SHKODROVA, A.: *Communist Gourmet*, p. 124.

²² Other alleged spies also operated in the Alcron Hotel, such as the British journalist and writer Alexander Werth and the director of the US Foreign Police Association, Vera Michéles-Dean (see *Proces s vedením protistátního spikleneckého centra v čele s Rudolfem Slánským* [Trial of the Leadership of the Anti-State Conspiracy Centre Headed by Rudolf Slánský]. Praha, Ministerstvo spravedlnosti 1953, pp. 223, 243, 247 and 341). Another hotel for an exclusively international clientele, the Esplanade, is also mentioned in this context.

What Do the People Want?

Despite all the problems of the period, hotel and exclusive restaurant owners²³ could cherish hopes for a positive turn. Prague escaped the war with relatively slight damage, especially when compared to many other European capitals. The city appeared to be a big magnet for tourists, including wealthy overseas visitors. Nevertheless, the impact of the changes that took place after the communist coup of 1948 was devastating and *haute cuisine* was, for a certain period, erased from Czech, or Czechoslovak, culture. To its detriment, it lost virtually all its potential clientele, made up largely of foreigners, almost exclusively from the West, and also a small group of locals from the upper-middle or middle classes. Moreover, unlike *haute couture*, there was no figure among the new Czechoslovak power elite that would back up at least partial continuity. Whereas in the case of high fashion, the wife of President Klement Gottwald, Marta Gottwaldová, apparently played a key role, no evidence has been found that anyone like her promoted the gourmet sector. Beside Marta Gottwaldová, among those who had a weakness for a luxurious lifestyle were Deputy Prime Minister Zdeněk Fierlinger and Minister of Information Václav Kopecký. However, the majority of those who belonged to the centre of power demonstrated quite convincingly through their eating habits their connection to the common people.²⁴ Probably the most explicit example was the Prime Minister and later President of the Republic, Antonín Zápotocký, who created his “worker’s image” with an extraordinary meticulousness also in other spheres. With respect to gastronomy, he was known as a lover of sausages (allegedly, he had them delivered from the famous Prague snack bar Automat Koruna) and brawn. However, during foreign visits or other similar occasions catering was, of course, provided by the above-mentioned “hotels for foreigners”,²⁵

²³ In the interwar period and shortly after the war, just as after 1948, top restaurants usually formed part of luxury hotel establishments (for example, the Alcron, Šroubek Hotels and Grandhotel Steiner). This situation contributed greatly to the dependence of Czech *haute cuisine* on cross-border tourism.

²⁴ It should be noted that both President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and his successor, Edvard Beneš, were known as supporters of a simple diet and opponents of refined feasting. Both emphasized that ever since their childhoods they preferred simple, popular meals. Apparently, this was not only a pose, even though during official events they did follow the requirements of the period for representative catering. (See also, for example, Jaké je Vaše oblíbené jídlo? [What is Your Favourite Meal?] In: *Naše domácnost* [Our Household], Vol. 2, No. 11 (1947), pp. 244–245. The journal was informed about the eating habits of T. G. Masaryk by his daughter Alice Masaryková, while Beneš’s housekeeper, Mrs. Mašková, provided details on the eating habits of the second Czechoslovak president.)

²⁵ For example, the catering services for the presidential receptions during the premiership of Antonín Novotný were provided by the Alcron Hotel (see ČERNÝ, Rudolf (ed.): *Exprezident:*

and under President Gottwald (1948–1953) as well as under his predecessors, confectionery was allegedly provided by the famous Myšák pastry shop in Prague.²⁶

Problems in food supplies set the bar for evaluating the quality of the taste of food by the general public at a very low level, where only the quality and quantity of the ingredients were considered and full use of the available food resources was expected. This is also why, following the suspension of the imports of exotic and luxury ingredients, which were seen as redundant and an inappropriate luxury in the period, simple food preparation was preferred, so that the flavour of the basic ingredient (such as pork), albeit scarce for many people at the time, could be brought out. While a more detailed analysis is still unavailable, based on partial memories it seems that even gala receptions with the presence of prominent Soviet guests represented no significant stimulus for the *haute cuisine* of the period. Even so, if we can speak of any trend at all, it would probably be encouragement of the most conservative tendencies in gastronomy before the First World War, when an emphasis was put on luxury ingredients (in the case of receptions in the 1950s, it was primarily caviar and champagne).

Yet, this is not to say that no attempts were made to win over the members of the new elite from among the top manual workers – the so-called “shock-workers” – as potential clients of high-end restaurants. Giving the meals listed on the menus Czech names helped in this endeavour. The meals named after famous figures (even if in some cases they were already half-forgotten) were also to receive new names, prepared by linguists to capture their basic gastronomic characteristics as precisely as possible.²⁷ Thanks to this, even people inexperienced in gastronomy were expected to feel confident when studying the menu. Another aim was to strip the more expensive restaurants of their bourgeois touch. Therefore, *Tournedos à la Rossini* became sirloin with goose liver and Chicken

Vzpomínky Antonína Novotného [Ex-president: Antonín Novotný's Memoirs], Vol. 2. Říčany, Orego 1998, p. 129).

²⁶ František Myšák jr. (1907–1992) worked in the establishment, which had previously been located in his property, until the late 1950s (he was briefly imprisoned in a forced labour camp), after which he also worked in the nearby Tatran Hotel (formerly the Juliš hotel) as a confectioner. In 1958, his products made from marzipan (baskets with mushrooms) were allegedly on display at the Expo 58 in Brussels and in 1971 he obtained a golden medal for his marzipan products (fruits and vegetables) at the traditional culinary exhibition in Torquay, England. (See: *Tři zlaté našim kuchařům* [Three Golden Medals for Our Chefs]. In: *Lidová demokracie* (30 April 1971), p. 4; PÍŠOVÁ, Martina: *Co všechno zažil Myšák?* [What Did Myšák Go Through?]. In: *Jídlo a radost* [online], 19 September 2017. [Accessed 2021-09-14.] Available from: <https://www.jidloaradost.ambi.cz/clanky/co-vsechno-zazil-mysak/>; KOVAŘÍKOVÁ, Blanka: *Sladký život u Myšáka* [Sweet Life at Myšák's]. In: *Večerník Praha* (6 March 1998), p. 21.)

²⁷ This measure was also meant to remove various “chefs' secrets” etc., which was perceived as a certain form of consumer protection.

Marengo became chicken braised in tomatoes. Even the established names of foreign specialities were replaced – Irish stew was now referred to as mutton braised with vegetables, *Minestra* soup as beef soup with cabbage and rice. Instead of *soufflé*, one could find mild puffy cake on the menu; *sauce tartare* was called tartar sauce (*tatarská omáčka*), *pommes frites* were replaced with fried potatoes, and *ham and eggs* with baked ham with eggs (*pečená šunka s vejci*).²⁸ Not even bouillon stood the test of time – even though the commission in charge, which included experts from the Institute for the Czech Language, considered it comprehensible, given its French spelling, it was decided to replace it with beef stock. This was opposed by the editors of the linguistics journal *Naše řeč* [Our Language], who recommended the Czech spelling of the word, indicating, among other things, that the term “bulyon” existed in Russian.²⁹ At the centre of the changes was the requirement for comprehensibility, which interestingly enough corresponded with the situation in art where comprehensibility for the “common man” was also a key issue.³⁰

However, such mostly cosmetic changes could naturally not lead to any major changes. What mattered was whether clients who were potentially interested in *haute cuisine* could be found, be it by reviving tourism from Western countries or by cultivating at least part of the new elite. But both these solutions required some time, during which *haute cuisine* in Czechoslovakia hovered in a vacuum. Many restaurants went into rapid decline, due to the loss of motivation as well as due to the growing isolation from contemporary gastronomic trends. The situation was at its worst in restaurants where continuity was broken because of massive personnel changes. Moreover, many restaurants, mainly those connected to hotels, were removed from the sphere of the catering industry, which resulted in a rapid and sharp decline of their quality. Some of them were traditional restaurants formerly famous for their cuisine. This was manifested in the most radical way in the west Bohemian spa towns. For example, in 1953 only one hotel (Otava) came under the Main Administration of Hotels and Restaurants of the

²⁸ *Národní archiv* [National Archives], Prague (hereafter NA), fond [collection] (hereafter f.) Ministerstvo vnitřního obchodu, neuspořádáno, kolegium ministra 1952 [Ministry of Internal Trade, unorganized, Collegium of the Minister 1952].

²⁹ See SOCHOR, Karel: Úprava jídelních lístků a kuchařské názvosloví [Modification of Menus and Culinary Terminology]. In: *Naše řeč*, Vol. 36, No. 7–8 (1953), pp. 247–251; IDEM: Nové názvy pokrmů na našich jídelních lístcích [New Names of Dishes on Our Menus]. In: *Literární noviny*, Vol. 1, No. 46–47 (1952), p. 12; IDEM: V novém roce nové názvy na jídelních lístcích [New Names on the Menus in the New Year]. In: *Výživa lidu*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1953), pp. 5–7.

³⁰ See BARTLOVÁ, Milena: *Dějiny českých dějin umění 1945–1969* [History of Czech Art History 1945–1969]. Praha, Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová 2020, p. 276. This was also similar for other forms of art.

Ministry of Internal Trade in Karlovy Vary. Other hotels, including the Pupp Hotel (renamed Grandhotel Moscow), were turned into holiday facilities, mainly for the workers in the armed and security forces.³¹ The catering industry also faced restrictions in recruiting new apprentices as preference was given to other sectors, mainly industry and mining. The average age of the employees was increasing and mainly lower-end restaurants had to comply with a high number of untrained employees. Similarly to health care and the retail trade, the catering industry employed more women, which also had its positive aspects. Women often brought not only a sense of diligence and workmanship into Czechoslovak *haute cuisine*, but also an emphasis on aesthetic qualities.

Things Start to Change

In 1953 the situation started to change for the better, following the shift in the political landscape after the death of Joseph Stalin (and Klement Gottwald). What I see as key here is a greater concern for the living standards of the population, even though at first the focus was on improvements on a broader scale, that is, in the case of gastronomy mainly in pubs and railway station restaurants. However, subsequently this trend also resulted in a more favourable approach to luxury establishments. This was also later supported by Khrushchev's consumer policy and related efforts to use gastronomy as one of the fields for "peaceful competition" between the power blocs, as well as a diplomatic instrument in general.

As early as 1953, the Ministry of Internal Trade sought to restore a number of catering establishments to their original purpose. These included the hotel at the Konopiště Chateau (at that time the Central Workers' School of the Ministry of

³¹ NA, f. Ministerstvo vnitřního obchodu, neuspořádáno, kolegium ministra 1953 [Ministry of Internal Trade, unorganized, Collegium of the Minister 1953], Návrh na rozšíření počtu pohostinských podniků v Praze, ve velkých městech a ve výletních místech [Proposal to increase number of catering establishments in Prague, in large cities and touristic places]. This proposal was based on the document "List of the most important facilities of the national catering establishments, which had been assigned other than their original purposes after 1945", which included more than 200 establishments. Only 26 of them were proposed to be returned under the Ministry of Internal Trade. (See *Slovenský národný archív* [Slovak National Archives], Bratislava (hereafter SNA), f. Povereníctvo obchodu, Kolégium povereníka obchodu 1952–60, Kolégium ministra vnútorného obchodu 1953–60 [Ministry of Trade, Collegium of the Minister of Trade 1952–60, Collegium of the Minister of Internal Trade 1953–60], kartón [box] (hereafter k.) 102, Zpráva o plnění vládních usnesení z 19. 10. 1954 a 12. 1. 1955 o navrácení stravovacích a ubytovacích zařízení původním účelům (1956) [Report on the fulfilment of the government resolutions of 19 October 1954 and 12 January 1955, on returning the catering and accommodation establishments to their original purposes].

Forestry and Timber Industry), the Central and Moscow (originally Pupp) Hotels in Karlovy Vary, the Tlapák and Luxor Hotels in Poděbrady, the Central Hotel at Lake Mácha in Doksy (the seat of the Regional National Committee was located there) and the Fénix and Adria cafés in Prague. These efforts were not very successful at first due to the great influence of the then owners of these buildings, but gradually at least some of them were acquired.

Another important factor was the end of rationing, even though the situation in food supplies remained rather strained and only improved in the mid-1950s. Consequently, the end of the decade saw an expansion of the range of products offered, although the standard was still far behind that in the developed Western states. Gradually the strict international isolation of Czechoslovakia began to decline. But it was only toward the end of the 1950s and mainly in the first half of the 1960s that a major breakthrough came in this field, related to the rebuilding of existing infrastructure and even new constructions.

Even though it could seem at first sight that a major change in relation to luxury food and refined gastronomy came about only at the end of the 1950s, detailed research based on available archive sources clearly shows that the turning point had already been reached in the first half of this decade. It was in this period that decisions were made on measures which had an impact some years later. For example, as early as 1954, it was decided to build *Dům potravin* [House of Food] in Prague, which not only sold local novelty food items and a number of imported goods, but also where a high-quality restaurant, led by the renowned chef Jiří Hlávka, was located. Its cold cuisine section was managed by Helena Kramperová, who, among other achievements, represented Czechoslovakia at the world fairs of Expo 58 in Brussels and Expo 67 in Montreal, as well as in a famous culinary contest in Torquay in England.³² A year later, the final decision was made on Czechoslovakia's participation in Expo Brussels, and in the following year the media reported that some restaurants, wine bars and cafés in Prague would specialize in foreign cuisine. Not all the projects were implemented, but those which were included the Chinese restaurant on Vodičkova Street in Prague, which will be discussed later. It should also be mentioned that the Olympia-Grill bar was to offer classic French cuisine and that the Automat Lucerna snack bar was to be converted into "a Parisian-style canteen".³³ In the context of Czechoslovak

³² See also VALEŠ, Arnošt: Vzpomínka: Dům potravin [Recollections: The House of Food]. In: *Neviditelný pes* [online], 6 April 2009. [Accessed 2021-07-09.] Available from: [³³ Praha na úroveň světových metropolí \[Bringing Prague to the Level of World Cities\]. In: *Lidová demokracie* \(8 August 1956\), p. 1. The article was based on the material entitled](https://neviditelnypes.lidovky.cz/spolecnost/vzpominka-dum-potravin.A090405_221212_p_spolecnost_wag; STROUHAL, Josef – SÝKORA, Borek: O své lásce vypráví Helena Kramperová [Helena Kramperová About Her Love]. In: <i>Rudé právo</i> (13 May 1972), p. 13.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

haute cuisine, we should not forget Prague's Hotel International, where one of its most prominent representatives of the 1960s, Ladislav Koreček, later worked as a head chef. In around 1955, a final decision was made that this hotel would become the most important centre for lodging foreign tourists in the metropolis, under the aegis of the state travel agency Čedok. After its opening in 1957, the hotel's restaurant with café and bar became the very first establishment included in a newly created exclusive price category, under which the dishes cost about half as much as those in the then highest, first-price category.³⁴ In 1956, Jiří Hříbek, already mentioned above, became the director of the Alcron Hotel and this clearly indicated that the hotel had reoriented itself in favour of a clientele from Western countries.³⁵

The changing situation is also illustrated in an interesting way by the gastronomy periodical of the time. In 1955, the *Naše jídelny* [Our Canteens] journal was launched and after two years it was renamed *Československé pohostinství* [Czechoslovak Catering Industry]. The term "canteen" began to disappear around 1956, or to be more precise, it started to be used to designate those places offering so-called closed public catering (that is, factory catering or catering offered at holiday resorts etc.) or low-end catering establishments, often with partial self-service. This was certainly influenced by the fact that factory catering had been taken over by the national *Restaurace a jídelny* [Restaurants and Canteens] enterprise in 1956.

The stabilization and improved quality of standard restaurant meals also contributed to the development of *haute cuisine*. To a certain extent, the introduction of technological standards (albeit mostly temporary) and a general pressure on cultivating society, including improved standards in the second- and partially also third-price category restaurants, also played a positive role in this process.

"Elaboration of the tasks arising from the resolution of the Czechoslovak Republic's government of 27 April 1956 on the measures to develop public catering and ensure services and sanitation in the public catering establishments", discussed by the Central National Committee of the Capital City of Prague on 7 August 1956. (*Archiv hlavního města Prahy* [Prague City Archives] (hereinafter *AHMP*), f. Rada Ústředního národního výboru [Council of the Central National Committee], zápis ze zasedání rady ÚNV 7. 8. 1956 [Minutes of the meeting of the Council of the Central National Committee of 7 August 1956].)

³⁴ See KNAPÍK, Jiří – FRANC, Martin et al.: *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967* [A Guide to Cultural Life and Lifestyle in the Czech Lands 1948–1967], Vol. 1: A–O. Praha, Academia 2011, pp. 387–388 (key word "International").

³⁵ In the first half of the 1950s, Hříbek managed *Dům cizinců* [Foreigners' House] of the Škoda Pilsen enterprise. This was one of the few places in Czechoslovakia where visitors from Western countries also lodged in greater numbers. (See MÜCKE, P.: *Šťastnou cestu...?*, p. 211.)

Towards the Brussels Triumph

After the relative successes of the first attempts to present Czech national cuisine at an international level, albeit for the time being in the considerably less competitive environment of the Soviet Union³⁶ and the German Democratic Republic (in Leipzig at the traditional trade fair),³⁷ a delegation of leading figures in the field led by Miroslav Hříbek³⁸ was sent to the West, namely to France, Switzerland and Belgium, in preparation for the presentation of Czech gastronomy at Expo 58 in Brussels.³⁹ During this trip, the Czechoslovak experts learnt about the newest trends in their field and also identified the potential weaknesses of Czechoslovak restaurants at the world exhibition, and hence also of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* of the period.⁴⁰ These weakness included an insufficiently varied beverage menu and the low quality of some food items (such as cheese) in the Czechoslovak retail network.⁴¹ Czechoslovak restaurants, however, used the highest-quality products, destined for export and not for local consumers.⁴²

³⁶ See GOLDSCHIEDER, František: Co předcházelo dopisu [What Came Before the Letter]. In: *Květy*, Vol. 5, No. 48 (1955), p. 2. This involved a several-month sojourn in the Soviet Union by the head chef of the Belvedere Hotel in Prague, Alois Vršťala, and the pastry chef of the Palace Hotel, another luxury hotel in Prague, Oldřich Zeman, who trained local staff at the newly opened Prague Restaurant in Moscow.

³⁷ See KOUŘIL, František: Na 48 hodin v Lipsku [For 48 Hours in Leipzig]. In: *Rudé právo* (14 September 1955), p. 1. A temporary Czech restaurant was set up in Paulaner Gaststätte, in the vicinity of the trade fair buildings during the autumn trade fair. Its main attractions included, apart from Pilsen beer, smoked meat, roast pork with sauerkraut and dumplings, and especially sirloin in cream sauce.

³⁸ Originally, it was Hříbek's deputy, Jan Růžička, who was appointed as the main manager of the Czechoslovak restaurant in Brussels, but he was quickly replaced by his superior.

³⁹ For the Czechoslovak restaurant at the World Fair in Brussels see FRANC, Martin: We're Good Enough to Host the World! Czech and Slovak Cuisine at World Fairs in 1958, 1967 and 1970. In: TEUGHEL, Nelleke – SCHOLLIERS, Pieter (eds.): *A Taste of Progress: Food at International and World Exhibitions in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Farnham (MA), Ashgate 2015, pp. 133–146.

⁴⁰ In his memoirs, Miroslav Hříbek acknowledges both the decline of *haute cuisine* in the early 1950s and the huge gap between the standard of haute cuisine in Czechoslovakia and in other important tourist destinations in Western Europe. (HŘÍBEK, M.: *Hostili jsme svět*, p. 26).

⁴¹ See BENEŠOVÁ, Emilie – ŠIMŮNKOVÁ, Karolina: *Expo '58: Příběh československé účasti na Světové výstavě v Bruselu* [Expo 58: The Story of Czechoslovak Participation at the World Fair in Brussels]. Praha, Národní archiv 2008, p. 122.

⁴² See KNAPÍK, J. – FRANC, M. et al.: *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem*, Vol. 1, p. 307 (keyword "Exportní zboží" [Export Goods]).

The Expo menu was prepared very thoroughly based on experiences from abroad. The original version of the menu was strongly influenced by the traditions of French *haute cuisine* from the interwar period, which was to satisfy the mostly Belgian visitors to the Expo.⁴³ This was partly due to the fact that Florián Zimmermann, who had mainly built on his experiences in top French restaurants, had been appointed the Expo 58 restaurant's chef. However, it was clear that with this menu the Czechoslovak restaurant would lack the originality and distinctiveness necessary for national representation at the world forum. This is partly why the menu was radically revised and much more room was given to dishes representing traditional Czech cuisine from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, most of these dishes paired well with Pilsen beer, which, given Belgian customs,⁴⁴ was to be one of the main attractions of Czech gastronomy at the fair. The change in the menu, even though it may have looked like a step back in the efforts to present Czechoslovakia as a progressively developing modern country, proved extremely successful.⁴⁵ Its logic to the overall approach of the exhibition was to attract people by successfully combining historical traditions with a moderate humanistic modernism. In the field of gastronomy, there was obviously a strong continuity with interwar *haute cuisine*, embodied by Zimmermann. On the other hand, openness to new international trends was linked mainly to the head chef of the restaurant de Luxe and later Zimmermann's successor, Ladislav Koreček. The enormous success was based on the variation of so-called fusion cuisine, that is, a combination of top international gastronomy and Czech bourgeois cuisine of the nineteenth century, as it had been prepared for years in the Alcron by Zimmermann. Despite all the

⁴³ NA, f. Československá obchodní komora, Praha – Kancelář generálního komisaře pro světovou výstavu, nezpracováno [Czechoslovak Chamber of Commerce, Prague – Office of the General Commissioner for the World Fair, unorganized]. Revealing in this respect is the annotated proposal for the menu, a photograph of which can be seen in Emilie Benešová and Karolina Šimůnková's book *Expo '58* (p. 125).

⁴⁴ One of the factors that contributed to the great success of the Czechoslovak exposition was that it took into account not only Walloons, but also the often overlooked Flemish, including records and menus in Flemish. Even though beer is popular with both nationalities, the Flemish are more fond of it.

⁴⁵ According to the former staff of the Czechoslovak restaurant in Brussels, foreigners initially turned up their nose at tripe soup. But in the end, the Czechoslovak specialties, such as tripe soup, became the biggest hits, while the stock of caviar was consumed by the staff of the restaurant (see WANATOWICZOVÁ, Krystyna: Expo 58: Když nám tleskal celý svět [When the Whole World Applauded Us]. In: *Idnes* [online], 18 June 2008. [Accessed 2021-07-10.] Available from: http://zpravy.idnes.cz/expo-58-kdyz-nam-patril-svet-dd7-/kavarna.aspx?c=A080613_190409_kavarna_bos).

later experiments, it remained an important component of the overall concept of Czech *haute cuisine* in the next decades.

Careful selection of the staff for the cold cuisine section also proved a wise decision.⁴⁶ Although led by a man, Jiří Bohata, its staff was exclusively female and included two of the most important representatives of this cuisine in the 1950s and 1960s – Božena Bedrníčková from the Alcron and Helena Kramperová from *Dům potraavin*.⁴⁷ Interestingly, in the 1960s these two women became members of the Czechoslovak culinary teams at different international events, where Czechoslovakia, with its mixed gender teams, was a great exception, since *haute cuisine* remained a primarily male domain in the 1960s.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, only men appeared in the Czechoslovak culinary teams in the following decades.

However, the fact cannot be overlooked that the success of the Czechoslovak restaurant at the world exhibition was greatly facilitated by the specific conditions in gastronomy – it was no problem to hire the elites of local *haute cuisine* to work at the exhibition for several months and create exceptional conditions for them. On the other hand, in Western countries it was unthinkable that private owners of restaurants would release their biggest culinary “aces” to cook at the national expositions of the Brussels and the Montreal World’s Fairs. The influence of this factor is also illustrated by the success of the national restaurant of another state in the Soviet bloc – the Hungarian People’s Republic. If the Czechoslovak restaurant ended in the first place in an unofficial evaluation at the Brussels World Fair, the Hungarian restaurant won an imaginary bronze medal. Subsequently, Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* sought to participate in prestigious international events, notching up numerous successes mainly in the 1960s, but also in the following decades.

The presentation at the Brussels World Fair, which became a symbol of the revival of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* as well as one of its greatest successes, must of course be understood within the context of the period.⁴⁹ This is characterized

⁴⁶ The report from the trip of the gastronomy experts to Western Europe, which was mentioned previously, pointed to the fact that cold cuisine products, such as *chlebíčky* (garnished bread slices) and *jednohubky* (canapés), were not very widely known in the West and had many opportunities to succeed (see BENEŠOVÁ, E. – ŠIMŮNKOVÁ, K.: *Expo '58*, p. 124).

⁴⁷ Libuše Hölzelová from the Hotel International in Prague is also worth mentioning.

⁴⁸ However, not even the Czechoslovak approach was free from gender bias – women were successful almost exclusively in cold cuisine, which was considered less prestigious, where their aesthetic taste and sense for meticulousness were appreciated.

⁴⁹ For the evaluation of the participation in Brussels by those working in the catering industry, see the relevant articles in the *Československé pohostinství* journal. Their clearly arranged bibliographies are listed in Pavel Mücke’s book *Šťastnou cestu...?!* (p. 212). The articles reflect a considerably greater self-confidence of the experts in gastronomy.

mainly by a major purge which took place in the central bodies of the KSČ, but also in certain other institutions, at the beginning of 1958.⁵⁰ In order to revive Czechoslovak (at that time primarily Czech) *haute cuisine*, the focus of the purge against those who had been members of social elites and entrepreneurs before 1948 was highly sensitive, as it could fundamentally complicate all attempts to maintain continuity with First Republic traditions. While it mostly did not affect chefs, because they were mere employees, albeit well-paid ones, strong pressure to leave was placed on certain former owners of restaurants and other catering establishments who were working in expert positions and whose expert knowledge was essential for the revival of *haute cuisine*. For example, the former owner of the popular Prague wine bar and excellent wine connoisseur Jan Goldhammer (1910–1990), was forced out of his position of wine bar inspector after his wine bar was taken from him. This atmosphere of reevaluating the trend for a continuation with the First Republic traditions, which had only just been embarked upon, meant that a huge question mark also hung over the Czechoslovak participation at the Brussels World Fair. However, what prevailed in the end was the vision of profit as well as of the possible propaganda use of the awards received and the potential great response, which the exposition eventually enjoyed in Western Europe.

In terms of *haute cuisine*, Czechoslovak participation at the Brussels World Fair signified a real turning point. First of all, the composition of the team which represented Czechoslovakia at the international culinary forums changed only slightly during the entire 1960s. The substantial media attention also focused on the chefs and for the first time their names became more widely known. The interest was periodically revived in relation to other events abroad, such as the opening of the Chrystal restaurant in Moscow during a big exhibition of Czech glass in 1959, and the Prague restaurant at the spring fair in Leipzig in 1961, located in the upscale Hotel Astoria, which was designated for Western foreigners. The successes of the Czechoslovak team at the international culinary festival in Torquay in England and the presentation of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* at the Eiffel Tower in 1966 were also widely publicized. The press also reported more on luxury restaurants and their chefs. Still, we can term this branch of *haute cuisine* as “export” – although the chefs worked in restaurants in Czechoslovakia, they focused almost exclusively on a foreign clientele, be they clients on trips abroad

⁵⁰ In some of the establishments, for example in the Pramen-Maso enterprise, the purge took place as early as the second half of 1957 (SNA, f. Povereníctvo obchodu, Kolégium povereníka obchodu 1952–1960, Kolégium ministra vnútorného obchodu 1953–1960 [Ministry of Trade, Collegium of the Minister of Trade 1952–1960, Collegium of the Minister of Internal Trade 1953–1960], k. 119, Zpráva o kádrové situaci ve speciálních podnikách Pramen-Maso [Report on the cadre situation in the Pramen-Maso enterprise]).

or tourists coming to Czechoslovakia mostly from Western countries and staying in the high-end hotels in Prague (or alternatively, in Brno).⁵¹ Of course, this does not mean that Czechoslovak citizens could not taste their creations, but they had to be content with not being those for whom the dishes were primarily intended. This was emphasized even further by the development of this branch of *haute cuisine* in the second half of the 1960s.

On the other hand, the legend of top Czech gastronomy, Vilém Brabec (1901–1983), tried to defend the position of *haute cuisine*, or, in his words “culinary arts”, in socialist society in the introduction to his cookbook by claiming that it led to an improved standard of catering for the broad masses: “All working people have the right not only to satiate their hunger, but also to be served a tasty dish, hygienically prepared from a variety of ingredients, and offered in a large selection. Even the culinary arts must comply with the basic requirements of socialist aims, which is a greater concern for people and the rise in their material and cultural standards.”⁵²

TV Fame of *Haute Cuisine*

The fame earned at the Brussels exhibition certainly contributed to the idea to use chefs, along with actors, for advertising purposes. The most important project of this kind was the aforementioned television series *Vaří šéfkuchař*, broadcast weekly from 1963 as part of the main television news.⁵³ Unlike other culinary shows which appeared on television screens in most of Europe, including, for example, in the German Democratic Republic, the series *Vaří šéfkuchař* had no permanent chef, but featured different chefs from more prominent restaurants. Initially, these were almost exclusively professionals who worked in top establishments in Prague; later the series also featured top chefs from other tourist destinations within Czechoslovakia. In the latter half of the 1960s, the original concept of presenting famous employees of public catering establishments changed considerably when various celebrities (such as the singer Hana Hegerová) and winners of an audience contest for the best recipe prepared dishes in some of the episodes. What was paradoxical about the show was the fact that although

⁵¹ The position of Brno as a place for international tourism was strengthened by the international engineering trade fairs held there since 1959.

⁵² VRABEC, Vilém: *Studená kuchyně*. Praha, Státní zdravotnické nakladatelství 1960, p. 5.

⁵³ For more details on this issue see: FRANC, Martin: Chefs with Tins: The *Vaří šéfkuchař* Show on Czechoslovak Television from 1963–1970. In TOMINC, A. (ed.): *Food and Cooking on Early Television in Europe* (in press).

professional chefs prepared the dishes, the commentary was by a studio voice-over. However, this was apparently done at the request of the chefs who felt uncomfortable with sharing anything other than their work (Ladislav Koreček and Jiří Hlávka were clear exceptions in this respect). Still, it can be said that the *Vaří šéfkuchař* show, which was broadcast until 1970, greatly popularized the top figures of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* of the period. This was greatly helped by the fact that initially every recipe in the accompanying brochure was linked to the name of a particular chef and some of the episodes also served as an advertisement for restaurants where the TV show chefs worked.⁵⁴

On the other hand, in terms of awareness of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine*, the series *Vaří šéfkuchař* was rather misleading. It was primarily an advertising programme that the broadcaster, Czechoslovak Television prepared in cooperation with the general directorate of *Potravinářský obchod* [Food Trade]. Its goal was to advertise those types of food and food products which did not sell sufficiently well. On top of that, the *Vaří šéfkuchař* show went on air in the middle of a severe supply crisis, so it often gave instructions on how to solve the problem of shortages in certain types of food, such as meat stock. While it was also emphasized that the dishes presented were meant for Sunday or festive meals, the presentation of some meals and especially some products of the local food industry by the celebrities of local *haute cuisine* were rather curious – for example, when the famous Ladislav Koreček made pancakes and two kinds of pudding from a sweetened instant mix for the preparation of the *Kalorka* porridge brand, which had been placed on the market by the Kávoviny Pardubice enterprise at the end of the 1950s.⁵⁵ Other masters of cuisine also ostentatiously used various tinned products, which is highly problematic in terms of taste, especially from today's perspective.

As in other spheres of life, it can be also said about gastronomy that in the first half of the 1960s its luxurious variant still seemed to embody, to a great extent, the glitter intended primarily for tourists who would bring in the permanently scarce hard currency. *Haute cuisine*, as a part of consumer society, was a rather false reality in Czechoslovakia.⁵⁶ However, even in this sphere we can see a dynamic development in the latter half of the decade, which was also reflected in the format of the previously mentioned TV series. More room was made

⁵⁴ See footnote 10.

⁵⁵ See *Vaří šéfkuchař* [1964], pp. 10–11.

⁵⁶ *Haute cuisine* in other countries of the Soviet bloc also developed similar characteristics, for example in Bulgaria, Hungary, the GDR and, during a certain period, also in Romania (see for example, SHKODROVA, A.: *Communist Gourmet*, mainly pp. 123–130, which also outlines limits of this approach from the perspective of Western clientele).

for recipes based on famous specialities of international *haute cuisine*, including those prepared with luxury ingredients (for example crab or lobster Newburg – the recipe for this appeared on television in 1967).⁵⁷ The television series also presented recipes for meals intended for the presentation of Czechoslovakia at the biggest international event of the latter half of the 1960s, Expo 67 in Montreal. At the same time, another trend was echoed on the show, which was closely linked to the development of professional gastronomy in Czechoslovakia – a major surge in pseudo-traditional regional dishes.⁵⁸ This trend started with the development of tourism and partially also with some changes in the catering network, where different cooperatives started to be active and tried to attract attention through original and distinctive offers (often, however, these were common dishes only with different names). An example of these new recipes ostensibly based on regional traditions was *Jizerské dráčky*, that is, roast streaky bacon with garlic and paprika.⁵⁹

Peak in Montreal

It was at Expo 67 in Montreal that Czech and Slovak chefs presented their version of *haute cuisine* in its highest form. There was a clear shift from its version in Brussels, which was clearly related to the figure of the main protagonist. The “old school” man, Florián Zimmermann, died relatively young at the age of 58, shortly after the Brussels triumph. He was replaced by Ladislav Koreček (1918–?) of the next generation, who was less linked to the First Republic traditions of the Escoffier style and instead tried to adapt to the contemporary trends of international *haute cuisine*.⁶⁰ On the one hand, he still placed emphasis on the inspiration from traditional Czech (and also Slovak) cuisine of the nineteenth century, prepared, however, with the use of modern technical procedures and considering

⁵⁷ See HEJZLAR, M. – KUDLÁČEK, J. (eds.): *Vaří šéfkuchař*, p. 92. Naturally, the use of tinned crab or lobster was expected.

⁵⁸ For a clear example see HANZLÍČEK, Miroslav: *Jihočeská kuchařka* [South Bohemian Cookbook]. České Budějovice, Krajská pobočka Českého svazu novinářů 1968.

⁵⁹ HEJZLAR, M. – KUDLÁČEK, J. (eds.): *Vaří šéfkuchař*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ However, it should be noted that in the early 1950s Koreček worked with Zimmermann in the Alcron Hotel. Previously, he was at the luxurious Hotel Alexandria and shortly after the war, he worked as head chef in the Esplanade Hotel. He also worked in the popular snack bar U Rozvařilů in Prague and this experience was very positively valued in his “cadre report”. After the mid-1950s, he worked as head chef in the Hotel International in Prague, and seasonally also in the Grandhotel Moscow-Pupp in Karlovy Vary. He was awarded *Řád práce* (the Order of Work) in 1978. (See HŘÍBEK, M.: *Hostili jsme svět*, p. 127.)

the principles of a healthy diet. On the other hand, he, as well other chefs of his circle, such as Antonín Nestával and Antonín Skála, but also Božena Bedrničková, increasingly began to use more ingredients not typical of Czechoslovak cuisine, such as condiments (for example, tomato ketchup and curry powder) or exotic, usually tinned fruit (for example, bananas, pineapple). There was also an increased use of chicken, which was booming in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in the 1960s, thanks to the introduction of intensive poultry farms as well as because it was considered to be an extremely healthy food.⁶¹ In the context of the above changes, we should mention, for example, a recipe for Chicken Pavilion Czechoslovakia, which was on the menu of the Old-Prague Restaurant (!) at the Montreal World Fair and later also appeared in a kind of “bible” of this branch of Czechoslovak haute cuisine, the book *Československá kuchyně* [Czechoslovak Cuisine] published in 1968,⁶² as well as in the publication by Ladislav Koreček, Antonín Nestával and Antonín Srkal entitled *Od Montrealu k Osace* [From Montreal to Osaka].⁶³ According to this recipe, the chicken was served with bananas, slices of tinned pineapple, almonds, raisins, butter and cognac. Nevertheless, it was game (especially the traditionally famous Czech pheasants), which only rarely appeared on the plates of middle-class Canadians, that became a big attraction in Montreal.⁶⁴ Other dishes related to the Montreal exhibition can also be mentioned in this context, such as veal fillet Loreta (with bananas, almonds, whipped cream and cognac), *tournedos* Hradčany (with stuffed olives, truffles, generously topped with tomato ketchup and flambéed with vodka),⁶⁵ veal steak Grandhotel Brno (with bananas, almonds and cognac), Spišská Nová Ves steak (with shrimps, tomato ketchup, parmesan cheese and flambéed with gin) and veal escalopes Grandhotel Pupp (with pineapple, almonds, raisins, curry and flambéed with cognac). What was also typical for the names of these meals is that they referred to Czech (or Slovak) localities, historic sites and the like, but also more often to

⁶¹ Nearly all developmental shifts in the field of *haute cuisine* were justified by a respect for the results of scientific research into nutrition.

⁶² KOREČEK, Ladislav – NESTÁVAL, Antonín – SYROVÝ, František: *Československá kuchyně*. Praha, Merkur 1968, p. 174.

⁶³ KOREČEK, Ladislav – NESTÁVAL, Antonín – SRKALA, Antonín: *Od Montrealu k Osace: Československá kuchyně na světové výstavě* [From Montreal to Osaka: Czechoslovak Cuisine at the World Fair]. Praha, Státní zdravotnické nakladatelství 1969.

⁶⁴ HRÍBEK, M.: *Hostili jsme svět*, p. 126.

⁶⁵ In this version of *haute cuisine*, flambéing was also used very often, mainly in the most luxurious food preparations. But it was used even for dishes such as Wallachian rib-eye steak (flambéed in gin) and Moravian-Slovakian pork steak (flambéed with vodka). (See SRKALA, Antonín: *Flambování a dochucování jídel* [The Flambéing and Seasoning of Food]. Praha, Merkur 1969.)

specific establishments, in particular those whose chefs had been present at the Montreal World Fair.

Exotic ingredients, which were often hard to find for the common people in Czechoslovakia, as well as the frequently used flambéing technique, clearly indicated that Western visitors in privileged hotel restaurants remained the main potential consumers.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the mass presentation of the recipes to the Czech audience – be it on the *Vaří šéfkuchař* show, or through the above mentioned cookbooks, printed in large quantities, numerous contributions and recipes published in the daily press and magazines, or at major gastronomic fairs of the period in Czechoslovakia, like Ex Pilsen⁶⁷ – illustrated that the representatives of *haute cuisine* tried to reach and inspire local audiences quite intensively in the latter half of the 1960s.⁶⁸ After all, Heinz tomato ketchup, curry powder and tinned pineapple could also be bought, though admittedly with some difficulty, through the common retail network. Inspirations from *haute cuisine* also spread thanks to the fashion of the period of hobby chefs – men for whom flambéing was a challenge.⁶⁹ However, due to traditional eating habits, some of the basic principles of the new style, mainly the combination of meat and fruit as well as the high proportion of chicken, did not become widely popular. Wider use of veal and game was hindered by their limited availability on the market.⁷⁰

The Innovative Traditions of the First Republic

Even though the version of *haute cuisine* that related to the culinary representation in Montreal and at other gastronomic events was the most important trend, other branches of the top culinary arts, which also proved at least partially successful in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, cannot be omitted. One branch continued

⁶⁶ We should bear in mind that in Czechoslovakia, unlike, for example in the GDR, all restaurants were in principle accessible to local clients paying only in Czechoslovak crowns.

⁶⁷ The first year of Ex Pilsen took place in 1966. Exhibitors included, apart from local producers and other institutions active in gastronomy, big producers from abroad, including important Western companies.

⁶⁸ The clash of the worlds of *haute cuisine* and common manual workers in Czechoslovakia in the late 1960s is shown with humorous exaggeration in the comedy film *Světáci* [Men About Town] (directed by Zdeněk Podskalský Sr., 1969).

⁶⁹ Homemade mixed drinks became another similar fashion. The book of recipes for mixed drinks by Ivan Crha, entitled *Dědeček na scestí a 300 dalších míchaných nápojů* [Grandpa Gone Rogue and 300 Mixed Drinks More] (Praha, Merkur 1968), which became a huge best-seller, played an important role. Its reissue appeared on the shelves again as early as in 1971.

⁷⁰ Game, however, became an extremely advantageous export article for Czechoslovakia.

to build on the legacy of the First Republic traditions of haute cuisine. This was personified by the previously mentioned, very successful author of cookbooks and master mainly of cold cuisine, Vilém Vrabec, whose *Velká kuchařka* [The Big Cookbook], first published in 1968, became a huge bestseller.⁷¹ Vrabec's name also often appeared in the daily press, where he published numerous recipes, which were often part of an advertisement for the major retail food distributor *Pramen*. As early as 1929, Vrabec founded a very successful culinary arts school in Prague. This was, however, nationalized in 1948 and after that he could only work there as an ordinary employee. At the end of the 1940s, he reportedly also experienced problems for trying to distribute his cookbooks privately. However, his cookbook *Teplá kuchyně* [Hot Meals] was republished in 1950 and *Studená kuchyně* [Cold Cuisine] was republished in 1956 (by the *Práce* publishing house), in 1957 (by the State Medical Publishing House) and again in a modified edition in 1960 (again by the State Medical Publishing House). Vrabec also published – both in the interwar period and after the late 1950s – publications with recipes for mixed drinks. Both in the interwar period and under socialism, Vilém Vrabec was not, however, a gastronomic conservative; on the contrary he had an openness to new trends. As he stated in the introduction to his 1950 edition of *Studená kuchyně*, it had been written “to include all the scientific knowledge about diet as well as the latest trends in cooking”.⁷²

Apart from Vilém Vrabec, mention should also be made of another veteran of First Republic *haute cuisine*, Josef Bittermann, who was mentioned at the beginning of this study and who managed to have his major work republished (although in a considerably modified form) under the title *Kuchařský lexikon* by the Trade Publishing House in 1967. The changes concerned mainly the terminology relating to meals – not only did the meals receive Czech names, but also all the references to ideologically undesirable or half-forgotten figures disappeared. However, Bittermann was not nearly as influential a figure as Vrabec, and his key opus was rediscovered only recently. Moreover, unlike Vrabec, there is little relevant information about Bittermann. According to a few scattered references in the daily press and sports publications, it seems that after 1948 he worked primarily as the chef of the Czechoslovak national sports teams – for example, in 1953 he formed part of the sports delegation to the 4th World Festival of Youth and Students in Bucharest.⁷³ Three years later, he worked as the chef of the Czechoslovak delegation to the Summer Olympics in Melbourne (allegedly,

⁷¹ VRABEC, Vilém: *Velká kuchařka*. Praha, Státní zdravotnické nakladatelství 1968.

⁷² IDEM: *Studená kuchyně*, p. 5.

⁷³ Naši sportovci na festival v Bukurešti [Our sportsmen head for the festival in Bucharest]. In: *Rudé právo* (24 July 1953), p. 4.

he was bullied there by anti-communist chefs from other countries and by a certain Czech émigré),⁷⁴ and at the Winter Olympics in Grenoble, in 1968 he was head of Central European cuisine for downhill skiers in Chamrousse.⁷⁵ He also worked as the head chef at the National House restaurant in the neighbourhood of Vinohrady in Prague.⁷⁶

Chinese-Style Celebrities

Finally, there was what we can consider the third variant of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine*: fine dining restaurants offering dishes of foreign cuisine, which ironically had the biggest impact on the broad masses of the population. A network of representative establishments with relatively extensive privileges with regard to imports of gastronomic specialities started to emerge in Prague in the latter half of the 1950s. Among the most popular restaurants were the Moscow restaurant (established in 1960), the Sofia restaurant (1960) and, especially, the Chinese restaurant (1958). Even though similar restaurants with a focus on the gastronomy of Western countries were also planned as early as the latter half of the 1950s, they did not become a reality until the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁷⁷ Chefs from

⁷⁴ See NOVOTNÝ, Jan – ŽURMAN, Oldřich: *Dopisy z Melbourne* [Letters from Melbourne]. Praha, Sportovní a turistické nakladatelství 1957, pp. 82–83; see also URBAN, Ivo: *Moji slavní spoluhráči: Jiří Skobla, Josef Masopust, Václav Kozák, Jiří Vícha* [My Famous Team-Mates: Jiří Skobla, Josef Masopust, Václav Kozák, Jiří Vícha]. Praha, Naše vojsko 1974, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Ve znamení pěti kruhů [Under the Banner of Five Circles]. In: *Lidová demokracie* (4 February 1968), p. 8. According to this article, Bittermann was a former head chef of the Paris Hotel in Prague, but in fact he worked in the Grandhotel Steiner (later Prague Hotel), only a few steps from the Paris Hotel.

⁷⁶ See *Vaří šéfkuchař*, Vol. 3, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Praha na úrovni světových metropolí; AHMP, f. Rada Ústředního národního výboru [Council of the Central National Committee], zápis ze zasedání rady ÚNV 7. 8. 1956, Rozpracování úkolů vyplývajících z usnesení vlády Republiky československé ze dne 27. dubna 1956 o opatřeních k rozvoji veřejného stravování a zabezpečení služeb a hygieny v závedech veřejného stravování [Minutes of the meeting of the Council of the Central National Committee on 7 August 1956, Elaboration of tasks arising from the resolution of the Czechoslovak Republic's government of 27 April 1956 on the measures to develop public catering and ensure services and sanitation in public catering establishments]. The Italian ambassador discussed “the opening of a restaurant, canteen and wine bar in the house of Italian culture” in April 1964. (See *Archiv bezpečnostních složek* [Security Services Archive], Praha, f. II. správa Ministerstva vnitra (A 34) [Directorate II. of the Ministry of the Interior (A 34)], k. 489, týdenní svodka č. 14, 11. 4. 1964 [weekly report No. 14, 11 April 1964].) See also IMRICH, M.: Ulice pro ženy a další modernizace v centru Prahy [Streets for Women and Other Modernizations in the Centre of Prague]. In: *Lidová demokracie* (17 August 1966), p. 1., which mentions the planned Italian restaurant

the relevant countries usually worked in these representative restaurants in the first few months or years after the opening, during which time they trained their Czechoslovak colleagues.

By far the most popular was the Chinese restaurant, which was reportedly established on the initiative of the artist, writer, diplomat and joint author of the concept of the Czechoslovak pavilion at Expo 58 in Brussels, Adolf Hoffmeister. As was planned from the outset, it was Chinese chefs, masters of their cuisine, who stood behind the stoves in the restaurant. Allegedly, they were even part of the kitchen staff who cooked for the Chinese leader Mao Zedong himself. In any case, they were experts in so-called imperial palace cuisine.⁷⁸ Moreover, generous imports directly from China were expected, including exotic ingredients such as sea cucumbers, swallow's nests and shark fins. The restaurant immediately gained huge popularity, and in the 1960s it was frequented by the main figures of the cream of society, mainly popular artists such as the actor and theatre producer Jan Werich, singers Karel Gott and Waldemar Matuška, actor, lyricist and screenwriter Vladimír Dvořák, and many others. While the Chinese restaurant was also visited by prominent foreign visitors to Prague, largely from the East, such as the Turkish writer and poet Nazim Hikmet, the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa and Indonesia's President Sukarno,⁷⁹ unlike the establishments in which chefs such as Ladislav Koreček worked, emphasis was put on prominent local customers.

In contrast to other establishments offering original foreign gastronomy, at least some of the chefs from China were expected to stay in Czechoslovakia permanently. However, after several years these plans were ruined by the Sino-Soviet (and therefore also Sino-Czechoslovak) split. After the departure of the

on Dlouhá Street. But in fact, Trattoria Viola in Národní Street opened much later, in 1970. The Wine bar Paris-Prague on Jindřišská Street, with an adjacent shop offering French food products, opened two years earlier. Construction of an Indian restaurant, which was planned from the late 1950s, dragged on for years. The first guests could finally visit the Mažur (Peacock) restaurant on Štěpánská Street much later, in 1978. (See ŠUSTA, Jan: *Průvodce pražským pohostinstvím* [A Guide Through Prague Catering Establishments]. Praha, Merkur 1983, pp. 74, 146 and 200–201.)

⁷⁸ See EBR, Vratislav: *Čínská restaurace, aneb, Literární procházka Vodičkovou ulicí v Praze a mimořádné zastavení u domu a v domě č. 19* [The Chinese Restaurant or, a Literary Walk Through Vodičkova Street in Prague, and a Special Stop by House No. 19]. Praha, Epoque 2008, p. 34.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37. The guest book also included signatures of the Austrian three-time Olympic ski champion and actor Toni Sailer, the French actress Jeanne Moreau and the Canadian singer Paul Anka.

Chinese chefs, original recipes were still followed,⁸⁰ but elements of *fusion cuisine* were introduced as a concession to the tastes of local consumers.⁸¹ What was particularly obvious was a higher proportion of meat in the meals than what would correspond to Chinese customs. Interestingly, this was commented upon by the head chef of the Chinese restaurant, Miroslav Tomaník, in an interview in 1979, in which he argued that the European concept of Chinese cuisine was simply better for Europeans. Yet, he also emphasized that he himself cooked as he had learnt from the Chinese chefs (he was originally a chef on a transatlantic ship).⁸² As early as the late 1960s, pseudo-Chinese cuisine as a vulgarization of haute cuisine became highly fashionable in Czechoslovakia, encouraged by the above-mentioned lovers of Chinese cuisine (naturally the finest cuisine, although it was in decline) among popular cultural celebrities. Nevertheless, this did not encourage creative cooking, but rather a unified pretence of originality with the help of different substitutes.⁸³

From a Brief Fame to a New Decline

Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* suffered the sharpest decline in its history in the first years after February 1948, chiefly due to the lack of clientele when, after the Communist coup, tourism practically stopped and the new social elites lacked sufficient cultural capital. The beginning of a turn for the better came shortly after Stalin's death in 1953, when the emphasis on raising the living standards of the population also brought with it the rehabilitation of luxury in dining. Gradually, the influx of foreign tourists, who formed a considerable part of the clientele, started to be re-established. However, the symbolic turning point came with the participation of Czechoslovak gastronomy in Expo 58 in Brussels, where *fusion*

⁸⁰ In 1967, the head of the Chinese restaurant, Michael Dobromil Klíma, published a highly knowledgeable Chinese cookbook (see KLÍMA, Dobromil: *Čínská kuchyně* [Chinese Cuisine]. Praha, Merkur 1967). The book became extremely popular, but its reissue was blocked by the author's emigration a year later. The recipes from the cookbook were, however, reproduced by other authors.

⁸¹ This process was critically viewed, for example, by the renowned caricaturist, Jiří Winter-Neprakta (see MÜLLER, Jiří – VALENTOVÁ, Helen: *Hovory s Nepraktou* [Conversations with Neprakta]. Praha, Naše vojsko 2008, p. 71).

⁸² MIKŠOVIC, Alexander: Koncert pro dvě hůlky [Concert for Two Chopsticks]. In: *Lidová demokracie* (19 January 1979), p. 12 – interview with the head chef of the Chinese restaurant in Prague, Miroslav Tomaník.

⁸³ See MERTLÍK, Vladimír: *Život jako menu: Nejlepší kuchařka na světě ze Spáleného mlýna* [Life as a Menu: The Best Cook-book in the World from Spálený mlýn]. Praha, Ikar 2004, p. 46.

cuisine based on the combination of top modern international gastronomy and the traditional bourgeois cuisine of the nineteenth century achieved an enormous success. In the following decade, *haute cuisine* developed in Czechoslovakia as part of a virtual consumer society, stage-managed for foreign tourists. However, at the same time, the top gastronomy protagonists also sought quite intensively to reach their local consumers, for example, through the media, including TV, and gastronomic exhibitions, such as Ex Pilsen. Apart from a conscious following of the First Republic traditions, re-editions of Vilém Vrabec and Josef Bittermann's cookbooks included, there was also clear inspiration from the cuisines of friendly countries. We should mention, for example, the opening of the Chinese restaurant on Vodičkova Street in Prague in 1958, which became hugely popular and as early as the 1960s inspired a wave of pseudo-Chinese cuisine, which continued for the following decades. Another peak of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* came with Expo 67 in Montreal, Canada, under the baton of the leading figure of a new generation of chefs, Ladislav Koreček, who was no longer linked to the Escoffier traditions of *haute cuisine* that dominated the interwar period. He still built on the legacy of the bourgeois cuisine of the nineteenth century, but also accentuated new international trends with an emphasis on a well-balanced diet and creative, sometimes surprising flavour combinations, with the use of some not typical and exotic ingredients in the Czechoslovak environment, such as curry powder, combinations of exotic fruits and meat, etc.

What is typical of the development of *haute cuisine* after 1969 is that it echoed the Czechoslovak participation in Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan. The menu built in many aspects on the concepts tried and tested in Montreal, although traditional regional specialities, which must have seemed quite exotic in faraway Japan, were used to a greater extent again.⁸⁴ However, the local Czechoslovak response, when compared to Brussels and Montreal, was extremely weak, not only due to the geographic distance, but primarily due to political reasons. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the political persecution with the upcoming normalization era affected the main figures of the Czechoslovak *haute cuisine* of the 1960s – on the contrary, Ladislav Koreček, Miroslav Hříbek, Antonín Nestával and many others kept their high positions in the catering industry, with the emigration of Michael Dobromil Klíma being a rather isolated case. This period even saw the establishment of a tradition of an international competition for chefs, confectioners and waiters, Gastroprag, a project from the 1960s (between 1972 and 1990 six seasons

⁸⁴ See Brusel, Montreal, Ósaka: Soubor receptur ze světových výstav [Brussels, Montreal, Osaka: A Collection of Recipes from the World Fairs]. Praha, hotelový úsek Generálního ředitelství Čedok – Reklama Čedok 1987, pp. 63–83.

were held), which provided a space for the representatives of the next generation of chefs, such as Josef Vladař (1945–2007), to display their art.⁸⁵

However, what changed was the target clientele of Czechoslovak *haute cuisine*. The efforts to bring it closer to most modern gastronomic trends in Western Europe weakened considerably. It slid instead into a comfortable conservatism, suiting the new (or old-new) local power elites and attuning itself to the atmosphere of the Brezhnev era with its return to luxury in the tradition of the nineteenth century. It is no exaggeration to say that creative and well-off people, mostly intellectuals, who had been eager for new consumer experiences from the West and were the driving force behind the gastronomic innovations had now either emigrated or lost their previous status in society. Consequently, Czechoslovakia missed the wave of changes in top gastronomy in the 1970s and 1980s. To a visitor from the West in the normalization period, top Czech restaurants often resembled gastronomic museums, even though efforts were occasionally made to move them in the direction of contemporary trends. In part, this could have been influenced by the fact that to maintain social stability, the new political power avoided any more serious attempts to change prevailing eating habits, accommodating them instead in a number of other ways (mainly through the structure of retail prices).

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Abstract

The study deals with top gastronomy in Czechoslovakia from the establishment of the communist regime in 1948 to the end of the 1960s. I first recall the local tradition of haute cuisine in the interwar era when Czechoslovakia was clearly on the periphery of the gastronomic map of Europe and was trying to adapt the inspirations from more advanced centres. This effort, however, was seriously undermined by the Second World War and by the communist takeover soon afterwards. If in 1945, after all the post-war difficulties, it was still possible to hope for a positive turnaround, the consequences of the changes in 1948 were absolutely devastating, making haute cuisine practically absent from the Czech/Czechoslovak culture for a long time. It lost virtually all potential clients, and restaurants preferred simple preparations that featured basic – but at that time, often scarce – ingredients. A greater

⁸⁵ See, for example, ULIK, Karel: *Gastroprag* 78. In: *Květy*, Vol. 28, No. 46 (1978), pp. 30–35.

concern for the living standards of the population was a key factor to the turnover that began after 1953. A symbolic breakthrough was the carefully prepared participation of Czechoslovak gastronomy at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958, which marked a real triumph for the recovering haute cuisine. Essential to the Brussels success was a variant of the so-called fusion cuisine, i.e. the merging of modern international trends with the Czech bourgeois cuisine of the 19th century. At the next World's Fair in Montreal in 1967, Czech and Slovak chefs presented their version of haute cuisine in its ultimate form. Compared to Brussels, there was a clear shift, which was also related to generational changes. The emphasis remained on the inspiration of traditional Czech cuisine, although its preparation was now with the use of modern technological procedures and with regard to the principles of rational nutrition. At the same time, hitherto unusual ingredients (ketchup, curry powder, exotic fruits) began to be used on a larger scale. The frequent use of exotic ingredients as well as flambéing techniques indicated that the main potential consumers were Western guests in privileged Czechoslovak hotel restaurants. The gastronomy presented in top-class luxury restaurants which were offering foreign cuisine was more influential on the local population, especially the Chinese restaurant in Prague, which caused a wave of popularity of pseudo-Chinese gastronomy. The Czechoslovak participation at the Osaka World's Fair in Japan, in 1970, resonated weakly at home, mainly for political reasons. With the onset of normalization, the target clientele of Czechoslovak haute cuisine changed and efforts to bring it closer to the most modern Western trends were attenuated significantly. Instead, comfortable conservatism prevailed, which matched with the atmosphere of Brezhnevism and its affinity for traditionalist luxury.

Keywords:

Czechoslovakia; state socialism; gastronomy; haute cuisine; food; luxury; restaurants; hotels; Expo 58 in Brussels; Expo 67 in Montreal