



What to Do with Family Accounts? Two Sides of Raising the Living Standards in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s¹

Drahomír Jančík

KEYWORDS:

Czechoslovakia (1953–1959) — Individual consumption — Standard of living — Price policy — Money reform 1953

There is a plethora of sources on the history of consumerism in Czechoslovakia, even for such a short period as the 1950s. However, the vast majority of them are of official provenance, in the same sense that statistical publications provide only aggregate data. They do not, however, take into account the struggle of the individual, the family, and not infrequently the entire social group, with the ordinary, but essentially existential, concerns of everyday life, which are determined by the seemingly simple accounting equation of give and take.

The history of consumerism in this period is the history of consumer asceticism imposed in the name of the “great idea”, the “construction of a socialist society”. Aggregate data does not capture this reverse side of consumerism, does not express individual experience, lacks the power of the anxiety of helplessness with a simultaneous flash of sarcastic defiance encoded in the family account book of a housewife, a mother of three small children expecting a fourth, in a note questioning her own conscience: “How can I believe that the standard of living of a working man is constantly rising when I cannot even buy the bare necessities, and yet I work from morning till night, am I also a working man or only a ‘lazy woman’, or is the standard of living so high that I cannot reach it?!”² The “accounting diary” kept by this woman provides a detailed insight into the economic behaviour of the family as a microeconomic unit within the conditions shaped by state economic policy (consumption and production of goods, running a business).

1 This study was carried out at Charles University as part of the PROGRES Q09: Historie — Klíč k pochopení globalizovaného světa (PROGRES Q09: History — The Key to Understanding a Globalised World). It is a shortened version of the text Drahomír Jančík, *Co s rodinnými účty? Rub a líc zvyšování životní úrovně v Československu v 50. letech 20. století*, *Hospodářské dějiny/Economic History* 35, 2020, no. 3, pp. 381–416.

2 “Accounting diary”, p. 27 (the “accounting diary” is kept in the family of Ing. Václav Mahdák, whom the author thanks for his kind provision of it, as well as for numerous clarifying information and for his consent to mention the names of his parents).



The author of the “accounting diary” Marie Mahdánková with her first-born son (Source: Private papers of the Mahdák family).



THE “ACCOUNTING DIARY”

It used to be common, well into the 1960s, for families to keep accounting records in an attempt to identify excess or excessive expenditure and, by cutting it out or reducing it, to create a reserve for the purchase of necessities for which there was no money left over from the current salary. At the beginning of 1953, Marie Mahdánková also began to keep records, but by the end of the year her confidence in achieving a balance between family income and expenses was fading. She complained bitterly to her “accounting diary”: “I have been using you to manage for a year now, counting halers and crowns, and yet there is no improvement. There are more children and less money. I say goodbye to you, 1953, without a crown in my pocket, without a bit of grease in the pot, and with only a little flour in the sack”.³

These and similar emotionally charged entries, unfortunately not very numerous and disappearing at the beginning of 1955 with the laconic statement “the situation has not changed”,⁴ reinforce the testimony of the column of figures with expenses about the material life of the family, in which the crippling difficulties in providing

³ “Accounting diary”, pp. 26–27.

⁴ “Accounting diary”, p. 53.



for its elementary needs did not, after all, cover the excessive expenses, for the pleasure of the children, for example, for small trips, tickets to the cinema or circus, for a sweet shop, even a toy, or for paints, brushes and other painting supplies for the husband's painting hobby. There is not much more to be found in them — no winter or summer overnight outings, quite minimal improvements to household furnishings falling short of the contemporary standard, no purchases of fashionable goods, etc.

Until the early 1960s, the “accounting diary” tells not only about the family's consumption, the structure of which was limited by the disposable income of the breadwinner, determined by the state wage policy, and the insufficient and only very slowly increasing supply. The optimisation of consumption in the family was generally in the hands of women, whether in terms of substitutes in nutrition, given the scarcity of certain foods in the retail network or their price, or in terms of extending the life of various items of clothing, or in terms of their home production. After her mother, M. Mahďáková was an active player in the family, contributing to the enrichment and improvement of consumption in the difficult conditions of the time through “household economy”.

ACTORS OF CONSUMPTION IN THE MICROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT OF THE FAMILY

The “accounting diary” was written in the family of bank clerk Miroslav Mahďák, an employee of the Prague headquarters of the Státní banka Československá (State Bank of Czechoslovakia), since autumn 1953 of its branch in Čáslav in Central Bohemia. His birthplace was the small village of Podkoprná Lhota, where his father, Inocenc Mahďák, ran a tailoring business. He grew up in this village together with three other siblings until the family moved to Ostrava. There was a greater demand for tailoring services, including from the local military garrison. Miroslav completed his secondary studies at the local trade academy in 1941 during the Nazi occupation. After graduation, he received a five-month scholarship from the Zahraniční ústav českého obchodního školství (Foreign Institute of Czech Trade Education). It allowed him to work for free at the Rolný clothing company in Prostějov, where he attended a course focused on foreign trade, probably at the local trade academy. Rolný then employed him in its export department. He worked there until the beginning of November 1942, when he was assigned by the occupying German administration to the foundry of one of the factories in Wrocław as part of the total labour deployment.⁵

After the end of the war, in the liberated Czechoslovakia, and after completing his military service, M. Mahďák started his professional career in the banking sector. In May 1946, he applied for a position in the Ostrava branch of the traditional na-

5 Archiv české národní banky, Praha (Archive of the Czech National Bank, Prague, further as AČNB), fund (further as f.) Státní banka Československá (State Bank of Czechoslovakia, further as SBČS), Personal file of M. Mahďák, Letter of M. Mahďák dated 6 May 1946. In Germany, M. Mahďák was stationed at the Metallhüttenwerke Schaeffel & Schael Breslau, and in November 1944 he escaped and joined one of the partisan units operating in Wallachia.



tional Czech money institution Živnostenská banka (Trades Bank), and the following month he worked in its newly established “Slavic Department”, as he fully met the required criteria. In addition to German, he was proficient in three Slavic languages, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, and Russian, he was equipped for office work with knowledge of shorthand and typing and had some experience in foreign trade issues.

As the “Slavic Department” was also being built in the Prague headquarters of the Živnostenská banka and there was a shortage of suitably qualified staff, the headquarters requested M. Mahdák from the Ostrava branch for its own department. Mahdák joined it at the beginning of November 1946, when he had been married for a month. He lived with his wife Marie in her mother’s house in Zbraslavice.⁶ In March 1950, the Živnostenská banka was incorporated into the State Bank of Czechoslovakia, and so M. Mahdák became its employee.

Miroslav Mahdák’s wife came from a family which, after the Communist Party took power in February 1948, was classified as members of the former “exploiting class”. This was because her parents had developed a trade business in interwar Czechoslovakia. Her father, Antonín Vít, as a war invalid from the First World War, received a concession to operate a wholesale and retail tobacco business as part of the care for war victims. Her mother, Marie Vítová, was a ladies’ dressmaker, trained in Vienna during the Habsburg monarchy. In 1929, thanks to her efforts, they bought a house in Zbraslavice for their business. Although the house was suitable for the business and the trade of a ladies’ dressmaker, which prospered and employed several seamstresses, as a former distillery it offered only modest possibilities for permanent housing — yet they lived there with their two daughters. After Antonín Vít died in 1937, both trades were run by his wife until 1948, when she had to terminate her tailoring business. However, she was left with a tobacco shop, reduced to the right of retail sale of tobacco products, squeezed into one room of her ground floor flat.⁷ She kept the shop despite the administrative pressure exerted on the tradesmen to join municipal or state enterprises or to go out on their own. The communist regime tolerated essentially only aged and disabled tradesmen, “to live out their lives”. Marie Vítová also retained ownership of her house. Shortly after the end of the war, the housing shortage led to the legislative consolidation of the power of the local administration to assign tenants to privately owned houses. The house of Vítová’s house was additionally assigned to a family of four, later a second family was added, and other premises were occupied by the local administration. Their use changed, with the barbershop being replaced by a puppet theatre and later by the offices of a social organisation.

The modest income from the tobacco trade mitigated the harshness of the pension assessment regulations for former “capitalists”. M. Vítová was granted a retirement pension of only 160 crowns. She represented a type of “entrepreneur” who was pushed to the periphery of economic life and destined to disappear, but still contributed to maintaining awareness of private enterprise in society. Indeed, given the inflexibility of communal and cooperative service providers, this did not disappear

6 AČNB, f. SBČS, Personal file of M. Mahdák, Letter from Živnostenská banka-branch Ostrava dated 1 November 1946. In Prague M. Mahdák lived with his relatives.

7 The operation of a small tobacco shop was closed in 1985 at the age of ninety-two.



even after the near 100 % liquidation of the trades and the transition to the shadow economy. Even the widow M. Vítová earned a living by sewing, but due to the circumstances, only for good friends. It is one of the many paradoxes of the time that she was able to support her daughter Marie's family financially from her small income. The only thing she had left from her former trade was a sewing machine, and she also helped her daughter by sewing and repairing clothes.

The originator of the "accounting diary", Marie Mahďáková, graduated from a business school, and even during the German occupation, she was not spared the total deployment. After her marriage in 1946, two sons were born a year apart. As a third addition to the family was expected, she quit her job at the end of 1949. She became a housewife, fully occupied with caring for her gradually growing family, with the birth of a third son in 1950 and a daughter three years later. She was brought up in the Catholic faith, which she carried into her family. Despite official and often enforced atheism, she remained a practicing Catholic. Her musical talents enabled her to take up the organ at services when needed.

The family thus consisted of six members: a breadwinner, a housewife, and four children born between 1947 and 1953. The ruling Communist Party stressed that from money reform to the spring of 1955 there had been a "rapid increase in personal consumption" as a result of rising real wages, although it admitted that the dynamics varied from one social group to another, with the lowest rates precisely in families with one income and a larger number of children.⁸ While from a macroeconomic point of view the increase in aggregate numbers, even if only one point, represented growth, in the microeconomic environment of the family it was essentially imperceptible in its consumption, as evidenced by a remark in the "accounting diary" at the beginning of the February 1954 accounting period: "My plan for February is not at all demanding and yet its quantification is Kčs 2 045 and my income only 1 710. Let us not be curious, but let's wait to see how it turns out".⁹ The result of the expectations is summed up in the entry for the following month: "The standard of living is rising so rapidly upwards that I cannot reach it; the more I reach for it, the more I fall into the depths of misery". This was followed by a note on the repayment of a small debt and then a loan of six times that amount.¹⁰ M. Mahďáková's efforts to balance the family budget without debts did not bring the expected result. When she had to borrow 25 crowns from her "home savings" for one of her sons, she complained to her "diary": "When, oh when will I get rid of the debt?"¹¹ Without debts, however, the basic needs of the family could not be met throughout the period under review.

8 Národní archiv, Praha (National Archives, Prague, further as NA) f. Předsednictvo Ústředního výboru Komunistické strany Československa 1954–62 (Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 1954–62, further as PÚV KSČ), vol. 87, archival unit (further as a.u.) 105, b. 1-Development of the standard of living of the population in the draft directives for the perspective plan for the development of the national economy of the Czechoslovakia for 1956–1960, p. 6.

9 "Accounting diary", p. 30.

10 Ibid., p. 32.

11 Ibid., p. 40.



In the kitchen (Source: Private papers of the Mahdák family).



THE EFFECTS OF THE MONEY REFORM

The abolition of the “dual” market (tied and free), together with the money reform announced at the end of May 1953, had a severe impact on the development of the family budget. These measures were intended, among other things, to solve the growing problems in the supply of the population, primarily with foodstuffs, but also with consumer goods, the production of which was lagging behind growing consumption. The discrepancy between production and consumption was particularly marked in the case of meat, meat products, and fats. The solution was found in the “price index being ahead of the wage index” and in the new, higher valuation of existing stocks, which had increased in value. These administrative measures reduced the purchasing power of the population.

Under the Money reform Act, wages and salaries were recalculated at a ratio of 5:1.¹² The new state retail prices of basic foodstuffs were substantially higher than the 5:1 recalculation of prices on the tied market. While the prices of bread, pastry, and flour on the single market were set below the double, the prices of other staple

¹² Sbírka zákonů a nařízení republiky Československé (Collection of Laws and Regulations of the Czechoslovak Republic, further as Sb. z. a n.) 1953, no. 41, p. 223.



foods, especially meat and dairy products, were higher.¹³ The price of 1 kg of butter increased by 175 % compared to the recalculated prices on the tied market, beef by 160 %, margarine by 215 %, and sugar by 346 %.¹⁴

The changes in prices significantly affected the purchasing power of the household's permanent income. The money reform was a disaster for family budgets, especially when they depended on a single income. Whereas in January 1953 the purchase of foodstuffs accounted for 70.3 % of the salary of the head of the household (68 % if the Kčs 200 allowance per housewife is included), by June food expenditure had risen sharply to 84 % and in the last quarter of 1953 it averaged 77 %. These overwhelming figures were softened in June by the "outfitting allowance" for a newly born daughter from the household head's insurance premium of Kčs 650, but especially by the family allowance.

The family had no major savings and entered 1953 with a debt of 3 500 crowns. Permanent deficits in the family budget, generated by daily food purchases and household expenses (e.g., coal purchases), were bridged by loans within the extended family.

From the beginning of 1953, the growing distrust of the population towards the crown currency, the alarming premonition of money reform, and the fear of rising retail prices also prompted the family in question to make purchases. However, their financial reserves were modest, only enough to buy bed linen, two pairs of shoes, three pairs of children's shoes, diapers, and a few yards of fabric. At the same time, she paid off some of her debts. On the date of the announcement of the money reform, she was left with a debt of Kčs 2 000. The wife of the head of the household closed her statement for May in her "accounting diary" with the statement "The old currency has fallen, I do not pay my debts".¹⁵ The two thousand owed had suddenly turned into 91 dkg of butter, i.e. Kčs 40.¹⁶

CONSUMPTION FROM THE MACROECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE OF STATE ECONOMIC POLICY

The fall of the old currency represented the first shock wave that the population anticipated and tried to mitigate by realising their cash. But then came the second in the form of price tags on the shop shelves. The price was meant to limit food consumption, as the countryside disturbed by collectivisation process was unable to produce food in sufficient quantities. A similar situation applied to consumer goods, the limited supply of which was due to the oversized construction of heavy industry at the

13 Václav Průcha et al., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918–1992* (Economic and Social History of Czechoslovakia 1918–1992), vol. 2, Brno 2009, p. 284; Vladimír Mička — Václav Čáp — Jana Bondyová, *Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR* (Historical Statistical Yearbook of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic), Praha 1985, p. 154.

14 Calculations based on the *Statistická ročenka ČSR 1959* (Statistical Yearbook of the Czechoslovak Republic 1959), Praha 1959, p. 383.

15 "Accounting diary", p. 10.

16 V. Průcha et al., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny*, p. 284.



expense of consumer industry. In an effort to counter the rising discontent fed by these prices, party and government leaders therefore committed themselves to annual reductions. The price cuts were presented as the results of the Communist Party's successful economic policy. As early as the end of September 1953, the first reduction in retail prices took place, the last in March 1959.

While prices doubled or tripled after the abolition of the tied market, selected types of food were reduced by between 5 and 25 %. Prices were reduced mainly for flour, pasta, bread, and sugar, and in the case of meat only for the lower-value types (e.g. pork belly), but also for mutton, the consumption of which was not common in the Czech environment, unlike in Slovakia.

The low purchasing power of households was not sufficient to absorb the consumer goods that were produced for domestic consumption, including those that could not be exported and were piled up in warehouses as surplus stocks. The purchase of a standard men's overcoat for Kčs 650 (about half a month's salary), women's dresses for Kčs 333, or men's shoes for Kčs 200, represented a significant hit to most households' budgets. The purchase of durable industrial goods, e.g. a medium radio receiver for Kčs 2 200, let alone a first television set for Kčs 4 000, was almost unaffordable for most of them. From an economic as well as a political point of view, it was therefore necessary to reduce the prices of consumer goods. The price reduction contributed to an increase in sales, by about one-third in 1955 compared to 1952. By April 1955, although the retail price index had fallen to 96.4 points compared with 1952 as a result of the price cuts, and the volume of purchases of basic foodstuffs and consumer goods by households had increased, these purchases often fell short of the 1952 level.¹⁷

Table 1: Sales of selected staple foods and consumer goods (1952=100; in material units)

	1953	1954	1955
milk	85.5	88.1	86.5
butter	81.5	106.1	106.2
eggs	77.4	91.5	90.2
wheat flour	88.1	91.0	90.2
sugar	99.1	116.9	122.9
minced meat	108.9	112.7	115.0
cotton cloth	83.2	96.3	98.1
leather footwear	89.3	98.6	92.2

Source: NA, f. PÚV KSČ, vol. 87, a.u. 105, b.1-Development of the standard of living of the population in the draft directives for the prospective plan for the development of the national economy of the Czechoslovak Republic for 1956–1960, p. 7.

Changes in household consumption behaviour, which the planning system did not take into account, were becoming increasingly evident. The register of unmet demand was gradually expanding, and the persistent shortage of meat was joined by

¹⁷ NA, f. PÚV KSČ, vol. 87, a.u. 105, b. 1, p. 7.



shortages of quality textiles and durable industrial products, washing machines, and refrigerators.¹⁸ In the category of workers' and employees' households, the number of households with an average net income of more than Kčs 600 per member was slowly increasing; by the end of 1958, one quarter of them were to be so. The average income of another quarter of households was about Kčs 600 per head, but they also spent most of their income on food and clothing. The remaining half of households, however, had an average income of up to Kčs 400 per capita, which was barely enough to cover the basic necessities of life.¹⁹ Such a structure of income groups, with three-quarters of households spending more than half of their income on food and clothing, predetermined the stagnation of sales of industrial goods, the growth of which, however, was foreseen in the plan.

TABLE 2: Share of food and non-food goods in total retail sales (in %)

	1955	1957	1959	1960
food	59.4	56.0	56.4	55.1
non-food goods	40.6	44.0	43.6	44.9

Source: NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-ANI., b. 133, *Analýza rozvoje národního hospodářství ČSSR v období od XI. sjezdu* (Analysis of the development of the national economy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in the period since the XI Congress), p. 139.

The Communist Party leadership preferred to increase personal consumption by lowering retail prices. On the one hand, because it was of a general nature, in theory benefiting the entire population without distinction, and on the other hand, because it was a tool for targeting their consumer behaviour. However, the reduction of retail prices had its limits due to the relatively high cost of production. Retail prices of, for example, children's clothing were already depressed by waves of discounting as early as 1958. Agricultural production suffered from similar problems, where disproportionately high production costs prevented price reductions in, for example, eggs, and milk.²⁰ The reduction of retail prices was carefully combined with a wage policy, which the Communist Party leadership held back for fear that wage increases would raise production costs.²¹ These were already high enough given the obsolescence of

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ NA, f. Komunistická strana Československa — Ústřední výbor. Kancelář 1. tajemníka ÚV KSČ Antonína Novotného (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia — Central Committee. Office of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Antonín Novotný, further as KSČ-ÚV-ANI.), box (further as b.) 70, Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, 13–14 November 1958, Questions of the development of the standard of living, problems of reconstruction of the workers' wage system and the solution of housing construction (thesis report), p. 28.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 9–10.

machinery and low labour productivity, raising prices, and making it difficult to sell goods on domestic and foreign markets.



TABLE 3: Retail price indices of state and cooperative trade (previous year = 100)

	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
total goods	96.8	97.3	97.9	100.1	97.5
foodstuffs	98.4	97.5	96.8	100.0	97.4
industrial goods	95.2	97.1	99.0	100.1	97.5

Source: Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1960 (Statistical Yearbook of the ČSSR 1960), Praha 1960, p. 388.

The retail price index shows clearly for foodstuffs the effect of price adjustments. It fell by 1.4 points in 1955 compared with 1954 and continued to fall gradually until 1958, when the crop failure raised it, but it returned to essentially its previous level the following year. The trend was similar for the index of prices of manufactured goods. This shows that the efforts to change the relationship between food and manufactured goods in favour of manufactured goods did not overcome the barriers imposed by high retail prices, the structure of the range of goods on offer, and the purchasing power of income groups, the largest of which was the low-income group.

The highest income groups did not find sufficient supply on the market, especially for consumer goods, and saved their financial surpluses. Unrealised purchasing power was beginning to accumulate, which would in the future constitute a “time bomb” for the Czechoslovak economy. However, the middle-income group, with roughly Kčs 600 per family member, spent the greater part of their income on buying the basic necessities of life. Although their material status increased slightly, their income severely limited their ability to purchase consumer industrial goods or durable goods, which, even in conditions of limited consumption, brought a certain increase in the standard of living. However, for the lower income group with an income of up to Kčs 400 per capita, to which the family in question belonged, the purchase of such goods was out of reach. Her income was barely enough to buy basic foodstuffs, and the purchase of even the most basic clothing was a problem for her.²²

INCOME AND EXPENDITURES

The monthly income of the household head²³ before the money reform, with all allowances, was Kčs 5 950 in the “old currency”, after conversion into the “new currency” it

²² As early as 1958, the Communist Party leadership had already concluded that the lack of purchasing power of the middle-income stratum had to be bridged by developing forms of credit sales.

²³ The term “household head” is used by statisticians in research on changes in the structure of households (families) over a period of time. The household head is the person (male or female) who brings the most money into the household.



was calculated at Kčs 1 082.60.²⁴ Although the wife's allowance was abolished, he was left with an allowance for knowledge of foreign languages of one hundred crowns. The income in the "new currency", excluding family allowances, was therefore almost exactly one fifth of the income in the "old currency", which corresponded to the ratio of five "old crowns" to one "new", according to which most economic figures were converted, and only slightly exceeded the average income in the money sector, which in 1953 was Kčs 1 027.²⁵

In mid-October 1953, the head of the household was transferred from the Prague headquarters of the SBČS to its branch in Čáslav. His family's financial situation improved after he was promoted to the post of chief accountant in the summer of 1954 and his salary was increased by almost 500 crowns.²⁶ A second significant increase in income occurred in July 1958, when he was promoted to the position of Head of the Operations Department, which was associated with an income of Kčs 1 800.²⁷

The family's income was supplemented by family allowances paid quarterly in the old currency of Kčs 960 until the money reform and monthly in the new currency of Kčs 470 afterwards. If we leave aside their only symbolic increase in 1957 by 20 crowns, the last adjustment in the 1950s took place two years later. Family allowances for four children were increased by 150 crowns (to a total of Kčs 640).²⁸

The standard of living of the family changed only slowly. The family's monthly budget was helped by loans of a few tens or hundreds of crowns, usually from the mother of the head of the household's wife. According to the entries in the "diary", she was the permanent source of these "bridging" loans, granted from one payday to the next, as well as loans for larger expenses for which the available cash was insufficient, e.g. for coal deliveries, for potatoes for storage, for grain for the chickens, but also for the purchase of shoes or clothes. Some of the repayments of these loans were sometimes forgiven and the family budget was occasionally helped by a financial gift from the father's parents. The debt, which spilled over from one month to the next and from one year to the next,²⁹ together with the expenditure on the "household

24 AČNB, f. SBČS, Personal file of M. Mahdák, Letter of the SBČS dated 16 October 1953.

25 V. Průcha et al., *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny*, p. 284; V. Mička — V. Čáp — J. Bondyová, *Historická statistická ročenka*, p. 154.

26 AČNB, f. SBČS, Personal file of M. Mahdák, Letters of the SBČS dated 31 May and 28 July 1954.

27 *Ibid.*, Memorandum of the regional branch of the SBČS in Pardubice dated 30 August 1958.

28 Sb. z. a n. 1949, no. 242, p. 695; Sb. z. a n. 1953, no. 42, p. 227; Sb. z. a n. 1956, no. 54, p. 130; Sb. z. a n. 1959, no. 16, p. 62.

29 Aggregate "domestic" loans granted in a current year (rounded to the nearest ten Kčs)

	lent	repaid	difference
1953	650	550	-100
1954	3 490	2 550	-940
1955	4 030	3 020	-1 010
1956	5 000	3 750	-1 250
1957	2 920	2 320	-600
1958	3 230	2 230	-1 000
1959	1 680	1 370	-310

Source: "accounting diary".

economy”, which is not reflected in the table below, gamely swallowed up any savings in the household’s expenditure, and its balance sheet showed an almost permanent excess of expenditure over income.



TABLE 4: Average monthly cash income and expenditure of the household (in Kčs)

	cash income			total cash expenditure			
	gross	with family allowances	net family budget income	total	of which for food	of which for food in %	employee households in Czech regions on food in %
I.–V.1953	5 950.0	6 600.0 ^a	5 892.0	8 136.5	4 356.7	53.6	—
VI.–XII. 1953	1 182.6	1 652.6 ^b	1 552.9	1 810.5	1 281.1	70.8	—
1954	1 442.0	1 912.0	1 711.5	1 848.6	1 430.2	77.4	—
1955	1 667.7	2 137.7	1 889.9	1 697.2	1 125.1	66.3	—
1956	1 667.7	2 137.7	1 936.6	1 761.9	1 115.7	63.3	—
1957	1 667.7	2 157.7	1 926.6	1 664.0	973.2	58.5	44.0
1958	1 706.7	2 196.7	1 971.3	1 787.2	1 091.9	61.1	41.7
1959	1 815.0	2 455.0	2 144.2	1 887.6	1 161.1	61.5	39.2
I.–IV. 1960	1 810.0	2 450.0	2 228.3	2 431.4	1 006.5	41.4	—

^a with family allowances for the 1st quarter of 1953

^b with family allowances for the 2nd quarter of 1953

Source: “accounting diary”; household expenditure of employees in Czech regions based on statistical yearbooks (Statistická ročenka ČSR 1958, p. 323; Statistická ročenka ČSR 1959, p. 381; Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1960, p. 380).

This dismal state of family finances persisted, even though the income of the head of the household already exceeded the average household income by 26.8 % in 1954 and 32.7 % in 1959.³⁰ His income, however, did not keep pace with the average cash outlay per member of an employed household.³¹ As the table illustrates, there was a gap between the consumption (and hence the standard of living) of the family under study and that of the average family of employees.

TABLE 5: Annual gross cash expenditure per household member (in Kčs)

	household in question	employee households
1957	4 771	7 709
1958	4 984	8 759
1959	5 085	9 782

Source: “accounting diary”; employee households based on V. Mička — V. Čáp — J. Bondyová, Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR, p. 364.

³⁰ V. Mička — V. Čáp — J. Bondyová, Historická statistická ročenka ČSSR, p. 154.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 153–154.



If in 1957 the expenditure per one member of the surveyed household lagged 38 % behind the average expenditure per one member of employed families, in 1959 it was already 48 %. One of the reasons for this development was the higher than usual number of members of the surveyed household than was usual in employed households. Indeed, the main source of the rise in the standard of living of these households in the 1950s was the increase in female employment, i.e. a double income for family budgets.

CONSUMPTION OF THE HOUSEHOLD IN QUESTION

In Czechoslovakia, the model of the family in which the man played the role of breadwinner while the woman took care of the household was still dominant. Despite the efforts of state policy, women's employment increased only slowly, e.g. in the occupational group to which money management belonged, it reached 40.5 % in 1958, only 0.2 % more than in 1948. Women therefore accounted for only one-third of the average annual household income.³² In 1958, this income amounted to Kčs 26 000. The household in question managed only on the wages of its breadwinner, and its annual income was therefore lower, but only by 2 400 crowns in 1958. In fact, his wage exceeded the average wage in the moneyed sector by a full third.³³ Nevertheless, the structure of this household's expenditure differed significantly from that of the average household of the same occupational group, particularly in its expenditure on food. These were significantly higher than the average, e.g. by 15.2 % in 1958. The higher expenditure on food was due to the number of children being more than twice the average. The families of the occupational group in question had on average one or two children, while the family in question had four. This fact was strongly reflected in the structure of its consumption.

TABLE 6: Composition of household cash expenditure (in %)

	household in question ^a							employee household (average) ^b
	1953 ^c	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1958
food and drink	70.8	77.4	66.3	63.3	58.5	61.1	61.5	41.6
of which:								
bread, flour, flour products	10.8	10.7	11.5	11.2	11.3	12.0	10.9	5.2
meat and meat products, fish	15.7	17.6	14.4	13.4	13.2	14.1	14.7	8.6
milk, dairy products, eggs	23.4	24.5	21.8	17.9	18.6	18.7	19.8	5.2
fats	4.9	7.0	5.6	6.3	4.7	4.2	3.9	5.6

³² Statistická ročenka ČSR 1959 (Statistical Yearbook of the ČSR 1959), pp. 93, 380–381.

³³ Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1960 (Statistical Yearbook of the ČSSR 1960), p. 92.

	household in question ^a							employee household (average) ^b
	1953 ^c	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1958
vegetables and fruit	8.1	7.0	6.2	6.3	5.4	6.6	5.7	3.5
sugar	4.3	3.4	3.0	2.7	2.5	2.5	1.8	2.2
beverages	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.7	1.2	1.6
dining out	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.4
consumer goods	18.9	12.9	20.3	23.3	27.6	21.6	23.6	25.8
of which:								
clothing	1.6	1.0	1.9	4.9	3.3	6.2	4.3	9.1
footwear	3.6	1.2	2.1	3.3	1.6	1.6	1.6	2.1
drugstores	3.0	3.3	4.5	3.7	3.8	4.5	3.7	—
electrical appliances	0	0	5.4	0	0	0	0	—
home furnishings	0	0	0	1.5	8.3	0	0	4.8
coal, wood	4.6	3.5	3.4	4.1	4.3	2.0	4.6	—
services	9.3	8.0	10.0	10.8	11.7	13.6	10.6	12.4
of which:								
electricity	0.8	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.7	1.9	—
rent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.0
payments	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20.0
of which:								
deposits	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5.4
payroll tax	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9.3
domestic savings	0.3	0.8	1.7	1.1	1.2	2.0	2.0	—
economic expenditures	0.7	0.9	1.7	1.5	1.0	1.7	2.3	0.2
total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^a “accounting diary”

^b Composition of cash income and expenditure of households of 6 or more persons. Statistická ročenka ČSSR 1960, p. 382.

^c June-December

TABLE 7: Consumption of selected foodstuffs per 1 member of the household in question (A) and per capita in the Czech lands (B)

type of food		1953 ^a	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
milk in litres	A	249.6	272.5	275.1	218.7	183.7	200.0	294.3
	B	145.1	138.8	144.5	136.6	125.5	114.4	106.0
butter in kg	A	10.2	11.5	11.8	11.2	10.4	11.7	13.6
	B	4.5	5.9	6.0	6.5	6.7	6.8	7.2
cottage cheese in kg	A	8.9	19.5	19.3	14.3	12.0	11.0	15.2
	B	1.0	1.2	1.9	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.4



type of food		1953^a	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
cheese in kg	A	0.4	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.7	1.5	2.6
	B	1.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.7
eggs (pcs)	A ^b	168	233 ^c	340	405	274	—	291
	B	208	181	186	189	196	191	186
sugar in kg	A	17.5	18.0	14.9	14.1	12.4	13.3	12.0
	B	30.8	34.8	36.1	36.6	35.9	36.3	35.9
bread in kg	A	74.2	91.4	82.9	79.1	76.3	89.8	94.7
	B	85.8	79.5	82.2	81.0	76.7	70.6	70.1
baked goods in kg	A	17.6	18.5	34.8	41.4	43.3	55.4	52.3
	B	20.5	22.0	24.1	25.3	25.4	25.0	27.6
flour in kg	A	19.6	37.1	33.5	31.3	23.6	17.6	21.4
	B	23.4	20.6	19.0	21.4	14.5	18.8	14.3
rice in kg	A	2.2	1.5	1.3	1.8	3.0	2.3	4.2
	B	2.2	2.7	2.5	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.5
meat in kg	A	25.5	32.1	25.3	28.7	27.0	29.0	35.8
	B	47.4	46.7	51.2	56.2	58.7	59.5	61.1
smoked meats in kg	A	4.3	7.8	4.8	3.8	3.8	4.3	5.5
	B	4.5	5.9	6.0	6.5	6.7	6.8	7.2
lard in kg	A	2.6	7.0	6.5	7.1	6.0	5.8	5.9
	B	1.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.7
vegetables in kg	A	84.4	129.3	79.2	95.8	74.5	86.5	92.5
	B	77.6	75.5	82.0	70.8	76.1	81.5	78.8
potatoes in kg	A	152.8	216.8	136.1	111.3	88.8	206.2	137.0
	B	129.3	130.1	126.1	135.7	130.7	115.3	117.7
fruit in kg	A	31.6	50.3	32.7	31.6	28.5	24.6	22.7
	B	77.2	52.7	47.9	58.6	39.0	66.9	39.9
southern fruit	A	0.8	2.6	1.7	1.0	1.2	1.7	2.0
	B	3.0	3.0	4.2	2.6	3.1	3.2	3.8

A – annual consumption/consumption per member of the household in question. Calculated according to the consumption weights of each household member. First adult = 1.0; second adult (over 13 years) = 0.7; child under 13 years = 0.5. Methodology and definition of basic indicators see Český statistický úřad (Czech Statistical Office).

The conversion of purchases in Kčs per kg was made on the basis of Table 15-11 — Development of retail prices of some important goods, In: Statistická ročenka ČSR 1959, p. 383.

B — per capita consumption in the Czech lands. Český statistický úřad — spotřeba potravin 1948–2012 (Czech Statistical Office — Food consumption 1948–2012) [online]. Available from: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/spotreba-potravin-1948-az-2012-n-hjw8eg93rj> [cited 2020-10-02].

^a For the period January-May, it is based on the rations set for individual household members (J. Štěpek, Sto let přidělových systémů na území bývalého Československa, Part II (1945–2015), Praha 2015, pp. 354–355, 358, 361) and prices on the bound and free market.

^b Sum of eggs from own breeding and purchases.

^c Data on egg laying from January to September are missing.



The consumption behaviour of the household surveyed was influenced by its composition, the level of its net income, and, not least, the limited supply and scarcity in the shops. Its consumption was dominated by milk and dairy products, roughly double that of the average household, and dairy and bakery products. Among the dairy products, cottage cheese (*tvaroh*) had a special place, certainly not under the influence of contemporary propaganda, which recommended cottage cheese as the richest source of protein because of the lack of more valuable sources of protein (beef or fish). Regardless of this, cottage cheese was a suitable and extremely affordable substitute in the face of the general shortage of quality meat. Cheese was consumed relatively little by the household in question, given its price, which was in line with that of meat products, and yoghurt rarely appeared on the shelves.

Flour-based foods in a wide range (from Czech buns to dumplings in the case of ordinary consumption, from cakes to sweets for more festive occasions) constituted an important, affordable component of the diet of the family in question. Their calorific value was increased by fats, primarily butter, and eggs. The high consumption of eggs in the preparation of flour dishes, as well as other meals, led to the establishment of a backyard layer hen farm in 1954–1955, which reduced the retail price of eggs. Consumption of dairy and bakery products, unlike consumption of dairy products, saw partial changes from the mid-1950s, probably linked to a modest increase in family income and only partly influenced by price discounts. They were reflected in the declining consumption of flour, although its retail price was reduced, but even so its consumption was well above that of the average household in almost all years.

The composition of the diet undoubtedly rested on the shoulders of the mother, who, in the face of permanent financial constraints, sought to optimise it within the limits of the time, primarily with a view to the healthy development of the children. Her family's consumption of meat and meat products was below average. In 1958, in a family of four with an average income, each member of the family had 44.5 kg of meat³⁴, whereas in the family in question, the average consumption was only 29 kg. Meat products accounted for 14.1 % of the total expenditure of the family, while they accounted for only 8.6 % of that of the average working family. The meat supply suffered not only from scarcity but also from poor quality, as the "diary" entry of December 1953 shows: "My nerves and my poor stomach must eat what does not suit it and what it refuses to accept. I am beginning to forget what the butcher and the things on sale at his shop look like."³⁵ The deficit in meat consumption was partly made up by the family in question from their own resources by breeding rabbits, by replacing laying hens, and by increased consumption of floury foods and vegetables, especially potatoes.

The household's vegetable consumption was above average, with purchases from the shop supplemented by vegetables grown in the small garden at the house. The

34 The data reflects the average actual meat consumption in working families based on a statistical survey. *Statistická ročenka ČSR 1959*, pp. 380–381 (own calculations). In contrast, the data in Table 7 shows the average per capita meat consumption derived from the weight of whole pieces of meat entering the processing process. It includes waste and losses estimated at up to one third.

35 "Accounting diary", p. 24.



same was true for potatoes, as the household obtained a certain quantity of these, as well as some other agricultural products, in return for help with fieldwork and other work on the private farm of one of its relatives.³⁶ However, the consumption of fruit, let alone southern fruit, was below average, probably because of the price and, in the case of southern fruit, because it was rarely available in the shops, usually only on holidays such as Christmas.

Other types of food, such as pasta, legumes, and rice, had a modest position in the consumption of the family in question. Even the expenditure on purchases of beverages was more than modest. Beer and soft drinks tended to be on the table only on Sundays and holidays. Only on very rare occasions was spirits or a bottle of wine purchased.

In the expenditure on consumer goods, the first place was occupied by expenditure on clothing and footwear, almost exclusively for children. Most of their clothing, however, was provided by “hand-me-downs” from older siblings, and re-sewing and re-weaving older items of clothing. The family was forced to do this not only by their financial situation, but also by the lack of cotton and woollen goods in the shops. It was rare to buy new fabric for home sewing or yarn for home knitting. The parents reduced their needs considerably, basically only to the essentials (e.g. shirts, stockings, socks). The breadwinner of the family bought only one jacket and two trousers while his wife bought two dresses in the period under review, but the latter were made only from newly discounted artificial silk.

TABLE 8: Expenditure on clothing and footwear (in Kčs)

expenditure on	1953 ^a	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
clothing	88.6	231.0	435.2	966.3	814.3	838.1	958.6
footwear	468.6	204.4	510.2	778.9	374.2	492.3	405.6
fabrics	60.0	104.0	32.2	108.0	159.8	301.5	348.2
yarn	125.2	23.2	71.9	193.4	22.6	54.0	89.4
total	742.4	562.6	1 049.5	2 046.6	1 370.9	1 685.9	1 801.8

^a June-December

Source: “accounting diary”.

Expenditures on food and clothing absorbed most of the breadwinner’s income, and thus the necessary funds were lacking to improve housing conditions and increase the amenities of the home. The apartment in which the family in question lived was still very much in the nature of the “pavilion apartments” that were still abundant in the 1950s. The main room was the kitchen, where family life was essentially con-

³⁶ He was a cousin on his mother’s side in Nové Nespěřice, about 20 km from Zbraslavice, who resisted joining the so-called unified agriculture cooperative (jednotné zemědělské družstvo — JZD) and managed to run a small local shop and a pub in the evenings in addition to the farm. The family in question had one room in his building, and the children spent part of their holidays there. At the end of the 1950s, these private farmers could not withstand the pressure of high compulsory agricultural deliveries and joined the local agricultural cooperative. They kept the shop and the pub, but they gradually became unprofitable and closed in the early 1970s.



ducted. The kitchen was not only used for cooking on a solid fuel stove, but also for eating, the children studied in it, and it was the only room heated throughout the winter. From the kitchen one entered through a windowless connecting room to the bedroom, which was heated only in severe frosts. It was filled with cots, later replaced by folding beds. The owner, her two daughters' families, and another family placed by the housing department of the national committee lived in the house separately, and later another family was added. A single toilet was available for all of them in the hallway, which also housed the only water supply with a sink in the house.

The first hint of modernisation of the household under review was the installation of a water supply to the kitchen in April 1954.³⁷ For a long time the only electrical appliance in the household was a radio receiver. In 1955, a second one was added, a vacuum cleaner for 1 100 crowns (58 % of the average monthly net income of the family), which was made possible by a "home family" loan of 800 crowns, and in February of the following year a new stove was purchased, again on credit.³⁸ The biggest modernisation of the household took place in May 1957, when a washing machine was purchased thanks to a cash present from the parents of the head of the household.³⁹ Along with it, a tin bathtub was purchased to replace the wooden baskets brought down from the attic each week to bathe all the family members in order from youngest to oldest. The water for the bath was heated in pots on the stove in the kitchen. Until the water supply was brought in, water had to be brought in from the hallway and poured out there as well. The last improvement in the furnishings of the flat during the period under review took place in August 1957, when a couch and a mattress were purchased, as it was already necessary to provide each child with his or her own bed.⁴⁰

TABLE 9: Expenditure on utilities (in Kčs)

type of service	1953 ^a	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
crafts and repairs	407	678	820	947	705	924	679
transport (fares)	247	327	380	496	398	682	507
postal services, radio fee	64	116	68	85	72	77	91
financial services (insurance)	25	116	84	84	84	84	84
health	275	—	—	—	—	—	—
entertainment, culture (cinema, theatre, ball, etc.)	12	114	301	148	137	217	242
education (violin lessons)	—	—	—	160	440	500	290
electricity and water supply	143	415	378	366	491	431	494
total	1 173	1 766	2 031	2 286	2 327	2 915	2 387

^a June-December

Source: "accounting diary".

³⁷ "Accounting diary", p. 34.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 60, 83. The stove was worth 324 crowns (16.7 % of the average monthly net income of the family).

³⁹ Ibid., p. 115. The Romo washing machine cost Kčs 1 860 (97 % of the average monthly net income of the family).

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 121. The couch cost Kčs 1 090 and the mattress Kčs 285.



The largest item in expenditure on services was reimbursements for services provided by local private artisans, primarily a local shoemaker for shoe repairs. Extending the life of shoes, especially children's shoes, was necessitated by their relatively high price and the narrow choice of suitable types in the shops. During the 1950s, private craftsmen were forced to join production cooperatives or communal enterprises. The availability of services deteriorated, except perhaps for the most basic ones, such as barber and hairdresser shops, dry cleaners, shoe repair shops, and public laundries. This created space for former private craftsmen, now employees of municipal or state enterprises, to make extra money after hours and outside the legal framework by doing minor repairs and other work for the citizens. In the 1950s, some door-to-door services such as pot-wiring, which had already been corroded by long-term use, were still alive. Housewives had them repaired not only out of thrift, since especially in the first half of the 1950s there were not enough kitchen utensils in the shops. The entries in the "accounting diary" also bear witness to neighbourly help, e.g. in spinning shearling, feathering, or various minor repairs, often for a rather symbolic fee, often free of charge.

There was not much money left for entertainment, especially for the children. The amounts spent annually on cinema, theatre, and circus tickets, as well as on small trips to the countryside in the vicinity, were more than modest. However, there was always money for the children's education, as was the case with violin lessons.

CONSUMPTION AT CHRISTMAS TIME

State propaganda presented the Christmas holiday period as a "holiday of consumerism", which was supposed to be a reward for the year's work and at the same time proof of success in the construction of the "material base of socialism" that would allow the standard of living to rise. In the phraseology of the time, it portrayed the richness of the festive table setting and the joy of the gifts to be brought by the atheist substitute for in the Czech environment traditional Baby Jesus, Grandfather Frost (Russian "Ded Moroz", Czech "Děda Mráz"), imported from the Soviet Union.⁴¹ The true state of the economy and the never-ending difficulties in supply were, of course, not consistent with this view.

Population groups with average, let alone below-average income, which the family in question also possessed, did not share the official optimism proclaimed at Christmas time. The income barely covered the household expenses, living from one pay check to the next, and therefore the Christmas season brought more trauma to the children's parents than the joy of the festive days, as evidenced by an entry in an

⁴¹ Martin Franc, *Šťastné a bohaté! Vánoce v českých zemích v padesátých a šedesátých letech jako svátky konzumu* (Happy and Wealthy! Christmas in the Czech lands in the 1950s and 1960s as a holiday of consumerism), In: Oldřich Tůma — Tomáš Vilímeček (eds.), *Pět studií k dějinám české společnosti* (Five Studies on the History of Czech Society), Praha 2008, p. 244.



accounting “diary” from early December 1953: “The golden age of socialism and the last month of the last year of the ‘Glorious Five-year Plan’, when the hair on my head stands up in horror when I think of Christmas and the little children hoping that everything their mother cannot buy for them will be given to them by the Baby Jesus. My dear children, you don’t even know what real chocolate tastes like, which cost Kčs 6 in the sad days of the infamous republic of Masaryk and Beneš, and now, even with its thick tinfoil wrapping, Kčs 160. You can’t live like during the ‘old times’, but you can die during the ‘new times’”.⁴²

Spending at Christmas increased slightly in line with the growth of the breadwinner’s income and the changing needs of the children according to their age — from toys to practical gifts (shoes, clothes) and gifts channelling their interests or aptitudes (e.g. hockey sticks or violins).⁴³ Their parents gave each other only small gifts (e.g. a book, house shoes, stockings, lipstick) and only rarely more expensive residual items, such as a set of paintbrushes for their father, who liked to paint landscapes in his spare time.⁴⁴

An annual treat at Christmas time was a supply of citrus fruits, especially oranges, as they were only available sporadically, about two or three times during the year. The expenses for baking Christmas candy were kept in an accounting “diary” separate from the regular purchases. They ranged from three to four hundred crowns, while the expenditure on gifts, with the exception of perhaps 1958,⁴⁵ showed an increase, from less than two hundred crowns in 1954 to almost eight hundred crowns in 1959.

“HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY” – SUBSISTENCE SELF-HELP

The announcement of the second reduction in retail prices from the currency reform on 1 April 1954 raised hopes of easing the still widening gap between a family’s basic needs and disposable income. This can be read from the entry in the “diary”, albeit with a question mark signalling doubt: “The pervasive reduction in prices will enable me to pay off my debts and, I firmly hope, to save a decent amount of capital? We may be able to show our gratitude to our socialist government, with only the welfare of the working people in mind, at the elections in May.”⁴⁶ It was pointed out in the press that this measure increased the purchasing power of the population by 5.6 billion

⁴² “Accounting diary”, p. 24. The “Glorious Five-Year Plan” refers to the so-called “First Five-Year Plan”, the economic development plan for Czechoslovakia 1949–1953. “The famous republic of Masaryk and Beneš” refers to the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic of the interwar era (1918–1938).

⁴³ Extra Christmas expenses (rounded): Kčs 600 (1954), Kčs 800 (1955 and 1956), Kčs 1 200 (1957), Kčs 800 (1958), Kčs 1 200 (1959).

⁴⁴ “Accounting diary”, pp. 52, 78, 105, 149–154, 179.

⁴⁵ Christmas expenses in 1958 are not itemized in the “accounting diary”. Data on “extraordinary expenditures” from September to the end of the year were used to estimate them.

⁴⁶ “Accounting diary”, p. 34.



crowns a year.⁴⁷ The reality, however, was far more modest. Only a few staple foods were cheapened, 1 kg of bread by 7.1 %, wheat flour by 10.9 %, butter by 4.5 %, sugar by 8.3 %⁴⁸ and the summer price of eggs by 9.1 % a piece.⁴⁹ From a microeconomic point of view, these price reductions could not compensate for the increase in the consumption of staple foods by the family in question. This is evidenced by the rise in the share of food in the family's total expenditure, up by almost 7 % in 1954 compared with the previous year. In the circumstances, there was no alternative but to resort to at least partial subsistence within the limits of one's means. Among the most common forms were vegetable growing and the small-scale rearing of small livestock, usually rabbits and poultry in urban areas.

Rabbit farming was the most common, reducing the deficit in meat supply. The family in question was no exception and maintained rabbit breeding throughout the 1950s. In addition to the common type of rabbit, they attempted to breed Angora rabbits, from which they expected a dual benefit — meat and pelts. The pelts in particular failed to meet expectations, and the breeding was abandoned as early as 1955. Domestic poultry rearing was dominated by laying hens, with only a few ducks or geese reared for fattening and feathering.

The rearing of laying hens was one of the most efficient activities in the “household economy”, as the cost of maintaining it was considerably lower than the retail price of eggs. From the beginning of 1953 until the currency reform, at the time of the rationing system, the family in question could afford to buy 288 eggs, although from March to May their sale on tickets in the tied market was restricted to children only. After the single market was restored in June, however, only 185 eggs could be purchased by the end of the year, partly because of the introduction of a 55 % higher “winter price”.⁵⁰ This development was commented on in the “diary” with a hopeless sigh: “Milk is 40h more expensive per litre and eggs 60h more per piece. My financial situation is terrible”.⁵¹ In 1954, the family consumed 820 eggs, on the purchase of which just over 940 crowns (55 % of the family's monthly income) were spent. In an effort to reduce the expenditure on eggs, the family in question bought seven laying hens in early November 1954 and gradually expanded their flock to fifteen hens.

47 Rudé právo (The Red Right, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia), vol. 34, no. 89, 31. 3. 1954, pp. 1 and 3.

48 After the money, 1 kg of sugar cost Kčs 14.0, but at the end of September 1953 it was reduced by 14 % (Kčs 2.0). At the same time, the price of 1 kg of wheat flour was reduced by 10 % (55 h.). Rudé právo, vol. 34, no. 271, 29. 9. 1953, p. 1.

49 Rudé právo, vol. 34, no. 89, 31. 3. 1954, p. 1.

50 Winter prices increased the price of eggs from Kčs 1.1 to 1.7 and 1 litre of milk from Kčs 1.8 to 2.2. Statistická ročenka ČSR 1959, p. 383.

51 “Accounting diary”, p. 22. The abbreviation “h” stands for “halér” (haler/heller, i.e. small coins, 1 Kčs equals 100 hellers).

**TABLE 10:** Balance sheet of laying hen production

	egg laying		costs in Kčs	sale		eggs for home consumption	
	pcs	in Kčs ^a		pcs	in Kčs	pcs	of which bottled
1. 11. 1954 — 31. 10. 1955	1 407	1 566.0	1 240.0	0	0	1 407	241
1. 11. 1955 — 31. 10. 1956	2 056	2 418.4	1 290.0	310	445.2 ^b	1 746	399
1. 11. 1956 — 31. 10. 1957	1 352	1 548.5	606.8	150	230.0 ^b	1 202	395
1. 11. 1957 — 31. 10. 1958	—	—	—	217	326.5	—	—
1. 11. 1958 — 31. 10. 1959	1 226	1 271.4	898.0	103	154.5	1 123	—

^a value of eggs at retail prices

^b including buying-in

When the number of hens exceeded ten, they became subject to the prescribed delivery obligation until the end of 1956, when the type of farmer represented by the family in question was exempted from this obligation.⁵² The very first year of breeding was profitable. The cost of acquiring the breeding stock and of buying the feed was more than three hundred crowns less than buying the same quantity of eggs at retail. In the 1954–1955 marketing year, one home-reared egg was produced for Kčs 0.88, and in the following years the cost fell to Kčs 0.45, while the summer price in the retail trade was kept at Kčs 1 per head and the winter price, from October to March, at Kčs 1.60. From the second year of breeding, the real costs were reduced by the income from buying eggs and selling them to neighbours, albeit to the tune of only a few hundred crowns. The housewife preserved the surplus eggs from the summer period by pickling them in lime in bottles for use in the winter months.

“Home farming” in an urban environment was a form of subsistence farming that was particularly characteristic of the countryside. For the family in question, it was, in a real sense, a lifeline against falling into permanent destitution.

CONCLUSION

The type of written source presented here, the “accounting diary”, provides a detailed insight into the economy of a single household, but its explanatory value is much broader. Through the amount of income per household member, the household in question can be conceived as representative of one income group in the social structure of the population in the Czech lands, to which the same or similar ste-

⁵² Sb. z. a n. 1953, no. 114, p. 420; Sb. z. a n. 1957, no. 5, p. 69.

reotypes of consumer behaviour can be attributed, shaped by income, retail market conditions, and the overall economic strategy of the ruling power.

With the money reform, the state intended, among other things, to reduce the consumption of those foodstuffs that were in the most obvious shortage (especially meat and meat products). For political-propagandistic, but also economic reasons, almost every year it proceeded to reduce retail prices, to a lesser extent for foodstuffs, higher for consumer industrial goods. It tied their sales on the internal market to their high price, given the low purchasing power of the population. However, this, in addition to the lower technical level, reduced its competitiveness on Western markets. Sales of consumer goods on the internal market were therefore to be boosted by price cuts. However, this price policy had its limits. In some cases, such as children's clothing, the retail price exceeded the relatively high production costs. Increasingly, there was talk of the need to increase the purchasing power of the population by levelling wages, which was primarily expected to increase labour productivity (and thus reduce production costs). The consequence was to be an increase in domestic demand for manufactured goods, a considerable part of which was in excess inventories. Gradually, this helped to create the conditions for the experiment — the first economic reform.

The effects of this economic policy on the consumption of one particular family can be clearly read in the “accounting diary” of the family in question. They highlight the importance of intergenerational solidarity, on which the young family, especially with a large number of children, was in no small measure dependent. This solidarity helped to bridge the frequent discrepancy between the breadwinner's income and the necessary expenses, in which food purchases were dominant.

The “accounting diary” tells the story of the consumption pattern of a low-income family which shows underconsumption compared to the statistically calculated average per capita consumption in numerous items, primarily foodstuffs. If we take into account that in the social structure of society, approximately half of the total number belonged to this category, the picture of living standards in the 1950s becomes more concrete. The family in question, like many others at that time, partly bridged the financial gap and the frequent shortfalls in supply by growing vegetables and keeping rabbits, chickens, etc. They adapted their diet to their financial means, in which flour products and flour-based home-cooked meals predominated. It was to her advantage that she had family ties to the countryside. This “diary”, however, tells not only of the hardships of material life and coping with them, but also of the everyday pleasures of ordinary life, since these too require costs, however marginal, from a lollipop from the sweet shop to Christmas presents. Herein also lies its uniqueness for the knowledge of the times.

