

## special section

### Introduction.

# Dietary reforms, ca 1850–1950. People, ideas, and institutions

**F**ood has always occupied a prominent role in public and political discourse, which in its turn has historically been shaped by concerns about hunger, food security and safety. During the last two centuries or so, attempts to change the way people eat have consistently involved invoking different kinds of scientific arguments, co-opting authoritative experts, generating new knowledge and spreading it to the public.

In the period from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until World War I, nutrition research evolved and spread through North America and Western Europe to Scandinavia and the Russian empire. The period witnessed the institutionalization of nutrition science. The field began to acquire some of the common attributes of a scientific discipline, such as the establishment of specialized research institutes, professional societies and dedicated journals. Germany, Great Britain and the United States were central countries for nutrition research.<sup>1</sup> Not by coincidence, these countries hosted organized and vibrant vegetarian movements and experienced far-reaching dietary reform efforts. Similar developments followed in other countries beyond the European continent.

19<sup>th</sup> century vegetarians and life reformers in Western Europe increasingly linked the consumption of meat to a



Workerwoman, strive for a clean canteen.  
For a healthy food (1931).

range of ills, characteristic of modernity and often associated with urbanization, industrialization and societal change in general. By the end of the century, such thinking was joined by the latest scientific knowledge that stressed the role of proteins and calories in human nutrition. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, knowledge about the value of vitamins in maintaining healthy bodies and preventing illness entered the scene. The emergence of modern nutri-

tion science coincided with the development of the modern meat industry in its various national forms.<sup>2</sup> Malnutrition in the lower classes became a special concern of governments. The political and scientific elite tried to reduce the level of protein deficiency in the population. Nutritional aspects of the “social reform question” and “class question” forced scientists to engage in debates and public education. Nutrition had eventually transformed into a field of both social and scientific action, as Corinna Treitel puts it.<sup>3</sup>

**VEGETARIANS WERE** motivated by different imperatives, employed different forms of science, and used different strategies of enforcement and forms of persuasion. Those vegetarians who, for example, were opposed to eating animals for ethical or religious reasons, sometimes sought scientific support for their dietary choices, and the studies they initiated led to the production of new knowledge. Scientific evidence from the fields of anthropology, physiology, chemistry and statistics were used to support vegetarian arguments. Public debaters and critics also turned to science and medicine to demonstrate that an alternative diet could be healthful and nutritious, and that meat could be harmful. But health concerns were only part of the picture. In the wide-ranging account of vegetarianism, environmental

reasoning was also part of the discussion. Vegetarians were also motivated by moral imperative. In all these approaches to diet, scientific rationales for vegetarianism were mixed with philosophical, ascetic and religious arguments, debates about the relationship between human and animals, between body and spirit.

An increasing number of scientific experts, health reformers and home economists went beyond their interest-based communities and were keen to bring the new knowledge of nutrition into the home, to inform women about the best way to feed their families and at the lowest cost. A woman’s contribution to society was to be measured by professional work and household management, but also by her adoption of modern nutritional knowledge and keeping her family healthy. Women’s magazines, newspapers and popular science journals of the period eagerly published the latest scientific discoveries and discussions on a cheap, healthy and nutritious diet for the benefit of their readers. Dietary experts, health reformers and vegetarian activists travelled around offering lectures to interested audiences and wrote textbooks for home economics classes and culinary courses.

**THE SCIENTIFIC** literature on contemporary dietary reforms and vegetarian movements, their philosophical and sociological aspects, is rapidly expanding, while historical studies on the topic that focus on the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe, post-Soviet and post-communist parts of Europe are scarce. A historical assessment of this topic is particularly relevant nowadays given the widespread anxieties about the health and environmental footprint of the current patterns of consumption and production, the rise of food activism and the limits of the planet’s natural resources. Contemporary veg(etari)ans and food activists propagate new ways of eating and living, as they had been doing more than one hundred years ago.

Zooming in on the entangled histories of dietary reform in the Baltic and Eastern Europe, a topic which thus far has only been fleetingly assessed in previous research, the contributions in this Baltic Worlds special section seek to initiate a

“DIETARY EXPERTS, HEALTH REFORMERS AND VEGETARIAN ACTIVISTS TRAVELLED AROUND OFFERING LECTURES TO INTERESTED AUDIENCES.”

scholarly discussion on the historical perspectives on a topic that has become of great interest and public relevance.

The special section is a result of an online workshop on May 7, 2021. The workshop brought together scholars from the disciplines of history, cultural studies and ethnology to examine novel avenues for interdisciplinary and transnational research on the histories of dietary reform in the Baltic and Eastern Europe, through the lens of dissemination, circulation, fusion and motion. In scholarly literature, the period from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until World War I has been called “the first era of globalization”,<sup>4</sup> when border crossings became a mass-scale phenomenon and the flow of commodities, foodstuffs, knowledge and information across borders became commonplace. Dietary reform ideas and efforts were one of many transcultural and transnational phenomena embedded in the reformist cosmopolitan movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century East Central Europe. These efforts, with their focus on scientific rationalism, health, physical strength and hygiene, or moral and ethical imperatives, and whether embraced by a wider public or not, reflected the spirit of “multiple modernities”<sup>5</sup> in Europe.

In this special section, the histories of dietary reform have been approached and explored from different perspectives. The essays weave together threads of the history of dietary advice and nutritional standards with social history, women’s history and food history, covering the elements of life reform and women’s movements, the establishment of communist food ideology, etc. Three peer-reviewed articles focusing on the case studies of

Estonia, Bulgaria and the Russian empire are built on previously untapped sources and offer original perspectives on the topic. As the contributions suggest, the entangled histories of dietary reform efforts proved to be a valuable and novel prism through which to study the region and the history of Europe in general.

**EMPLOYING SOCIOLOGICAL** framework, **Julia Malitska** analyses the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress, which took place in Moscow in 1913, uncovering the forces and rationales behind its organization and convocation. The study unfolds the ideological underpinnings that were prioritized at the congress and suggests why this was the case, as well as discusses the possible effects of the results of the congress on vegetarian activism in the empire. The congress resolutions failed to represent the whole spectrum of vegetarian thought, including aspects of hygiene and health, environmental and economic deliberations, which were publicly discussed and academically developed at the time. Instead, it favored the ethical strand of vegetarianism and aimed at life reform in a broader sense. An ethical vegetarianism with some Christian religious undertones was decreed to be a priority for vegetarian activism in the Russian empire. This was largely due to the activity and dominance of certain resourceful activists, who seemed to monopolize the symbolic space of the event to promote their agenda and views on vegetarianism.

**Anu Kannike and Ester Bardone** explore the evolvement and spread of the idea of vegetarianism, as well as the variety of educational initiatives, practices and agents related to it in Estonia. The attempts to reform Estonian food culture aimed at modernizing the Estonian nation. The study uncovers the changing trajectories of cultural influences and cultural transfer in the attempts to modernize Estonian food culture, discovering a shift from Baltic German cultural influences towards the Nordic countries, and specifically Finland. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Finland had become an important destination for Estonian women seeking inspiration about the promotion of vegetarian food and acquiring a professional

home economics education. Since the 1910s, Estonian female home economics teachers who trained in Finland started to play a crucial role in modernizing the food culture in Estonia and educating the nation about a healthy and nutritious diet. A network of home economics schools and cooking courses established by female pioneers praised local products, a seasonal diet and promoted lacto-vegetarianism. By the end of the 1930s, as the study suggests, educational efforts through the media, printing matter, educational activities, as well as the general economic growth of the country, resulted in a more varied and balanced diet for population, yet the vegetable consumption was still relatively low.

**ALBENA SHKODROVA** examines the continuities and ruptures between the ideas of “rational nutrition” and science-based diet in early communist Bulgaria with pre-communist food ideologies and the ideas about a healthy diet that were promoted by the vegetarian movement that flourished in the country in the 1920s and 1930s. The study reveals that communist dietary advice built on the legacy of the period prior to World War II in Bulgaria to a greater extent than the communists acknowledged themselves, and more than was acknowledged by previous research. It would appear, Bulgarian nutrition experts – Ivan Naydenov, Tasho Tashev and Nikolay Dzehelepov – were torn between – and thus negotiated – the pre-communist nutrition advice promoting a meatless diet and a high consumption of vegetables on the one hand, and meat-centered protein-rich diet promoted by Soviet nutrition teachings on the other. The article challenges earlier assumptions that communist nutrition advice consistently disregarded vegetarianism. Nevertheless, what the communist regime brought to Bulgarian nutrition science and the notion of healthy nutrition was the centrality of meat in the human diet.

Those articles are followed by an interview with **Corinna Treitel**, whose work on the history of German efforts to invent more “natural” ways to eat and farm at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had a profound impact on the field of study

represented by the essays in the section. The developments in Germany regarding both the development of scientific knowledge about diet, nutrition, as well as environmental thinking and life reform movements, had centripetal effects on the neighboring countries and communities.

Taking a slightly different approach, **Paulina Rytönen**’s essay addresses the foundation of a modern food system in Sweden from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century against the backdrop of modernization and societal change, as well as the industrialization of the agro-food sector, technological development in the country, the consequences of the two world wars and the rise of the welfare state.

It is my hope that this special section will generate a further discussion on the intertwined histories of science, politics, food and the environment in the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe. ✕

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“Typical of the period, the students’ weight and strength were measured to demonstrate the beneficial effects of gardening activities and vegetarian food.” **Page 125**





The group of participants of the First All-Russian Vegetarian Congress. Note: According to Old Vegetarian, this picture was taken on the last day of the congress when not all participants were present. Source: Vegetariankoe obozrenie, no. 3 (1913).

# “There is no salvation outside our church”

by **Julia Malitska**

**THE ALL-RUSSIAN VEGETARIAN CONGRESS  
AND THE MAKING OF THE VEGETARIAN MOVEMENT  
IN THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY RUSSIAN EMPIRE**

## abstract

In this article, I tackle and reflect on the vegetarian *movement* of the Russian empire in its making, branding, and imagining by examining the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress in Moscow in 1913. By scrutinizing its organization, agenda and resolutions, the study brings to the surface and explores the ideological imaginaries and the dynamics of vegetarian collective action. I discuss the organization and convening of the congress, analyze the discursive activity around it, as well as hint at its implications for the fledgling vegetarian activism. I also contextualize the event within a broad reform-oriented social movement space, as well as spotlight the diversity of understandings of vegetarianism. The case study hints at the manifestations of movement making and branding, as well as unfolds the ideological foundations that were given preferences and why this was so. The congress apparently favored the ethical strand of vegetarianism and aimed at life reform in a broader sense. However, it did not really succeed in bringing about the long-awaited consolidation and unification of the vegetarians in the country.

**KEY WORDS:** Life reform, vegetarianism, Russian empire, collective identity, All-Russian Vegetarian Congress, social movement, modernity, counterculture.

Among us, as it seems to me, there is no one with a narrow conviction: “There is no salvation outside our church,” and therefore, no matter how great the ideological divergence, our “unity in love” will not become either lesser or paler because of it.<sup>1</sup>

## Aims, scope and sources

The epigraph belongs to Semen Poltavskii,<sup>2</sup> a vegetarian activist and member of the Saratov Vegetarian Society, who positively evaluated the ideological differences expressed at the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress. The aim of this study is to tackle and reflect on the vegetarian *movement* in its making, branding and imagining by scrutinizing the All-Russian Congress that took place in Moscow in April 1913. With the available sources at hand and a sociological analytical framework in mind, I discuss the organization and convening of the congress, analyze the discursive activity around it, as well as hint at its implications for the fledgling vegetarian activism. I am specifically guided by the following questions: What was the idea behind and the purpose of convening the congress? How was convening the congress legitimized, discussed and evaluated? What were the outcomes and possible implications of the congress for the *movement*? How did (if at all) the congress reflect the diversity of vegetarian ideas in the Russian empire and the forces that drove its convocation? What meanings were generated around the congress and as a result of it? By analyzing its organization, agenda and resolutions, and placing the event in a broader context regarding the progress of vegetarian thought and vegetarian movement activity, the study brings to the surface and explores the ideological imaginaries and dynamics within the social movement space.

To contextualize the event within a broad reform-oriented social movement space, as well as spotlight the diversity of understandings of vegetarianism, I analyze the texts and treatises of the activism’s intellectuals and the materials of the vegetarian societies. The All-Russian Vegetarian Congress is studied through its coverage and representation on the pages of *The Vegetarian Review* (The VR), a Kiev-based pressure group periodical.<sup>3</sup> The VR staged and documented the preparations for the congress and its convocation, published its resolutions and participants’ talks, thereby disseminating information about the event. I scrutinize reviews of and press notes on the congress, the memoirs of its participants, lectures and talks, greetings and congress resolutions – all of which were published in The VR. The role of print media as meaning-makers and opinion builders has been acknowledged in previous research, as did its consolidating role in the collective identity building of the reformist environments in Europe.<sup>4</sup> Similar to Ron Eyerman’s observations of the *new* social movements,<sup>5</sup> the reform-oriented movements of the Russian empire were shaped by the print media. Periodicals helped to “create” reform-oriented social movements in the empire. Reformists were conscious of media attention; they were also aware of their own importance in making and shaping events and in catching the public eye.

Vegetarians, dispersed across the Russian empire, committed to and enthusiastic about the fledgling activism, would learn about the congress from *The VR*. Moreover, they would make sense of the event and relate to it based on the information from the daily press and The VR. Thus, The VR is a valuable resource not only for its basic reporting of events and activities, but for its recordings of the ideas, dreams, debates and disappointments communicated at the congress. It is the perfect resource for tracing the process of the formation and consolidation of the collective action, mobilization strategies and movement imagining and making. It is a rich terrain for studying the construction of a collective identity, as previous research has proved.<sup>6</sup> Finally, it is a promising arena for exploring the formation and manifestations of vegetarian ideologies, as well as the rifts and tensions that emerged as a result of the formative processes, and the role of the different actors in all this. The periodical gave room for debate, negotiation and fashioning of the *movement*, for voicing ideological disputes, for constructing collective identities, a vegetarian self, and much more. Regarding source-critical pitfalls, the factual coverage of the congress, its organization, convocation and results in The VR are reliable, whereas the discursive and intellectual activity around the event pursued on its pages will be critically considered in this study.

Finally, this study has no ambition to be exhaustive. Although beyond the scope of this study, an additional analysis of materials from the Tolstoy Museum and possibly the archives of Moscow might be insightful.

## Tolstoy’s vegetarianism and its contested legacy

In the last decade, researchers have begun conducting empirical investigations into the practices and ideas associated with





The cover page of *The Vegetarian Review* with handwritten lines and signed by Lev Tolstoy, dated November 7, 1908. Source: *Vegetarianskoe obozrenie* no 9-10 (1910): 1. Lev Tolstoy enjoying a vegetarian meal in his garden, right.

contemporary vegetarianism.<sup>7</sup> However, socio-historical studies of the vibrant vegetarian activism of the *ancien régime* in Eastern Europe have not hitherto attracted the attention of researchers. Although the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress has been mentioned in previous research,<sup>8</sup> thus far, no one has attempted to unpack and conceptualize the event by placing it within the context of movement-making activity.

**THIS ESSAY IS** A continuation of a breakthrough discussion initiated by Ronald LeBlanc and Darra Goldstein on the ideological fashioning of vegetarianism in Russia and the mythologizations of Lev Tolstoy. Ronald LeBlanc conducted a revisionist account of Lev Tolstoy’s conversion to a meatless diet in order to demythologize an established view of his vegetarianism as being essentially “ethical”. By thoroughly reading “The First Step” essay, which was canonized as a “bible of vegetarianism”,<sup>9</sup> and contextualizing it with other literary works by Tolstoy, he argues that Tolstoy’s conversion to vegetarianism was part of his quest for ascetic discipline and moral self-perfection, rather than non-violence and animal rights.<sup>10</sup> He argues for a distinction to be made between Tolstoy’s own vegetarian beliefs and those advocated by Tolstoyans. In their efforts to convince people to adopt a meatless diet, Tolstoyan activists chose to highlight the moral and humanitarian aspects of Tolstoy’s “The First Step”, rather than the ascetic and religious aspects.<sup>11</sup> According to LeBlanc, Tolstoy’s colleagues at the Intermediary Publishing House (*Posrednik*) were animal rights activists who contributed to the creation and dissemination of what Darra Goldstein calls the “disingenuous myth of Tolstoy as a compassionate vegetarian”<sup>12</sup>

in order to promote their own cause. Vladimir Chertkov and Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov, public promoters of the Tolstoyan movement, sought to fashion a more appealing image of their leader by toning down some of his old-fashioned views with respect to food abstinence and carnal pleasures. One way this was achieved, as LeBlanc’s study implies, was by reprinting only the final section of “The First Step”, in which Tolstoy describes his visit to the Tula slaughterhouse, thereby excluding the part devoted to the reflections on gluttony, fasting, abstinence and self-abnegation.<sup>13</sup> The practice of reprinting only the final section of Tolstoy’s essay, as LeBlanc implies, seems to have originated with Chertkov, whose Intermediary Publishing House published Tolstoy’s depiction of the Tula slaughterhouse in “The First Step” as a separate article entitled “At the Slaughterhouse” (“*Na boine*”) (1911).<sup>14</sup>

The ascetic and religious motivations that led Tolstoy to adopt a slaughter-free diet did not escape the attention of competing groups within vegetarian activism.<sup>15</sup> The literary works, writings and personality of Tolstoy came under scrutiny and close reading of fellow vegetarians, who urged for a holistic approach to Tolstoy’s legacy.<sup>16</sup>

The dispute over competing vegetarian ideologies intensified right before and during the First World War. In his article “On Vegetarianism and Vegetarians,” published in the 1915 spring issue of *The Vegetarian Herald* (The *VH*), Ivan Nazhivin criticized moralists for their moral hypocrisy, doctrinaire attitude and sect-like spirit. The article prompted criticisms and responses, published in subsequent issues of *The VH*. In his article, Georgii Bosse disentangled Tolstoy’s motivation for vegetarianism from

the one that was promoted by some of his disciples, reminding readers that Tolstoy’s teaching about vegetarianism in “The First Step” was religious and ascetic. Bosse insisted that the dogmatism of Chertkov and “his like-minded associates” was antithetical to vegetarianism and had no place in “the movement”.<sup>17</sup>

The capitalization on Tolstoy’s name and philosophy by his disciples in order to promote their reform agenda is not something unusual. As sociologist Donna Maurer reminds us, cultural movements use cultural products such as values, beliefs, stories, art and literature to spur collective change.<sup>18</sup>

### Theoretical framework

My perception of movement-making activity and collective action is inspired by sociological scholarship on cultural social movements, specifically Alberto Melucci’s *collective identity* and Ron Eyerman’s and Andrew Jamison’s *cognitive praxis*.<sup>19</sup> A cognitive praxis, the core of collective action and the cornerstone of the identity of a vegetarian movement, includes: a new “cosmology”/“utopian mission” (worldview assumptions), the practical or technological dimension (media, means of transportation and communication, instruments of production), the mode of organization for the production and dissemination of knowledge (science, education, interpersonal contacts, cooperation), and the proliferation of the roles of intellectuals necessary to implementing ideas in a given context.<sup>20</sup> I view the fledgling vegetarian activism as constituting knowledge producers, new venue creators, propagators of alternative values, reformers, meaning-makers, “new” producers of consumer culture and information managers. Popular movements aimed at change and innovation, pushed for reform, provided new elites, created new patterns of behavior and new models of organization.

Vegetarianism, as the movement’s ideology, comprises a set of ideas, practices and values that people and organizations can draw from and combine in different ways; it is a symbolic system that people construct and manipulate, that makes sense to a specific group of people. An ideology provides both meaning and direction to social movement participants, giving them a sense of purpose and the momentum to act. Expressions of ideology, Donna Maurer reminds us, can both increase commitment within a movement and attract new members. Vegetarianism was and is a multifaceted set of ideas. Advocates and movement leaders sometimes debate the finer points of vegetarianism, but they rarely, as Maurer suggests, contest its basic tenets. Instead, vegetarian leaders are more likely to debate *how* these tenets of the ideology should be presented to potential adherents.<sup>21</sup>

I adhere to the process-oriented concept of collective identity, which is concerned about shared meanings, experiences, and reciprocal emotional ties as experienced by movement ac-

tors through their interaction.<sup>22</sup> Collective identity as a process involves cognitive definitions about ends, means, the field of action and the activation of relationships among actors. This process is voiced out through a common language and enacted through a set of rituals, practices and cultural artefacts. Actors do not necessarily have to be in complete agreement on ideologies, interests or goals in order to come together and generate collective action. For Melucci, collective identity refers to a network of active relationships and he stresses the importance of the emotional involvement of activists.<sup>23</sup>

Movements are *action systems* and their structures are based on aims, beliefs, decisions and exchanges operating in a systematic field. Melucci speaks of *movement networks* or *movement areas* as a network of groups and individuals sharing a conflictual culture and a collective identity. The function of movement actors is to reveal the stakes, to publicly announce that a fundamental problem exists in a given area. They have a growing symbolic function, a *prophetic* function, in Melucci’s opinion. They fight for symbolic and cultural stakes, for a different meaning and orientation of social action, trying to change people’s lives, and society at large. Since their action is focused on cultural codes, the *form* of the movement is a message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant patterns.<sup>24</sup>

**COLLECTIVE IDENTITY** is the result of an interaction between more latent day-to-day activities and visible mobilizations. Both types of activities provide crucial arenas in which activists can foster reciprocal ties of solidarity and commitment, and clarify their

understandings of who they are, what they stand for and who the opposition is. Collective identity is usually perceived as a requirement to strengthen and sustain movements – but is this really so? Boundary work can lead to divisive opinions because strong group collective identities or different understandings of collective identity can make it difficult for movement sub-groups to form alliances.<sup>25</sup> Strong collective identities at the group level can work against movement cohesion because of strong differences between movement sub-groups. At the same time, movement building and move-

ment collective identity can exist despite a strong collective identity at the group level.<sup>26</sup>

Social networks and personal interactions appeared to be particularly critical in maintaining a vegetarian diet, as well as sustaining the *movement*. Vegetarians gathered for congresses across Europe, as well as in their own countries. The International Vegetarian Union, established in Leipzig in 1908 by British, Dutch and German activists, evolved into a quasi-European organization whose congresses took place exclusively in Europe until 1957.<sup>27</sup> Both nationwide and international congresses had a powerful symbolic and mobilizing role for building networks of

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Doctor of Medicine Aleksandr Zelenkov (left). Source: The *Vegetarianskoe obozrenie*, no. 4 (1914): 139.

Cover page of the cookbook *I Don't Eat Anyone: 365 Vegetarian Menus and a Guide for Preparing Vegetarian Meals. 1600 Vegetarian Recipes by Seasons for Six Persons*, written by Olga Zelenkova and under the editorship of Aleksandr Zelenkov. Due to its popularity, the book was republished on several occasions.

active relationships, for formulating and effectuating common purposes, for activating and consolidating resources. There is one more dimension to mention. As Julia Hauser argues, the 15<sup>th</sup> World Vegetarian Congress of the International Vegetarian Union, the first event to take place outside Europe, was seized and instrumentalized by its Indian hosts in order to promote their global political aims and impact on domestic politics.<sup>28</sup>

### A worldview or a diet? Vegetarian thought(s) and the fledgling movement

In this section I briefly illustrate the diversity of intellectual trends of vegetarian thought. Vegetarianism was one of many transcultural and trans-imperial phenomena of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, commonly regarded as a corollary of modernization and as a protest against it. As in many European countries and the USA, vegetarian activism in the Russian empire, stimulated by societal change and urbanization, was also an aspect of broader reformist environments. In the decade following the Revolution from 1905–1907, a network of vegetarian circles appeared in the cities in the European parts of the Russian empire. By the 1910s, vegetarian enthusiasts of different ethnicities and from different backgrounds had mobilized themselves into vegetarian societies, re-launched an advocacy journal and developed an infrastructure to propagate the *movement* in many of the empire's cities.<sup>29</sup> The management and dissemination of information on the cause, as well as public outreach via the press, became one of the key activities of vegetarian activism. Vegetarians were aware of the power of the printed word in promoting their cause and made good use of it.

Though there is an established historiographic tradition of reducing vegetarianism in the Russian empire to Tolstoyism, or to fasting and religious calendars, the sources are outspoken about the heterogeneity of ideas and views on vegetarianism. Depending on their ideological orientation, whether enthused by the *lebensreform* movement or Lev Tolstoy's radical philosophy, re-

form-oriented environments, or *radical habitus*, to quote Pierre Bourdieu, addressed a wide range of issues concerning hygiene and consumption habits, compassion for animals, temperance and anti-vivisection, and called for a return to “natural ways of living,” as well as endorsing abstinence and moral self-perfection. Concerns about social reform and questions about raising children became part of the reform-oriented social movement space. Similar to Western and Central Europe, vegetarianism in the Russian empire was an embodiment of a broad reformist agenda and also had its supporters in the scientific world.

In 1878, Professor Andrei Beketov (1825–1902), botanist and rector of St. Petersburg University, published the essay “Human Nutrition in its Present and Future”, where he argued for the benefits of a plant-based dietary regimen and promoted the need to scientifically identify a “new formula” for a nutritionally rich plant-based diet. The author employed a set of arguments from different spheres: physiology and comparative anatomy (the structure of the human digestive system is adapted to a soft and semi-soft plant-based diet), economy and ecology (the production of plant-based food requires less resources and soil; the earth's capacity would not suffice to produce meat for the ever-growing mankind) and ethics (a plant-based diet promotes the optimal development of the human intellect; love for all living things is the main attribute of a “morally-developed person”).<sup>30</sup> In his article “Future Human Nutrition”, Professor of St. Petersburg University Aleksandr Voeikov (1842–1916), climatologist and geographer, chairman of the St. Petersburg Vegetarian Society, discussed the nutritional value of nuts, vegetable oils and plant-based alternatives to milk, and argued for the replacement of dairy products with nut-based products.<sup>31</sup> It was Aleksandr Voeikov who represented the St. Petersburg and the Kiev vegetarian societies and The VR at the Third World Vegetarian Congress in Brussels from June 10–12, 1910.<sup>32</sup>

The rationale of so-called medical vegetarianism, which asserted the physiological, biological, health and hygiene ben-

efits of a meat-free diet and frequently referred to evolutionary theory, anatomy and physiology, was represented by the couple Aleksandr (1850–1914) and Olga Zelenkov (1845–1921). Aleksandr Zelenkov, who obtained a title of a Doctor of Medicine at Derpt (Tartu) University, came to vegetarianism and temperance largely due to his own health condition. While staying in Germany, he learned about and became interested in naturopathic medicine and homeopathy. He was a founder and the first chairman of the St. Petersburg Vegetarian Society, and a founder of a sanatorium near Riga. Zelenkov authored works on meat-free diets as a means of treating and preventing diseases, an approach which he promoted and practiced as a physician.<sup>33</sup> Olga Zelenkova wrote a culinary book entitled “I Don't Eat Anyone,” (*Ia nikogo ne em!*), which became very popular, and also wrote about vegetarianism.<sup>34</sup>

ANOTHER PROMINENT figure representing this trend of vegetarian thought and practice was Aleksandr Iasinovskii (1864–1913), a graduate of the University of Vienna, a renowned surgeon and Doctor of Medicine, as well as an ideological guru of Odessa's vegetarian circle.<sup>35</sup> In his book about a slaughter-free diet, Iasinovskii, like Beketov, put forward various arguments in favor of a meat-free regimen and dietary reform, yet, as a man of medicine, he still leaned towards hygiene and health reasons. An overabundance of animal proteins caused constipation, putrefaction and diseases, Iasinovskii argued. Animal proteins produced toxins – purines – which cause uric acid diathesis, gout and arthritis, Iasinovskii stated. Plant foods, he argued, contained a sufficient amount of digestible proteins, and a meat-free diet had a therapeutic effect in cases of diseases. Iasinovskii was in favor of dairy products.<sup>36</sup>

The question of *why* a person should abstain from eating meat divided vegetarian activists and reformist groups. Some advocated a meat-free diet on scientific grounds while others avoided meat out of moral and humanitarian convictions. This latter group was divided between ethical but secular vegetarians and those who abstained from meat consumption for religious and ascetic reasons. Also, discussions regarding not only *what* brand of vegetarianism to propagate, but *how* to do so, were pursued with increased intensity. Moralists wanted dietary issues to stop being the focus of vegetarians' attention and instead prioritize morals in discussions about vegetarian doctrines. They viewed vegetarianism as an aspect of a humanitarian doctrine, an ethical philosophy, a *new* worldview, a life reform and a counterculture. There were those who supported a slaughter-free diet based on the principle of “no kill”. Critical voices attacked gluttony, since eating was not supposed to be seen as an act of pleasure, but as a satisfaction of basic needs.<sup>37</sup>

Philosophizing on slaughter-free diet at times intersected

with advancing social justice, free pedagogy and moral education (*nравstvennoe vospitanie*), general attitudes to the non-human world, equality in family and society, and the critique of hired labor. Vegetarianism was presented as the panacea for many physical ills and social troubles. If urban dwellers could be persuaded to abstain from meat (and alcohol), as advocates of vegetarianism argued, then the “social question” could be solved. “Scientific” or “medical” vegetarians advocated a dietary reform based on the (then) scientific evidence from the fields of medicine, anatomy, physiology and pathology. Some medical professionals viewed meat eating, along with tobacco and alcohol consumption, as harmful. A general dietary reform was a way of improving people's health. A dispute between professors and students at the meeting of N. I. Pirogov's Scientific Circle in Saratov in February 1913 is a telling illustration of the clash between and diversity of perspectives on vegetarianism, as a teaching and a practice.<sup>38</sup> Reconciliation between the different approaches to and views on vegetarianism was hardly possible and a middle ground between the paradigms was never found.

### The congress: Preparation, organization, proceedings and aftermath

From a word to an action

At different times, various strategies regarding the promotion of vegetarian ideas and forms of consolidation of vegetarians across the Russian empire had been articulated. In 1909, Mikhail Pudavov, the then chairman of the Kiev Vegetarian Society and member of the Moscow Vegetarian Society, suggested founding an All-Russian Vegetarian Society.<sup>39</sup> This society with its board in St. Petersburg, would extend its activity throughout Russia,

enjoying the right to open its branches in various parts of the country, and promote vegetarianism locally.<sup>40</sup> This idea was, however, not realized. Iosif Perper, a co-founder and editor of *The Vegetarian Review*, persistently promoted the idea of organizing a vegetarian union inspired by the example of German-speaking vegetarians, united under the banner of the German Vegetarian Federation (*Deutscher Vegetarierbund*).

Print media, postal service and railroads, which represented a powerful way of consolidating vegetarians across the Russian empire, could not,

however, replace the vitality of personal interaction, which was crucial for building ties and networks of active relationships, formulating and enabling the realization of common goals. The very idea of an All-Russian Vegetarian Congress stemmed from the Saratov Vegetarian Society. Its chairman, L. Chernyshev, asked The VR's editor to publish the society's appeal to the readership of the journal and vegetarians in the country. Finding the idea of convening of the First All-Russian Vegetarian Congress as something that was both timely and urgent, the Saratov Vegetarian

“DISCUSSIONS REGARDING NOT ONLY WHAT BRAND OF VEGETARIANISM TO PROPAGATE, BUT HOW TO DO SO, WERE PURSUED WITH INCREASED INTENSITY.”



Society called for all Russian organizations and individuals interested in the idea of a congress to send their proposals regarding the time and place for such an event, approximate number of participants, and general considerations regarding the practical realization of a congress. Most of the responses received were enthusiastic about the event.<sup>41</sup>

The Saratov Vegetarian Society’s initiative was taken over by the “Spiritual Awakening” Society (*Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie*), another vegetarian society, founded in Moscow in 1912, which aimed to develop and promote ethical vegetarianism as part of a humanitarian doctrine.<sup>42</sup> The preparatory work for the organization of the congress and exhibition started. At the end of September 1912, the Board of the “Spiritual Awakening” Society petitioned the Minister of the Interior to authorize the convocation of the congress and exhibition scheduled to be held from December 28, 1912 to January 6, 1913. The event was to take place on the premises of the Maria Briukhonenko’s Women’s Gymnasium. Perceiving the upcoming congress as an event of major importance for the “vegetarian movement in Russia”, whose members were described as being of different confessions and nationalities, the society’s board asked the Minister of the Interior to temporarily lift restrictions on entering Moscow for the participants of the congress for its duration. The society planned to appeal to the country’s vegetarian societies for financial support.<sup>43</sup> However, the convocation of the congress was not destined to take place in December 1912. The society’s board had to postpone the congress and exhibition until Easter 1913 for several reasons, primarily because of a lack of official permission.

ON MARCH 10, 1913, the “Spiritual Awakening” Society received official permission from the Minister of the Interior for convening of the congress in Moscow from April 16–20, 1913, although under certain conditions. Firstly, Jewish people without a residence permit for Moscow were not allowed to attend the congress. Secondly, a list of congress participants was to be presented to the city mayor beforehand and approved. Thirdly, the participants were required to be issued with membership cards, as a condition for participating in congress meetings. A separate authorization was required for organizing the congress exhibition. The “Spiritual Awakening” Society took care of accommodation for non-Muscovites.<sup>44</sup>

The congress welcomed talks on the following topics: What is vegetarianism? Vegetarianism and ethics (*nравstvennost*); vegetarianism and beauty; vegetarianism from a religious perspective; vegetarianism and upbringing; vegetarianism and health; vegetarianism from an economic perspective; vegetarianism and labor (*trud*); vegetarianism in connection with mankind’s general worldview; outstanding vegetarian figures; human diets compatible with vegetarianism; the current state of the vegetarian movement both in Russia and abroad; discussion about the

ways of disseminating vegetarianism: about organizing a Central All-Russian Vegetarian Bureau, and the perspectives of organizing an All-Russian Vegetarian Union, publication of a consolidating vegetarian media outlet, vegetarian literature; ways of implementing ideas about vegetarianism: food, footwear and other everyday items.<sup>45</sup> The organizer’s inclination towards the *ideal* vegetarianism becomes noticeable when comparing the order of the topics of the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress with the order of the topics of the Third World Vegetarian Congress in Brussels in June 1910.<sup>46</sup>

The draft of the Vegetarian Exhibition comprised eight sections. The first section would be about the “scientific grounds of vegetarianism” (comprising books, tables, diagrams) and would focus on foodstuffs, their composition and digestibility. The second section would be about the “social significance of vegetarianism”, covering hygiene, economic, moral, aesthetic and educational aspects. The third section would illustrate the dissemination of vegetarianism, and focus on vegetarian societies in different countries, vegetarian trends in Russia, and other trends related to vegetarianism. The fourth section would showcase “vegetarians’ cultural products” such as writings, fine arts, handicrafts. The fifth section would include the portraits of “prominent figures in vegetarianism”, while the six section would include vegetarian literature. The seventh section would present household items made from animal-free products. Finally, the eighth section – culinary – would cover the theoretical and practical aspects of food preparation, and comprised cookery books, samples of vegetarian food, and kitchen utensils.<sup>47</sup>

The congress was scheduled to start on April 16 with a meeting of delegates from the various vegetarian societies. The entire organizational part of the congress, such as admission to the congress, participants, contacts with authorities, delivering drafts of talks, etc. was to be taken over by the meeting of the delegates. The meeting of the delegates would also suggest candidates for the Presidium of the Congress. The evening of April 16, the opening of the congress, was scheduled for electing the Presidium and announcing the congress program.<sup>48</sup> The congress comprised full and competitive participants. Full participants could be: delegates from vegetarian

societies, appointed by their general assemblies or boards; full participants of vegetarian societies who had certificates from the boards of these societies confirming their useful activities in promoting vegetarianism; authors of literature on vegetarianism; finally, individual vegetarians, who were neither authors of literature on vegetarianism nor were members of vegetarian societies, but were recognized by a majority vote at the meeting of delegates as being valuable when it came to promoting vegetarianism. People who did not meet the above-mentioned criteria but who wanted to be given full participation at the congress had to submit an application. Competitive participants might be veg-

etarians or people interested in vegetarianism. Full participants had the right to make a decisive vote at the congress meetings. A president/chairman of the congress had the exclusive right to vote more than once. Competitive participants only had the right to make a deliberative vote at the congress meetings. When attending congress meetings and sessions, all participants were supposed to have an entrance ticket to the congress.

The organization of the congress was mainly funded by the “Spiritual Awakening” Society, the Moscow, Kiev and Saratov vegetarian societies. Eventually, more funds than required were raised for the organization and convening of the congress. After the event, the remaining funds were proportionally returned to the four societies.<sup>49</sup>

**“Man does not live by bread alone”: Event branding**

In this section, I focus on three texts in The VR written by Iosif Perper, someone whose input in promoting vegetarian activism is hard to overestimate.<sup>50</sup> These texts, which were put before the information about preparations for the congress, presented the event in a certain way.

In the first text entitled “Our fragmentation”, which was a sort of preamble to the Saratov Society’s letter, Perper called on readers to respond to the Saratov Society’s request and send proposals regarding the organization of the congress. He believed the time had come to consolidate the efforts for the cause of vegetarianism. In his opinion, little had been achieved in recent years regarding the promotion of vegetarianism. Even though there had been an increase in the amount of literature on vegetarianism, no fundamental works, either original, or translations, had been produced. At this point he mentioned Lev Tolstoy, asserting “[...] when you remember that Lev Nikolaevich lived in our country and worked so much for the benefit of our movement, you become ashamed of the present state of vegetarianism in Russia, of our indifference, disregard [...]”. Perper poses a rhetorical question about the point in time when fragmentation would end and vegetarians across the empire would meet for a discussion. He optimistically presented the congress as a solution to all the challenges of the fledgling vegetarian activism. Eventually, Perper turned to the Saratov Society’s letter itself, which followed his text, and encouraged readers to react and respond to it. “It is enough to fight individually, without any system. We need to unite”, Iosif Perper insisted claiming that at the upcoming congress, it would be possible to organize a vegetarian exhibition and discuss the founding of an All-Russian Vegetarian Union, which would unite like-minded people from all over the country, and greatly advance the idea of vegetarianism and other related humanitarian movements.<sup>51</sup> Before even taking any tangible form, the upcoming congress was perceived and discursively branded as a joint enterprise, a shared collective action project, and a joint effort of all vegetarians in the country.

In his commentary in the July 1912 issue of The VR, Iosif Perper gave his parting words and his assessment of the planned congress and exhibition, inviting readers to study the draft program of the event. According to Perper, the fact that the first

congress and exhibition were organized by the young “Spiritual Awakening” Society was a symbolic act. He continued:

We vegetarians should have spiritually awakened long ago and not limited our activity and aspirations to the mere organization of beautiful dining rooms with various rich menus, expensive dishes, waitresses in strange-looking dresses. We should be ashamed of this superficiality and unnecessary tinsel ...<sup>52</sup>

Then he turned to a critique of the vegetarian societies, which, in his opinion, were mostly preoccupied with increasing the number of vegetarian canteens, forgetting that “man does not live by bread alone”. Perper was confident that the upcoming congress would propose a new way of promoting the idea of vegetarianism. He presented the organization of the congress as a joint venture, when “each of us now has the opportunity to do something for our movement”. At the end of this text, Perper mentioned Tolstoy and also referred to the “First Step”.<sup>53</sup> He continued:

The upcoming congress and exhibition should serve the widespread propaganda of vegetarianism. Our movement should flow throughout Russia as a wide river, so that it will be as Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy envisioned it. [...] This movement should be particularly attractive to people who want to realize a kingdom of God on earth, not because vegetarianism itself is an important step towards this kingdom [...], but because it serves as a sign that a man’s effort to achieve moral self-perfection is serious and sincere, [...] and starts with the first step.<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, Perper connected vegetarianism with man’s moral self-perfection, consonant with Tolstoy’s very idea expressed in “The First Step”. The convening of the congress is presented as an embodiment of collective action. Perper’s text is a sort of ideological marker. By invoking Tolstoy and including a reference to his “First Step”, Perper brands the alleged congress in a certain way.

IN THE MARCH 1913 issue of The VR, on the eve of the congress, Iosif Perper wrote another text on the upcoming event. According to Perper, the aim of the congress was to unite all vegetarians living in Russia and systematically promote the idea of vegetarianism. For the first time, like-minded people from different parts of Russia would come together and discuss the issues that interested them. Perper spoke about the lack of a “unifying center”. Thus, the main task of the First Congress, in Perper’s words, should be the founding of an All-Russian Vegetarian Union, which it was believed would bring a sense of belonging and commonality to the country’s vegetarians and reduce the apparent inconsistency in the activities of vegetarian societies and individual vegetarians. Perper praised the First All-Russian Vegetarian Congress for being a historic and important step in “our movement”, since its convening was perceived as a sign of

a firmly strengthened movement that was looking for new forms of growth. Tensions were seen as unavoidable as witnessed by international vegetarian movements and which Perper also highlighted. On the other hand, Perper hoped that participants at the upcoming congress would still avoid unnecessary friction. “Our great idea teaches us love and respect for all living things...”, Perper stated.<sup>58</sup> He also commented on the Minister of the Interior’s decision regarding Jews’ participation at the congress:

In spreading the vegetarian movement in Russia and in preparing the congress, we Jews had taken an active role, but we are not allowed to “enter it”. Let us hope this will not happen again. Upcoming congresses must be arranged in cities of the “Pale of Settlement”, so that like-minded Jews can freely partake in them. And in the future, this “pale” will disappear, and heavy yokes will fall off the necks of millions of people, their only fault being that they are people of the “Jewish faith”.<sup>56</sup>

Iosif Perper had discursively placed great faith in the congress as an event that could potentially bring vegetarians of the empire closer, find new ways of promoting vegetarianism, as well as consolidate activists. At the same time, as a member of the German Vegetarian Federation, Iosif Perper was aware of the challenges of movement consolidating activity, fragmentation and alienation. It is also worth noting how, by invoking Tolstoy and speaking of self-perfection, Perper colored the event.

The finest hour

Thanks to the attention given to the congress by the Moscow press, readers had the opportunity to learn about the event, which, however, could not be easily attended by the public. An informative report on the congress was provided by the newspaper *The Russian Sheet* (*Russkie vedomosti*).<sup>57</sup> Other dailies of the empire also reported on the congress, among them, the Khar’kov’s *Morning* (*Utro*).<sup>58</sup> The congress participant with the pseudonym *Old Vegetarian* provided a detailed description of the event.<sup>59</sup> This section seeks to reconstruct the event.

The congress comprised around 200 participants and representatives of different vegetarian societies, as well as individual vegetarians. It was open from 10.00 to 23.00. A vegetarian buffet with appetizers was organized by Jenny Schulz<sup>60</sup> and other female colleagues at the congress. The Vegetarian Exhibition presented information on the current state of vegetarianism, Russian and foreign vegetarian literature, the documentation of vegetarian societies, household items and kitchen appliances, photos and portraits of well-known vegetarians, vegetarian soap, foodstuffs and samples of dried vegetables, non-animal footwear, briefcases, belts and suitcases, Natal’ia Nordman-Severova’s exhibits and much more. The Jewish section com-

prised brochures and books on vegetarianism in Yiddish.<sup>61</sup> The *Russian Sheet*’s journalist paid attention to a map showcasing the geographical dissemination of vegetarianism in the country, highlighting canteens, sanatoriums that offered vegetarian meals, agricultural colonies, lectures, etc. The vegetarian movement had apparently spread mainly in the northwest and southwest of the empire, from Petersburg to Moscow, Kharkov, Poltava, all the way to Odessa.<sup>62</sup>

THE FIRST DAY of the congress started with a meeting of the delegates of vegetarian societies at which the candidates for the Presidium of the congress were proposed and a number of technical and organizational questions were resolved. The congress was opened during the evening of the same day by Georgii Bosse,<sup>63</sup> chairman of the “Spiritual Awakening” Society. The Presidium was elected unanimously: Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov – honorary chairman of the congress, Aleksei Zonov – chairman, Georgii Bosse – deputy chairman, Semen Poltavskii – secretary, Mikhail Pudavov – deputy secretary. The congress participants listened to a funeral march, dedicated to the memory of Tolstoy, whose portraits decorated the premises.

Greetings to the congress, received from different vegetarian groups and individuals,<sup>64</sup> voiced the expectations and hopes for the congress, sometimes revealing their ideological orientation.

The first four greetings, which were very detailed and loaded with meaning, were likely a form of a discursive activity of ideological branding of the event. On behalf of the editorial board of the periodical “Calendar for Everyone” (*Kalendar’ dlia kazhdogo*, published from 1907–1918 in Moscow), Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov and Aleksei Zonov greeted the congress participants, wishing them success in strengthening and spreading the idea of “compassion for all living things”. On behalf of the Interme-

diary Publishing House, an extended greeting was delivered, indicating the self-perceived role of the publishing house in vegetarian activism. The Intermediary Publishing House, which had apparently been working on spreading the ideas of humanity and vegetarianism in Russia for 20 years, greeted its “brothers in spirit and cause”, who attended the congress. When the publishing house started publishing books on vegetarianism, the few vegetarians in Russia were regarded as mere curiosities, according to Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov and Aleksei Zonov. The Intermediary acknowledged the great importance of the issue of nutrition and the replacement of slaughter food, yet hoped that the congress would:

ensure that its main focus was on mankind’s spiritual rebirth through an increase in the spirit of love, the spirit of active brotherhood of all living things, the spirit of eternal peace, the spirit of universal justice, remem-

bering that vegetarianism is a great development, but only the first step in the spiritual rebirth of a person.<sup>65</sup>

The Intermediary Publishing House expressed its deep regret that the congress had not been held during the lifetime of Lev Tolstoy, “our greatest apostle of love for all living things”, who, together with Vladimir Chertkov, another “fighter for vegetarianism”, founded the Intermediary Publishing House.<sup>66</sup> This greeting allowed a self-image of the publishing house as an important agent in the *movement*, its founder, to emerge.

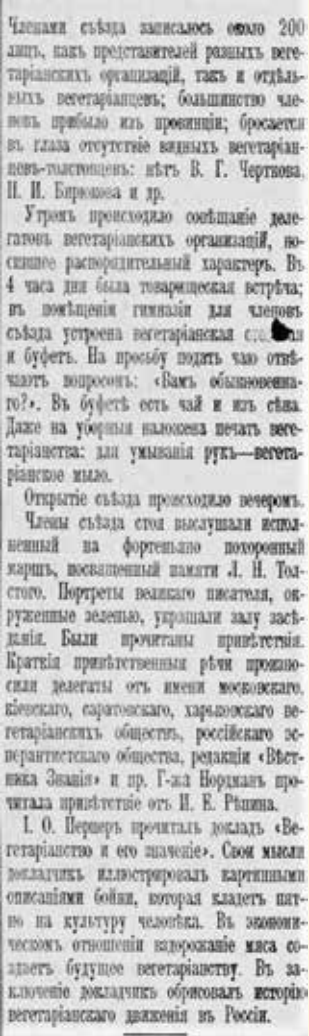
E. Gorbunova, E. Korotkova and I. Gorbunov-Posadov, editors of the children’s journal “Lighthouse” (*Mayak*), also greeted the congress on behalf of its vegetarian children readers, “future participants of the vegetarian movement in Russia”. This greeting also permeated by the idea that compassion for all animals was paramount to the congress. Another extended greeting delivered by Gorbunov-Posadov was from the editors of the journal “Free Education” (*Svobodnoe vospitanie*). Its editorial board expressed the hope that the congress would work on the issue of raising children in the spirit of humanity, sympathy and respect for all living things, as well as the active protection of all life. Also, the vegetarian movement, perceived as a movement that was striving for a natural, truly healthy and joyful life close to nature, should specifically work on the issue of raising children in such settings, and the editors of “Free Education” expressed the hope that the congress would specifically address this issue. The editors wanted the congress to particularly focus on the development of standards for slaughter-free food which, it was believed, would enable the proper physical and spiritual development of children. The greeting ended with the glorification of life, love for all living things, and “natural education” (*estestvennoe obrazovanie*).

AS WE CAN SEE, the four greetings had the same ideological content, projecting the idea of compassion for animals and an ethical vegetarianism on the congress.

Regular citizens across the country also greeted the congress. Seven peasants from the Saratov province sent their greetings to the congress. Three vegetarian esperantists sent their greetings in Esperanto. Having acquainted himself with the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress in The VR, a “lonely vegetarian”, F. Frey and his wife wished good luck to the initiators and participants in the founding of the All-Russian Vegetarian Union. According to the couple, no one needed it as much as provincial vegetarians and rural inhabitants. Short greetings were sent from chairman Vasilii Zuev on behalf of the Board of the Odessa Vegetarian Society, as well as from vegetarian gardeners from Ekaterinoslav, a vegetarian group from Kishinev, Tobol’sk vegetarians, as well as the first vegetarian canteen in Ekaterinoslav. Personal greetings were also received from people from Samarkand and Tashkent. A group of Vitebsk Jewish vegetarians, as they called themselves, sent their greetings to the congress. Anna Kamenskaia, chairwoman of the Russian Theosophical Society, sent greetings on its behalf. Samuil Perper, a doctor, columnist at The VR and Iosif Perper’s brother, together with his wife, sent their greetings to the congress from Rome.



A report on the opening of the congress in Moscow in the Khar’kov newspaper *Morning*. Source: “Poslednie novosti. Vegetarianskii s’ezd v Moskve,” *Utro*, April 20, 1913, 3.



Greetings and brief welcoming speeches were delivered by delegates of vegetarian societies, and other individuals and organizations. Natal’ia Nordman-Severova, a suffragette and a champion of vegetarianism, read greetings on behalf of her partner, Ilja Repin. In his talk entitled “Vegetarianism and Its Significance”, Iosif Perper spoke about vegetarianism from ethical, educational and economic perspectives. The second talk was given by Dr. Dokuchaev on “Vegetarianism as the First Step to a Healthy Life”.

On April 17, during the morning session, the reports of I. Tregubov on teetotalers and their vegetarianism, and Iosif Perper on the “Contemporary State of Vegetarianism in Russia” were delivered. Perper promoted the founding of the All-Russian Vegetarian Union, which, in his opinion, would propel the success of the *movement* even more. The questions about a unified center, consolidation and organization of vegetarians were heatedly debated resulting in a resolution on the establishment of a Vegetarian Enquiry Office (*vegetariankoe spravocnoe biuro*). In the evening, Semen Poltavskii discussed whether “a vegetarian worldview” was possible and criticized the reduction of vegetari-



anism to “a kitchen doctrine” in which morals presumably became less significant.<sup>67</sup> The second evening speech, delivered by V. Totomianets, was about the history of the “Eden” life reform colony, located nearby Berlin suburb.

On April 18, the administration of the congress banned journalists from attending the sessions and there were only closed meetings.<sup>68</sup> On this day, talks were delivered on “The Influence of Vegetarianism on Human Spiritual Life” by P. Skorogliadov, “Where Vegetarianism Takes Us” by I. Prikashchikov, “The Main Questions of Vegetarianism” by M. S. Anderson and “Vegetarianism in Krinitsa” by B. Iakovlev-Orlov. The issue of the promotion of vegetarianism through the organization of consumer vegetarian societies and shops, and an increase in the number of vegetarian canteens was raised. The canteen issue caused a particularly long and heated debate. In the evening, Poltavskii’s report had been debated for many hours, as well as the question of the enquiry office.

ON APRIL 19, during the morning session, chairman Zonov read out the resolution on the Vegetarian Enquiry Office accepted by all participants. Viktor Lebren’s report proposed to initiate an international encyclopedic periodical, preferably in Esperanto which, for example, would disseminate *progressive* ideas about free upbringing, combating alcoholism and prostitution, promoting women’s emancipation and the true and holistic enlightenment of people and children.<sup>69</sup> Vladimir Kimental lectured on “Vegetarianism and Upbringing”, pointing out that vegetarianism can go hand in hand with an ideal (*ideal vospitaniia*) and rational upbringing (*ratsional’noe vospitanie*), since, in his view, both preached love, willpower, the value of life, respect for individual rights, emancipation of an individual from *zhivotnoe “ia”*, i.e. from “the animal within”.<sup>70</sup> The lecture resulted in the congress passing a resolution on education. During the evening session, K. Iunakov talked about “Vegetarianism in Connection with a Human Being’s General Outlook” and an exchange of opinions followed. Three more lectures were delivered that evening. Based on B. Ioffe’s report “On the Propaganda of Vegetarianism”, a resolution was adopted. After extended discussions, the congress voted to condemn vivisection. The evening session ended with a reading of the resolutions passed after the lectures of Lebren, Poltavskii and Kimental.

The morning session on April 20 started with a report on “the life ideal” (*ideal zhizni*). Later, decisions about publishing a vegetarian handbook and creating a mobile vegetarian exhibition were made. The congress greeted the Esperanto Union and thanked its representative Anna Sharapova for two reports and overall fruitful cooperation.<sup>71</sup> After a few more congress greetings to individual vegetarians, as well as speeches, Zonov read the resolutions, summarized the work of the congress and

“VEGETARIANISM WAS QUINTESSENTIALLY ABOUT RENEWAL, NEW LIFE, NEW MAN, NEW RELATIONS BASED ON THE EGALITARIANISM OF ALL FORMS OF LIFE, THE UNITY OF ALL LIVING THINGS.”

thanked all the participants and organizer. Farewell speeches were delivered by Gorbunov-Posadov, Zonov, Bosse, as well as delegates of vegetarian societies. The congress participants then attended a banquet organized by the Moscow Vegetarian Society. On April 21, the remaining congress participants visited the Tolstoy Museum, the Tretyakov Gallery and the Kremlin. Afterwards, a small group of participants visited Iasnaia Poliana (literally “Bright Glade”), Tolstoy’s residence 200 kilometers from Moscow.

The delegates from the vegetarian societies of Moscow (I. N. Morachevskii), Kiev (M. Pudavov and E. Sklovskii), St. Petersburg (N. Evstifeev), Saratov (K. Iunakov), Poltava (M. Dudchenko), Khar’kov (A. Gurov) and Rostov-on-Don (A. Kovalev) attended the congress. It seems that no delegates from the Odessa, Warsaw and Minsk vegetarian societies attended the congress. Vegetarian groups and reformist circles operated in many more cities of the empire than those mentioned above. Speakers who did not attend the congress in person sent their talks and reports via the postal service. They were then read out at the congress.<sup>72</sup>

**The manifesto: Congress resolutions**

The Presidium was permitted to propose a resolution based on a speech, which, for instance, provoked a lively discussion, as in the case of Lebren’s talk. Congress participants could also propose ideas for resolutions. A majority vote was needed in order for a proposal to be adopted. The issue regarding potential manipulations and mechanisms of influence on the resolution adopting process requires further research. Through a majority vote, the congress adopted seven resolutions.<sup>73</sup> Let us have a closer look at them.

According to the first resolution, based on Poltavskii’s talk, the All-Russian Vegetarian Congress, recognizing the need for new and broader ways of developing the idea of vegetarianism, stated that it wanted dietary issues to stop being the focus of vegetarianism. When addressing the theoretical issues of vegetarianism, the primary focus would be on the spiritual aspects (*dukhovnaia storona*). Vegetarianism would only achieve the highest value when it was sanctified by moral ideas, which was the realization of the kingdom of harmony and justice on earth. Through this resolution, the congress was clearly distancing itself from the hygiene and health tenets of vegetarianism.

The second resolution was inspired by Kimental’s report.<sup>74</sup> Acknowledging the great importance of vegetarianism in child-rearing, the congress considered it necessary to promote the idea of vegetarianism in both family and at school. Recognizing the importance of parents and caregivers as living examples, the congress expressed a strong desire for parents, educators and vegetarians to fully invest in building their lives on the foundations of humanity, in the constant work of creating an atmo-

sphere for the natural, harmonious and holistic development of children’s bodies and souls. The congress identified a number of most urgent tasks of cooperation for all vegetarians. Among them were the establishment of agricultural settlements, urban gardens, gardens for workers, school gardens, etc., and in general all the ways of unity with nature and life of the family and society, particularly for children’s lives and the lives of working urban people. In this regard, the task was also about organizing children and youth clubs at schools for the “protection of all living things”.

**THE NEXT RESOLUTION** was based on B. Ioffe’s report. The resolution claimed that one of the main tasks of social and educational work was addressing the active struggle of the family, school and society against everything that contributes to the “development of cruelty, sexual promiscuity, relaxation of will, and confusion in the souls of children and young men”.<sup>75</sup> The congress drew the attention of parents and educators, school and society to the importance of the struggle against alcoholism, to organizing children’s clubs of sobriety, and combating depictions of all kinds of atrocities and sexual promiscuity in the content of movie theatres. The congress unconditionally condemned experiments on live animals known as vivisection.

The congress initiated the founding of the Vegetarian Enquiry Office aimed at establishing contacts between and consolidating the activities of vegetarian societies and individual vegetarians by responding to queries, sending vegetarian literature, etc. The office, according to the congress, should consist of delegates from Moscow and other vegetarian societies, as well as all those willing to contribute to its work, to include three appointees from the congress (Zonov, Gorbunov-Posadov, Bosse). The latter were to take on the responsibility of organizing the office.

According to the sixth resolution, based on Lebren’s report, the congress considered it necessary to establish a media outlet that would bring together individuals and organizations seeking spiritual rebirth based on vegetarianism. Thus, the congress expressed the desire that not only vegetarian but also other Russian (*russkie*) *ideinye*, socially oriented organizations such as religious, ethical, peace, cooperative, educational and temperance organizations would engage with the Vegetarian Enquiry Office in order to establish such an outlet. Until this had been achieved, the congress considered it necessary for all vegetarian societies to support The VR by sending donations so that it could expand its program, thereby bringing it closer to the type of periodical in question. In addition, the congress considered it necessary to actively promote and support Zonov’s periodical “Calendar for Everyone”. As previously stated, Zonov had been compiling articles and information on all aspects of “spiritual revival”.

Believing that one of the reasons for the spread of alcoholism among the urban working population was a meat-based diet, the congress took it upon itself to appeal to the boards of trustees and temperance societies to introduce an optional plant-based diet in their public canteens. Sympathizing with the development of vegetarian consumer and productive cooperatives, the congress expressed the desire that the vegetarian societies

would contribute to their organization. The congress instructed the upcoming Vegetarian Enquiry Office to publish a handbook of vegetarianism, as well as arrange a mobile vegetarian exhibition. The congress wanted the Second All-Russian Vegetarian Congress to be convened in Kiev in 1914 during Easter week.

The resolutions of the congress aimed to forge and cement the ideological orientation of a fledgling vegetarian activism, thus endorsing life reform and cultural critique. The resolutions also concerned consolidation and the organizational elements of social movement activity, and included aspects of information management, communication and coordination. The resolutions passed at the congress reaffirmed the confidence in the idealistic ambitions of vegetarianism. Overlooking the time-honored scientific debate on dietary reform, one of the resolutions nevertheless inscribed itself into a global debate on vivisection. As sociologist Julia Twigg states:

**Nature is a framework of meaning, not just an alien object for our regard and exploitation. This is the significance of the deep hostility of the counterculture to science.**<sup>76</sup>

The counter-cultural imaginary emanating from the congress resolutions resonates well with Mary Douglas’s ideas and Twigg’s reflections on purity and vegetarianism.<sup>77</sup> The resolutions evoke dichotomies of purity/impurity, body (stomach)/spirit, meat/vegetables, structure/antistructure and so forth. Vegetarianism was imagined to be concerned with the control of “passions” and the improvement of “will”. Passions represent man’s carnal instinct, the “animal” instinct of humans, antithetical to rational, spiritual and moral persons. The underlying idea was the subduing of the flesh, the holistic development (read *subjection*) of the body and (*to*) the spirit. Consuming meat was linked with the rise of instincts beyond control and an appetite for food, alcohol and sexual congress. The ethics of wholeness and the ethics of naturalness were undeniable. Vegetarianism was quintessentially about renewal, New Life, New Man, new relations based on the egalitarianism of all forms of life, the unity of all living things. Having all these in mind, it is no wonder that the two resolutions heavily focused on educational aspects and the imagined role of children in the movement.

**Aftermath: Make no one happy?**

The congress was followed by assessments, exchange of opinions and even critiques of the congress’ work and outcomes. The assessments varied and revealed conflicting views on the congress’ work, as well as deeper frictions on doctrinal issues.

On May 5, 1913, K. Iunakov, a delegate from the Saratov Vegetarian Society, shared his impressions of the congress with the society’s members. Iunakov spoke of the technical shortcomings in the development of the congress program which, however, in his opinion, did not diminish the fruitfulness and value of its work. He expressed overall satisfaction with the results of the congress and gratitude to its organizer. The speaker mentioned the ideological differences that regrettably appeared during the



congress. In his opinion, three “conflicting currents”, – “religious,” “scientific-positivistic” and “hygiene”, – perceived vegetarianism from different angles. In Poltavskii’s opinion, the goal outlined by the congress was realized beyond what the organizer had hoped for. Poltavskii considered the ideological dissent (*ideinoe raznomyslie*) spelled out by Iunakov not to be regret, but rather deepest and sincerest joy. In Poltavskii’s opinion, the diverse assessments of vegetarianism indicated that it concerned different aspects of life. In his words, from the “conflicting currents of vegetarian thought”, from a very “clash of opinions”, a *new* and a *broad* vegetarianism, “closely connected with life”, must be born.<sup>78</sup> Poltavskii continued:

**This struggle of thoughts, which – let us hope – will flare up with even greater force and passion at our Second Congress in Kiev, will only strengthen the unity of spirit firmly established by the First All-Russian Congress in Moscow. Among us, as it seems to me, there is no one with a narrow conviction: “There is no salvation outside our church,” and therefore, no matter how great the ideological divergence [*ideinoe raskhozhdenie*], our “unity in love” will not become either lesser or paler because of it.**<sup>79</sup>

In the fall of 1913, the “Spiritual Awakening” Society launched a series of internal discussions on theoretical foundations and the consolidation of vegetarians. The assessment of the congress became one of the subjects of these discussions. In September 1913, L. Plakhov, chairman of the society’s board, opened a meeting by presenting the society’s aims and the direction of its activity, as well as its ideological foundations. He stated that the society had pioneered the convocation of the vegetarian congress in Russia, laying the foundation for a new way of promoting a high moral (*nравstvennaia*) doctrine and the humanitarian trends connected with it, as well as the “brotherly unity of Russian [*russskikh*] vegetarians”.<sup>80</sup> At the meeting in October 1913, P. Gurov started his speech on the aims, forms of propagation and mobilization activity of the “Spiritual Awakening” Society, with a critique of the congress, judging its results as insignificant and its scale as limited.<sup>81</sup> According to Gurov, it was not worth gathering the congress to pass resolutions on movie theatres, Mr. Zonov’s and Mr. Perper’s periodicals, and the “dogmatic resolution” on vivisection. He added that it was pointless to spend time on needless conversations about the benefits and hazards of medicine, when questions of paramount importance were not raised, such as: what was vegetarianism? Or, propaganda about what type of vegetarianism the congress considered to be the most rational; how to make the idea and practice of veg-

etarianism available to the masses, the working class, and other important questions. According to Gurov, the failure of the congress stemmed from the vagueness of the organizer’s perception of the task they faced, and from the vagueness of their practical program. Had the “Spiritual Awakening” Society presented clear views about the idea of vegetarianism, about the obligations to be imposed on its members, the members of the society would have likely voted unanimously at the congress, and the society would have been able to develop a program for the congress and draft resolutions that would meet its objectives. In his subsequent speech, he reflected on how to understand vegetarianism, with whom to unite and on which grounds. Humanistic socio-ethical worldview based on justice and “active love” was a nodal point of the ethical vegetarianism about which Gurov spoke. Interestingly, he did not mention Tolstoy, but cited Jean-Marie Guyau and Nikolai Nekrasov.<sup>82</sup>

AS THE ABOVE examples show, there was no consensus in either the assessment of the work of the congress or the doctrinal foundations of vegetarianism. Poltavskii was enthusiastic about the ideological differences articulated at the congress and believed that ideological diversity did not harm the collective cause. Plakhov and Gurov evaluated the work of the congress from the point of view of promoting ethical vegetarianism. Gurov criticized the “Spiritual Awakening” Society for not being proactive in preparing drafts of the congress resolutions and working ideologically with its members.

The VR provided an opportunity to share impressions of the congress. As Old Vegetarian wrote, 1913 would remain memorable for the “vegetarian movement in Russia” due to the convocation of the congress and exhibition, which demonstrated the vitality of the idea of vegetarianism, its growth and flourishing in recent years. For the first time, the author continued, an attempt had been made at the congress to unite like-minded people living in Russia, and it was hoped that this would be achieved in the future.<sup>83</sup> Being a

Tolstoy devotee, Esfir Kaplan highly praised the congress for the opportunity it gave to personally interact with like-minded people. In her opinion, the question of vivisection raised the most heated debates, and a few of the talks on the religious aspects particularly resonated with her. Hinting at the official antisemitic decision, she regretted that many vegetarians were not permitted to attend the congress.<sup>84</sup> In Iosif Perper’s opinion, the congress was like a large family, in which the participants showed love to each other. Yet, he acknowledged that there had been friction in some of the debates and that the issue of vegetarian canteens created tensions when “passions ran too high” and too much was said. According to Perper, the most important aspect of the congress was the unity of like-minded people, “a feeling

of unlimited love for all living things”, as well as the resolution that “vegetarianism only then acquires the highest value when it is sanctified by moral ideals...”.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, the congress did not manage to launch the All-Russian Vegetarian Union, as Perper had hoped.<sup>86</sup>

Some activists welcomed the diverse assessments of vegetarianism articulated during the discussions, while other activists wanted to fix its perceived doctrinal shortcomings. Although heated debates may have preceded the adoption of the congress resolutions, the resolutions that were adopted did not reflect the diversity of the ideological tenets of vegetarianism – rather the opposite. It seems that Tolstoy was not a unifying symbol, as some activists had wanted him to be. Old Vegetarian spoke of at least two portraits of Tolstoy and a picture of “Jesus with his followers in the corn field” which decorated the walls of the main hall of the congress building.<sup>87</sup> Remarkably, the “Spiritual Awakening” Society published a postcard in memory of the congress with a portrait of Élisée Reclus and his views on vegetarianism.<sup>88</sup> Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov’s verse “Happy is the one who loves all living things”, preaching compassion for animals and all living creatures, voiced out at the congress, became a vegetarian hymn.<sup>89</sup>

### Concluding remarks

As Donna Maurer reminds us, to succeed, vegetarian advocates and activists must balance practicality with moral consistency. Although activist groups want to promote an inclusive vegetarian message, the development of a vegetarian collective identity requires the ability to identify with the various motivations for vegetarianism. A vegetarian collective identity can create a sense of commonality and shared interests among vegetarians, encourage current vegetarians to become more involved in movement activities, yet if it becomes too strong, vegetarian advocates risk alienating some of their potential members.<sup>90</sup>

The congress resolutions appear to be exclusive, endorsing one strand of the vegetarian argument. The moral-ethical vegetarianism with some Christian religious undertones (the third resolution with references to God) was decreed a priority for imperial Russian vegetarian activism. Beside resolution on vivisection, there was no resolution that addressed vegetarianism from a scientific, economic, human health or environmental perspective, even though these perspectives were included in the congress program draft, as well as publicly discussed and academically developed. The so-called “medical” or “scientific” vegetarians were steadily increasing in number and influence, particularly during the 1910s. On the eve of convening the congress some of the leading Tolstoyans themselves were aware that the “moralistic vegetarians” of the Tolstoyan camp had been losing their influence within the *movement*, as Ronald LeBlanc has noted. Those who advocated vegetarianism on the basis of rational or modern scientific considerations showed growing displeasure with the doctrinaire views of “moralistic vegetarians”.<sup>91</sup> The second part of the resolutions focused on efforts to consolidate and mobilize, as well as information management. The congress resolutions made clear which ideological foundations


were given priority and which standpoints were favored by the congress. Enforcement of a certain brand of vegetarianism, and absolutization of its ethical-humanitarian aspects could have disenfranchised all those who sympathized with vegetarianism for health reasons, for example. This could have deepened the existing frictions between movement groups, causing further disintegration and alienation, a tendency which was common in many reformist environments of Europe. The flash of ideological polemics occurred on the eve of the First World War and the congress results might have fueled it.

According to LeBlanc, a rift that developed in the 1910s between “moralistic vegetarians” and “hygiene vegetarians” clearly had a profound impact on the direction that the movement took. By refusing to tolerate any departure from the ethical vegetarianism, Vladimir Chertkov, Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov and other influential Tolstoyan activists alienated and disenfranchised many of those who were attracted to vegetarianism for reasons other than the principle of not killing other living creatures. They were also solely responsible for identifying vegetarianism with Tolstoyism. According to this outlook, not only were all Tolstoyans expected to practice vegetarianism, but all vegetarians were also expected to abide by Tolstoy’s teachings.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, it seems that so-called “moralistic vegetarians” were not united either.

It also appears that the congress participants had different expectations about the congress, which were evident in its diverse assessments. Some participants criticized the congress for its ideological vagueness, weakness and indecisiveness, other participants praised it for providing a forum for communication and interaction between vegetarians from across the empire, while other participants mentioned the significance of the ideological rifts and debates during the sessions. These diverse assessments echoed well with the discussions on the ideological tenets of vegetarianism, which appeared in The VR’s column “The conversations on vegetarianism” and were pursued long before convening the congress. According to Perper, it was not the task of vegetarianism to make a “careful distinction” between “ethical” and “hygiene” vegetarians. The history of the international vegetarian movement, as Perper maintained, included examples of people who adhered to vegetarianism for hygiene reasons, grew subsequently concerned about its ethical side, and became adherents of “our idea”. Thus, in Perper’s view, it was not “we”, who had been striving for unity, who should be obliged to make any distinctions.<sup>93</sup>

THE PRESENT INQUIRY has barely scratched the surface of vegetarian movement activity, its branding and ideological anxieties. In order to further our understanding of these processes, it is crucial that more research is conducted. However, let us speculate on the factors that might have contributed to the dominance of a certain orientation of vegetarianism as manifested in the congress resolutions. First, in The VR, the congress was discursively (and beforehand) branded as the event that placed an ethical vegetarianism at its center. This is the impression that is gained when reading Perper’s texts, which served as a preamble to

information about the congress. This might have discouraged activists who did not associate their vegetarian regime with ethics, or their ethics with Tolstoy, in order for them to participate in the congress. Administrative barriers and official antisemitic decision could also have diminished the ideological diversity of the congress participants. The “Spiritual Awakening” Society, the organizer and the host of the event aimed to promote an ethical vegetarianism, as part of a humanitarian doctrine.<sup>94</sup> The triumvirate of Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov, Georgii Bosse and Aleksei Zonov gained a disproportionate influence.<sup>95</sup> Overall, these could have contributed to the prevalence of people among the delegates and participants at the congress with voting rights that favored moral-ethical/humanitarian vegetarianism. Yet, this point requires additional verification, since the present sources do not hint at the voting process. Due to the outbreak of the First World War, the second congress in Kiev did not take place. The outbreak of war corresponded with the flash of ideological polemics, forcing vegetarian activists to reexamine and more explicitly defend their motivation for abstaining from eating meat.<sup>96</sup>

The congress resolutions witnessed the absolutization of one line of argument in favor of vegetarianism, promoted by certain activist groups with resources. Out of seven congress resolutions, four were about doctrinal aspects and three were about the promotion and realization of these. The educational agenda, which preoccupied two out of seven resolutions, seemed to be one of the milestones of the vegetarian imaginary, promoted by the congress resolutions. The resolutions deliberately overlooked the hygiene and health considerations of vegetarianism. Was the congress and its resolutions representative of the vegetarian activism of the Russian empire? Due to the partiality of the resolutions, it is unlikely that the congress became a consolidating event, as it was hoped. On the contrary, it could have deepened the fragmentation and rifts between the different reformist groups. Micro-historical studies of local vegetarian and reformist environments across the former Russian empire are crucial not only for the nuancing of the historiographic image of vegetarianism in Eastern Europe, but also for comprehending a variety of grassroots initiatives and philosophies from these milieus. The mere fact that journalists were ousted from the congress is intriguing. Did the congress administration want to hide something from the public? Was it a way of influencing, if not controlling, the media image of the event? 

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Semen Poltavskii (1887–ca 1960) was a Soviet journalist, critic, author of prose, translator. He graduated from Saratov University as a physician. In the 1930s, he was subjected to repressions.

3

The name of the cities in Ukrainian and Moldavian provinces of the

Russian empire (such as Odessa, Kiev, Khar’kov, Ekaterinoslav, and Kishinev), journals or newspapers are translated from Russian as they appear in the source material. Russian was the language of communication within and between the vegetarian societies in the empire. The source material that was produced and left by the respective societies is also in Russian. The activists’ names are translated from Russian as they appear in the source material, with the exception of Jenny Schulz. However, important to bear in mind that vegetarian circles were multilingual and multiethnic in their nature.

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Ronald D. LeBlanc, “Tolstoy’s Way of No Flesh: Abstinence, Vegetarian-ism, and Christian Physiology,” in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 85, 87.

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Julia Hauser, “Internationalism and Nationalism: Indian Protagonists and Their Political Agendas at the 15<sup>th</sup> World Vegetarian Congress in India (1957),” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 44:1 (2021): 158. Here are some examples: in 1908 the First World Vegetarian Congress took place in Dresden; 1909 – Second World Vegetarian Congress in Manchester; 1910 – Third World Congress in Brussels; 1913 – Fourth World Congress in The Hague. The list of the locations of world congresses is long: Stockholm (Sweden), London (UK), Steinschönau (Czechoslovakia), Berlin/Hamburg (Germany), Daugaard (Denmark) etc.

Hauser, “Internationalism and Nationalism,” 152–166.

On the evolvment of vegetarian activism, see: Malitska, “Mediated Vege-tarianism”; Julia Malitska, “The Peripheries of Omnivorousness: Vegetar-ian Canteens and Social Activism in the Early Twentieth-Century Russian Empire,” *Global Food History*, 7:2 (2021): 140–175; Julia Malitska, “Meat and the City in the Late Russian Empire: Dietary Reform and Vegetarian Activism in Odessa, 1890s-1910s,” *Baltic Worlds*, 2–3 (2020): 4–24.

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Olga Zelenkova, *‘Ia nikogo ne em!’: 365 vegetarianskikh menui i rukovodstvo dlia prigotovleniia vegetarianskikh kushanii: 1600 vegetarianskikh retseptov po vremenam goda, s raschetom na 6 person*. Pod red. A. P. Zelenkova. 4-e izdanie (Petrograd: Tipografiia t-va A. S. Suvorina “Novoe vremia,” 1917); Olga Zelenkova, *Nechto o vegetarianstve: vyp.1–4* (St. Peterburg: Tipo-grafiia Doma prizreniia maloletnikh bednykh, 1902–1904).

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For more about the start-up see the columnns: “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu,” VO, no. 5 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/31.htm> ; “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu,” VO, no. 6 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/32.htm> ; Sovet Vegetarianskogo Obshchestva “Dukhovnoe Probuzhdenie,” Vegetarianskii s’ezd i vegetarianskaia vystavka, VO, no. 10 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/71.htm> .

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The Moscow Vegetarian Society founded in 1909 on similar grounds and with the same aims as other vegetarian societies in the empire. In his speech at the first General Meeting of the Moscow Vegetarian Society on March 16, 1909, Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov, chairman of the meeting, assert-ed that vegetarianism was part of the humanitarian movement, aiming at life reform on the grounds of humanity and that all vegetarian societies must serve a great idea – “establishing love between all living things”. Interestingly, at the second General Meeting of the society on April 29, 1909, a member Sergei Bykov spoke of the scientific promotion of veg-etarianism among the population and suggested seeking doctors’ opinions on vegetarianism. V. Molochnikov proposed that they should conceal the hygiene side of vegetarianism and mainly focus on its ethical side. This was supported by Aleksei Zonov, whereas Fedor German considered hygiene to be the basis of the ethics of vegetarianism. For further infor-mation, see the Moscow Vegetarian Society’s report from 1909 and the minutes of its meetings: *Moskovskoe Vegetarianskoe Obshchestvo. Obzor sostoiianiia i deiatel’nosti Obshchestva za 1909 g. (Pervyi god sushchestvova-niia obshchestva)* (Moskva, 1910). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/history/mosvegi909.htm>. Moscow had become the center of the Tolstoyan movement to an even greater extent after the “Spiritual Awakening” Society was founded there in 1912. The society declared its abstention from the dietary aspects of vegetarianism, see Obshchestvo “Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie,” VO, no. 8 (1913): 321–322.

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Staryi Vegetarianets, “Po miru,” VO, no. 7 (1912): 273–274.

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- 50 For more about Iosif Perper, see Malitska, "Mediated Vegetarianism."
- 51 Iosif Perper, "Nasha razroznennost'" (Po povodu predpolagaemogo sozyva Pervogo Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo S'ezda)," *VO*, no. 5 (1912). Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.vita.org.ru/veg/veg-literature/veg-viewing1912/30.htm>
- 52 Iosif Perper, "Vegetarianskaia vystavka i s'ezd vegetariantsev," *VO*, no. 7 (1912): 272.
- 53 Ibid., 271–272.
- 54 Ibid., 272.
- 55 Iosif Perper, "K otkrytiiu Pervogo Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo S'ezda," *VO*, no. 3 (1913): 89–90.
- 56 Ibid., 90.
- 57 "V mire pechati," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 198–200.
- 58 "Poslednie novosti. Vegetarianskii s'ezd v Moskve," *Utro*, April 20, 1913, 3.
- 59 "Old Vegetarian" was a pseudonym that most probably belonged to Aleksandr Zankovskii. Saryi Vegetarianets, "Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S'ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprilia 1913)," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 136–140.
- 60 Jenny Schulz, a renowned vegetarian chef and activist from West Prussia, contributed to both the opening and the work of vegetarian canteens in Budapest, Zurich, Berlin, Locarno, as well as in a number of cities in the Russian empire. In 1909, she became a member of the Moscow Vegetarian Society. For more information, see Malitska, "Meat and the City," 14–16.
- 61 Natal'ia Nordman-Severova (1863–1914), a friend of the Perper family, suffragette and promoter of vegetarianism, and much more. She was also the partner of painter Ilja Repin. Saryi Vegetarianets, "Vegetarianskaia Vystavka (16–21 aprilia 1913)," *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 241–243.
- 62 "V mire pechati," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 199.
- 63 Georgii Bosse (1887–1964) was a Soviet botanist, professor, doctor of biological sciences and member of the Board of the Moscow Esperanto Society.
- 64 "Privetstviia Pervomu Vserossiiskomu Vegetariankomu S'ezdu," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 141–144.
- 65 Ibid., 141.
- 66 Ibid., 141.
- 67 Semen Poltavskii, "Sushchestvuet li vegetarianskoe mirosozertsanie? (Doklad, chitannyi na I Vegetarianskom S'ezde)," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 157–170.
- 68 "V mire pechati," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 199.
- 69 Viktor Lebrén, "O neobkhodimosti osnovaniia novago entsiklopedicheskago progressivnago organa pechati," *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 207–213.
- 70 Vladimir Kimental', "Vegetarianstvo i vospitanie (Doklad, chitannyi na I Vegetarianskom S'ezde)," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 144–155.
- 71 Anna Sharapova (1863–1923), a Russian translator and activist in the international Esperanto movement and vegetarianism. She was also sister-in-law of Pavel Biriukov, Lev Tolstoy's secretary. She corresponded with Tolstoy and translated a number of his works and the works of other writers into Esperanto. She translated materials from Esperanto for The VR. Sharapova, who was from Kostroma and Roman Dobrzhanskii, who was from Kiev, were national secretaries for imperial Russia in the International Union of Esperantist Vegetarians founded in 1908. Tolstoy was elected as honorary president of the union. See, inter alia: A. Sharapova, "O Mezhdunarodnom Soiuzze Esperantistov-Vegetariantsev (Internacia Unuigo de Esperantistaj Vegetaranoj)," *VO*, no. 2 (1910): 28–29; "Mezhdunarodnyi Soiuz Esperantistov-Vegetariantsev," *VO*, no. 2 (1910): 29–30.
- 72 Ibid., 136–140.
- 73 "Rezoliutsii Pervogo Vserossiiskogo Vegetarianskogo S'ezda (Moskva, 16–21 aprilia 1913)," *VO*, no. 4–5, (1913): 131–133. I have tried to summarize and convey the content and rhetoric of the resolutions as close to the original as possible.
- 74 Kimental', "Vegetarianstvo i vospitanie."
- 75 Rezoliutsii, 132.
- 76 Julia Twigg, "Food for Thought: Purity and Vegetarianism," *Religion*, vol. 9 (1979): 22.
- 77 Twigg, "Food for Thought," 13–35. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).
- 78 Old Vegetarian reproduced the discussions (with citations) conducted at the Saratov Society, see Saryi Vegetarianets, "Po miru," *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 243–244.
- 79 Saryi Vegetarianets, "Po miru," *VO*, no. 6 (1913): 244.
- 80 Obshchestvo "Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie," *VO*, no. 8 (1913): 321–323; Obshchestvo "Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie": Svedeniia o namechennoi rabote i planakh Vegetarianskogo Obshchestva "Dukhovnoe Probuzhdenie" v 1913 godu," *VO*, no. 7 (1913): 277–278.
- 81 It is worth mentioning that The VR's editorial board disagreed with Gurov's statement, as revealed by the reference attached to it, yet published his critique in the journal.
- 82 P. Gurov, "Nashi tseli i nashi zadachi," *VO*, no. 10 (1913): 390–393. Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–1888) was a French philosopher and poet. Nikolai Nekrasov (1821–1878) was a Russian poet, writer, critic and publisher.
- 83 Saryi Vegetarianets, "Po miru," *VO*, no. 1 (1914): 34.
- 84 Mira K, "Dni Radosti (Vospominaniia o I Vserossiiskom Vegetarianskom S'ezde)," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 133–136. Esfir Kaplan had a pseudonym *Mira K*. Born in Volhynian province, she was secretary of The VR from 1909–1911, led a culinary section in the journal, and was one of the initiators of the vegetarian canteen in Poltava. Esfir was married to Iosif Perper in 1917.
- 85 Iosif Perper, "Nash pervyi S'ezd," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 130.
- 86 Ibid., 129–131.
- 87 Saryi Vegetarianets, "Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S'ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprilia 1913)," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 136.
- 88 Saryi Vegetarianets, "Po miru," *VO*, no. 7 (1913): 283. Élisée Reclus (1830–1905) was a renowned French geographer, writer and anarchist.
- 89 Saryi Vegetarianets, "Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S'ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprilia 1913)," *VO*, no. 4–5 (1913): 140.
- 90 Maurer, 121, 124, 128–129.
- 91 LeBlanc, "Vegetarianism in Russia," 12.
- 92 Ibid., 25.
- 93 Iosif Perper, "Besedy o vegetarianstve (Otvét Evgeniiu Lozinskomu)," *VO*, no. 9–10 (1910): 51–54. Evgenii Lozinskii's text "Vegetarianism and Anthropophagy," published in The VR, triggered a debate on the ideological foundations of vegetarianism, see Evgenii Lozinskii, "Vegetarianstvo i antropofagiia," *VO*, no. 6–7–8 (1910): 93–95.
- 94 Obshchestvo "Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie," *VO*, no. 8 (1913): 321–323; Obshchestvo "Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie": Svedeniia o namechennoi rabote i planakh Vegetarianskogo Obshchestva "Dukhovnoe Probuzhdenie" v 1913 godu," *VO*, no. 7 (1913): 277–278.
- 95 Saryi Vegetarianets, "Pervyi Vserossiiskii Vegetarianskii S'ezd (Moskva, 16–21 aprilia 1913)," *VO*, no. 4–5, (1913): 137. From 1909–1912, all three were influential members of the Moscow Vegetarian Society and directly involved in its activity. Zonov was the first chairman of the society.
- 96 For more about this, see LeBlanc, "Vegetarianism in Russia," 12.



Illustration 4. Students of gardening and housekeeping courses at Liplapi Farm in the 1920s. Source: EPM FP 330:30.

# VEGETARIAN FOOD AS MODERN FOOD

by **Anu Kannike**  
& **Ester Bardone**

**ATTEMPTS TO EDUCATE  
THE NATION OF ESTONIA  
FROM THE 1900s TO THE 1930s**

## **abstract**

This article considers the spread of ideas on vegetarianism in Estonia from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1940. The study builds on analyzing archival sources, media texts and educational work conducted by nutrition experts, schools and organizations. Propaganda about the consumption of vegetarian food was associated with the general moderniza-

tion of domestic culture and the discourse on healthy food as the basis for the nation's vitality. The article highlights the leading role of women's movement in home economics, including attempts to implement food culture informed by nutritional science, especially teaching the people to eat more fruits and vegetables. The spread of vegetarian ideas

in Estonia also illustrates how the previously dominating German cultural influences were gradually replaced by an orientation towards the Nordic countries, and demonstrates how these ideas were adapted to an Estonian context.

**KEY WORDS:** Vegetarianism, modernization, home economics, nutritional science.



In this article we analyze the arrival and spread of ideas and practices of vegetarianism and the attempts to modernize the diet of Estonians from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to 1940. The period of Estonia’s transition from a province of the Russian empire (1710–1918) to independent statehood (1918–1940) was especially significant when considering the changes in food culture that took place in the context of rapid modernization and the emergence of a modern nation state.<sup>1</sup> Estonia represents an interesting case for examining the intertwining of different ideologies and cultural influences because of the country’s geographical location at the crossroads between Germany, Russia and the Nordic countries.

Starting from the 1870s, Estonian intellectuals who led the national movement increasingly began to look towards the rest of Europe, especially the Nordic countries, for examples of progressive culture and civilizing everyday life – the ideals that vegetarian visionaries also expressed in their writings and public speeches.<sup>2</sup> Novel nutritional ideas were adapted to the local climate, economy and food habits. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of vegetarian food – not just vegetarianism – was emphasized in the public discourse on food and the nation’s diet, based on nutritional science and scientific household management. The consumption of vegetarian food was associated with the general modernization of domestic culture and a healthy diet as the basis for the nation’s vitality. The focus on health, physical fitness, natural lifestyle, scientific rationalism, but also ethical consumer awareness, reflected the values of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, vegetables were envisioned as the food of the future for both health and economic reasons. Plant-based nutrients were less expensive and more accessible to all strata of society. Thus, the ultimate goal of advocates of a plant-based diet was not to convert people to vegetarianism but rather to convince them to change their everyday eating habits by consuming more vegetables and fruits.

**WE EXPLORE** the development of ideologies and initiatives related to educating the nation about healthy eating, the benefits of vegetarian food and how advocating for vegetarian food became a project about modernizing the nation of Estonia. Our main sources are articles published in newspapers and magazines, advice literature and cookbooks, but we have also relied on archival documents (files of home economics schools, the Chamber of Home Economics and the Tartu Association for Vegetarians), as well as published surveys about health conditions. In order to understand the context of our study, it

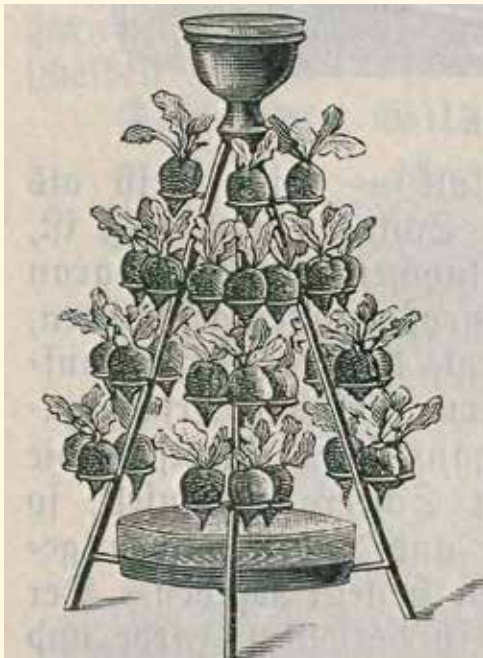


Illustration 1. A frame for serving radishes. Source: Marra Korth *Praktisches Kochbuch* (Riga, 1911).

must be stressed that the promotion of plant-based food until the late 1930s was aimed at a mainly agrarian society in which the emerging rural or urban middle class still retained peasant foodways.<sup>4</sup> How did the educated elite perceive the food habits of the masses and what were the arguments used to convince people to eat more vegetarian food? Unlike the Russian empire until 1917 – and in Western Europe – in which male nutritional scientists and physicists played a prominent role in leading the people towards a modern diet, after World War I in Estonia, female home economics teachers took the leading role in both the nutritional and the culinary education of the nation.<sup>5</sup> Women home economics teachers who instructed other Estonian women to become reformers of the nation’s diet by changing their own eating habits are the main focus of this study. Who were these women?

Where did they receive their education and how did it shape their values and understanding of vegetarian food? Estonian women who established home economics education and led the diet reform can be regarded as “culture builders”<sup>6</sup> who were not only addressing workers and peasants, but also the middle class who, like themselves aimed to change their everyday food habits and values. Their goal was similar to what was envisioned in other European countries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – housewives were regarded as being responsible for the physiological and economic prosperity of the nation and a vegetarian diet was seen as a tool for achieving this goal.<sup>7</sup>

### Early introduction of vegetarianism: male experts as educators

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Estonian (food) culture had developed under the influence of two major cultural spheres. Although Estonia was part of the Russian empire, the cultural influence of the Baltic German elite prevailed until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, due to socio-historical circumstances, like much of the working classes<sup>8</sup> in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Estonians were “vegetarians by necessity, not by choice” – they appreciated meat but could eat it only on festive occasions.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, famines (the most recent from 1867 to 1869) were still relatively fresh in people’s minds at the end of the century.<sup>10</sup> However, Estonian simple folk traditionally regarded meat, particularly fat, as a desirable and nutritious food. During holidays, at weddings, and particularly at Christmas, there had to be plenty of meat, and they wanted to eat as much meat as possible.<sup>11</sup> At the everyday table, grain-based dishes dominated, and fruits and vegetables had a poor reputation (with the exception of



Illustration 2. Edible wild stinging nettle (*Urtica* L.). Source: Wikipedia.

**“STINGING NETTLES (*URTICA DIOICA* L.) AND GROUND ELDER (*AEGOPODIUM PODAGRARIA* L.) COULD BE CHOPPED AND BRAISED WITH SOME MILK OR DRIED ICELANDIC MOSS (*AEGOPODIUM PODAGRARIA* L.) POWDER COULD BE ADDED TO BREAD DOUGH.”**



potatoes since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which, in turn, reduced the consumption of other vegetables). Similar to neighboring countries, vegetables were often perceived as animal fodder or a fad of gentlefolk.<sup>12</sup> The attitude of Estonians towards vegetables also reflected the distinction between the social classes. In contrast to modest allotments at farmsteads, horticulture was well developed in upper-class households by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In manor houses in particular, a great variety of vegetables were cultivated, using heated beds and greenhouses for more cold-sensitive plants (e.g., asparagus and artichokes).<sup>13</sup> Like the gentry elsewhere in Europe, the Baltic Germans used to serve vegetables in elaborate ways (see Illustration 1) although vegetarian dishes did not feature much in the cookbooks aimed at Baltic German households before the 1910s as the authors of cookbooks tended to praise the abundance of meat dishes on bourgeois and upper-class tables.<sup>14</sup>

**SEVERAL BALTIC GERMAN** intellectuals, pastors and doctors wrote advice literature in Estonian aimed at country folk. These authors criticized the peasants’ poor eating habits and suggested the inclusion of more wild plants in their diet, especially during food shortages and times of famine. For instance, in 1818, pastor and writer Johann Wilhelm Ludwig von Luce (1756–1842) published a booklet *Suggestions and Advice When You are Struggling with Poverty and Famine* (Est. Nou ja abbi, kui waesus ja nälg käe on), which was aimed at enriching Estonians’ eating habits. He described the culinary use of several common plants in Estonia. For instance, stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica* L.) (Illustration 2) and ground elder (*Aegopodium podagraria* L.) could be chopped and braised with some milk or dried Icelandic moss (*Aegopodium podagraria* L.) powder could be added to bread dough. Luce also preached at local peasants for not consuming enough legumes or vegetables (cabbage, turnip) like Germans, Russians and Latvians did and relying too much on grain-based foods, the quantity of which was often insufficient.<sup>15</sup> Similar concerns about Estonians’ limited eating habits were also expressed by some of the leading figures of the Estonian national movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., doctor and literate Friedrich Reinhold Kreutz-



Illustration 3. Peasants at Saaremaa island at the breakfast table (1913). Photo: Johannes Pääsuke. Source: ERM Fk 1:2/78

**“HELLAT WAS VERY CRITICAL OF ESTONIANS’ NUTRITIONAL HABITS AND BELIEFS. HE CLAIMED THAT THE DIET OF THE PEOPLE WAS UNVARIED, THE CHOICE OF FOOD POOR AND COOKING SKILLS LACKING.”**

reached the countryside. The first Estonian intellectuals felt that their mission was to be educators of the common people, and questions about vitality, morality and the need for personal development became prominent. The advice was often moralizing in nature, underscoring the shortcomings of their lifestyle, hygiene and nutrition caused by their lack of knowledge. Among the health advancement ideas that were based on the natural sciences, the temperance movement had the broadest support. Similar arguments were also used by new teachings about diet – vegetarianism.

Jaan Spuhl-Rotalia (1859–1916), a self-educated schoolteacher, journalist, horticulturalist and the author of several handbooks was probably the first Estonian to discuss the principles of vegetarianism in greater depth. (There had been some introductory articles in Estonian dailies in the 1890s.) His arguments primarily reflected the ideas of *Lebensreform*, a reform movement in German-speaking Europe that praised the natural lifestyle, of which nutrition (especially vegetarian food) formed a significant part.<sup>17</sup> Spuhl-Rotalia was particularly inspired by German natural lifestyle pioneer Eduard Baltzer (1814–1887), whose vegetarian recipes he published in a number of issues of the magazine *The Housekeeper* (Est. Majapidaja) in 1905. Among the recipes, root vegetable and grain soups were predominant, and cooking various “grass soups” from naturally growing edible plants was also

wald; folklorist Mattias Johann Eisen). They offered general advice on nutrition to Estonian country folk and criticized their eating habits, which were primarily based on bread and cereals. Since the 1860s, the advice of intellectuals reached more Estonians due to the spread of newspapers and educational literature. Unlike other provinces of the Russian empire, the peasantry in Estonia (and other Baltic provinces) was very literate (by the 1890s, around 96% of them could read and write).<sup>16</sup>

**BY THE BEGINNING** of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all main ideas of Western social thought had reached Estonians, and by the 1910s, scholarly literature was already being published in Estonian, although most of the publications were popular general knowledge books. Via magazines and popular education, more urban attitudes and a greater awareness of the body, health and food

recommended. Although the magazine’s main emphasis was on farming and gardening issues, it also included advice on food. The tone of the advice was moralizing – eating had to be governed by strict rules: you could only drink half an hour after a meal; there should be three hours between supper and bedtime. Vegetables, fruits and dairy products were preferable, while meat was to be consumed in moderate amounts. He repeatedly explained the harmfulness of coffee, even calling it a poison that caused nervousness and thin blood and recommended “coffee drinks” made from malt or peas instead.<sup>18</sup> In 1905 British vegetarian and women’s rights campaigner Anna Kingsford’s (1846–1888) *The Perfect Way in Diet* (originally published in 1881) was published in a translation by Jaan Spuhl-Rotalia. The book actively promoted vegetarianism, stressing both health and economic arguments. However, in his postscript, Spuhl-Rotalia himself expressed only moderate support of vegetarianism: “As vehement enthusiasts and excessive practitioners can be found in any society, they are not lacking among vegetarians, but a golden mean and sensible moderation are best even in this.”<sup>19</sup> He concedes that eating only raw vegetables is not conceivable in the Nordic countries. He mentioned bread and fruit as the most valuable foods, emphasized a balanced diet and the correct combination of vegetarian and dairy foods. Spuhl-Rotalia concluded that cooking vegetarian dishes was simpler and less costly; in addition, vegetarian eating was clean and humane.

**SEVERAL ADVOCATES** of vegetarianism in Western Europe and America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were male doctors, who combined health and ethical arguments and focused on “the purifying effect, both spiritual and physical, of a vegetarian diet.”<sup>20</sup> During the Interbellum era, Danish physician Mikkel Hindhede (1862–1945), one of the best-known advocates of vegetarianism in Europe at the time, was also the greatest authority for Estonian vegetarians, and his ideas were often reflected in newspapers. In 1911 his *The Exemplary Cookery Book* (Est. Eesku-juline kokaraamat)<sup>21</sup> was published in Estonian. In Hindhede’s opinion, the global population would be threatened by hunger due to a looming food crisis, which is why he recommended voluntarily choosing the vegetarian path. His program of a meatless diet was based on both physiological and economical arguments that questioned the earlier nutritionists’ dogma of meat being the ultimate source of protein.<sup>22</sup> He promoted simple and moderate nutrition and stressed that in making food choices, the most important factor was its wholesomeness, its inexpensiveness and its taste. Hindhede’s approach with its scientific systematicity was novel in Estonia: he proposed complete menus for different meals in each season, as well as tables on the protein, fat and mineral content of foodstuffs. He formulated instructions that he suggested each housewife copy in capital letters and hang on the wall above the dining table. The diversity of food served in the boarding houses he had founded was highlighted and the dishes’ “nutritious value” was said to “compete with refined tastes”.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in Estonia, the doctor and prominent public figure Peeter Hellat (1857–1912) raised the topic of healthy eating for a broad audience in a professional manner. He was a supporter

of temperance and vegetarianism who studied and worked at St. Petersburg before World War I. In the guidebook *A Study of Health* (Est. Tervise õpetus) (1913), Hellat was very critical of Estonians’ nutritional habits and beliefs. He claimed that the diet of the people was unvaried, the choice of food poor and cooking skills lacking (see Illustration 3). Hellat suggested that different kinds of dishes should be eaten throughout the year, particularly emphasizing the rich nutrient content of vegetables. He believed that people should be educated that both meat dishes and vegetables – which improve the taste of a meal and its digestibility – were nutritious. Although he was a vegetarian himself, he did not emphasize it, like other European doctors who were practicing vegetarians – medical experts of the age often criticized vegetarians for being unscientific and sectarian.<sup>24</sup> His book took a moderate stance: “What can be called *approximately reasonable* is a position that ascribes equal status to both vegetarian and meat dishes. Among our people it is still impossible to talk about the excessive consumption of meat.”<sup>25</sup> Hellat’s views also reflected a broader understanding of vegetarianism elsewhere – being vegetarian did not always mean total abstinence from meat or animal products, and dairy products in particular were considered part of a healthy vegetarian diet.<sup>26</sup>

**IN THE LATE 19<sup>TH</sup>** and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian empire, a variety of vegetarian movements emerged based on diverse ideologies, some of which were inspired by vegetarian ideas in European countries, some evolving a uniquely Russian character. Although vegetarianism developed later in Imperial Russia compared to Western Europe, a considerable number of vegetarian societies, canteens, cafes and journals existed before the 1917 revolution.<sup>27</sup> St. Petersburg as an intellectual center of the Empire was also a probable source of influence from where ideas of Russian and Western European vegetarianism might have spread to Estonia.<sup>28</sup> In Russia, the spread of vegetarianism based on spiritual ideas was also facilitated by religion – the Orthodox church had long fasting periods. However, the vast majority of Estonians were protestants and did not fast; only a few vegetarians in Estonia were inspired by sectarian religious ideas that were rather similar to the German natural living movement.<sup>29</sup> The ideas of the influential figure in the Russian spiritual vegetarian movement, Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), were known to Estonian intellectuals (1908 Tolstoy’s *The First Step: On Vegetarianism* (the Russian original from 1892) was translated into Estonian) but did not give rise to a similar movement. Although vegetarianism based on medical science arguments was another prominent movement in the major cities of the Russian empire, it had no impact in Estonia. Unlike in the major cities of the Russian empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century vegetarian societies, periodicals or canteens were not established in Estonia.<sup>30</sup> Organized vegetarianism did not develop in Estonia despite a strong temperance movement and an awareness of modern medical science and nutrition. The development of vegetarian ideas in Estonia rather reflects the nationalization of modernism very similar to that in Scandinavia.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was mainly men – Baltic German or Estonian intellectuals and foreign or local medical ex-



perts – who were leading the way towards a healthier and more diverse diet for Estonian country folk. Estonian authors translated articles and books by foreign vegetarians and physicians but in their own writing they advocated for a more balanced diet, emphasizing the nutritional value of vegetables but not excluding animal products.

## The rise of local female experts in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Estonia

In Western modernizing societies since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, attitudes towards home economics changed, and it was no longer regarded as an art of service but as a science that required professional training.<sup>32</sup> This new field was based on the latest scientific and technological achievements. The idea of housekeeping as a full-time profession was promoted by a new set of experts who, unlike the doctors and gardeners of the previous generation, were predominantly women. The new home economics culture was introduced by middle-class women and became a means of spreading the values of this social group into the lower strata. The modern educated, rational and efficient housewife who contributed to the nation's welfare became an ideal at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> The aim of home economics was not just a private concern of the family because women were supposed to change the way of life and the mindset of the entire nation.<sup>34</sup> Reforming the people's traditional attitudes towards food and their nutritional habits was a critical aspect of the modern housewife's battle. Laura Shapiro described the belief in the transformative power of science in cooking as "culinary idealism." Domestic scientists were inspired by the nutritional properties of food, by its ability to promote physical, social and moral growth.<sup>35</sup> The promotion of vegetarian food became part of a modern home economics education and also part of the modern nutritional and urban discourse.

**IN THE YEARS** preceding World War I, vegetarianism had already become significantly more visible in Estonia. Similar to the Nordic countries, women played a leading role in promoting vegetarian ideas.<sup>36</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Finland (at that time the Grand Duchy of Finland as an autonomous part of the Russian empire) became the closest sphere of influence for Estonian women. The role of women in society at the time was more progressive in Finland<sup>37</sup> and in the other Nordic countries compared to Western Europe. Women's education in home economics and horticulture was seen as an opportunity to modernize home culture and food culture and thereby society at large, but also a chance for female emancipation. Progressive Estonian women regarded Finland as a good place to acquire a professional home economics education and, after returning home, they became pioneering instructors for their fellow countrywomen.

Like the Nordic countries, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Estonia was mainly an agrarian society, unlike the leading industrialized

countries (Germany, Great Britain, USA) in which mass-produced food started creating health issues in the population and vegetarianism was used to combat these issues.<sup>38</sup> In the 1910s the first vegetarian handbooks and cookbooks were published in Estonian, aimed at a wider audience, not just the elite. Favorable grounds for adopting the new knowledge on healthy eating was undoubtedly laid by the active participation of Estonian women in temperance societies in which they represented one third of the total membership at the turn of the century.<sup>39</sup> Also, the peculiarity of the modernization of Estonian home culture should be understood in light of the fact that women's reading skills and practice were more advanced than those of men at the time.<sup>40</sup>

The rapid pace of the modernization of everyday life at the turn of the century is vividly illustrated by the change of opinions about the importance of education on food and home economics in just a couple of decades. At first, it was advocated by a few intellectuals. In Natalie Johanson-Pärna's girls' handicraft school (1880–1885) whose curriculum was based on her studies in Denmark in 1878 and Finland in 1879, cooking was included alongside other manual activities.<sup>41</sup> Some newspaper articles of the decade described Finnish housekeeping schools as good examples.<sup>42</sup>

Gardening, nutrition and food education went hand in hand as the people had to be taught to grow fruit and vegetables as well as be introduced to new recipes to make their diet more varied. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the wisdom of the era of national awakening had developed into a widespread demand for gardening and cooking courses in both rural and urban areas. In Tallinn, the first cooking courses to last three months were organized in 1906.<sup>43</sup> The advertisement for the course emphasized that the ways of cooking taught by manor cooks were insufficient for real life and the Finnish art of creating better and less expensive dishes should be considered as an example. The course manager was invited over from Finland. In the 1910s, educated Estonians started expressing their opinions in local newspapers about the urgent need to teach the population about nutrition. They argued that the food consumption of ordinary people was incredibly poor. "There is no emphasis on vegetarian dishes; they cannot even cook such dishes."<sup>44</sup> The media was also critical of the food offered at eateries in cities and compared them with Helsinki, where the menu in eateries was much more diverse, and vegetarian dishes were always available, including dishes containing various kinds of fruits and berries. The Scandinavian countries were used as an example as these countries consumed plenty of food based on oats, while in Estonia "the prevailing idea was that oats were only suitable for horses."<sup>45</sup>

**AT THE BEGINNING** of the 20<sup>th</sup> century quite a few young women studied at Finnish schools of home economics. Upon completing their education, some of them found employment as hired housekeeping instructors and started organizing cooking courses for country folk. Marie Sapas (1875–1950), who had been

## FAKE MEAT

Ingredients:\*

approx. 0.7 l water

approx. 230 g buckwheat groats

3 beets

2 onions

2 tablespoons of butter or fat

2 eggs

1 tablespoon of sour cream

salt, pepper

Cook the beets until they are soft. Cook the buckwheat porridge. Allow the beets and porridge to cool and then pass them through the mincer. Sauté the onions in butter or fat and add to the buckwheat and beet mix. Add lightly whipped eggs and salt and pepper to taste. Pour the mix into a buttered oblong oven dish and bake in the oven. Serve with boiled potatoes, brown sauce and cucumber salad.

\*Contemporary measurements have been used.

Illustration 5. A recipe of “Fake meat” from Marta Põld’s *A Course on Vegetarian Food* (1916).

studying at the Järvenlinna gardening and home economics school in Antrea, Finland<sup>46</sup> from 1908–1910, launched six-month gardening and housekeeping courses at Liplapi Farm right after she had finished her training, developing these courses into the first gardening and housekeeping school in Estonia (1920–1927). A total of around 210 women graduated from the school.<sup>47</sup> Several teachers at the school also came from or were trained in Finland. In spring and summer, the students engaged in gardening and in autumn they prepared preserves (Illustration 4). Special emphasis was placed on using local produce “to eliminate expensive and unhealthy foreign products”. Also, when feeding the students, vegetarian food played a primary role – meat was only used as an addition, and journalists wrote that the students no longer missed meat dishes.<sup>48</sup> In her report to the Ministry of Agriculture, Sapas wrote that the school mainly taught students how to prepare vegetarian dishes while also emphasizing the contents of foodstuffs and their nutritional value.<sup>49</sup> The training had an element of solid practical leaning but was also based on contemporary science. The school had a sample garden, chemical experiments were conducted, foodstuffs studied under the microscope in housekeeping classes, and tables on the contents and price of food were used. Typical of the period, the students’ weight and strength were measured to demonstrate the beneficial effects of gardening activities and vegetarian food.

**BASED ON THE** knowledge acquired in Finland, Sapas published the first original Estonian language book on vegetarian food *Vegetarian Dishes and How to Prepare Them* (Est. Taimetoidud ja nende valmistamine) (1911). The book was dedicated to Jenny Elfving (1871–1950), director of the Järvenlinna school, under whose influence the author had become familiar with vegetarianism and learned about its economic and health-related effects.<sup>50</sup> In her book, Sapas presents vegetarianism as a food choice that is naturally suited to humans and will give more strength and stamina compared to meat. Also, fruit should not only be used as a dessert but should make up a part of the daily fare. She describes how vegetarian food represents better value for money as vegetable protein is less expensive than meat

protein. However, Sapas does not consider it either necessary or feasible to give up meat entirely: "Strict vegetarians who abstain from any form of meat are likely to remain isolated instances in our conditions."<sup>51</sup>

As food was scarce during World War I, the need for and interest in vegetarian dishes grew. They were introduced at exhibitions and offered at canteens and restaurants. In June 1916, a law was introduced that prohibited the sale of meat products and the serving of meat dishes from Tuesdays to Fridays.<sup>52</sup> In September, the Estonian Exhibition in Tartu had a separate buffet offering vegetarian dishes. The daily *Postimees* wrote that it would give tips "to the numerous vegetarians who had previously followed its principles and were adapting to the circumstances. In this current period of vegetarian food, these are especially useful."<sup>53</sup> Housekeeping instructor Marta Põld (1882–1963), who also graduated from the Järvenlinna school in 1912, conducted courses in vegetarian food at the Central Society for Farm Work for domestic employees, as well as the wives of military personnel (without charging a fee). At the course she demonstrated how to cook dishes made from legumes and grain, as well as various soups. The course participants agreed that by using the Finnish examples, Marta Põld could "even make nettle infusion taste delicious, not to mention more delicate garden plants."<sup>54</sup> However, some journalists also published ironic comments about an exclusively vegetarian menu, describing it as an oddity, even during wartime. Her cookbook *A Course on Vegetarian Food* (Est. Taimetoidu kursus) (1916)<sup>55</sup> mainly contains recipes using cabbages, potatoes, carrots, spinach, pea, and beans in combination with rice, macaroni and mushrooms. She suggested meat substitutes such as "fake meat" made from buckwheat porridge and beetroot (Illustration 5) or "fake liver casserole" made from pearl barley, rice and raisins, etc. Such imitation meat dishes were supposed to make vegetable dishes more attractive and acceptable for consumers. Also, mock meat products (e.g. such as Protose) that were available in the USA or Britain and that tasted, felt and smelled like meat were not available for Estonian consumers at the time.<sup>56</sup> Remarkably, the recipes in Marta Põld's handbook

EVERYDAY  
VEGETARIAN MENU  
(summer and autumn season)

BREAKFAST: white radish snack,  
cheese sandwich, grain coffee or milk

DINNER: tomato soup, boiled as-  
paragus or common beans with melted  
butter and fresh salad

SUPPER: fresh cucumbers with cream,  
sandwich, berries with milk

FESTIVE VEGETARIAN  
DINNER MENU FOR GUESTS  
(winter and spring season)

Apple juice with honey

Beetroot dish

Carrot bouillon with onion pie

Rolled pate made of peas with white  
radish salad

Berry cream

Illustration 6. Sample veg-  
etarian menus suggested  
by Elisabet Sild in *A Book  
on Vegetarian Dishes and  
Housekeeping* (Taimtoidu-  
ja majapidamisraamat),  
1938, 253–254.

were almost identical to those published in Finnish cookery books compiled by the teachers at the Helsinki home econom- ics school, which had been published some years previously.<sup>57</sup> Finally, it should be mentioned that neither Marta Põld’s nor Marie Sapas’ vegetarian cookbooks were strictly vegetarian but rather lacto-ovo vegetarian in the contemporary sense.

Thus, in the years preceding and dur- ing World War I, a significant change took place in the educational activities related to Estonian food culture: a leading role was adopted by women and women’s organizations, and the teaching of gar- dening and nutrition was also directed at homemakers. Consequently, we can see a powerful Finnish influence on the modernization of food culture and gardening in Estonia. The Estonian alumni of Finnish housekeeping schools proved to be capable initiators and leaders of the diet reform. Close contact between Finnish teachers and teacher educators of home eco- nomics, as well as several Estonian home economics experts and schools, continued until 1940.

The modernization of food culture  
from the 1920s to the 1930s

In the 1920s, a network of home economics schools developed in Estonia that started to prepare both educated housewives and professional teachers, cooks, nurses, etc. By the late 1930s, 44 educational institutions specialized in home economics and approximately 6,000 women had been trained in home econom- ics.<sup>58</sup> During the second half of the decade, specialist advice on food topics started to appear in the media, which specifically emphasized the wholesomeness of vegetarian dishes and sug- gested particular guidelines and recipes. The most influential journals were *Estonian Woman* (Est. Eesti Naine), which ap- peared in 1924, published by the Estonian Women’s Temperance Union, and *Farm Mistress* (Est. Taluperenaine) launched in 1927 by the Academic Farmers’ Society. Starting from 1927, rural women began to join societies of farm mistresses and participate in numerous home economics courses.

Despite the extensive explanatory work, it took some time for modern food habits to spread. The predominantly conserva- tive attitude of Estonians was reflected in the criticism launched by educated specialists. For instance, in 1929, a teacher at the Saku Household Management School, wrote that the situation in the field of nutrition was embarrassing: “Although in some

places communal bowls and wooden spoons have been discarded, the man- ner of serving is still incredibly tasteless and primitive. The worst sin, however, is the unvaried nature of the food.” People eat too much meat and too little garden produce, for “the general opinion is that if meat – the expensive food – is missing from the dinner table, it feels as if there

had been nothing to eat at all.” Raw vegetables are not eaten. It is the custom to boil them for too long “so that nearly all the nu- trients are removed”.<sup>59</sup> Fresh salads and green soups created the most ardent resistance due to the common view that these were types of animal food. Furthermore, homemakers regarded the preparation of vegetable dishes as too time-consuming.<sup>60</sup>

The nutritional discourse of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was domi- nated by a moralizing rhetoric, primarily directed at the eating habits of the poor. The “uncivilized” eating habits of the workers were associated with their lack of knowledge. Yet, unlike in in- dustrialized and urbanized societies in Western Europe and the USA, where advocates of vegetarianism opposed the increasing consumption of processed food, in largely agrarian Estonia, the proponents of vegetarian food mainly criticized people’s lim- ited diet based on peasant ideas of what constituted a “proper meal.”<sup>61</sup>

From the 1920s to the 1930s, home economics teachers and experts published several innovative cookery books and hand- books on nutrition. Excessively salty, fat-rich and limited diets were criticized, and vegetarian dishes were praised. The au- thors<sup>62</sup> were unanimous in claiming that the diet up to then had been insufficient, and more vegetables needed to be grown and preserved effectively, primarily in a raw state. There was much talk of making healthy preserves as many of the valuable proper-

ties of berries and vegetables were lost due to. As a good alterna- tive, airtight preserves were introduced, while salting and pick- ling in vinegar were no longer recommended. General advice on food was complemented by generous collections of recipes, tables of nutrient contents, as well as sample menus. Almost all the authors recommended reducing the amount of meat on the menu, eating more vegetable dishes, and eating fresh salads as appetizers or main courses. It was also believed that vegetables should be used as much as possible as seasonings as they made dishes less expensive, and easier to digest. As a manifestation of such a rational approach, menus containing a complete range of food for the family, covering a week, a month, or a whole season, were published in cookbooks, as well as in the above-mentioned women’s journals (see Illustration 6). It is also remarkable that these exemplary menus always recommended seasonal food of local origin.

THE DEVELOPMENT of nutritional science in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was related to the rise of modern nation states – it was the period when the state started intervening in people’s eating habits, seeing a strong link between physical health and diet.<sup>63</sup> Healthy citizens who could work efficiently and contribute to the nation’s pros- perity were regarded as a valuable resource. In the 1920s, knowl- edge of the beneficial qualities of vitamins was spreading, and the vitamin content of vegetarian dishes became the main argu- ment for promoting them. In the 1930s, calorie counting also started in Estonia. Several authors pointed out that the number of calories obtained from eating meat could successfully be re- placed by an equal amount obtained from vegetarian food. *The Housewife’s Handbook* (Est. Perenaise käsiraamat) (1934) recom- mended adding at least one boiled vegetable to the daily menu in addition to potatoes, eating uncooked fruit or vegetables once a day, and freely consuming vegetables and bread during each meal.<sup>64</sup> Although graphs and charts about the nutritional content of food never made their way into daily use in ordinary kitchens, the mindset they projected became increasingly attrac- tive to modern housekeepers.<sup>65</sup>

The explanatory work by the home economics teachers em- phasized that food should guarantee the physical and mental development of both the individual and the nation. In the sec- ond half of the 1930s, educational activities concerning healthy food became particularly extensive and systematic, and the Chamber of Home Economics (Kodumajanduskoda), founded in 1936, became the leading force in the field. The Chamber’s Food Committee was tasked with studying, improving and managing the dietary conditions in homes and in public, including offer- ing various consultation services. In the series of publications by the Chamber, the booklet *Inexpensive and Healthy Food* (Est. Odav ja tervislik toit)<sup>66</sup> was published. It underscored the impor- tance of eating local foods from the perspective of both health and value for money and emphasized the need to carefully consider vitamins and calories when making food choices. First and foremost, growing, preserving and using garden produce was promoted (see Illustration 7). By the end of the 1930s, some



Illustration 7. Seasonal autumn foods at the exhibition of the Cham- ber of Home Economics (1937). On the right the Secretary in Chief Hilda Ottenson. Source: AM F 23319: 10.

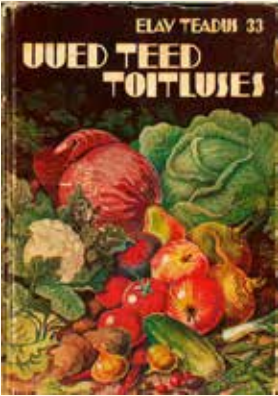


Illustration 8. The handbook *New Ways in Nutrition* (Est. Uued teed toitluses) by home economics instruc- tor Olga Kesk (1934).



Illustration 9. The Association for Vegetarians in Tartu celebrating its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1939. Source: Internet.



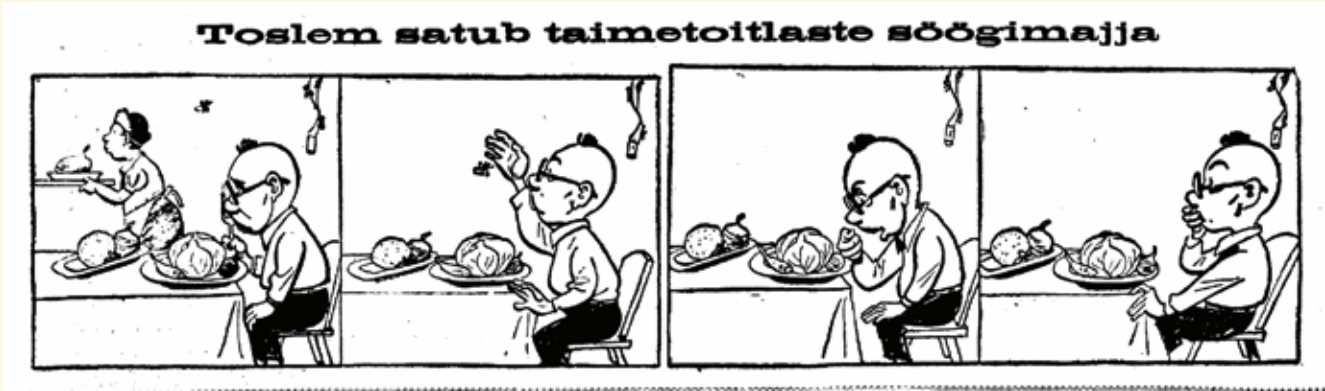


Illustration 10. A comical character Toslem in a vegetarian canteen. Author: Gori. Sädemed, August 1, 1937.

advances in vegetable consumption had been made, mainly due to the awareness-raising activities regarding suitable kinds of food for babies and infants. Numerous lectures and sample cooking classes were organized. For instance, weekly demonstrations of the preparation of inexpensive and healthy dishes were given at schools. Home economics experts underscored that the outlandish and complicated recipes based on bourgeois Russian and French cooking should be abandoned and replaced by a healthier diet. The experts even stated that public eateries should be supervised by home economics teachers, like in the Nordic countries.<sup>67</sup>

Some home economics and nutrition experts such as Elisabeth Sild (1888–1980) and Olga Kesk (1898–?) also collaborated with groups of devoted vegetarians. The only officially registered organization was the Association for Vegetarians [Est. Taimetoitlaste Ühing] founded in Tartu in 1924 under the aegis of the Temperance Union<sup>68</sup> (see Illustration 9). It aimed to combat meat consumption and promote a healthy lifestyle and an understanding of a meat-free lifestyle. However, like moderate vegetarians in Europe, they considered it acceptable to consume butter, eggs, milk and cheese.<sup>69</sup> Educational activities were the priority of the association. Based on the nutritional science of the age, the association provided recommendations about the most beneficial foods to eat, especially recommending raw food dishes and berry and fruit juices. In order to make imported fruit more available to consumers, the association submitted a request to the government to free these products from customs duty.<sup>70</sup> The association arranged regular lectures and cooking demonstrations from both foreign and domestic experts. For instance, Elisabeth Sild demonstrated how to cook raw food dishes and published the handbook *A Book on Vegetarian Dishes and House-keeping* (Est. Taimtoidu- ja majapidamisraamat)<sup>71</sup> at the association's request. She also compiled menus for everyday and festive usage (see Illustration 5). Sild criticized processed and manufactured food, snobbish cooking and the excessive use of meat and spices. According to her, the so-called “food of Sun force”<sup>72</sup>, or raw leaves and the fruits of plants, were most valuable, and she recommended starting each meal with raw food. Olga Kesk also wrote that “nutritional competence today is by far not limited to

the skill of “making soup” but represents a whole new branch of science, full of innovations and novel discoveries.”<sup>73</sup> (see Illustration 8).

**IN THE 1930S**, appeals were also made for the transition to full veganism or even a raw food diet. Along with health professionals, Estonian clergyman Alfred Lepp (1900–1984)<sup>74</sup> aimed to reform people's diet, emphasizing the religious aspects of a vegetarian diet in combination with medical arguments (especially those of Maximillian Bircher-Benner (1867–1939)) and temperance.

By the end of the 1930s, educational efforts through the media, schools and courses, as well as general economic growth, resulted in the people having a more varied and balanced diet. However, progress in the consumption of vegetarian food was relatively slow. Regional descriptions of health conditions from the 1930s conducted by medical scientists<sup>75</sup> give a brief idea of people's actual diet: bread and potatoes were staple foods, as were grain porridges and soups. The persistence of such food habits also reflected generational attitudes towards proper food. With the exception of the poor, most of the middle class remained conservative. The menu was seasonal and vegetables (except sauerkraut) were mainly eaten in the autumn. In 1939 the Secretary-in-Chief of the Chamber of Home Economics Hilda Ottenson (1896–1990) (Illustration 7) had to acknowledge that there were regions in which mostly bread and salted pork were still eaten for breakfast, lunch and supper throughout the year, without even potatoes as a side dish. The consumption of fruit and vegetables was low and was almost non-existent in the winter.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe that Estonia's food culture was lagging behind in global terms. For instance, in the USA, a breakthrough in what constituted healthy eating was only made during the Great Depression of the 1930s.<sup>77</sup> In Finland, the change from simple eating to an awareness of the proper menu also occurred in the second half of the 1930s.

Moreover, the media also sometimes published critical or humorous pieces about vegetarians, who would go to extremes in vitamin hunting, depriving themselves of the necessary ani-

mal nutrients (see Illustration 10). Several dailies wrote that in Estonian conditions, imported fruit was an excessive luxury and also warned their readers that raw food could become a health hazard if the rules of hygiene were ignored (which was often the case in rural areas).<sup>78</sup>

### Concluding thoughts

The introduction of vegetarian ideas in Estonia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the systematic spreading of science-based knowledge about the benefits of eating and the skills of cooking vegetarian food in the decades between the two world wars reveal some unique patterns to the modernization of everyday life. At that time, Estonia transformed itself from a province of the Tsarist empire, in which Baltic German culture dominated, into an independent nation state. Western ideas and practices was considered part of new, modern Estonians, who were supposed to rid themselves of both old “unhealthy” peasant food habits as well as admiration for the Baltic German food culture which, in turn, had taken on several French and Russian influences, with its elaborate bourgeois recipes, preference for imported products and excessive eating. In the period studied, the influences of both spiritual and medical branches of Russian vegetarianism in Estonia remained marginal.

**MALE INTELLECTUALS** – doctors, horticulturalists and journalists – were important figures in the early promotion of vegetarian ideas in Estonia. Since the 1910s, female home economics teachers trained in Finnish schools played a particularly significant role in the modernization of food culture. They established similar educational institutions in Estonia and followed similar ideas about healthy nutrition: praising local products, seasonal diet and preferring moderate vegetarianism that did not exclude products of animal origin. Despite the dietary reform efforts of nutrition experts and home economics teachers, the eating habits of the broader population were slow to change and conservative attitudes rooted in peasant culture persisted until the 1930s. Yet, a broad network of home economics schools and cooking courses, numerous manuals, cookbooks and articles in the media, as well as state-supported institutions like the Chamber of Home Economics, contributed to the spread of modern ideas and practices, especially among the younger generation. Furthermore, home economics experts were realistic about the people's living standards in what was still largely an agrarian society and therefore mainly promoted vegetables and fruits, while emphasizing that consuming more healthy plant-based food might also help them to be thrifty. ❌

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63 Kamminka Harmke and Andrew Cunningham, eds., *The Science and Culture of Nutrition, 1840–1940* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 1–2.

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65 Shapiro, 83, 198.

66 *Odav ja tervislik toit*. Kodumajanduskoja toimetused [Cheap and Healthy Food. Household Editions] no. 9, (Tallinn: Kodumajanduskoda, 1939).

67 For example, Olga Kesk, “Mis on meil vananenud toitlustuse alal” [What Do We Have in The Field Of Obsolete Nutrition?], *Postimees*, February 15, 1938.

68 The first attempt to establish a vegetarian organization in Tartu was made in 1917, but not enough people showed up. Starting from 1925, the association was part of the International Union of Vegetarians and would operate until it was forcefully closed down in 1940 by the Soviet occupation authorities.

69 *State Archives of Estonia*, RA, ERA, *Collection R-1252*, Inventory1, File 162, sheet 2. Tartu organisatsioonide likvideerimine. Tartu Taimetoitlaste Ühing [Liquidation of Tartu organizations. Tartu Vegetarian Association] November 21–23, 1940.

70 Ibid.

71 Elisabeth Sild, *Taimtoidu- ja majapidamisraamat* [Vegetarian and Household Book] (Tartu: K. Mattiesen, 1938).

72 She refers to Maximilian Bircher-Benner who used balanced raw food that he called “food of Sun force“ to cure patients at the Lebendige Kraft sanatorium, which opened in Zürich in 1904. Bircher-Benner was inspired by the *Lebensreform* movement that particularly referred to sunlight; he and others believed that this energy was more “concentrated” in plants than in meat and was diminished by cooking.

73 Kesk, 7.

74 Alfred Lepp emphasized the possibility of raw foodism in a Northern climate and the necessity of preparing food that could be enjoyed in every season. He was in awe of all living nature. He first and foremost promoted the consumption of seasonal local food – primarily grains and legumes –

as well as fruits and vegetables, Lepp’s lists of recommended foodstuffs include the flowers, leaves and fruits of wild plants. See Alfred Lepp, *Toortaimtoitlaste toitude valmistamisõpetus* [Cooking Instructions for Raw Vegetarians] (Tartu: Ilutrükk, 1939).

75 Aleksander Rammul, Mihkel Kask, *Tartumaa tervishoiuline kirjeldus* [Health Description of Tartu County] (Tartu: E.V. Tervishoiuvalitsuse ja Tartu Ülikooli Tervishoiu Instituudi väljaanne, 1938), 108; Aleksander Rammul, ed., *Viljandimaa tervishoiuline kirjeldus* [Health Description of Viljandi County] (Tartu: E.V. Tervishoiuvalitsuse ja Tartu Ülikooli Tervishoiu Instituudi väljaanne, 1933), 43; Aleksander Rammul, ed. *Võrumaa tervishoiuline kirjeldus* [Health Description of Võru County] (Tartu: E.V. Tervishoiuvalitsuse ja Tartu Ülikooli Tervishoiu Instituudi väljaanne, 1932), 39; Aleksander Rammul, ed., *Virumaa tervishoiuline kirjeldus*, [Health Description of Viru County] (Tartu: E.V. Tervishoiuvalitsuse ja Tartu Ülikooli Tervishoiu Instituudi väljaanne, 1932), 63; Aleksander Rammul,ed.,*Järvamaa tervishoiuline kirjeldus* [Health Description of Järva County] (Tartu: E.V. Tervishoiuvalitsuse ja Tartu Ülikooli Tervishoiu Instituudi väljaanne, 1934), 50.

76 Hilda Ottenson, ”Rahvatoitluse suund” [The Direction of Public Nutrition] *Eesti Noorus* [Estonian Youth], no. 5 (1939): 162–164. Ottenson had studied in Uppsala home economics school in Sweden from 1916 to 1919.

77 Kathleen Babbitt, “Legitimizing nutrition education: the impact of the Great Depression,” in Sarah Stage, Virginia Vincenti, eds., *Rethinking Home Economics. Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 153.

78 For example: “Taimetoit tervisele kahjulik” [Vegetarian Food is Harmful to Health] *Kaja*, March 12 (1930): 5.





Original vintage sport propaganda poster promoting good physical health and well-being at work: "Industrial gymnastics invigorates, restores and strengthens!" Bulgaria, 1958. One of the goals of Bulgarian communist nutrition ideology was to feed a nation of healthy, efficient workers for the state-run industry, which was forcefully developed under Soviet pressure.

# RADICAL REFORMERS OR NOT QUITE?

## FROM VEGETARIANISM TO COMMUNIST NUTRITION IN BULGARIA: CONTRASTS AND CONTINUITIES (1925–1960)

by **Albena Shkodrova**

### abstract

This article investigates the ideas of correct and modern nutrition during the early communist period in Bulgaria and outlines their relationship to previously existing ideas and practices. The research reveals the multiple influences of pre-communist food ideologies, particularly those of the vegetarian movement that flourished in the country in the 1920s and 1930s. It questions the propaganda claim that the communist regime introduced a radically new understanding of and approach to nutrition. It also suggests that there were significant differences between the attitudes towards meatless diets in Eastern European communist countries. The hostility towards vegetarianism was not equally strong and consistent across the bloc, and despite the evident influence of Soviet teachings focused on meat-based, protein-rich diets, nutritionists introduced meatless diet "through the back door".

**KEY WORDS:** History of food, Bulgarian food, communist nutrition.

Communist regimes in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe widely built their legitimacy on claims of radical reforms that stretched from state management to the everyday lives of their citizens. Communist officials regularly evoked contrasts with the pre-communist past or the Western world to emphasize the contribution of the new states to the modernization of societies and their social innovations. However, few studies have explored the limits of these claims: how radical the revolution actually was or how its various elements related to processes which had been evident in the respective societies prior to communism. The question is particularly applicable to Central and South-Eastern Europe, where the modernization that took place<sup>1</sup> towards the end of the Second World War was more advanced than in Russia prior to the October Revolution (1917). This article examines one aspect of the attempted lifestyle revolution in communist Bulgaria – the ideas behind modernizing public nutrition – and shows their relationship to previous understandings and practices in the country. It explores how the pre-war legacy of nutritional ideologies and discourses was approached by leading nutritionists in the new communist state and how various elements were rejected or appropriated.

Early communist ideology paid significant attention to issues of nutrition. Historically, this interest was rooted in the malnutrition and hunger among Europe's poorer classes, whose circumstances Communism had vowed to improve. The communist regime was established in Bulgaria amidst the pan-European economic crisis and the rationing of food in the aftermath of the Second World War, which exacerbated the problem.

Thus, Bulgarian communist nutrition ideology<sup>2</sup> was promptly formed around several intertwined goals. One of them was to eliminate hunger and social injustice in access to food. Another was to feed a nation of healthy, efficient workers for the state-run industry, which was forcefully developed under Soviet pressure. Finally, scientifically-based nutrition became a matter of credibil-

ity: it was integrated into the ideal of an advanced communist lifestyle, informed by science and dominated by industrial production, which the communist world was striving to prove capable of achieving.<sup>3</sup>

These ideological goals defined the main policies of communist nutrition, such as removing the production and provision of food from the hands of profit-oriented capitalist businesses<sup>4</sup> and entrusting them to the state, developing an extensive network of state-subsidized canteens, providing industrial foods as a substitute for home cooking<sup>5</sup> and so on.

**WHILE THESE POLICIES** were applied with varying degrees of success, the official discourses often presented them as a specifically communist achievement and as a clear illustration of the supremacy of Communism over Capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Hence, they present a good opportunity to investigate how communist nutritional ideology related to or stemmed from earlier ideas or practices. Yet, these ideas and practices have hardly been explored in this sense. Historical research on nutrition in Eastern European communist countries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is generally scarce. As studies have lately multiplied, they increasingly suggest that – important similarities notwithstanding – national cases significantly vary.

Much of the existing research on communist nutrition is about how the application of ideas was constrained by economic limitations<sup>7</sup> or complex political and professional struggles in communist administrative hierarchies.<sup>8</sup> Studies on how ideologies changed upon confronting reality comprise the main bulk of works on the topic, including research on the concept and failure of the communist canteen networks<sup>9</sup> in Bulgaria or, to some extent, the study of coastal restaurants as revealing a communist culinary utopia.<sup>10</sup>

Nutrition in the pre-communist era has been even less studied, making it difficult to identify any potential legacy. Notable exceptions are the works of Ronald LeBlanc<sup>11</sup> on the vegetarian movement in pre-Soviet and early Soviet Russia and Julia Malitska's investigation of the vegetarian movement in Ukraine and the European parts of the former Soviet Empire.<sup>12</sup> Both authors noted the hostile attitude among Soviet nutritionist-ideologists, who rejected meatless diets as foolish and outdated and attempted to obliterate the vegetarian movement.

**IN BULGARIA, WHERE THE** communist regime only took power after the end of the Second World War, a vegetarian movement had flourished in the 1920s as part of a pan-European trend, incorporating the teachings of Western European vegetarian activists such as Marcel Labbé, L. Pascault, Evgeniy Lozinskii, Mikkel Hindhede, Aleksandr Iasinovskii, and the popular by then moralistic-religious school of thought of Lev Tolstoy and Tolstoizmut. After a period of significant success, the Bulgarian vegetarian movement took heavy blows from the pre-communist political elites in the late 1920s and never fully recovered.<sup>13</sup> Yet, vegetarianism remained popular in medical circles until at least the late 1940s.

When the communist regime came to power, the nutritional





Left: The cover of *The problem of nutrition* by Michail Stoitsev (Sevlievo, 1938). The extended title reads “Accessible lecture for those who wish to lead a more rational, healthy and long life in spiritual sophistication”. On the right: a portrait of dentist Michail Stoitsev.



The earliest cookery book for vegetarian cuisine, published during the communist period, when the state held a monopoly over the publishing of cookery advice in Bulgaria since 1948. The title reads *Meatless dishes*, avoiding to use the term “vegetarian” (Sofia, 1958).

science strongly emphasized the consumption of animal proteins. It seems that meat was held in high esteem in the countries of the former communist bloc – this was certainly the case in Czechoslovakia.<sup>14</sup> Yet recent research on the GDR shows that early 20<sup>th</sup> century teachings that promoted meatless diets lasted longer in some countries than others. Unlike the Soviet Union or Ukraine, in the GDR the idea of a diet that was predominantly based on raw vegetables proliferated throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Bulgaria was certainly under the heavy influence of Soviet nutritional science. So, did the communist cult of animal proteins ruled out vegetarianism or vegetable-based diets? How radical were the reforms promoted by communist nutritionists?

The present study examines the similarities between Bulgarian communist nutrition – the dominant principles and ideas popularized by the most influential voices in the early communist period, and the dominant beliefs and practices of nutritionists in the pre-communist period. In particular it explores the potential legacy of the most influential nutrition movement from the preceding period – vegetarianism.

The study focuses on the level of discourses: the core ideas of communist nutritionists on rational and modern nutrition and the strategies that were used to promote them. The article does not discuss their actual application, as do some of the above-mentioned works. Instead, it looks at the less considered aspects of potential legacies and adds depth to the understanding of the nature of communist reforms and the extent of their radicalism, which in popular discourses are all too often taken for granted and remain understudied.

Theoretically, the article is embedded in the historiography

on Eastern Europe, which views the communist regimes as non-monolithic systems, influenced and influencing multiple players. This literature treats the ideologies as important but inconsistent and inconsistently applied frameworks and has focused on leading individual voices, players or power groups and their impact on the modifications of the nutritional discourses.<sup>16</sup>

**THE MAIN FOCUS** of the study are the writings of the authorities on nutrition published in the early communist period – between 1944 and 1960.<sup>17</sup> The most prominent and abundant work in this period is that of Ivan Naydenov, Professor of Hygiene, who between 1940 and 1970 authored dozens of leaflets, short monographs and chapters on nutrition in cookbooks, targeted at professional and domestic cooking. Naydenov was born in 1900 in Sofia and in 1947 became one of the founders and the first permanent director of the Institute for Hygiene at the Medical University of Plovdiv. In subsequent years he published a significant body of research and advice on the hygiene of nutrition, which was to become the foundation of the communist nutritional science. In 1957 he moved to Sofia, where he established the Faculty for Hygiene at the Institute for Specialization and Development of Physicians.

Until the late 1950s, Naydenov was the single voice of nutritional advice. Then, two more scientists joined forces: Tasho Tashev and Nikolay Dzhelepov. Tashev, who was born in 1909 and graduated from a French college in Plovdiv and the Medical Faculty in Sofia before the Second World War, became a leading specialist in gastroenterology. He is credited as being the founder of the Bulgarian Scientific Society for Gastroenterology in 1954 and the

Institute for Nutrition at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1959. He began publishing nutritional advice in 1957 and was very active throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. His early works, which must have sought to strike balance between science and the politics of the communist state, have also been taken into account in this research. Finally, Nikolay Dzhelepov was also a doctor of nutritional science. He offered advice to the general public, mainly from the late 1960s onwards. Little is known about his career, which was not mentioned in his numerous published works, but he was presented as a “prominent, experienced specialist in the field of nutrition”.<sup>18</sup> In 1956 he wrote an introduction on nutrition in one of the most popular cookbooks of the following decades, *The Housewife’s Book (Kniga za domakinyata)*<sup>19</sup> which was also included in this research.

Due to the lack of previous studies, pre-communist advice on nutrition has also been researched here in order to provide a basis for comparison. Most of the source material from this period comprises booklets published by the vegetarian movement. Important information was found in the prefaces to pre-war cookbooks, both vegetarian and mainstream.<sup>20</sup>

Cookbooks are a powerful historical source and conceal a wealth of information on everything from politics and economy to everyday life. Food historians have frequently emphasized the tendency of cookbooks to represent food ideologies rather than actual food practices.<sup>21</sup> This could be seen as an advantage, considering the purposes of this research. The main limitation of the literature on nutrition in the 1950s as a source is, that it gave expression to very few individual voices.

This article is divided into four parts: The first part examines the ambitions of the communist regime to introduce public nutrition on scientific basis and looks at the background of these ambitions and the context in which they were promoted. The second one discusses the consumption of raw vegetables in Bulgaria and how they were incorporated in communist dietary advice. The third section focuses on the idea of changing the nation’s food habits through a network of canteens. Finally, a more extensive part is dedicated to the importance attributed to animal proteins by communist nutritionists and their attitudes towards vegetarianism.

### A focus on correct, scientifically-based nutrition

A leading theme of early communist doctrine was to portray communist nutrition as being based on scientific grounds and that it was therefore more advanced than that of the capitalist world. Such dichotomous views were regularly expressed by nutritionists and authors of the state-published cookbooks in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>22</sup> Only socialist societies, because of their revolutionary planning system, could achieve proper nutrition among the population, asserted leading Professor of Food Sciences Ivan Naydenov.<sup>23</sup> He wrote that capitalist systems, in contrast, create conditions for poor nutrition and that rational

nutrition is “out of the question” under capitalism.<sup>24</sup> As Franc concludes from his study on Czechoslovakia, many nutritionists across the Eastern bloc saw the vision of a society managed by scientists as quintessentially socialist.<sup>25</sup>

**THE IDEA TO DEVELOP** public nutrition on scientific and medical basis had deep roots in Bulgaria, where nutritional advice had predated the very dawn of written cookery advice (recipes) by one generation: *Igionomia, i.e. rules to preserve our health (Igionomia sirech pravila za da si vardim zdraveto)*, by Greek author Arhigenis Sarantis<sup>26</sup> was translated and published in 1846 and recommended modesty and diversity in nutrition some quarter of a century prior to the publication of the first printed Bulgarian cookbook by Slaveykov in 1870.<sup>27</sup>

The chemical definition of the first vitamin marked the start of modern nutritional science in the Western World in 1926. With the Great Depression causing famine across the globe, there was a rush to find applications for scientific nutritional advice.<sup>28</sup> Bulgaria did not miss a beat in joining the trend. The connection between medical and cookery advice was strengthened in the 1920s when

cookbooks introduced elaborate explanations about the preservation of nutrients during cooking and conservation and published tables with nutritional values and information on vitamins.

One of the earlier examples, *A Handbook on Domestic Food Preservation (Rukovodstvo za domashno konservirane na ovoshtia i zelenchutsi)* by Assen Ivanov (1925) described the differences between the nutritional value of meat, fruit and vegetables by introducing the reader to a range of terms such as albumins, glycogens, minerals, glucose, sucrose, cellulose, organic acids and so on. After the discovery of vitamins in 1926, Kasurova and Dimchevska’s exquisite *Cookbook (Gotvarska kniga)* from 1933,<sup>29</sup> which targeted upper-middle class housewives, opened with a six-page introduction on the basics of nutritional science. “Medical science measures the nutritional value of ingredients with calories,” stated the cookbook. The authors discussed nutritional elements, the importance of vitamins (A, B, C, D, E) to the human body and offered diagrams of calorie usage depending on the reader’s lifestyle and occupation.

By the mid-1930s, medical advice was prominent in the mainstream cookery literature. With no centralized health care or state-organized social care available, women were expected to treat more basic health issues in the family on their own and were regularly advised about healthy and preventive diets. For example, the influential women’s newspaper *Vestnik za zhenata* published more than a dozen books in the 1930s by Dr Nikolay Neykov, offering guidance on a wide range of issues: from rheumatism and hemorrhoids to sexual health. In his *Dietary Cuisine (Dietichna kuhnya)*, physician Neykov dedicated ten pages to introducing housewives to nutrition and the necessity of counting calories and observing the intake of vitamins, fats and proteins. In his foreword to the 1937 *Handbook on Domestic Food Preservation (Rukovod-*

**“BY THE MID-1930S, MEDICAL ADVICE WAS PROMINENT IN THE MAINSTREAM COOKERY LITERATURE.”**





The covers of *Manual for conservation of fruits and vegetables*, authored by specialist in conservation of food K. Balabanov (Sofia, 1932).

stvo za domashno konservirane na ovoshtia i zelenchutsi) by Vlado Ivanov, university professor Assen Zlatarov recommended that a table showing the nutritional values of the most widely used ingredients should be found on the wall of every kitchen.<sup>30</sup>

The level of involvement of the medical community in formulating nutritional advice in Bulgaria becomes particularly clear from the history of the vegetarian movement in the country. As mentioned above, it developed as part of a pan-European trend of basing nutrition and lifestyle advice on the moralist philosophy of Tolstoyism and Western European vegetarian advice at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Bulgarian Vegetarian Union, which aimed to create broader social support for Tolstoyism,<sup>31</sup> was established in 1914. The union opened numerous branches across the country and became very active in organizing talks and publishing health, nutritional and culinary advice.

**THE BULGARIAN VEGETARIAN** teaching was holistic and partially drew on religion: some of its ideologists saw themselves as “direct spiritual descendants” of the Bulgarian non-orthodox Christian denomination of Bogomils, whose worldview was “represented in its purest form” by Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy.<sup>32</sup> But despite this connection to religion and radical ethical philosophy, vegetarianism in Bulgaria – just like the Tolstoyan activist vegetarians in 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia<sup>33</sup> – focused on the moral and humanitarian, rather than the religious aspects of vegetarianism. Most of all it sought legitimacy in modern medical science. At its peak between the 1920s and the 1940s, the Bulgarian Vegetarian Union published dozens of foreign and Bulgarian articles and pamphlets on vegetarianism. The book series *Vegetarian Library* featured works by Eastern and Western authors. Among them were key philosophers like Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but most of all physicians, includ-

ing prominent Ukrainian physician of Jewish origin Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Iasinovskii, French Professor of Physiology Dr Marcel Labbé of Paris, his colleagues Dr L. Pascault from Cannes and Dr P. Carton from Brévannes, as well as the Danish Minister of Health and nutritionist Dr Mikkel Hindhede. People educated in the medical sciences were also prominent among the Bulgarian writers (for example, dentist Michail Stoitsev<sup>34</sup>) and members of the movement.<sup>35</sup>

The impetus of the vegetarian movement on the involvement of medical doctors in nutrition was part of a global trend to utilize medicine for public nutrition on a national, or even supranational, level. Some European countries considered devising national nutrition strategies in the 1930s,<sup>36</sup> and the pressure grew to seek supranational control over global nutrition problems.<sup>37</sup> The League of Nations Health Organization (LNHO), which Bulgarian nutritionists attentively followed,<sup>38</sup> supported the rapid development of new research and internationally promoted the notion of minimum and optimum diets.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, when the communist regime arrived in Bulgaria in 1944, promoting its ideas for a state-organized system of public nutrition – i.e. state-run production, trade, canteens and restaurants, at least some medical doctors thought that it opened new avenues for ideas that had been brewing for a long time. In 1947, while the communist regime was tightening its grip, a medical congress was held in Plovdiv under the title *The Nutrition of our People*. After the congress, two doctors summarized the discussions, along with their previous work, in a book of nutritional advice. The volume, authored by Ivan Maleev and N. Stanchev, addressed “mothers, housewives and managers of public canteens”, advising them to base their work on scientific grounds and help the new government to correctly feed the new generation of the working nation.<sup>40</sup> Their ideas drew on the advice of medical nutritionists from previous years. This

was certainly the case in a number of specific areas: increasing the consumption of raw and fresh vegetables; incorporating more dairy products into the Bulgarian diet; reducing the amount of salt in cooking; using as little meat as possible; using more honey; increasing rice consumption; replacing white bread with whole grain bread; completely avoiding the consumption of alcohol; and using public canteens to promote healthy nutrition. These were the quintessential scientific grounds for proper nutrition at the time, and were based on many of the tenets of vegetarianism.

**THE TWO AUTHORS** never became renowned authorities on nutrition. They vanished from the world of food advice, which in 1948 became a state monopoly and for more than a decade was occupied by one person: Ivan Naydenov. The ways in which Naydenov navigated around the ideas expressed by Maleev and Stanchev defined the nature of Bulgarian communist nutritional science for years to come.

An explanation of what would appear to be two interrupted careers in public nutrition can be found in the observations of Ronald LeBlanc on the Soviet Union, where throughout the Stalinist years and beyond, vegetarian ideas were regarded with suspicion “as utopian fantasies and later with increasing scorn and censure as threats to the hegemony of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine”.<sup>41</sup> As LeBlanc noted, vegetarianism was associated not with advanced ethical standards, but with class oppression and backwardness. However, as the following paragraphs show, the relationship between communist nutrition and vegetarianism was more ambiguous and complex than communist ideologists might had been willing to admit.

Many of the suggestions in Maleev and Stanchev’s book were deemed non-controversial and were adopted by Naydenov. The increased consumption of rice, milk, yogurt and honey became the goals of the dominant nutritionist doctrine in the 1950s. The observed continuity of views on the consumption of fresh and raw vegetables and in the idea of employing canteens in the effort to change the people’s diet is of particular interest for this research, since before being introduced as part of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, they had both been incorporated into the Bulgarian foodways by the vegetarian movement.

### Eat your (raw) vegetables!

A survey of early Bulgarian cooking advice shows that raw vegetables were not part of the Bulgarian dietary recommendations before the 1920s.<sup>42</sup> Authors of cookbooks and textbooks for housekeeping schools described fresh vegetables as being difficult to digest, unfriendly to the stomach and lacking in nutrients. Even cucumbers, tomatoes or lettuce were supposed to be boiled or pickled.<sup>43</sup> There was one reference to a fresh vegetable salad in *Domestic Cookbook (Domashna gotvarska kniga)* (1905) and one in *1200 Recipes (1200 Retsepti)* (1901), which was

a translation from French, although this category of food was not included in all the other many cookbooks published before 1917.<sup>44</sup> In that year, the first cookbook to feature salads – an entire section on them – was published: Bulgarian vegetarian cuisine.<sup>45</sup> From that point on, more and more recipes for fresh vegetable preparations were included, first in vegetarian literature and then for general cooking. The discovery of vitamins in 1926 clearly also gave a boost to the attention given to healthy diets. “More fruits, more vegetables – let this become the aim of every mother who cares for the health of her family”, wrote Arthur Gerlach in the foreword of Hristova’s 1926 book *Vegetables. 90 Recipes (Zelenchutsi. 90 retsepti)*, part of the mainstream culinary advice of the Economy School in Sofia.<sup>46</sup>

Communist nutrition appropriated this legacy seamlessly and – needless to say – without making any references to the innovations introduced by vegetarianism and pre-war non-communist nutritional science in Bulgaria. The relationship between vegetarianism and bourgeois society prior to the war, as well as certain religious links that formed part of Tolstoy’s and the Bogomils’ teaching were among the taboos that descended on society with the establishment of the communist regime. Arguments for the inclusion of fresh raw vegetables in the diet

were evident in the developing understanding of the importance of such food to digestion and vitamin intake. Serving raw vegetables with each meal, and preferring them over cooked vegetables, was one of the ten basic principles of a proper diet stipulated by Naydenov in his nutritional advice.<sup>47</sup> Later, Naydenov’s advice was closely replicated by his colleague Tasho Tashev.<sup>48</sup>

Naydenov and Tashev invariably described vegetables as a second-rate source of beneficial proteins, but insisted that their consumption – fresh, preferably raw – was one of the pillars of proper nutrition. Bulgarian vegetable-based cuisine and production during Communism spread its influence across the borders and, according to the research by Martin Franc, it influenced the nutritionist and culinary advice being offered in Czechoslovakia, where it was regarded as a model of healthy foodways.<sup>49</sup>

### Canteens

Developing a vast network of canteens across the country was one of the major tenets of post-revolutionary Soviets and was copied by the Bulgarian government which, in the first months after it came to power in September 1944, made it a statutory requirement for all employers in the country to open canteens for their employees.<sup>50</sup> Naydenov became an outspoken proponent of the development of a network of public canteens and regularly endorsed canteen food as being more cost-effective and having better preserved nutrients.<sup>51</sup> He constantly wrote about the canteens being a revolutionary innovation of the communist government,<sup>52</sup> never acknowledging that the concept had been previously introduced in Bulgaria. Vegetarians were not pio-

**“THE INCREASED CONSUMPTION OF RICE, MILK, YOGURT AND HONEY BECAME THE GOALS OF THE DOMINANT NUTRITIONIST DOCTRINE IN THE 1950S.”**

neers in conceptualizing the canteen formula, but they were the first to popularize it in the country. In other parts of the world, canteens were first introduced as part of industrial models to improve workers’ welfare. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Bulgaria was still in the early stages of industrialization and only a few canteens existed (for example, in the state-run mining company in Pernik). In such an environment, vegetarian canteens were an innovation for the country’s urban population.

In this endeavor, the vegetarians were following the model of similar vegetarian movements in other countries. In the context of the European parts of the Russian empire, Malitska observed that vegetarian canteens came into being largely as a result of the collective desire of vegetarian activists to “promote a vegetarian dietary regimen and worldview.”<sup>53</sup> Their strategy was to allow their customers to try a variety of flavors and combinations of ingredients, originating in both local and European cuisine. A very similar pattern can be identified in Bulgaria, where the canteens were a key part of the visibility of vegetarian movement. According to historian Margarita Terzieva, several canteens operated in Sofia in the 1920s and more were subsequently opened in many of the larger towns: Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Yambol, Burgas, Varna, Ruse, Pleven and Vratsa, for example.<sup>54</sup> These restaurants served as cultural centers for the movement, as they distributed literature, provided venues for public discussions and offered practical demonstrations of the vegetarian lifestyle: their plant-based food was offered in an environment free of tobacco smoke and alcohol consumption<sup>55</sup> – both exceptional for a Balkan restaurant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**IN ORDER TO DISSEMINATE** the nutritional advice that was used in the canteens, members of the vegetarian movement published cookbooks. In his 1937 *The Newest People’s Vegetarian Cookbook* (*Nay-nova narodna vegetarianska gotvarska kniga*), Krasimir Kadunkov, who described himself as a “vegetarian master chef”, wrote that popular dishes from the vegetarian canteens had not reached household kitchens. “Many of our supporters and customers have asked for the recipes we use in our vegetarian canteens to be published. But for various reasons, everyone is keeping their art a secret”, asserted Kadunkov. He stated that with his book he wanted to spread “his tasty dishes” across all households, thereby allowing a “bloodless diet to rule.”<sup>56</sup>

Numerous other leaders of the movement published cookbooks for home cooking. They did not possess Kadunkov’s professional credentials but stated their ambition of offering scientifically-based advice. The earliest such cookbook, authored by chairman of the Bulgarian vegetarian movement Ilia Stefanov and his wife Rayna Manushova Stefanova, includes references to a

significant (and, exceptional for a cookbook) medical bibliography of some 14 publications, nine of which were authored by people with medical titles.<sup>57</sup>

All these strategies to popularize nutrition ideology were reproduced by the Bulgarian communist regime, which quickly developed ambitious plans to feed the nation in a vast network of canteens and monopolized the publishing of nutritional and cooking advice. The food in the communist canteens was anything but vegetarian, but their concept echoed the ambition of vegetarian canteens to push through dietary reforms. The introduction of “dietary, prophylactic and rational nutrition” was one of the official goals of the canteen system.<sup>58</sup>

**BOOSTED BY REGULATIONS** and continuous efforts, the canteens in the country rapidly increased in number from 2340 in 1947 to 6500 by 1986.<sup>59</sup> From kindergartens and schools to factories and institutes, the nation was supposed to be fed healthily and with food prepared on scientific grounds in professional kitchens. The government increased its subsidies in the mid-1950s to make the food affordable. The canteens were also subjected to regular

inspections to guarantee the diversity, quality and adequacy of the food on offer.<sup>60</sup> All these intentions and efforts echoed the practices of the vegetarian movement. The rationale behind their public nutrition system in the 1930s was to serve “a rational and nutritionally rich diet in line with the latest science”.<sup>61</sup> Yet, all the references that the communist strategists made cited the Soviet post-revolutionary experience (see, for example, all the works of Hadzhinikolov, one of the main authors on the subject).<sup>62</sup> The extent to which this was due to Soviet-style censorship and self-censorship in the country – or the controversial reputation of the vegetarian movement<sup>63</sup> – remains unclear.

In any case, a broad and unrecognized legacy of ideas and practices that were introduced in Bulgaria by the vegetarian movement can be found in the communist nutritional guidelines. Beyond that, it was also a legacy of the industrial-era household utopia that had been developing across the old continent, Great Britain and the United States, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, creating a long intellectual history of ideas about communal living. The history of the modern canteen began with the industrial settlements devised by paternalistic entrepreneurs for their workers. It was an element found in many forms of utopian urban projects in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: from the United States to Brazil<sup>64</sup> and from Australia<sup>65</sup> to the Israeli kibbutz.<sup>66</sup>

The Bulgarian communist nutritional science made multiple appropriations from the legacy of the vegetarian movement, but its approach to the consumption of meat, alcohol and white bread made prominent exception in this regard.<sup>67</sup> The most striking among them is certainly the key role, which was given to meat.

## Giving meat a central place in the people’s diet

As Franc has previously argued about Czechoslovakia, communist nutritional science regarded meat as a highly valued source of protein and, hence, a central agent of human development.<sup>68</sup> The protein-centric teaching popularized in the Soviet Union largely dismissed vegetarianism as utopian lunacy on precisely these grounds. According to the recollections of prominent Soviet nutritionist Mikhail Gurvich, universities taught that vegetarianism had nothing to do with medicine and was foolish.<sup>69</sup>

On the surface, Bulgarian communist nutrition ideology also expressed anti-vegetarian views. Nutritionists who developed careers during the communist era claimed to share this antagonism. In his 1950 booklet *Food and Nutrition* (*Hrana i hranene*), Naydenov quoted Engels’ criticism of the movement: “With all due respect to vegetarians, a human would not be a human without consuming meat”.<sup>70</sup> These views persisted until at least the end of the 1970s, when Naydenov’s successor Tashev was still dismissing the idea that an exclusively vegetarian diet could satisfy the human body’s need for nutrients.<sup>71</sup>

But most of all, meat made an extraordinary important part of the ideal communist menu. The concern of Naydenov and other food experts about providing a healthy and balanced diet for the population was invariably and explicitly linked to the individual’s ability to perform their work duties for the communist state. “Only a well fed nation is healthy, endures misfortune and can hope for great work achievements”.<sup>72</sup> The attitude towards healthy food as being a high-quality gasoline for the engine of the communist people was echoed in all the cookbooks from the period.<sup>73</sup> “A correct diet allows the full development of the body’s abilities, ensures good workability, increases work efficiency and extends the lifespan”, taught Tashev.<sup>74</sup>

**IN THE COSMOGONY** of communist nutrition, created to feed the bodily machine of the worker in communist industries, meat was seen as the purest, most efficient kind of fuel. Despite the potentially eclectic personal views of people like Naydenov, communist cookbooks in Bulgaria routinely defined meat-based dishes as “fundamental”, “central” to the menu.<sup>75</sup> They insisted that both meat and animal fats were crucial to health.<sup>76</sup> Other assertions repeated in cookbooks and culinary literature from the early 1950s until the 1980s were that meat is a “powerful food”<sup>77</sup> that provides the body with essential amino acids, as well as easily absorbed proteins and vitamins.<sup>78</sup>

The importance attributed by communist nutritionists to meat consumption was not solely based on an appreciation of food diversity. According to them, health depended on and was demonstrated by a good appetite, and an appetite was seen as the best stimulator of the salivary glands.<sup>79</sup> Meat, then, was seen as stimulating the appetite.<sup>80</sup> It was like Mark Twain’s Painkiller – a cure for any disease. “Meat, this central foodstuff, is widely used in dietary cuisine”, declared the *Book for Everyday and Every Home* (*Kniga za vseki den i vseki dom*) (1967).<sup>81</sup>

It could be argued that the important role of meat in communist nutrition was facilitated by the very logic of the social revolu-

tion. The communist regime sought legitimacy in improving the lifestyle of previously disadvantaged social classes, which greatly appreciated meat.<sup>82</sup> The Soviet influence might have planted the seeds of the communist meat cult in Bulgaria, but here it fell on the fertile ground of an agrarian and not particularly wealthy society, a great part of whose rural population had little access to meat.

**ANOTHER ASPECT** related to the social revolution was that the new state allowed for unprecedented social advancement among previously disadvantaged groups.<sup>83</sup> The new leadership largely originated from such groups; and so their own preferences, which by means of the centrally run economy had a significant influence on public food culture,<sup>84</sup> also remained within the traditional food hierarchy, in which meat was seen as something festive and a privilege. Naydenov’s writings certainly suggest that, to him, meat was at least initially a symbol of wealth.<sup>85</sup> It could also be the case that in Bulgaria, as Darra Goldstein<sup>86</sup> observes about the Soviet Union, regular food shortages contributed to preserving the perception of meat as a status symbol throughout the communist period.

In this context, vegetarianism remained an enduring taboo. Even the terms “vegetarian” or “vegetarianism” were not used in the titles of cookbooks until 1980. Yet a closer look at Naydenov’s writing reveals that he was strongly influenced by the vegetarian movement and had appropriated at least some of their understandings of how meat affects the human body. He repeatedly stated that meat makes people wild, self-assured, stern, cruel, proud, arrogant and greedy for power, while plant-based foods pacify, calm people’s passions, soften their behavior and make them more noble; moreover, they make workers obedient and quiet, but offer them longevity and lean bodies.<sup>87</sup> This understanding repeated earlier writings by vegetarian activists almost word-for-word.<sup>88</sup>

Also, Naydenov never completely rejected the vegetarian diet. His work prior to the imposition of the communist regime seemed to be a fusion of eclectic ideas. On the one hand, acknowledging the omnivorous nature of humans, he was a proponent of the old belief in balanced, all-inclusive diets in which meat and plant-based foods represented the yin and yang of healthy food. On the other hand, he thought that vegetarianism reduced the risk of rheumatism, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis and many other diseases. He even stated that it made the mind clearer and the intelligence livelier.<sup>89</sup> In his view, the problem with a vegetarian diet was its inefficiency: burdening the digestive system but providing little energy.<sup>90</sup>

Importantly, Naydenov was generally concerned about the poorer classes of the country. He opened his 1940 work by stating that, according to a recent survey, the average Bulgarian consumed 920 grams of bread daily. Commenting on the Orthodox practice of fasting, he stated that it may be only beneficial to those who were tired of overindulgence and wild partying, while it would be no good for Bulgarian peasants, who were “vegetarian by default and anyway only occasionally eat meat”.<sup>91</sup> This understanding came close to the already mentioned Soviet idea of the vegetarian move-



ment as being oppressive and tailor-made for the wealthier classes.

Thus, if Naydenov evolved to expressly oppose vegetarianism as director of the Institute for Hygiene in the Medical Faculty in Plovdiv in the 1950s, he had at least two reasons for doing so. The ideological expectations at the time clearly played a role and he found himself quoting Engels and Russian nutritionists such as Ivan Petrovich Pavlov or Boris Ivanovich Slovtsov, alongside Gustav von Bunge and Carl von Voit. But the importance which he ascribed to the abundant consumption of meat and animal proteins should also be viewed in light of his concern about the diet of disadvantaged groups. “Bringing the cauldron to the field – with food cooked by a skillful cook, will rationalize the diet of our peasant population”, who had previously survived mainly on bread and onions, wrote Naydenov.<sup>92</sup> Of course, these beliefs, possibly humanitarian by origin, subsequently happened to serve well the less-than-humanitarian communist understanding of people primarily as a workforce.

In any case, as mentioned above, meatless diets were never completely ruled out. Naydenov, Tashev and Dzhelepov all described situations in which such diets are beneficial: during old age or in a warmer climate and for lifestyles involving less physical effort, in which case Dzhelepov advised a meatless diet twice a week (but only in the 1962 edition of the *Housewife’s Book (Kniga za domakinyata)*).<sup>93</sup>

**TOWARDS THE END** of the 1950s, the understanding of a healthy diet as a combination of necessary quantities of amino acids, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals and water rapidly developed into a complex process involving tables and calculations. The process rendered irrelevant the pro vs. anti-vegetarianism discussion: any ways to provide the body with the necessary combination of nutritional elements were acceptable. This was already evident in the later works of Naydenov,<sup>94</sup> in which neither plant nor meat-based diets were discussed in normative terms, although the requirements for various nutritional elements were stated. The trend became even more prominent in the works authored by Tashev and Dzhelepov in the 1960s and 1970s. Meat remained central to the suggested best diets, but the key was balance.

In this context, it is interesting to consider the findings of Treitel on the GDR, where vegetarian advice openly proliferated in the 1950s and 1960s. She associates the success of such advice with the regular shortages of butter, milk and meat. However, such shortages also existed in Bulgaria, where the idea of an entirely meatless diet was firmly rejected in the 1950s. The already quoted suggestion by Goldstein that communist food shortages strengthened the meaning of meat as a power symbol seems to be a counter argument. One possible explanation for the differences

observed between national cases could be the role of the personal factor. The degree of conforming to what were perceived as the ideological tenets of communist nutrition must have remained, at least to some extent, an individual choice, just like the ability to promote alternative views within the dominant discourses. Considering the small number of professionals, who published advice on nutrition, particularly in the 1950s, it seems inevitable that the dominant discourses were defined by the personal qualities and understandings of (only a few) individuals, along the tenets of abstract ideological requirements.

**TO CONCLUDE, THIS RESEARCH** suggests that communist nutritional advice embraced a much broader legacy from the pre-war period in Bulgaria than its authors cared to admit. Its ambition to improve the diet of the nation, which was promoted as radically reformist, echoed – and scaled up – ideas and practices that were not only already in place but had been introduced by movements, whom the communist ideology rejected.

Neither the idea to reform the national diet according to the latest scientific understandings of it, nor the methods to implement this plan via a system of canteens and cookbooks, were new. A significant group of medical experts and authors of cookery advice were promoting the latest advances in nutritional science in the period between the two world wars using accessible and diverse channels. They continuously updated the wide range of educational information and instructions, which aimed at housewives and professional cooks. They were promoting innovative practices, such as eating raw vegetables, following a diverse diet and understanding food intake in terms of nutrients and calories. Particularly active in the process was the Bulgarian Vegetarian Union, who used a network of canteens and cookbooks and other printed material to promote a diverse, healthy and ethical meatless diet. This research argues that the vegetarian movement was an important agent behind the introduction of raw vegetables/salads in the cooking advice in Bulgaria, which happened in the late 1910s and in the 1920s.

Thus, the legacy of vegetarianism and the pre-war healthy diet project and ideas were widely present in the official nutritionist advice of communist Bulgaria in the 1950s and 1960s, even though it was never acknowledged.

Moreover, and contrary to what transpires from previous research on the Soviet Union<sup>95</sup> and the assertions that communist nutritional science denounced vegetarianism, various sources in Bulgaria suggest that vegetarianism was allowed back in “through the back door”: as a healing diet, and many leading authorities did not fully reject it. Influential experts were strongly influenced by pre-communist nutritional advice and always remained torn between these earlier teachings and meat-centered Soviet teachings.

This research has found some evidence of direct influence and

borrowings, such as almost literate repetition of the wording of older texts on vegetarianism in the advice of leading communist nutritionist Ivan Naydenov. But even in cases where such direct borrowings are less evident, and ideas or practices might have arrived through different paths into the early communist nutrition ideology, they were generally already in place in the society. Moreover, they were introduced and practiced by movements like the vegetarian one, towards which the new system chose to be nominally hostile.

**WHAT THE COMMUNIST** regime introduced was an attempt to scale up the reforms and the ability to invest much greater resources in them. Perhaps its most prominent input in the idea of healthy nutrition was to attribute a central role to meat. Meat, as argued by Franc, was and remained central to the communist nutritional cosmogony. It delivered essential proteins, which were easily appropriated by the body, and presented the best-quality source of energy for the body of the worker in the state economy. Due to the specific combination of relative poverty across the nation in the past and chronic shortages of meat during the communist period, meat also retained its character as a “status” food. Food consumption was often used in the official discourses as evidence of the nation’s economic progress.

However, the ideal diet was increasingly conceptualized as a combination of certain quantities of nutrients. How were they delivered to the body – weather through meat or other foodstuffs – became less important. This rendered the debate for and against vegetarianism irrelevant.

Thus, on the one hand, this article disputes previous assertions that communist regimes radically and consistently ruled out vegetarianism. On the other hand, it shows that at least some of the communist “innovations” were not that innovative, but were rather portrayed as such by the persistent propaganda. It challenges the claims of radical reforms through which early communist nutrition sought legitimacy.

This research contributes to the growing body of studies on the technocratic and scientocratic aspects of communist Europe, showing that there were significant variations across Eastern Europe in the extent to which local scientific discourses appropriated the dominant Soviet discourses. It also suggests that the individual characters and qualities of the leading scientists might have played just as important a role as the ideological framework in shaping these discourses. ❌

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- 2 Here the term “ideology” is used as defined by Van Dijk – as systems of ideas, which form the “axiomatic principles” in representations of a given social group. As Van Dijk wrote: “ideologies are expressed and generally reproduced in the social practices of their members, and more particularly acquired, confirmed, changed and perpetuated through discourse.” (Teun A. Van Dijk, “Ideology and Discourse Analysis”, *Journal of Political Ideologies* vol. 11, no. 2 (June 2006): 115–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687908>.)
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- 4 Ivan Hadzhinikolov, *Rabotnicheskoto stolovo hranene [Workers’ Canteen Nutrition]* (Sofia: Profizdat, 1983), 4; Viera Hlavová, “Rok 1948 – rok zlomu v agrárnej politike státu” [1948 – The Turning Point in the State Agrarian Policy], in *Kapitolami najnovších Bratislava slovenských dejín*, ed., Jan Pesek a kol. (Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV: Prodama, 2006), 131–143; Rastislava Stoličná, “Practices and Changes”, Mauricio Borrero, “Communal Dining and State Cafeterias in Moscow and Petrograd, 1917–1921”, in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joice Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 164.
- 5 Albena Shkodrova, *Communist Gourmet. The Curious Story of Food in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2021), 2–3.
- 6 Ivan Naydenov and Sonya Chortanova, *Nasha kuhnya [Our Cuisine]* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1955), 10; Lyubomir Petrov et al., *Bulgarska natsionalna kuhnya [Bulgarian National Cuisine]* (Sofia: Zemizdat, 1978), 6 as just some examples.
- 7 Martin Franc, *Řasy, nebo knedlyky? Postoje Odborníků Na Věživu k Inovacím a Tradicím v České Stravě v 50. a 60. Letech 20. Století* (Prague: Scriptorium, 2003); Martin Franc, “Physicians, Technologists, Economists and Politicians. Nutritional Policy and Conflicts in Czech Lands from 1948–1970”, *Food and Drink in Communist Europe. Food and History*, 2020: 27–48; Stoličná, “Practices and Changes,” 143–158; Albena Shkodrova, *Soc Gourmet. Kurioznata istoria na kuhnyata v NRB [Communist Gourmet. The curious story of food in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria]*, (Sofia: Zhanet 45, 2014); Stefan Detchev, “Public Catering in Communist Bulgaria: 1950s-1980s”, *Food and History*, no. 18 (2020): 49–74.
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- 11 Ronald D. LeBlanc, “Vegetarianism in Russia: The Tolstoy(an) Legacy”, *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & East European Studies*, 1507 (2001): 1–39.
- 12 Julia Malitska, “Meat and the City in the Late Russian Empire”,

*Baltic Worlds* 23 (2020): 4–24; Julia Malitska, “The Peripheries of Omnivorousness: Vegetarian Canteens and Social Activism in the Early Twentieth-Century Russian Empire”, *Global Food History* 7 (May 2021), 140–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2021.1923997>.

13 Margarita Terzieva, “Tolstoizmut i obshtestvenite organizatsii v Bulgaria prez purvata polovina na XX vek” [Tolstoyism and Public Organizations in Bulgaria during the First Half of the Twentieth Century]’, *Istoria [History]*, 3 (2019), 227–90, 284.

14 Franc, “Physicians”.

15 Corinna Treitel, *Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, c.1870 to 2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316946312>.

16 See Kristen R. Ghodsee, “Crashing the Party”, *World Policy Journal* no. 35 (2018), 70–74, <https://doi.org/10.1215/07402775-7085877>. In food studies, Martin Franc has researched the formation of communist nutritionist advice, examining how struggle for power between nutrition scientists, politicians and administration influenced national food practices in former Czechoslovakia. Treitel has shown how in the GDR one individual ensured the popularity of a diet, based on raw vegetables during the first decades after the Second World War. Nilgen convincingly argued that the staff of the most influential publisher of cookery books negotiated its publishing policy with its readers, hence not simply preaching, but negotiating its nutritional and cookery advice with its readers. Nilgen, Nancy, “Recipe for Compromise? The Negotiation of East German Foodways”, *Food and Drink in Communist Europe*, eds. Shkodrova, A., Scholliers, P., Segers, Y., *Food and History*, no.1 (2020), 99-114; Franc, “Physicians”; Treitel, *Eating*.

17 1944 to 1948 were transition years, during which the Bulgarian communist party gradually absorbed power and abandoned its attempts to simulate democratic political pluralism. For the publishing of nutritional and culinary material, this meant that while the spirit of the new age was already strongly dominant and many authors tried to fit into it, hoping for physical and professional survival, private publishing houses were still operating. Much was often filtered in the process, a practice which in the East-European vernacular was later termed “self-censorship”. Yet alternative beliefs also found their way into the publications from this period - be it out of courage or genuine confusion. The expropriation of the publishing industry and declaring it a state monopoly in 1948 put an end to this period. From that point on, the discourses which would be later perceived as quintessentially communist began to take shape and solidify.

18 Mitana Markova and Nikolay Dzhelepov, *Naruchnik po hraneneto [Guidebook to nutrition]* (Sofia: Meditsina i fizkultura, 1974).

19 Penka Cholcheva and Aleksandra Ruseva, eds., *Kniga za domakinyata [Housewife’s Book]*, (Sofia: Otechestven front, 1956).

20 A body of 78 books from the period between 1870 and 1944 were searched for information on nutrition; out of them, some 30 were identified as relevant. It is known that members and followers of the White Brotherhood - a religious-esoteric community, based on the teachings of Petur Dunov, and possibly attracting between 15,000 and 40,000 members between the two world wars, also participated in the vegetarian movement. The community is thought to have used the movement’s forums to promote its ideas in favor of a meatless diet. However, the publications of the vegetarian movement make no references to the White Brotherhood and there are no clear traces of it in mainstream cookbooks and in communist nutrition advice. Dunov’s impact on the vegetarian movement remains to be studied and has been left out of this research.

21 Ken Albala, “Cookbooks as Historical Documents”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffrey M. Pilcher, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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23 Naydenov and Chortanova, *Nasha kuhnya* (1955), 10; (1971), 4.

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25 Franc, *Řasy*, 25-29.

26 Arhigenis Sarantis, *Igionomia sirech pravila za da si vardim zdraveto [Igionomia, i.e. rules to preserve our health]*, trans. Sava Dobtoplodni (Tsarigrad: Patriarsheskata tipografia, 1846).

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28 Josep L. Barona, *The Problem of Nutrition: Experimental Science, Public Health and Economy in Europe 1914–1945* (Bern: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2010).

29 Asen Ivanov, *Rukovodstvo za domashno konservirane na ovoshtia i zelenchutsi [A Handbook on Domestic Food Preservation]* (Sofia: Pechatnitsa Sveti Kliment, 1925), Bogdana Kasurova and Spaska Dimchevska, *Gotvarska kniga: s polezni uputvania za mladata domakinya: [Cookbook: With Useful Instructions for the Young Housewife]* (Sofia: Pridvorna knizharnitsa Iv.B. Kasurov, 1933).

30 Ivanov, *Rukovodstvo*.

31 Terzieva, “Tolstoizmut”, 284.

32 Ilia Enchev, “Petiat mezhdunaroden kongres v Stokholm” [The Fifth International Congress in Stockholm], in *Mezhdunarodnoto vegetariansko dvizhenie [The International Vegetarian Movement]* (Sofia: Bulgarian Vegetarian Union,1923), 8.

33 LeBlanc, “Vegetarianism in Russia”, 7.

34 Mihail Stoitsev, *Problemata za hraneneto [The Problem of Nutrition]* (Sevlievo: Bratstvo, 1938).

35 The Bulgarian Physicians’ Sobriety Union was involved in the movement (Terzieva, “Tolstoizmut”, 286). Many people with medical titles can be found among the subscribers of various editions of vegetarian literature, such as the subscribers of Stoitsev’s book.

36 Jon Verriet, “Struggling Over Healthy Lifestyles: The Dutch Nutrition Education Bureau and the Individualisation of Public Health (1940–1980)”, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* no. 136, May 4 (2021): 8–9.

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38 Ivan Naydenov, *Nauka za hraneneto [The Science of Nutrition]* (Sofia: Vestnik za zhenata, 1940).

39 Barona, *The Problem*.

40 Iv. Maleev and N. Stanchev, *Hrana i kuhnya. Rukovodstvo za semeystva i obshtestveni stolove [Food and Cuisine. Handbook for Families and Canteens]* (Sofia: Lekop -Lekarsjata kooperatsia, 1948).

41 LeBlanc, “Vegetarianism”, 27.

42 This does not mean that raw vegetables weren’t part of everyday diet. According to various testimonies, in 19th-century Bulgaria the staple diet, especially in the rural areas, consisted of a fresh green paprika or spring onion or onion, white cheese, lard and bread.

43 Hr. Yurdanova, *Rukovodstvo po gotvarstvo, potrebno za vsyako semeystvo [Cookery handbook, needed in every family]* (Svishtov: D.T. Damyanov, 1903); Maria Redelin, *Gotvarska kniga : Sustav. spored knigata na Maria Redelin [Cookbook]* (Sofia: Ivan K. Bozhanov, 1904); Elizabet Angelova Stefanova, *Rukovodstvo po gotvarstvoto [Cookery handbook]* (Sofia: Knizharnitsa Chipev, 1904).

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# “Vegetarianism was part of social reformism”

by **Julia Malitska**

**Corinna Treitel, Department Chair and Professor of History at Washington University in St. Louis, in conversation with Julia Malitska on dreams about and attempts at dietary reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and on German life reformers and their long lasting, but forgotten, impacts on the ways we think today about eating naturally and environmentally consciously.**

**S**pecializing in the interplay of modern science, medicine, culture, and politics in German history, Professor Treitel is one of the most influential scholars of modern European history. She helped introduce Medical Humanities as a field of study to Washington University in St. Louis in 2015. Her first book, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*,<sup>1</sup> asked why Germany, a scientific powerhouse in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, also hosted one of the Western world's most vibrant and influential occult movements. Her second book, *Eating Nature in Modern Germany: Food, Agriculture, and Environment, c. 1870 to 2000*,<sup>2</sup> investigated German efforts to invent more “natural” ways to eat and farm. Vegetarianism, organic farming, and other such practices have enticed a wide variety of Germans, from socialists, liberals, and radical anti-Semites in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Nazis, communists, and Greens in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book brings together histories of science, medicine, agriculture, the environment, and popular culture to offer the most thorough treatment yet of this remarkable story. Professor Treitel is now working on a third book called *Gesundheit! Seeking German Health, 1750-2000*. It explores changing ideas and practices of health in German lands from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to the present and tracks their global history. Professor Treitel teaches courses in European history, the history of science and medicine, and medical humanities.

**JULIA MALITSKA: What were the connections and lines of division between occultists, life reformers, and vegetarians in Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries?**

**CORINNA TREITEL:** I think of them all as being part of the life reform movement. Many occultists were vegetarians, but there were also many vegetarians who were not occultists and many occultists who were not vegetarians. For instance, in the first book I noted that almost all the German theosophists were vegetarians and I think that has to do with the connections to South Asia and Hinduism. All these reform movements are kind of cross fertilizing each other, and they often share personnel.

**JM: Why is it important to study the interplay of science, medicine, politics, and culture in German history? Why did you choose and continue with this field? What sparked your long-term interest in it?**

**CT:** It is a rather odd story. I never intended to be a historian. When I went to college, I studied chemistry and planned to do a PhD in biochemistry after I graduated. I was working in a lab. And instead, I started to get interested in the history of science. It was a field I knew almost nothing about. And I do not know if I could have put the feeling



Corinna Treitel, Professor of History, studies the interplay of modern science, medicine, culture, and politics.

PHOTO: PRIVATE

into words at that time, but I think what I was most interested in was the forms that modern belief takes in a scientific culture. The whole secularization thesis is that as religion recedes into the private sphere, rational forms of intellectual life take over. I was interested in what kind of opportunities a scientific age and robust scientific culture creates for belief and imagination. I was attracted to Germany as a kind of test case because Germany had such a robust scientific culture and also such a robust popular culture related to science. A lot of historians, at least in the United States, come to German history because they are interested in the Nazi past, which is a perfectly legitimate way to enter the field. But I actually came into it because of the rich 19<sup>th</sup> century German culture of high science and popular belief. It really fascinated me.

About why I think it's so important: I think of the German past as a kind of “laboratory of modernity”, to use a metaphor introduced by other researchers. I think of it as a place to study the intermingling of scientific ideas and popular beliefs, and the mutual influence of popular beliefs and scientific ideas on each other. That is something that you can see in many other places – probably in your own studies of the Russian empire. And there is a tendency, I think, among historians to assume that the history of science and the history of popular culture are two different things. I think that we miss something important about the modern condition if we do not study them together. Germany is a great place to do it, but I don't claim anything exclusive there. The metaphor I use is that Germany is a *Petri dish*.<sup>3</sup> That is my philosophy about this particular topic.



Evoking Giuseppe Arcimboldo's 16<sup>th</sup>-century portraits made of fruits, vegetables, and flowers, the cover of this weekly magazine implies that organic plant foods build firm and healthy flesh. "Bio-Foods: Pleasure without Poison. The Green Bluff?" *Der Spiegel* (July 26, 1982), front cover. DER SPIEGEL 30/ 1982. Published in Corinna Treitel's book *Eating Nature in Modern Germany*, 279.

**JM: What is the most fascinating case study and/or personality you have studied, or source that you have analyzed? What is your most unexpected discovery?**

CT: I have had so many! I will just give you one example from each one of my projects. Working on the first book on occultism. I think the person who surprised me the most was actually a guy by the name of Carl du Prel,<sup>4</sup> who was extremely well known, a kind of a popular philosopher, and interested in dreams. He tried to think about dreams from a robust philosophical and scientific standing. He actually shows up in the footnotes of Freud's "The Interpretation of Dreams."<sup>5</sup> Freud always gets all the credit for bringing dreams into the scope of scientific research, but Carl du Prel was already doing this in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and he was also a spiritualist. But no one had ever written about him. So, I wrote a bit about him in my first book, and I have always thought he deserves a full intellectual biography. You have probably found people like this in your own work who are just as interesting. You can only do a little bit with them and then you must leave room for someone else to do more. And then, when it comes to the second book, I am still fascinated by Eduard Baltzer.<sup>6</sup> He is the theorist of life reform at its very beginning in the 1870s. I find his origins in this kind of dissenting Protestant sectarianism so interesting, and he was involved in things way beyond vegetarianism. For example, he was involved in the kindergarten movement and women's rights, and in the anti-smoking campaign. I am sure that there is a much bigger story there.



The image showing Hitler as a butcher is by John Heartfield: "Don't Be Afraid – He's a Vegetarian!" (1936). Heartfield was a visual artist very critical of Nazism. Here he was playing on the idea that all vegetarians are peace loving. In the image, Hitler the vegetarian is about to butcher the chicken, who is wearing the French cockade. Don't be fooled by Hitler's words, Heartfield is saying: he talks about peace, but he is violating the Versailles Peace Treaty. He may be a vegetarian, in other words, but he is also bent on violence and aggression towards France. The reference in 1936 would have been to the remilitarization of the Rhineland, a direct violation of the Versailles Treaty yet one which few contemporaries at the time saw as part of a large spiral of German aggression against her neighbors.

**JM: Were there any established historiographical or popular myths that you faced, challenged, and/or debunked in your research?**

CT: Oh yes. You know, the black hole in German history is always the Nazis. When it comes to my first book, there was a historiographic consensus about the occult movement as a sign of German irrationalism and proto fascism. That was the historiographic consensus that I was arguing against. In the second book on natural eating, the challenge was that most German historians consider life reform movements as kind of strange and fringe. For these historians, life reform is interesting, weird and surprising, but not an incubator of innovation whose impact went beyond the kooky and fringe to the very center of German culture. That is why I came around to this idea of biopolitics. Biopolitics has been a huge thing for German historians talking about the Nazis: the racial hygiene programs, the Nazi anti-smoking campaigns, and so on. For German historians, biopolitics has always been very closely associated with fascist and top-down projects. I wanted to use this story of natural eating as a way of pushing back against that dominant narrative about biopolitics, that these biopolitical ideas about natural eating came from outside the scientific establishment, that they had big influence and multiple political aftereffects from the fascists to social democrats. I was trying to shake up the way how historians, German historians, think about biopolitics.

**JM: In my own research I was struck by a strong, almost exclusive, historiographic tradition of the association of vegetarianism in the Russian empire with Tolstoyism. So there was nothing other than Tolstoyan vegetarianism. When I told people around me that I was researching on vegetarianism in the Russian empire, the immediate comment was: "So you are studying Tolstoyans." What were transnational and global influences on German vegetarians and life reformers? Where did they get their inspiration from?**

CT: That is a question you can think about on at least two levels. There were international vegetarian congresses where people met. Personal connections certainly occurred. Even early on, one of the first modern German vegetarians, Wilhelm Zimmermann,<sup>7</sup> lived for a while in a vegetarian commune in England, so he knew a lot of British counterparts, and he helped get some of their material translated into German. So, there were those kinds of personal connections and international circulation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century reformers.

The other international factor in this story has to do with the globalization of the food system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I forget the exact numbers right now, but I think German meat consumption tripled between the early 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a lot of that was driven by importing of cheap meat from places like Argentina, the United States or Canada. That kind of globalization of the food system was distressing for many vegetarians, though not for all, because they saw Germans as losing control of their own food economy. I always say Germany was not such a great place to be self-sufficient in food. It was not like Ukraine, a breadbasket, or the United States or Canada that had the capacity to be very self-sufficient in foodstuffs. Germany was not that kind of place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so that fears about the globalization of the food supply were also a sort of stimulus, I think, for many vegetarians and early organic farmers, to develop more natural ways to eat and farm.

**JM: The history of vegetarian association activity dates back to 1867, when Eduard Baltzer founded the first German Association for the Natural Way of Life. Several other vegetarian associations developed after 1867. 1892 became a symbolic year in the history of vegetarianism in German-speaking Europe, marked by the establishment of the Leipzig-based German Vegetarian Federation. In the Weimar Republic, however, we can speak, as far as I know, of at least three parallel centers of vegetarianism – Berlin, Leipzig, and Dresden. I believe there also were vegetarians in Switzerland, Poland, and Austria, which might have been part of these developments and organizations. How did these centers (co)operate and relate to each other? How fragmented and/or consolidated were German vegetarians?**

CT: I cannot give you a good answer to that question because I did not really write a history of the vegetarian movement. There is another book that someone should write. And I would love to read it. I was more interested in the dream of eating naturally. But from what I did see, I would say that there was a fair amount of traffic. For instance, some people, such as Eduard Balzer, were part of a national lecture circuit. They would travel around Germany giving lectures on why everyone should embrace the natural lifestyle and become a vegetarian. There would be someone who heard them speak in Leipzig and wrote to a friend to say that they should invite Baltzer. And Baltzer would come to speak in that other place. So, I think that there was a kind of informal network of people who knew each other, and they collaborated with each other and shared knowledge. And of course, they all published in the same journals, and were part of these international congresses. The other thing that I noticed is that vegetarianism seems to be a very urban phenomenon. Even in the kind of rural colonies where you see vegetarianism

“I was trying to shake up the way how historians, German historians, think about biopolitics.”





A well-fed man happily carves up a potato as if it is a ham. This was typical of the visual propaganda produced by the Nazi regime to convince Germans that plant foods were a healthful and rational substitute for meat. *Vom ausgelassenen Apfelschmalz, vom großen Hans, dem blauen Heinrich und anderen guten Sachen zu Frühstück, Brotaufstrich und Abedessen* (Berlin: Rezeptdienst, Reichsausschuss für volkswirtschaftliche Aufklärung, 1940), front cover. Foto (c) Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen/Ute Franz-Scarciglia. Published in Corinna Treitel's book *Eating Nature in Modern Germany*, 192.

CT: Vegetarianism was part of social reformism. Reformism came in many different political varieties. There was the anti-Semitic variety, the pacifist variety, the communist variety, the women's rights variety, and so it got mixed in with all of those. I did not notice a lot of Catholic vegetarians. But then, on the other hand, it is always difficult to know the confessional background of particular people. I wondered if this mostly was a Protestant phenomenon. Did it maybe have to do with the secularization of Protestant beliefs about the body? That is just speculation.

The other thing I noticed, and maybe someone will develop this later on, is that there seem to be a lot of German Jewish physicians active in coopting the vegetarianism of the life reformers into academic medicine. Germany is a pork-based culture: meat eating for some Jews can be very problematic and this was a moment of assimilation for many Jewish Germans. I always wondered if some of these physicians had found their way into vegetarian circles or maybe even just vegetarian restaurants because it was a way to fit in, a way of being able to sit down for a meal with other people and not have to confront the issue of kosher meat. Again, that is just speculation. But I always thought that it might be an interesting thing for someone to investigate.

JM: I also found a sizeable proportion of Jews engaged in vegetarian activism in the context of the Russian empire, but since I do not have sources of personal origin, I cannot really make any speculations about their motives for joining the movement. Some of the main activists were educated in Austria and Switzerland, and they probably got interested in the ideas of life reform there. Can you think of any lasting results of the activities of German reformers and vegetarians on our post-modern societies, maybe on the ways we think, eat or simply are? In other words, what are the tangible historical legacies of German reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

CT: German life-reformers elaborated a lot of the arguments that I hear today about why people should eat less meat and buy more organic food. In the United States, a woman by the name of Frances Moore Lappé wrote a very famous book in the 1970s called *Diet for a Small Planet*<sup>8</sup> and she started her own food activist organization. The book is both a cookbook and a political document, and her basic argument is that meat eating is an inefficient way to use the caloric resources of the world, that it breeds injustice and causes environmental problems.

pop up, it is almost always city people playing farmers. There is a definitely an urban dimension, at least in the German context.

JM: Vegetarians in Germany, I guess, were anything but homogeneous. Were there any tensions or power struggles between different ideological currents; were there any attempts to take over, to dominate? Did you find any traces of ideological conflicts?

CT: I think the answer is yes. I mean of course there were different kinds of vegetarians. It is probably similar to what you have seen in the Russian empire. Some came to vegetarianism through animal rights and antivivisection. Others, like Baltzer, I think, were more concerned with social justice and poverty, ensuring that all types of people had enough to eat in Germany, so their concern was more with hunger. Pacifism was sometimes part of it, but not always. And then there were physicians who came to the whole topic of eating naturally because they were concerned about hunger and hygiene. By the time the eugenicists and the racial hygienists came online in the 1910s and 1920s, they were interested in what vegetarianism could offer in maintaining a pure Germanic people. But I did not see these guys all fighting with each other for dominance of the movement. As I said, I did not write a movement history, so it might be there and I just I did not see it.

JM: Let me again start with insights from my own research and the context of the Russian empire. Vegetarianism as social activism started to a great extent, I would say, in the multi-ethnic provinces of the Russian empire, and particularly in the cities with a direct cultural and educational link to Central European metropolises. Kyiv, Odesa or St. Petersburg are excellent examples of that. Did ethnic/confessional/religious or gender aspects play a decisive role in the processes you study in the German context?

Both German and imperial Russian vegetarians were already saying that in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I think we have forgotten that a lot of these arguments were already elaborated in much the same way by these people. I think that may be the hidden but lasting outcome. Again, for organic farming, I do not know what the case is in Sweden, but in the United States, a lot of people in academia are almost messianic about organic farming as the thing that is going to save the planet. And I am agnostic. People in academia also often think that organics is something that was invented in the 1970s by the hippies, and they are shocked when I say that the Nazis were very interested in organics. And there were people before the Nazis who were doing organic forms of farming as well. There is this forgotten past of people who created the techniques and the justifications and the whole philosophy around natural eating that I think are still with us today.

JM: Yes, in my source material starting from 1870s, I came across ideas of scientists, climatologists, and geographers about soya and other plants that should supposedly be introduced into people's diet for a number of reasons, including environmental concerns and food economy justifications, I would say, to use the modern language. Are there any blank spots in the field of your research? What do we know less about? What would you like to know more about?

CT: I think it would be cool if a consortium of historians could work with each other to flesh out the international dimensions of this topic, because all of us are limited by our language skills, the peculiarities of the way our mind works and our training. This is actually a global story, and it is probably not just a Western story. I am sure that there are South Asian and East Asian dimensions. Going back to the earlier question about transnational connections, one of the big surprises for me was about the Japanese physicians who came to study in Germany. They got interested in the studies of vegetarian eaters as a way to try to justify their own East Asian diet as being a robust way to eat in the modern world. That was interesting. I did not expect to see Japanese people cropping up in German journals talking about vegetarianism. I think that kind of international story is still hidden. I do not know anyone who is working on it. In my fantasy world it would be so cool if we could maybe create a consortium of people trying to flesh out what that bigger story is. We have zoom now, so maybe it is even possible.

This is a great conclusion to our interview. Thank you, Corinna.

CT: Yes, now you can think about it. Maybe you will be the organizer. ✖

Julia Malitska is PhD in History and Project Researcher at CBEES, Södertörn University.

Note: This text is based on an interview conducted on February 16, 2022.

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- 3 The Petri dish is a laboratory equipment item, and the name entered popular culture. It is often used metaphorically for a contained community that is being studied as if they were microorganisms in a biology experiment, or an environment where original ideas and enterprises may flourish.
- 4 Karl Ludwig August Friedrich Maximilian Alfred, Freiherr von Prel, or, in French, Carl Ludwig August Friedrich Maximilian Alfred, Baron du Prel (1839–1899), was a German philosopher and writer on mysticism and the occult.
- 5 *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) is a book by Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, in which the author introduces his theory of the unconscious with respect to dream interpretation and discusses what would later become the theory of the Oedipus complex.
- 6 Wilhelm Eduard Baltzer (1814–1887) was the founder of the first German vegetarian society, the *German Natural Living Society*, an early popularizer of science and much more. Coming from a family of Evangelical clergymen, he was educated at the universities of Leipzig and Halle where he chiefly studied theology. At Nordhausen, Thuringia, he founded a free religious community. Self-described religious humanists regard the humanist life stance as their religion and organize themselves using a congregational model.
- 7 Balthasar Friedrich Wilhelm Zimmermann (1807-1878) was a German poet, historian, literary critic and politician.
- 8 *Diet for a Small Planet* is a 1971 bestselling book by Frances Moore Lappé.

“German life-reformers elaborated a lot of the arguments that I hear today about why people should eat less meat and buy more organic food.”



Slaughterhouse  
in Stockholm 1928–1932  
Source: Axel Malmström,  
1928–1932. Stockholms-  
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# THE RISE OF THE SWEDISH WELFARE STATE

## Abstract

This article highlights the development of modern food practices and food regulations in Sweden with special emphasis on food safety and food security from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1950s. The results are linked to the wider discussion about modernization and societal change in Sweden and includes industrial organization in the agro-food sector, technological development, and the reality experienced by the population during decades that were heavily influenced by the consequences of two world wars and the rise of the welfare state.

## KEYWORDS

Food safety, food security, food regulations, Sweden.

## INTRODUCING MODERN FOOD PRACTICES INTO THE MODERN FOOD SYSTEM

by **Paulina Rytönen**

**“HUSMANSKOST CONSISTED OF SIMPLE DISHES BASED ON INEXPENSIVE INGREDIENTS THAT WERE AVAILABLE LOCALLY, FOR EXAMPLE, POTATOES, PEAS, CABBAGES, HERRING, BREAD AND CHEAP MEAT CUTS.”**

Historically, cereals and fatty fish like herring were key components in Swedish diets. Sweden was one of the poorest countries in Europe. Thus, meat and other expensive foodstuffs were not available to large parts of the population. As Sweden became industrialized, a new dietary norm became established, which was heavily influenced by state actions. Developments in nutritional physiology deeply impacted food practices and national policies. Early findings in nutritional physiology indicated that a rich and balanced diet, in which animal-based fat played a key role, was advantageous for human health.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, Swedish *husmanskost* [traditional home cooking], was adopted. *Husmanskost* consisted of simple dishes based on inexpensive ingredients that were available locally, for example, potatoes, peas, cabbages, herring, bread and cheap meat cuts. It was used as a social marker to differentiate ordinary people from the upper classes. Some examples of old *husmanskost* dishes are lye fish, cabbage pudding and pea soup. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, *husmanskost* was adopted as the official dietary norm by public institutions such as hospitals, workhouses, prisons and after 1937 it was also used in public schools. The concept of *husmanskost* eventually spilled over to private households. Meat, milk and other animal-based products were important ingredients in *husmanskost* and became a pillar of the Swedish diet.<sup>2</sup>

**STATE INVOLVEMENT** regarding how food should be produced and consumed is an important element in Sweden’s modern food history. Food policies included a range of regulations that targeted all aspects of food. State involvement also reached deeply into private kitchens and influenced what and how much households should consume.<sup>3</sup> Historically, food production and food consumption have developed under the influence of formal food regulations and production and consumption practices that often emerge through the interaction of various stakeholders in society.<sup>4</sup> Many studies have shown that it is particularly important to focus on the articulation of the institutional infrastructure, comprising food legislation and modern practices, supported by public food agencies, as well as by informal institutions when the industrialization of agriculture, food production and modern consumption are in focus.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this essay is in line with previous research and highlights some of the processes leading to how food sovereignty was achieved in Sweden. Special emphasis has been placed on the development of food safety and food security regulations. In addition, some insights are included into how the two world wars and technical development influenced Swedish diets.

The main sources of this essay are public documents, regulatory and legislative documents, data gathered from the *Stockhol-*

*mskällan* digital archive, as well as previous studies. The essay is organized chronologically with a main emphasis on the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

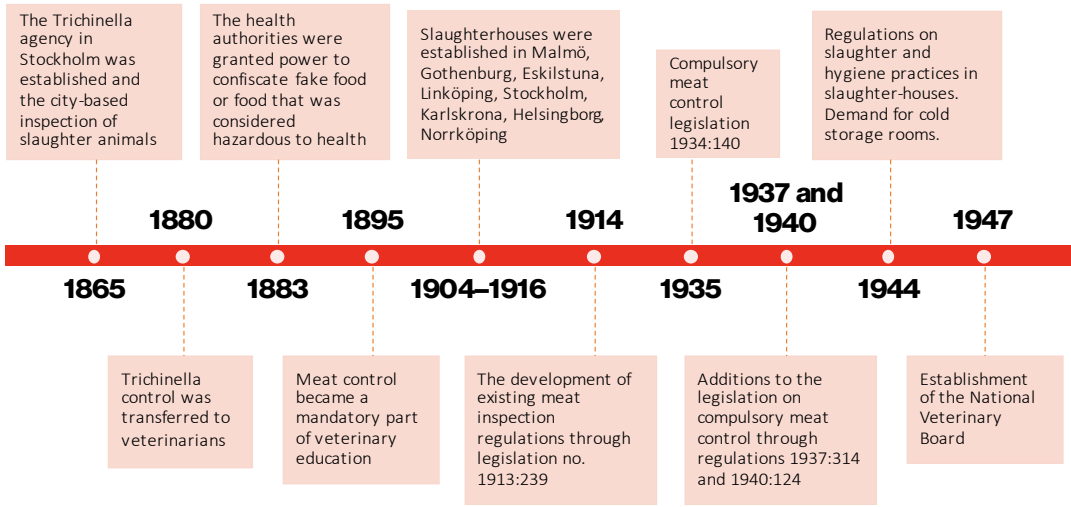
## Agriculture, crisis and restructuring 1890–1950 – a background

You cannot discuss the modern history of food in Sweden without mentioning agricultural regulations. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British demand for food staples such as butter, pork and oats stimulated Swedish exports. To a large extent, Swedish agriculture and food exports became dependent on the British market. But when other countries could offer less costly options, Sweden lost its market. This fueled an economic crisis as the domestic market did not have the purchasing power to replace exports.<sup>6</sup> Oat exports had completely ceased by 1880 and butter exports, which had accounted for 10% of Sweden’s total exports in 1890, had fallen to 5% by 1913.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, during the First World War, food imports decreased due to a trade blockade, inflation rose and between 1914 and 1919 food prices more than doubled, causing domestic demand to fall.<sup>8</sup> This exposed farmers and the emerging food industry to dramatic price fluctuations.<sup>9</sup>

The crisis highlighted above was one of the reasons behind the establishment of agricultural regulations in Sweden.<sup>10</sup> Another reason was the recession following the stock market collapse in 1929. Unemployment rose, prices fell, and the Social Democratic Party searched for ways to support the unemployed. This resulted in an agreement between the Agrarian Party and the Social Democratic Party that secured financial support to agriculture and food producers in exchange for support for legislation that enabled the establishment of unemployment benefits for workers. The agreement led to the regulation of agriculture, which included subsidies, price regulations, export equalization and import restrictions. In addition, farmer’s organizations committed to help reduce the number of food processing companies.<sup>11</sup>

**AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR**, farm structure became incorporated into agro-food regulations when the 1947 Agricultural Bill was passed. The bill targeted three main areas: 1) Farmers’ income level should be equal to that of an industry worker. The government committed to achieve this goal by maintaining agricultural prices at a high (if necessarily artificial) level; 2) agriculture was rationalized and productivity targets set. The ideal farm was defined as a family farm of 10–20 hectares (called “basic farms”). Productivity gains were supported through state loans, subsidies and counselling; 3) increased productivity in “basic farms” was expected to solve food security deficiencies.<sup>12</sup>





**Figure 1.** Milestones in the development of meat regulations and control authorities. Source: Paulina Rytönen, 2022.

Following the 1947 bill, total agricultural production increased to levels that were far above self-sufficiency, while the number of agricultural holdings decreased dramatically.<sup>13</sup> Thus, agricultural regulations helped shape the structure of the food industry. This facilitated the implementation of food hygiene and food security measures and regulations.

**Food safety – examples from meat and dairy products**

One of the first modern food policies was the establishment of food hygiene legislation. Historically, it was relatively easy to avoid food that could make people sick. The variation of food was relatively limited and most food was produced and consumed in the same household. When industrialization and urbanization gained momentum (in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century), food production and elaboration moved out of households and into emerging food enterprises. The previously inherited and experience-based know-how, and the personal control over food quality, shifted from a personal to a societal, institutional, and business level. Food quality and particularly food hygiene gained a wider and more intricate meaning as the food chain became more complex. Food hygiene control was established through the establishment of a legislative framework and new public authorities tasked with verifying that food enterprises followed the law. Two such authorities that played a key role in the development and articulation of food safety regulations were the National Medical Board (*Medicinalstyrelsen*), established in 1878 and the Public Health Institute (*Folkhälsoinstitutet*), established in 1938.

**Meat regulations**

The control of meat products and milk and dairy products in particular were essential to monitor. Some diseases that were transferred to humans via contaminated animal foodstuffs caused serious illness. This endangered exports and domestic consumption. Thus, already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, measures were taken to avoid trichinella, TBC, typhus and other bacteria.<sup>14</sup>

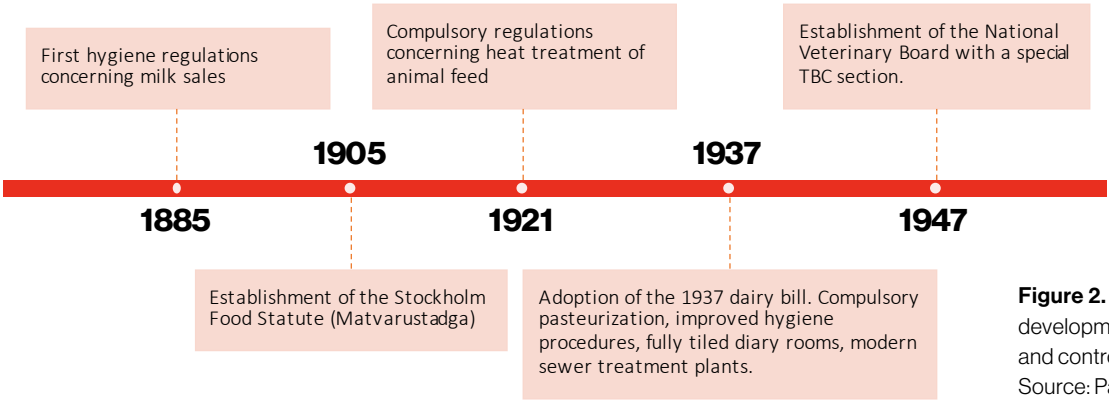
It was difficult to implement safety regulations, particularly when health controls were being developed. Many slaughterhouses had sub-standard premises and practices. The health authorities raided slaughterhouses and when one facility was closed, it was replaced by another one.

Police reports in the City Archive of Stockholm (*Stockholms Stads Digitala arkiv, Stockholmskällan*) bear witness to the discovery of rats and rat droppings, spider’s webs, dust, rotten food, blackening dough, sub-standard and dirty facilities and utensils, and much more.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, food control also included aspects of animal welfare. A summary of work by the health authorities from 1878–1928 states that animals were sometimes slaughtered in cruel conditions, causing them great suffering<sup>16</sup>.

**FOOD CONTROL**BECAME increasingly important for the meat industry. In 1931 there were 586 slaughterhouses in Sweden. Some of them were municipally owned, some were privately owned and some were cooperatives. In 1950 the number of slaughterhouses had been reduced and cooperatives dominated the market.<sup>17</sup> Hygiene regulations helped to rationalize the market because many enterprises, particularly private enterprises, could not comply with the health legislation. This also indirectly influenced the rise of the cooperative movement, as cooperative owners could share the economic burden imposed by the hygiene regulations. During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most slaughterhouses were small and privately owned enterprises. However, as legislative requirements increased, it became necessary to strive for economies of scale, resulting in larger slaughterhouses. Cooperatives as an organizational form helped reduce the business risk for each individual member and helped decrease the information gap that individual enterprises faced when the market became more organized.<sup>18</sup>

**Dairy regulations**

Food safety regulations for milk and dairy products also developed rapidly between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup>



**Figure 2.** Milestones in the development of dairy regulations and control authorities. Source: Paulina Rytönen, 2022.

century. Dairy products are perishable and sensitive to bacterial growth. Consumption of infected milk spread a number of serious diseases, for example, TBC, listeria, brucellosis. These diseases needed to be eradicated in order to protect the population, especially children.<sup>19</sup> Improving milk quality was also important from a food security perspective. This is how the authorities defined the role of milk:

With consideration to the versatility of milk and in some cases its irreplaceability as eatable, a prominent desire from a nutritional perspective is that milk consumption in our country should not only be maintained at its current level but, rather increased. Milk is relatively inexpensive in relation to its nutritional value and from a dietary point of view, the importance of which, not least in the often-one-sided diet of the wider layers of the population, should not be overlooked. Through extensive propaganda and information activities that have been conducted in our country, especially in the last decade [1930s], the great value of milk as a food and the importance of including it as an ingredient in the daily diet should increasingly become part of our general consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

Legislation, and the 1937 dairy bill in particular, played a key role in eliminating health risks related to milk consumption. The dairy bill included compulsory pasteurization, modern sewage treatment plants, fully tiled dairy rooms and improved hygiene practices in dairies. To comply with the dairy bill, most dairies had to make substantial investments, but since the industry was

still recovering from the export crises, the adoption of the 1937 dairy bill helped rationalize the industry and reduce the number of dairies. In most cases, the Swedish Dairy Association (*Svenska Mejeriernas Riksförening*) merged with hundreds of cooperatives after 1937, while many other dairies shut down.<sup>21</sup> Over a five-year period (1935–1940) the number of dairies decreased from 1,576 to 984. And while the number of cooperatives dropped from 723 to 719, the number of private dairies decreased from 853 to 265.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, hygiene and safety regulations played a significant role in the development of the dairy industry.

**ANOTHER MILESTONE** WAS the professionalization of the veterinary profession. Through the establishment of the National Veterinary Board (NVB, *Statens Veterinärmedicinska Anstalt*), it was possible to achieve better resource allocation. The NVB developed the expertise to address problems that were specifically related to animal production. Another key authority was the National Institute for Public Health (*Folkhälsoinstitutet*). This agency played a key role in supporting the development of what eventually became the first National Food Bill in 1951 (*Matvarustadga, Proposition 1951:63*).<sup>23</sup>

**Food security**

Public views about nutrition were cemented already in the 1930s when nutrition became part of general Swedish welfare policies. This was in line with the active state involvement in the welfare of the population. The general formula for achieving food sovereignty and enhancing the nutritional value of food was to improve the living standards of the working class and secure real wage increases through general national wage bargaining.

“THE VITAMIN DOCTRINE, DEVELOPED IN THE 1910S, LED TO AN INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE BENEFITS OF VITAMINS, AMINO ACIDS AND MINERALS.”



Rationing cards during the First World War. Source: Stockholmskällan, Object no. F85090.

The vitamin doctrine, developed in the 1910s, led to an increased awareness of the benefits of vitamins, amino acids and minerals. This influenced the outline of nutrition policies, guidelines and recommendations. A key concern of the state was that a poor diet could affect the working ability of the population. Thus, the state actively attempted to increase its knowledge about the consumption habits of the population. Several studies were conducted in order to understand the correlation between income level and diet. A general conclusion was that poverty in combination with family size were the underlying causes behind who consumed what and how much was consumed by each family member. Food consumption, particularly in rural areas and in Northern Sweden, was based on cereals and dairy products.<sup>24</sup> The diet was basic and one-sided, lacking in mineral salts and vitamins and contributed to tooth decay, rickets and anemia.<sup>25</sup> In urban environments, working class people lived in crowded environments in which tuberculosis, measles and rickets thrived. Children were the most vulnerable. A simple case of measles often led to other more serious diseases because the immune system was weakened by a poor diet.<sup>26</sup>

**BY THE END OF** the 1930s the State Institute for Public Health and the Swedish Co-operative Union (*Kooperativa Förbundet*) conducted the study *27 000 Meals (27 000 måltider)*. This was a milestone as it generated new knowledge about consumption habits and differences in food consumption in families. Women in working class families had “a substantially worse diet than others”. Adult (working) males ate cooked meals, small children ate porridge and gruel and older children ate sandwiches, while women often settled for coffee and sandwiches.

One of the strengths of the study is that it was able to establish what people actually meant when they referred to lunch, breakfast, dinner or coffee. This allowed the nutritional value of food to be clarified. Eggs, fruit and vegetables were virtually absent from children’s and women’s diets.<sup>27</sup>

Historically, butter was an important source of fat, although working class people could rarely afford it. The lack of fat led



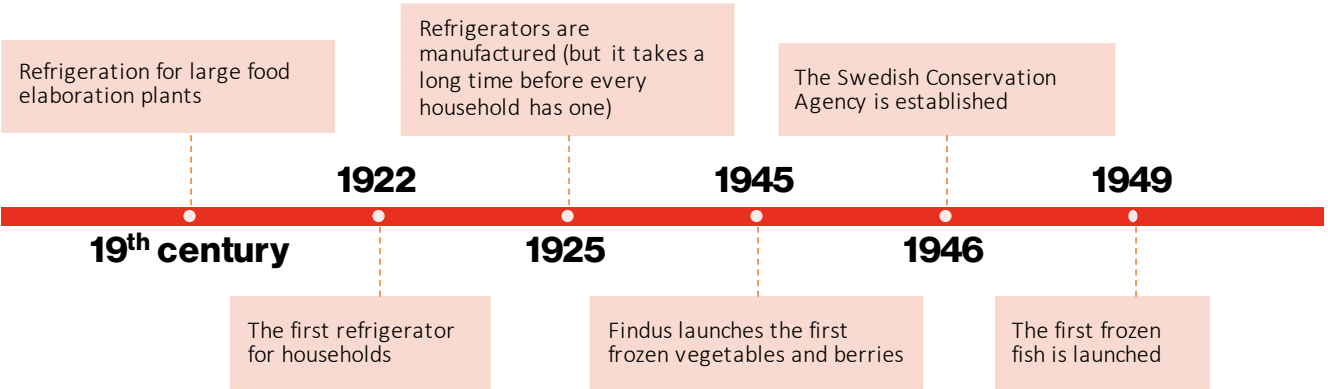
Growing cabbages in Karlaplan, 1917. Source: Axel Malmström 1917, Stockholmskällan. Object no. SSME014287

to the promotion of margarine. However, it was not easy to introduce margarine into the Swedish diet. One of the arguments against margarine was that it could lead to food adulteration. Early methods of producing margarine were based on mixing slaughter residuals (lard) with skimmed milk. After the First World War, vegetable oils became more available, leading to an improvement in the quality of margarine. With vegetable oils, the sensory quality of margarine became more stable, it was easier to spread and less expensive than butter.<sup>28</sup> Some arguments in the public debate raised concerns about the nutritional value of margarine. The lack of sunlight in Sweden during the winter, together with malnourished mothers, caused rickets in children. Although no statistics are available on the occurrence of rickets, the problem was substantial enough to raise concerns among decision makers. In the public inquiry 1937:51, which proposed to legislate in favor of vitaminized foods, an important argument was that adding vitamins to margarine would increase its nutritional value, thereby helping to eradicate rickets.<sup>29</sup>

The concern about children’s health also included school meals for working class children. In 1912, only 2 300 of the 26 000 children enrolled in schools in Stockholm benefitted from free school meals. Due to the food situation in poor families, Fredrik Ström, a prominent Social Democrat, submitted a proposal to increase the city’s budget for school meals from 70 000 Swedish crowns in 1912 (equivalent to 3 563 249 Swedish crowns in 2021) to 105 000 in 1913 (equivalent to 5 329 644 Swedish crowns in 2021). He argued that:

**Even during normal times, in a city of Stockholm’s size, there are many families in which the children are never properly fed; in working-class families with high numbers of children in particular, starvation is ever present.<sup>30</sup>**

The number of school meals gradually increased and in 1947 all children in Sweden were granted free school meals. This was expected to alleviate the economic burden for families comprising



**Figure 3.** The development of refrigeration technologies – timeline. Source: Paulina Rytönen, 2022.

many children; facilitate the workload of housewives; improve the nutritional status of all children. School meals were also necessary because the state considered that working-class households lacked knowledge about the importance of consuming versatile and nutritious food.<sup>31</sup>

Another significant measure to improve people’s diets was to inform and educate them about how to create a diet following the vitamin doctrine. Milk was identified as crucial because it was inexpensive and contained several nutrients that were difficult and costly to obtain through other foods. Encouraged by the state, in 1923 the dairy industry established the “Milk propaganda” association (*Mjölpropagandan*). The association lobbied the state to introduce milk in schools, as well as inform the public about its benefits. Influenced by this milk propaganda, milk became woven into the national identity and was one of the most emblematic symbols of the modern Swedish food system.<sup>32</sup> Milk consumption helped to improving food security, particularly after pasteurization was made compulsory in 1937. Diseases such as tuberculosis and rickets virtually disappeared.

The process behind how Sweden achieved food safety and food security are closely connected to what we now describe as social engineering.<sup>33</sup> However, this topic has not been fully explored.

**Food rationing – with Stockholm as an example**

Even though Sweden was not actively involved in the First and Second World Wars, it was indirectly affected by disruptions to trade flows of foodstuffs and inputs that were essential to food production. Sweden was ill-equipped to meet trade challenges, particularly during the First World War. In fact, the two wars considerably delayed the fulfillment of Sweden’s national food

security goal. However, there is a considerable difference in the situations that prevailed in the respective world wars.

**DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**, most Swedes were poor and poor people would occasionally starve. In 1917, a trade blockade affected the import of staple foods, resulting in the state rationing food. In 1917, the lack of food led to many famine revolts across the country. The discontent of the poor shook society to its core.<sup>34</sup> In Stockholm, the 1917 mass protests came to be known as the “potato rattles”, as poor housewives, after a very cold winter and almost three years of food rationing, rallied thousands of people in protest against rising food prices and the insufficient food supply.<sup>35</sup>

The hardships experienced by people did not go unnoticed. One of the main headlines of *Dagens Nyheter* (an important Swedish newspaper) on April 26, 1917 read: “Bread to people in need. An appeal for solidarity”. The appeal for solidarity was signed by many well-known experts from the National Food Commission (*Statens Livsmedelskommission*) and the main message asked households to be frugal in the use of rationing coupons. As highlighted in the previous section, a key issue behind the far-reaching consequences of food rationing was poverty.

The authorities acted to counter food shortages through initiatives at both a regional and a local level.<sup>36</sup> One strategy was to promote rabbit breeding. The first protocol of the Rabbit Breeding Committee (*Livsmedelskommissionens Kaninuppfödningsskommitté*) in Stockholm on April 3, 1917 includes information about the establishment of rabbit farms and the decision to purchase breeding animals.<sup>37</sup> Rabbits became an important source of animal proteins at a time when other food was being rationed. In only two years,

**“IN 1917, THE LACK OF FOOD LED TO MANY FAMINE REVOLTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. THE DISCONTENT OF THE POOR SHOOK SOCIETY TO ITS CORE.”**





Coffee surrogate in 1940.  
Source: Rich's 1940—1950, Stockholmस्कällan, SSM 48083



Extracting ice on Lake Uttran 1939.  
Source: Herbert Lindgren, 1939, Stockholmस्कällan, Object no. SSMFg011650



The iceman places the ice block into an ice cabinet 1960–1967. Source: Lennart af Petersens, Stockholmस्कällan, Object no. SSMFa026546

166 rabbit farms were established in Stockholm. Most important, rabbits could be bred in urban environments and were a perfect food during times of rationing. Moreover, the consumption of rabbit meat met with no resistance because other forms of animal protein were scarce, and also because plenty of sources indicate that small game such as hare was part of the diet in rural areas.<sup>38</sup> Additional measures to improve food security was to grow food in parks in Stockholm. Cabbages, potatoes and carrots were some of the main staples to be grown in the city. People helped each other by posting notices in local newspapers and writing cookbooks on the art of “crisis food preparation”. The most important recommendation was to replace flour with potatoes.<sup>39</sup>

**DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**, Sweden had emergency food stocks. Nevertheless, food consumption was negatively impacted by a combination of a trade blockade and poor harvests.<sup>40</sup> The Government Food Commission was responsible for the implementation of food rationing.<sup>41</sup> In its analysis about production from 1939–1944 it concluded that harvests were around 80% compared to a regular year. Unusually cold winters between 1939 and 1942 negatively affected output. Moreover, there was a reduction in the import of grain seeds. The production and consumption of beef and pork were reduced due to a shortage of fodder. Some desperate measures were adopted, for example, the authorities organized the collection of household food waste to provide pig breeders with fodder. Technologies that helped to preserve food, for example, powdered milk, made a break-

through when a study of the nutritional content and value of powdered milk using conscripts stationed in the northern parts of the country showed positive results.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in 1943, the state adopted regulation 1943:774 concerning a system for income-based food discounts that enabled the poorest segments of the population to utilize their food rations. Most food products were subject to rationing during the war. During the war the state promoted the home cultivation of food and the population was informed about how to preserve and make use of the available resources. Information disseminators were employed and brochures such as “Harvest and winter preservation of garden products” (*Skörda och bevara trädgårdsprodukter*) and “Wise preservation” (*Förståndig förvaring*) were distributed to all households.<sup>43</sup> The combination of all these measures helped the state take control of the food system, although the population’s food intake was still insufficient. On average, calory intake had reduced by 7% during the war years compared to the 1930s.<sup>44</sup>

### Technologies and knowledge

An additional key element of food safety and food security is food preservation. The Swedish state played a key role in promoting technological development at an industrial level and informing households. This is a vast area of research and will only be touched upon briefly here. The state had already developed industrial policies for multiple industries before the 1930s. In the area of food, the involvement of the state went hand in hand with the adoption of the vitamin

doctrine and state-led efforts to diversify the working-class diet. Before the 1950s, state policies also focused on modernizing food preservation in households. Such efforts also coincided with a period in which there were increasingly more housewives (1920s to 1960s). An important ingredient of food preservation was sugar. When sugar production was industrialized through the establishment of refineries and the large-scale production of sugar beets, the price of sugar dropped, making sugar available to working-class households.<sup>45</sup>

The state helped to educate housewives on how to use sugar for preservation, which also positively influenced the number of calories that were consumed.<sup>46</sup> The state supported information campaigns, research and the establishment of household schools. The latter were an important means of modernizing food preservation, food elaboration and food consumption at a household level.<sup>47</sup> The recipes included cooked fruit and berry juice *saft* [squash], marmalade and compotes. Through this strategy, households were invited to take advantage of the berries, fruits and other resources that were available for free.<sup>48</sup>

At an industrial level a key event was the foundation of the SIK [Swedish Institute for Food Preservation Research (*Svenska Institutet för Konserveringsforskning*)] in 1946. The SIK existed as an independent state agency and could therefore closely collaborate with the industry to develop industrial food preservation technologies and modern food products<sup>49</sup>.

### Refrigeration as an example

Refrigeration and freezing technologies were developed for both industrial use and for households. After the introduction of freon in 1920, it became possible to produce modern refrigerators. It took a long time before all households could afford a refrigerator. However, many households had ice cabinets that were cooled down with large ice blocks that were extracted from frozen lakes and rivers.

### Final remarks

Over a period of less than 100 years, Sweden embarked on a journey in which the production, elaboration and consumption of food moved from the sphere of rural and agricultural households to industries located in urban areas. In 1950, the dietary norm, comprising “Swedish home cooking” had become the dominant force. The 1950s are often described as the golden years of Swedish industry. After the war, Sweden was able to benefit from increased production, as well as increased exports and industrial productivity. The latter led to higher wages in real terms for workers and a general improvement in the standard of living of the population. An animal-based diet, which the state had so eagerly pursued, became a reality for most people. Sunday roast, pork leg with root mash, pickled herring or Falu sausage and fried potatoes were part of the diet of most Swedes. Milk became the dominant milk-time drink. The national diet had changed, largely influenced by active measures adopted by the state. ❌

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