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# Social Conflict and Control, Protest and Repression (Austria-Hungary)

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**This essay traces the experience on the plural home fronts of the Habsburg Empire. With a primary focus on the imperial city, Vienna, it also offers glimpses into the conditions in Hungary and the Czechlands. Preexisting political, national and class tensions were exacerbated by food and material shortages. In particular the perceived inequality of food distribution was a central source of strife between Austria and Hungary. Riots and strikes broke out as civilians began to wage battle among themselves behind the front lines. The key political actors in this context were women and children. By 1918, many civilians had lost confidence in the state's ability to meet the basic needs of the population.**

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## Introduction

When [Austria-Hungary](#) declared war on [Serbia](#) on 28 July 1914, some segments of the civilian population expressed sentiments similar to the “war enthusiasm” found on other belligerent home

fronts. The first two months of war saw a flood of patriotic publications, earnest discussions about the need for civilians to sacrifice material comforts in the name of the greater sacrifices of soldiers and [press](#) reports so hyperbolic that they became delicious fodder for Austria's greatest wartime satirist, [Karl Kraus \(1874-1936\)](#). Unsurprisingly the political strains within the Habsburg Monarchy that predated the war resurfaced early. Existing national and class tensions were exacerbated by acute shortages of food and other materials. This essay charts these strains on the Habsburg home front and suggests that the state had essentially lost the ability to govern its own civilians by 1918. Many on the home front had lost any sense of conviction in for what, or whom, they were fighting. Whatever debilitating losses the armed forces suffered on the military fronts, the Habsburg Monarchy also collapsed from within.

It is wise to speak of plural *home fronts* in the Habsburg case. No location in the Monarchy was truly representative of the whole. While it is not possible to chart all conditions across the Monarchy, this essay uses the imperial capital of Vienna and the surrounding countryside of Lower Austria as an anchor and then offers glimpses of comparative conditions in Hungary and the Czechlands.<sup>[1]</sup> The territories designated militarily "behind the lines" (*Hinterland*) shifted with fortunes on the [Eastern](#) (Russian) and Southwestern ([Italian](#)) battlefronts.<sup>[2]</sup> The lenience or severity of laws governing civilians shifted accordingly. For state-related crimes, civilians in proximity to the front lines were placed under the jurisdiction of military courts.

A number of structural conditions at the state level prevented effective cooperation between the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the Monarchy. Throughout the war, the civilian [Hungarian government](#) jealously guarded its sovereignty against Vienna. For example, the ostensibly unified [War Surveillance Office](#) (*Kriegsüberwachungsamt*, or KÜA) headquartered in Vienna never gained jurisdiction in Hungary. Hungarian Prime Minister Count [István Tisza \(1861-1918\)](#) refused to recognize decrees from Vienna as valid in Hungary: "from the day of mobilization he excluded Hungary from its sphere of operations."<sup>[3]</sup> Similarly, food supply and distribution between the two halves of the Monarchy were not coordinated, a fact that would have devastating effects on Austrian civilians.

## Vienna and Lower Austria

On the eve of the war, the imperial capital's population of 2 million resembled a Central European mosaic. The largest urban center in Habsburg Central Europe, Vienna was predominantly German-speaking but drew immigrants from around the Habsburg domains, primarily Bohemia, Moravia and Galicia. Added to this mix came a host of [refugees](#) and transient military personnel of various [nationalities](#). In the fall of 1914, 50,000-70,000 Polish and Yiddish speaking refugees arrived from the Galician front and refugees evacuated from areas behind the Italian front followed the next year.

Active (and acted upon) national and ethnic hostilities were a key feature of the disintegration of civic discourse over the course of the war. Just days after mobilization, roundups of "nationally suspect"

citizens began. This occurred, among other places, in Styria, where hundreds of Slovenes were arrested, and on Hungary's southern border with Serbia.<sup>[4]</sup> Despite such divisive incidents occurring sporadically across the Monarchy, when [Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria \(1830-1916\)](#) announced the declaration of war in 1914, he addressed his subjects as he always had as the father of his peoples: "I put faith in my peoples, who have always gathered round my Throne, in unity and loyalty, through every tempest, who have always been ready for the heaviest sacrifices for the honour, the majesty, the power of the Fatherland."<sup>[5]</sup> Yet, not only did military and local civilian authorities target elements among the *Kaiser's* "peoples" in 1914, individuals themselves turned on fellow citizens in the streets, workplaces and in myriad letters of denunciation sent to overworked police forces. The wartime paternalism of Habsburg rule was insufficient salve for national hostilities at the local level exacerbated by acute material distress.

When food shortages in Vienna set in – the first ration cards appeared in April 1915 for flour and bread, followed by sugar, milk, coffee and lard in 1916, potatoes and marmalade in 1917 and meat in 1918 – traditional political structures were not in place to manage civilians' reactions. The Austrian parliament had been dissolved in the spring of 1914 and did not convene again until May 1917. Political parties and their publications (notably of Slavs and leftists) were heavily [censored](#).<sup>[6]</sup> Everyday sites such as shops, street corners and apartment buildings became more important than traditional political bodies (parliament, political parties and organized interest groups) for determining the course of the war. In these non-traditional venues, conspiracy theories about internal "enemies" and "traitors" were hatched over questions of economic privilege and access to basic foodstuffs. Among German-speakers, these theories very often [targeted ethnic "others"](#): Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Jews or Italians, though citizens of the Habsburg Monarchy one and all. The constituency of "political actors" also expanded markedly, with women and children playing key roles in nearly every public dispute and incident of unrest between 1914 and 1918.

Food scarcity was more severe in Vienna than in Allied capitals.<sup>[7]</sup> At the time when ration cards were introduced for various foodstuffs, "non-self-providing" consumers (a category based on the kind of work one did) were allotted 1,300 calories per day. By 1917 this had fallen to 830 calories per day; by the end of the war, a medical study found that 91 percent of Viennese school-children were mildly to severely undernourished. The source of the suffering did not lie with the Allies. The great majority of foodstuffs imported to Austria in the prewar period came from Hungary. But as [Hans Loewenfeld-Russ \(1873-1945\)](#), head of the wartime Food Office (*Ernährungsamt*), explained, there was a glitch in the economic relationship between more industrial Austria and agricultural Hungary: the latter had the right to sell to Austria, but was under no formal obligation to do so.<sup>[8]</sup> Food shortage was the *leitmotif* in the letters of the prime ministers in Vienna and Budapest.<sup>[9]</sup> To manage the food crisis, the Food Office, a quasi-ministerial state-level institution was created in 1916 to coordinate food supply, distribution and pricing. In reality, provisioning food during the duration of the war remained in the hands of a haphazard collection of cartels (*Zentralen*) operated under the guidance of pre-war private interests in products such as coal, wood, leather, cloth, paper, metal and medicines. Accusations of

war profiteering, often in the form of anti-Semitic diatribes, were a staple of wartime vocabulary.

In addition to blaming Hungary for their distress, Viennese residents also protested bitterly against Lower Austrian farmers whom they accused of starving the capital. One may see this pattern elsewhere, with residents of Graz resenting nearby Styrian farmers or those from Linz suspecting that farmers from the surrounding countryside were hoarding foodstuffs. Any large [urban population](#) likely attributed at least some of its suffering to the perceived withholding of supplies from the nearby countryside. The [rural](#)-urban tensions came to a head in the “potato war” of 1918. “Extraordinary throngs” headed to the countryside looking for food and an estimated 30,000 people “poured over the lands” of terrified farmers. The Military Command in Vienna sent troops to reinforce local gendarmerie and security forces. The Habsburg state, fighting external battles on three fronts, had to post regiments to guard potatoes from its own citizens. <sup>[10]</sup>

As was the case on the Russian home front, the line between hunger strikes and labor strikes was a blurry one. A series of workers’ strikes broke out in Austria in early 1918. The flour ration had been drastically reduced on 14 January and soon after 10,000 employees from the Daimler plant in Wiener Neustadt expressed their frustrations by going on strike. They set the precedent for other workers who began to follow in their footsteps across Austria: 113,000 had left their jobs in Vienna, 153,000 in Lower Austria and 40,000 in Styria.<sup>[11]</sup> Though two waves of strikes in January and June threatened to paralyze Austrian industry, it was access to food, and not industrial working conditions, that initially sparked the actions. The memo sent to the *Kaiser* from the Interior Ministry located the genesis of the strikes in the complaints of insufficient food supply which spread into the “political realm” and evolved finally into a peace demonstration in which 550,000 workers from around Austria took part.<sup>[12]</sup> The strikes were not necessarily organized or welcomed by leftist parties. In one demonstration there were enormous crowds that the Socialist party leaders described as elements “unknown to the party” and comprised of agitated, “sensation-hungry womenfolk.”<sup>[13]</sup>

## Censorship

With low-level violence and rampant law-breaking now a routine part of everyday life, the state struggled to insulate soldiers in the field from news of the meltdown on the home front. [Letters](#) from the home front that mentioned food shortage and hunger were confiscated so as not to “endanger the discipline of front troops and negatively affect their spirits.”<sup>[14]</sup> The War Surveillance Office employed translators in the eleven officially recognized languages of the Monarchy to monitor the millions of letters and postcards sent between front and home front. Two-thirds of censors working at surveillance headquarters in Vienna were not originally from the city and also had difficulty coping with the food scarcity and high inflation in their temporary home; there was even talk of a censors’ strike. Here linguistic diversity put the Habsburg state at a disadvantage compared to other European governments similarly trying to monitor the production and dissemination of information. Other European censorship offices were not working in multiples of eleven.

Similar linguistic challenges affected operations of the press censors. German-language newspapers from the political left more often appeared with glaring “white spaces” (text removed shortly before publication) than did those on the right. Many Slavic-language newspapers in Austria were suspended altogether. Far more difficult to trace and repress than letters or newspapers were rumors, a persistent plague on the state’s effort at information control. An Army High Command (*Armeeoberkommando*, or AOK) memo from 1918 acknowledged an inverse relationship of censorship and rumors: the stricter the censorship, the more expansive the black market for unofficial information. “However difficult rumors are to combat,” the memo stated, “their suppression is essential at a time when unavoidably stricter operations of the censor have caused people to lend [rumors] even greater credibility.”<sup>[15]</sup>

## Hungary

Conditions in Bohemia (falling within the Austrian half of the Monarchy) and in Hungary resembled those in German-speaking Austria. One foreign press account from February 1915 noted, “Travelers from Austria [...] report that they have witnessed riots and demonstrations at Budapest, Prague, and other smaller towns of Hungary and Bohemia, against the continuation of the war.”<sup>[16]</sup> One caveat is required here: recent secondary scholarship on the Hungarian home front is exceedingly thin.<sup>[17]</sup> English and German-language sources do not allow one to draw solid conclusions about Hungary or about Budapest more specifically. This is a field wide open for future scholars.<sup>[18]</sup>

Despite the passionate belief in Austria that Hungarians were living well and hoarding food, Hungarians too were suffering food shortages. Here much agricultural production came from large feudal estates and, as in Austria, food shortages exacerbated urban-rural tensions. The necessity of feeding the combined armed forces – soldiers were allotted 500 grams of bread daily – exacerbated distrust between Austrians and Hungarians. Nearly 8 million Austro-Hungarian men were mobilized in the armed forces over the course of the war, and military-civilian food turf wars developed early. The introduction of government rationing in Hungary as early as 1915 caused “major food riots.”<sup>[19]</sup> Historian Bryan Cartledge notes that “the loss from the countryside of both men and horses sharpened the impact of poor harvest in 1914 and 1915.” In 1916, essential foodstuffs like bread and flour were added to the ration list that began in 1915.<sup>[20]</sup> There was “widespread resistance” amongst the agricultural producers to cooperate with state officials, either because they despised the war “or because the illicit trading” offered them more lucrative business.<sup>[21]</sup> The Hungarian government sent rural gendarmes to requisition food from the countryside, in some cases confiscating even seed grain. Some of the Russian [prisoners of war](#) captured by Austria-Hungary were employed as farm laborers, but alas, they too needed to be fed.<sup>[22]</sup> Views on the economic conditions for Hungarian peasants during the war were contradictory. Péter Bihari sums up the debate as follows: there was “pauperization of the peasants, as a result of ruthless requisitioning on the one hand – enrichment of the peasants, as a result of rising food prices on the other.”<sup>[23]</sup>

In the cities, shortages plagued the poor and working classes who were caught in an inflationary spiral. Between 1915 and 1916, workers' wages rose by 50 percent. This increase was not enough, however, to keep pace with food prices, which rose more than one 100 percent. One historian estimates that workers were now spending three times as much money on food as they had in the immediate prewar period.<sup>[24]</sup> While it has not been possible for us to test this data, one thing is clear: demonstrations, hunger protests and strikes became part and parcel of everyday life in Hungary. In the fall of 1917, "a new wave of strikes broke out" and "paralyzed rail transportations for a week."<sup>[25]</sup> Food shortages compelled the Hungarian Ministry of Justice to order a "cleaning out of prisoners in the jails." Officials did not "desire to submit prisoners to unnecessary suffering because of inadequate prison fare."<sup>[26]</sup> The same year, "the Hungarian Minister of the Interior [found] it necessary, owing to the food scarcity, to order foreigners living comfortably or luxuriously to leave the country within fortnight."<sup>[27]</sup>

Of note is the perception among the middle classes that they were suffering disproportionately. Their distress "penetrated into the pages of newspapers, parliamentary and local politics in 1916." By 1917, middle class organizations "began to behave like trade-unions, and demand improvements."<sup>[28]</sup> There was talk of a *Beamter-Proletariat* taking shape at the bottom rungs of the middle class. Teachers were conscripted into service as distributors of ration cards and, as Bihari recounts, they "found the delivery incompatible with the dignity of teachers."<sup>[29]</sup> While cities and charities operated public kitchens, prewar social conventions made some in the middle classes reluctant to be seen in them.

As in Austria, it appeared to officials that the food shortages were driving what might have, at first glance, looked like labor demonstrations. The "wage issue" came second to the "deficiency of basic necessities."<sup>[30]</sup> In 1917, the strength of the unions had grown to 200,000 members.<sup>[31]</sup> Radical leftists began to see ordinary workers in the streets – as opposed to sympathetic government officials or even social democratic leaders – as the most promising agents of political change. According to historian József Galántai, radicals regarded "governments, foreign ministers, and diplomats" as representatives of the "ruling class"; only ordinary workers could unite to achieve peace for the "world's proletarians."<sup>[32]</sup> Left-wing socialist groups which were part of the Zimmerwald movement had rejected the war at the start and were now gaining adherents.<sup>[33]</sup>

Avant-garde artists and intellectuals sometimes found common cause with workers. During the war, poet [Endre Ady \(1877-1919\)](#) blasted traditional Hungarian society, deeming it "hopelessly corrupt" and "ready for revolution." Historian Joseph Held maintains that the serious fissure between the "progressive intelligentsia and the conservatives" deepened.<sup>[34]</sup> Examining various artifacts of visual culture from the war years, including propaganda posters, magazine ads, café bills and artists' drawings, Paul Stirnton argues that wartime culture in Budapest encouraged greater independence on the part of the Hungarian avant-garde.<sup>[35]</sup> Mutual sympathies evolved between workers' representatives, artists and intellectuals. However, some artists felt distanced by the what they saw

as the “primitive and destructive nature of the workers’ movement, especially of those on the far left.”<sup>[36]</sup>

The press in Hungary, less heavily censored than in Austria, was better able to critique “the management of public affairs.”<sup>[37]</sup> However, as early as the spring of 1915, even leftist newspapers such as *Népszava* were receiving letters from their readers who disapproved of their overly “chauvinistic articles” and who wanted more critical coverage.<sup>[38]</sup> The Parliament, unlike in Austria, remained in session during the war. Furthermore, the competing political parties agreed upon a “truce (*Treuga Dei*)” for the duration of the war.<sup>[39]</sup> However, the ruling Magyar nobles in Parliament were unrepresentative of the country’s non-Magyar majority made up of Slovaks, Rumanians, Ruthenians, Croats and German-Saxons.<sup>[40]</sup> Even more than in Austria, the Hungarian government “had written a long record of blatant unenlightenment in dealing with national minorities.”<sup>[41]</sup> The Hungarian population consisted mostly of peasants and “only about 6 per cent of the population were privileged to vote.”<sup>[42]</sup> The industrial workers and landless peasants did not “[have] an elected spokesman, and in a body of 453 a mere 50 deputies were not Magyars.”<sup>[43]</sup> Aspirations for independence grew among non-Magyars during the war. One scholar notes that the situation was also aggravated by the growing anarchy in the South Slav regions of the monarchy, where the so-called Green Cadres, made up mostly of military deserters, were often in charge.<sup>[44]</sup>

In the initial stages of the war, poor news from the front spawned anti-war sentiment at the home front. However, during the waning phase of the war in Hungary, it was news from the home front of food shortages and national tensions that ultimately damaged the morale of the soldiers. Proposing a Hungarian maritime version of the notorious “[stab-in-the-back legend](#),” Admiral [Nicholas Horthy \(1868-1957\)](#) claimed in his memoirs, “our Navy was never defeated at sea. The debacle was caused by defeats on land and the weakening of the home front through hunger and shortages, engendering an internal collapse that spread to the Navy.”<sup>[45]</sup>

## Bohemia

The Czechs, one of the most heavily scrutinized nationalities of the Monarchy, experienced hardships very similar to those on other Habsburg home fronts.<sup>[46]</sup> At the outbreak of war in 1914, residents of Prague demonstrated mixed reactions to the news. While some German and Jewish citizens did take to the streets in impromptu pro-war demonstrations, the enthusiasm coming from the Bohemian capital did not match that from Vienna or Budapest. Very few of the close to 0.5 million Czechs that made up 90 percent of the population in the city participated in this enthusiasm, remaining calm and tending to say “less rather than more.”<sup>[47]</sup> Police officers in the city were left uneasy by this reaction amongst a normally lively population. It has become something of a truism to argue that the Czechs exhibited much less enthusiasm for the war than the Monarchy’s German-speakers. Some civilians who went to see off the soldiers shouted, “Don’t shoot your Slav brothers”

and marked the trains with anti-war slogans – behavior state officials found shocking.<sup>[48]</sup>

The Czechs' supposed ambivalence toward the war was in part caused by their desire to support their soldiers going to war, while also harboring deeply-rooted political grievances against the Empire for which they were fighting.<sup>[49]</sup> Recently, the image of Czech soldiers as reluctant fighters, or even traitors, has come under greater scrutiny.<sup>[50]</sup> In any case, Czech society quickly became paralyzed as political parties were forced to stop most of their activities, parliamentarians lost their voices and censorship thwarted public opinion.<sup>[51]</sup> Several prominent Czech politicians were imprisoned as political persecutions and roundups became the norm. Among the suspected dissidents were the leaders of the nationalist Young Czech party [Karel Kramar \(1860-1937\)](#) and his associate [Alois Raisn \(1867-1923\)](#), both of whom were sentenced to death, and later reprieved, for treason.<sup>[52]</sup> The Czech Social Democrat party, which was the largest Czech socialist group at the time of the war, stressed the importance of class allegiance and internationalism, rather than taking on an ethnic or nationalistic rivalry as other Czech parties often did.<sup>[53]</sup>

The imperial government in Vienna and the Army High Command (AOK) became even more uneasy about Czech attitudes toward the war after [Russia](#) began circulating pamphlets promising the liberation of the empire's Slavs if the Russians should triumph. These pamphlets appeared both at the front lines and among civilians.<sup>[54]</sup> By September 1914, around 170,000 copies of pamphlets appeared in Prague and Austrian authorities responded decisively by declaring the spreading of Russian leaflets as an offense punishable by death.<sup>[55]</sup> By this point press censorship had been greatly strengthened, with the banning of the National Socialist party's *Czech Worker* (*Český dělník*) and *Czech Word* (*České slovo*). The government also confiscated certain book from libraries, prohibited patriotic Czech songs from being sung and disbanded nationalistic Czech organizations.<sup>[56]</sup> Historian Claire Morelon's much-awaited dissertation-in-progress (Sciences Po/Birmingham) will offer an in-depth study of the Prague home front. We anticipate that this work will shed significant new light on the findings presented here.<sup>[57]</sup>

The Army High Command (AOK) remained convinced throughout the war that the Czech population was unpatriotic and opposed state authority, despite claims to the contrary from the Bohemian Governor's office. As a result, martial law was imposed on the lands of Bohemia throughout winter and early spring of 1915. When the new Governor, [Maximillian von Coudenhove \(1865-1928\)](#), came into power, he immediately targeted groups and individuals suspected to be less than enthusiastic about the war. This included the entire Czech community, especially those involved in political and social organizations with national orientations. From 1915 to 1917, Prague became one of the most closely monitored and mistrusted cities throughout wartime Europe.<sup>[58]</sup>

The Bohemian lands in the First World War were characterized by several important ethnic conflicts amongst the Czechs, Germans and Jews. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Prague saw the rise of mass nationalistic political movements of Czech, pan-Slav and German parties. Residents of



Prague did not call themselves “Bohemian,” but rather framed their identity with their national designation.<sup>[59]</sup> Organizations such as sporting clubs, women’s groups and school associations were typically identified as either German or Czech. However, as the war went on, economic and social problems caused largely by deprivation often overshadowed or were conflated with ethnic concerns.<sup>[60]</sup> The consequences of four years of war altered the ways in which Prague citizens viewed identity. Ethnic and national character were refracted through the experience of deprivation, which both amplified preexisting conflicts between the Germans and Czechs, as well as minimized differences when acquiring basic necessities required total focus. A “community of suffering” developed in Prague as the problems of obtaining basic necessities became of the utmost importance for citizens.<sup>[61]</sup>

Despite outbreaks of low-level violence, the Czech home front remained relatively quiet and seemingly loyal during the first two years of war. However, by the middle of 1916, political and economic changes within the Monarchy pulled the Czechs out of their ambivalence. Over the course of the last two years of war, the Czechs became increasingly hostile toward the Austro-Hungarian state.<sup>[62]</sup> As in Vienna, there was an almost immediate rise in food prices which was the biggest obstacle the residents of Prague faced during wartime. When combined with inflation and severe economic dislocations caused by massive workforce shortages, the consequences were devastating. During the very difficult winter of 1916-1917, the effects of food and coal shortages began to be painfully felt in the Czech lands and became alarming to Bohemian authorities.<sup>[63]</sup> The economic problems caused by these shortages led to widespread popular unrest and demonstrations, often from women and children demanding food. At first, these demonstrations did not necessarily have an anti-government or [nationalistic](#) tone; they were purely about material survival.<sup>[64]</sup> The hungry residents of the city responded with riots, theft and demonstrations with increasing fervor when the food crisis deepened. As winter turned into spring, the food situation worsened and manifestations of violence became more common. On 30 March 1917, a military official reported that Bohemian food shortages were the root cause of all of these expressions of unrest. Although this unrest occurred throughout all of Bohemia and Moravia, it was the most active in Prague.<sup>[65]</sup>

By August 1917, the situation had deteriorated further, as potatoes, fruits and vegetables were no longer available in Bohemia. The weekly meat, milk and bread ration could also not be covered fully.<sup>[66]</sup> To add to the already tense situation in Prague, the government realized in August that the new flour ration was still too large to be met by the state’s resources. The reaction to further flour rationing turned previously isolated instances of unrest in the city into massive, violent and widespread demonstrations that the police were unable to control. The tides had turned on 13 April, two days after the new ration had been implemented. Crowds destroyed the mayor’s house, the food depot, restaurants, hotels and anywhere else that food could be found. According to Prague authorities, the rioting had taken on an [anti-Semitic](#) tone, as the looters were largely targeting shops owned by Jews as well as Jewish residences.<sup>[67]</sup> The violence in the streets quickly spread to

factories. Many railway workers began to sabotage and destroy equipment and trains. Soon, all the major factories in the Prague area experienced massive strikes and the municipal transit system had to be shut down.<sup>[68]</sup> Much of the unrest caused by food shortages was fueled by the fear that rations were not being evenly shared. Many of the demonstrations called for an end to Bohemian food exports to other parts of the empire, as well to [Germany](#). As in Vienna, Czech demonstrators shared the conviction that they were suffering far greater in the Austrian half of the Monarchy than those in the Hungarian half.<sup>[69]</sup>

Throughout the spring of 1917, citizens of Bohemia used the imperial mail system as a popular means for expression of varying degrees of displeasure. In turn, censors used their letters as a gauge of the “mood of the people.” In the latter half of the war, state authorities consistently received anonymous death threats from throughout Bohemia, including Prague.<sup>[70]</sup> As the populace was largely silenced by censorship and police repression, the postal system, if used anonymously, became a relatively safe way to express anger and dissatisfaction. A large majority of the letters referred specifically to the overwhelming food crisis and the exports of Bohemian grain to Germany.<sup>[71]</sup>

Throughout the war, many Czechs were too preoccupied with trying to survive to pay attention to conventional party politics. It was only after social conditions eroded drastically that the inhabitants of Prague engaged in what we might consider more traditional “political” acts of resistance and dissent.<sup>[72]</sup> The imperial government’s inability to solve the Prague food problem led citizens to become much more overtly anti-German and anti-Habsburg. Many Czechs found hope in the [revolution in Russia](#), as it provided evidence that a long-standing dynasty could fall and that self-determination was indeed possible. On 28 October 1918, after almost 300 years of living under Habsburg rule, the Czechs formed their own independent Czechoslovakia, turning their backs on Vienna.<sup>[73]</sup>

In addition to food, another issue was of great concern on the multiple Habsburg home fronts during the war: sex. Military and civilian officials were concerned about the spread of [venereal disease](#) on both the home and the battlefronts. The immediate concern that infected men were weakening the fighting force was paired with longer-term fears about population decline and the fitness of the future generation for war. Historian Nancy Wingfield’s current research shows that the rate of venereal disease amongst married woman increased during the war in the Habsburg lands and that military officials came to see wives as a dangerous threat. Throughout the war, officials took precautionary measures in an attempt to regulate prostitution by placing stricter limits and rules on the activities of women and their bodies. [Prostitutes](#) (some of whom were also wives) were subjected to invasive, well-coordinated inspections. For example, in the Bohemian town of Reichenberg (Liberec), the local police formed a sanitation inspection team that included a military doctor, a garrison representative and the head of the military police to inspect and monitor the bordellos. Less attention was focused on male customers. Officials were not alone in ferreting out venereal diseases and the women

suspected of carrying them. Civilians and ordinary soldiers denounced women to local authorities with a variety of accusations of immoral behavior.<sup>[74]</sup>

## Collapse

One shared feature of life on the multiple Habsburg home fronts was a growing conviction that the wartime state was simply unable to provide basic material goods to its citizens. Civilians, asked to sacrifice so much for a greater cause, began to question in earnest what that cause was. The wartime *Kaisers* - Francis Joseph I. until 1916, followed by [Charles I, Emperor of Austria \(1887-1922\)](#) - were the clearest symbols of the Habsburg state. It is noteworthy that they both received tens of thousands of petitions each year during the war – letters from ordinary people asking the *Kaiser* (and thereby the state) for assistance. In multiple languages, these petitions arrived from all over the Monarchy asking for a rise in pension, a subsidy to pay school fees, medical assistance, a pair of shoes. The fact that such letters poured in – 21,056 of them in 1918 – suggests that some citizens still saw the state as salve for their suffering. Others' loss of confidence in the Habsburg enterprise is summed up well by an anonymous letter-writer who, by 1918, was finished with the war and the “cause”:

In circumstances like these in which one has to fight and live in Austria, one has lost heart and soul for the Emperor and the Empire and can only count the hours until the state Austria of collapses.<sup>[75]</sup>

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## Notes

1. ↑ Except where otherwise noted, material on Vienna is taken from Healy, Maureen: Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire. Total War and Everyday Life in World War I, Cambridge 2004.
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3. ↑ Redlich, Joseph: Austrian War Government, New Haven 1929, p. 85.
4. ↑ Marin, Irina: World War I and Internal Repression. The Case of General Nikolaus Cena, in: Austrian History Yearbook XLIV (2013), pp. 196, 200.

5. † *Wiener Zeitung* 29 July 1914, cited in Crankshaw, Edward: *The Fall of the House of Habsburg*, New York 1963, p. 406.
6. † See Orzoff, Andrea: *The Empire without Qualities. Austro-Hungarian Newspapers and the Outbreak of War in 1914*, in: Paddock, Troy (ed.): *A Call to Arms. Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Newspapers in the Great War*, Westport 2004.
7. † For comparison, see Winter, Jay / Robert, Jean-Louis: *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, Cambridge 1997, ch. 11.
8. † Loewenfeld-Russ, Hans: *Im Kampf gegen den Hunger. Aus den Erinnerungen des Staatssekretärs für Volksernährung, 1918-1920*, Vienna 1986, p. 34.
9. † Galántai, József: *Hungary in the First World War*. Translated by Éva Grusz and Judit Pokoly, Budapest 1989, p. 194.
10. † Report from the Lower Austrian governor to the Interior Ministry 1 July and 13 July 1918. Cited in Healy, Vienna 2004, p. 54.
11. † Jelavich, Barbara: *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic. 1815-1986*, Cambridge 1987, p. 140.
12. † Interior Minister to Kaiser, 10 February 1918, cited Neck, Rudolf (ed.): *Österreich im Jahre 1918: Berichte und Dokumente*, Munich 1968, pp. 34-35.
13. † Police report on Social Democratic party meeting, 1-3 February 1918, cited in Neck, *Österreich* 1968, pp. 26-27.
14. † Letter from Marie Krbuschek in Vienna to brother Anton Wolf; and censor's memo, 27 March 1918, cited in Healy, Vienna 2004, p. 85.
15. † Army High Command (AOK) Memo, July 1918, cited in Healy, Vienna 2004, p. 140.
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