



THIRTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL ROBERT A. KANN MEMORIAL LECTURE

Was the Habsburg Empire an Empire?

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Abstract

The Habsburg monarchy seems doubly confounding. Its historians call it an empire, but it actually never called itself that. For a fraction of its existence (1804–67), the monarchy counted as a *Kaisertum*, a word meant to burnish the fading glory of a lost imperial title (of the Holy Roman Empire). But its rulers never evinced the self-confident imperial aggressiveness or the desire to exploit distant territories that characterized British or Russian counterparts, and students of global empires often do not think the Habsburgs fit the category. But after calling the double monarchy an empire, Central European specialists lose the critical edge historians apply to other empires, and celebrate the Habsburgs for holding back nationalism, the force that made the twentieth century so deadly. The monarchy was not only an empire but a virtuous empire. This Kann Memorial Lecture examines a range of theoretical and practical reasons for calling the Habsburg state an empire—as its subjects often did. But if we do, we should recognize that like other empires it abhorred democracy. Perhaps more than a dam holding back the twentieth century and all its evils, the Habsburg Empire was more a conduit.

Keywords: Habsburg Empire; empire

We routinely call the Habsburg monarchy an empire, but technically the monarchy never was an empire, a word that roughly translates into the German *Reich*. The closest the Habsburgs came to using imperial language to describe their realm came in 1804, when they proclaimed it a *Kaisertum*—an emperor state—but in 1867, they downgraded it to the Austrian-Hungarian Double Monarchy. The other major European land powers—the French, the Russian, the German—had no such hesitation, proudly calling themselves *Empire*, *Tsarstvo*, and *Reich*. The word *Kaisertum* tells us that Habsburg leaders valued the imperial title, but why did they not match it with a corresponding geographic reality? How could an emperor not preside over an empire?

In what follows I try to show that there is more involved here than merely a semantic quibble. The resonance of *Reich* in the German cultural world was profound, evoking the heritage of a universal empire, and Austria’s leaders worried what they would signal to the world by using that word. Would calling their realm a *Reich*, for example, not evoke the old empire’s claim to embody the German nation and unite the German lands? At the same time they were loath to forsake claims to supposedly ancient imperial glory, and in the late century began routinely making use of the word *Reich* to describe the trappings of their rule, such as in the *Reichsrat* in Vienna. I argue that Habsburg leaders’ ambivalence on applying the word *Reich* to their holdings signaled an insecurity of identity, a fact that had dire consequences as Central Europe entered the twentieth century. After all, insecure states are potentially dangerous, often driven to desperate measures to bridge the gap between what they claim to be—and what they really are.

The origins of *Reich* were humble enough, going back to a Celtic word that meant realm, an area ruled by a king or some other potentate. We see traces of this original meaning in proper names like Heinrich, which means “ruler of the home.” There is also the word *Königreich*, a realm ruled by a king, as in *Königreich* England. Closer to our topic is *Österreich*, Austria, which designated an eastern march

of Bavaria, the first recorded use of which dates from 966. In the modern period, *Reich* continued to mean something less than an empire, for example German speakers often applied *Ungarisches Reich* to Hungary and they spoke of *Polnisches Reich*.

Yet *Reich* also came to signify something grander, a realm above kingdoms, a universal empire in the tradition of Rome; from the twelfth century onward the words *Heiliges Römisches Reich* carried transcendent overtones missing from the British or French variants of empire, signaling divine appointment, far above a king's divine right. Thus, when people said simply *das Reich* in the year 1800, they meant precisely that ancient structure, supposedly universal, supposedly going back to Charlemagne and earlier, involving much of Italy, most German areas, parts of what became France, and all of Czechia. Yet over time the old *Reich* fell far short of what people nowadays consider imperial rule. From the thirteenth century, emperors ceded rights to many vassals, so that by the eighteenth century the empire's components, including hundreds of German city-states, principalities, archbishoprics, and a few kingdoms, lived free from direct imperial influence.

In 1806, the Holy Empire ceased to exist, but its evocative power grew; Germans of succeeding generations recalled not so much the dysfunctional entity of recent times, but the supposed glory of the medieval *Reich*. The Austrian scholar Julius Ficker captured some of this magical appeal in lectures given in Innsbruck in 1861. When thinking of *Reich*, he told his audience: "we recall powerfully ruling emperors at the head of a united nation, filled with the proud feeling of their supremacy, dominating neighboring peoples (*Nachbarvölker*), determining the fate of this part of the world."¹

In the course of the nineteenth century, the Habsburg state had no choice but to connect to that ancient tradition as it vied to remain relevant in German and European politics. In what follows I trace the struggles of top officials, especially chief minister prince Klemens Lothar von Metternich, to use or avoid using this powerful word when plotting the future of Austria. The word itself prompted, even seduced, statesmen into thinking in grand, often bombastic terms, and Metternich the conservative employed it with great care. Recalling and attempting to revive the past, after all, had revolutionary implications. But he too would eventually prove powerless to resist the word's mass appeal.

Yet what follows will not simply be a story of elites. Even if the Habsburgs did not officially designate their realm a *Reich*, their subjects colloquially used that word to describe it, especially from the 1870s, ironically just as the monarchy ceased being a unified state. But what did they mean? In the work of many outstanding students of Central Europe's past, empire, when applied to the Habsburg monarchy, connotes a positive force that kept peace among quarreling nationalities, promoting order and progress.² Yet in other areas of the globe, the claim that an empire might accomplish something worthwhile would be unusual. The efforts of France or Great Britain to dispense civilization upon Algeria or India, for instance, have generated intense criticism. These and other empires exploited and often destroyed the peoples they ruled, and at the very least distorted other countries' political and social development.³

To connect the Habsburg lands to that broader story, I will also consider those who were on the receiving end of imperialism, subjects who felt that Austrian rule was rule by a foreigner set against their aspirations to self-government. I am thinking primarily of Czechs, Poles, and Hungarians—but there are many others—who resented the Habsburg monarchy's pretensions to spread a higher civilization to them. No doubt these groups respected imperial authority, but the word "empire"

¹Julius Ficker, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich in seinen universalen und nationalen Beziehungen*, 2nd ed. (Innsbruck, 1862). For the propagation of the idea that Germans longed for *Reich* and *Kaiser*, see Ernst Keller, *Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht an höheren Schulen*, 3rd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1903), 277, referring to the situation in 1849: "Die Sehnsucht aber nach Kaiser und Reich war fortan das vorwaltende Gefühl in Deutschland." The book went through six editions by 1912, for use in high schools (*Lyzeen und höhere Schulen*).

²See, for instance, Robert A. Kann, *History of the Habsburg Empire: 1526-1918* (Berkeley, CA, 1974); István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps* (New York, 1990); Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 2016); Barbara Jelavich, *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic 1800-1986* (New York, 1987). For discussion of nostalgia for the Habsburg monarchy, see Solomon Wank, "Some Reflections on the Habsburg Empire and Its Legacy in the Nationalities Question," *Austrian History Yearbook* 28 (1997): 131-46.

³See, for example, the essays in A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York, 2008).

provoked an intuition we find among subjects of colonial rule elsewhere, that rule by a foreigner cannot be just. When they were free to speak, Austria's subjects discovered they had a story about themselves that differed from the story told by their masters, they had their own feast days, their own heroes; and their own times of mourning. Czechs or Hungarians recalled the glorious feats of empire as national tragedies.⁴ Ironically but symptomatically, such critiques would reach full blossom after 1867, just as the monarchy softened censorship, and expanded civil rights.

The Habsburgs' problems with empire—the specific problem of *Reich*—began much earlier. In May 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte crowned himself emperor of the French, and proceeded to establish a Rhine Confederation—a large German state that would supply him soldiers and resources—looking aside as major collaborators in this new entity like Bavaria, Württemberg, or Hanover helped themselves to dozens of free cities and bishoprics. The old *Reich* was disappearing before everyone's eyes and Napoleon insisted that it be disbanded.

For Habsburg Emperor Francis II, this demand constituted a threat. The Habsburgs had been Roman emperors since the thirteenth century, and if the Holy Empire were disbanded, he would simply be king of Hungary and Bohemia, subordinate to Napoleon and the Tsar of Russia, maybe even their vassal. And so, in an act of dubious legality, Francis crowned himself emperor [*Kaiser*] of Austria in August of 1804.⁵

On the background of global history, this was an odd way of founding an empire. The act was not aggressive and the aspiration not imperial as the British might understand that word; there was no ambition to grow and be boundless, usually an essential attribute of empire.⁶ Rather, for Austria, becoming an empire was a step taken in fear to avoid falling a step lower on the European hierarchy of rulers.⁷ The point was more to seem imperial than to be imperial and the word used was not *Reich*, but *Kaisertum*, thus it was an entity where the focus was the glory of a potentate holding an unmatched dignity.

More positively, as Gottfried Mraz and Robert Kann have noted, the challenge and motive in 1804 was consolidating the Austrian empire, thus state building. Once more we see an odd feature compared to other empires: here the Habsburgs endeavored to delimit and centralize rather than grow in a hierarchically structured, theoretically unlimited space.⁸

In 1806, the old *Reich* was finally dissolved and now a vacuum of legitimacy opened in Central Europe, caught somewhere between the old regime and an emerging order of nation states. The new German national movement felt, as did many average Germans—as later reflected in Ficker's words—that an organizing entity was needed to unite and defend the lands of the old Empire, as well as the German nation, from a repetition of something like French occupation.

The Habsburg state could not ignore this new German nationalism. According to Brigitte Hamann, the monarchy's claim to leadership in Germany left it no choice but to appeal to the old empire's legacy, and therefore in succeeding decades, we see a movement away from diffidence and toward determination. Prince Metternich, Austrian Minister of state from 1809, presided over the shift, from his

⁴We can see outstanding witness to differences in recollections of the past among Bohemia's Germans and Czechs in the travelogue of J.G. Kohl, who visited the Prague Castle in 1841 and contrasted the glorious imperial portrayal of 1620 in the *Wenzelskapelle* with the pain reflection upon the events of that year caused in Czech visitors: "Kein Deutscher, kein Österreicher, kein Menschenfreund kann dem Böhmen sein Mitleid versagen, wenn er ihn trauernd durch diese Bildergalerie schreiten sieht ..." Johann Georg Kohl, *Hundert Tage auf Reisen in den österreichischen Staaten*, vol. 1: *Reise in Böhmen* (Dresden, 1842), 97–99.

⁵On the dubious legality of the act of self-crowning, see Brigitte Mazohl and Karin Schneider, "Translatio Imperii, Reichsidee und Kaisermythos in der Habsburgermonarchie," in *Was vom Alten Reich blieb* (Munich, 2011), 105.

⁶From the times of Rome, empires have been built upon expansion; "the imperial organization of political space has assumed the absence of permanent and exclusive borders." Alejandro Colás, *Empire* (Cambridge, 2007), 6–7.

⁷As Enno E. Kraehe pointedly asked "what would the Habsburgs be without the imperial title?" *Metternich's German Policy* (Princeton, 1963), 32.

⁸According to Gottfried Mraz, the declaration of *Kaisertum* in 1804 was a renewed effort at state consolidation, it was the culmination of efforts to realize a complete state idea, a victory of particularism over the "Reichsidee," turning one's back on larger concerns in the German area. Gottfried Mraz, "Das Kaisertum Österreich – Die Vollendung der Gesamtstaatsidee," in *Kaisertum Österreich 1804–1848* (Bad Vöslau, 1996), 12.

early days in office, when the Habsburg state hardly uttered the word *Reich*, to the 1840s, when it embraced the term, first in the more generic sense of “rule of realm” connoting the Austrian lands [*mein Reich*, later *unser Reich*] and then in the years before Metternich stepped down, as heir to the Holy Empire, implying leadership in and beyond Germany.

The beginnings of this evolution occurred beyond public view in the chambers of the Austrian bureaucracy. In 1812, a memo went out telling officials that it was now possible to use “our Kaiserreich” or “our Reich” to describe the Habsburg lands, but chiefly for appearance’s sake: the alternative historical terms (*Erbstaaten*, *erbländisch*) seemed weak and non-imperial, not wrong but “more or less embarrassing (mehr oder minder compromittierend).”⁹ And so a notation was added banning all discussion; the order was to be communicated “by way of quiet intimation” (*mittelt einer stillen Intimation*). Such was the entrance of the Austrian *Reich* into world history, barely audible even to top officials.¹⁰

Not surprisingly the new usage had limited effect, and hardly appeared in published form until the 1840s. Perhaps the government feared the word *Reich* for how Germans might understand it. To use the word openly implied either a return to the situation before 1789, thus undoing the territorial adjustments that had taken place since then to places like Bavaria, Hanover, or indeed Austria; or it meant opening the map to aspirations of the young German nationalists, who dreamed of a reformed *Reich*, fitting the boundaries of the old empire, but perhaps going beyond them, and ruled by a principle abhorrent to Metternich: popular sovereignty. Yet when speaking French in these years Metternich said “notre empire” without a second thought.¹¹ *Reich* had a different valence, however, and he preferred language left by the Corsican to refer to Germany, *confédération*, in German *deutscher Bund*, an expression that seemed harmless to the conservative because it had no history.

Still, in published materials, we note gradual acceptance of the words “Austrian Reich,” from a handful of cases in the 1820s, to a dozen in the 1830s, to a broader if still modest proliferation by the 1840s.¹² The formula seemed useful and meaningful, and Metternich too adopted it after 1840 in order to rhetorically counterbalance fresh challenges to Austria’s status in Europe. Prussian king Frederick William III had been replaced by the more vigorous Frederick William IV, thus reviving the Austro-Prussian dualism that had tested the old Empire; an assertive France was hinting at designs on territory in the German Rhineland; and national movements in Italy, Hungary, and Germany were growing rather than subsiding. The Austrian state’s response could not be simple suppression: it had to project a positive image, something to inspire, to make the Habsburg state seem a relevant force within and beyond the space of the old Empire.¹³

⁹According to the subject’s leading expert, Joseph Redlich, Europe and Austria both needed a new and vigorous *Reichsgedanke* in 1815, yet Francis was loath to provide one. Redlich, *Das österreichische Staats- und Reichsproblem; geschichtliche Darstellung der inneren Politik der habsburgischen Monarchie von 1848 bis zum Untergang des Reiches* (Leipzig, 1920), 44. Two years later, he rejected Metternich’s ideas for reconstituting Austria in more or less equal, more or less national units, a plan that would have lessened tension, reduced Hungary, and made the parts serve the whole. Arthur G. Haas, “Metternich and the Slavs,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 4 (January 1968): 123–27.

¹⁰A directive of 2 December 1812 instructed officials that they could and should use “Kaiser von Oesterreich, Unser Kaiserreich, oder Unser Reich, Unsere Königreiche, Furstentümer und Lande,” but that the directive should not be made public: “weil eine solche, wie Fürst Metternich in einer Note vom 7. März 1813 sich ausdrückte, ‘nur Gelegenheit geben würde, den Gegenstand in einem Augenblick zu besprechen, wo dieses zu vermeiden in so mancher Hinsicht rätlicher sei.’ Daher wurden die Gubernien und betreffenden Unterbehörden durch die vereinigte Hofkanzlei blos mittelst einer stillen Intimation angewiesen, sich in Zukunft der Worte: Erbkaiser, Erbstaaten, erbländisch 2c. 2c. nicht mehr zu bedienen.” Hermann Meynert, *Kaiser Franz Josef zur Geschichte seiner Regierung und seiner Zeit* (Vienna, 1872), 70–71. The reminder [printed in 1829] to actually implement this new understanding was Hofdekret of 22 February 1822. *Seiner Majestät des Kaisers Franz Gesetze und Verfassungen im Justiz Fache* (Vienna, 1829), 83.

¹¹Alfred Stern, “Les Memoires de Metternich,” *Revue Historique* 6 (1881): 341.

¹²This is evident among digitized sources using the search terms “österreichisches Reich” and “österreichischen Reiches” by decade.

¹³This is a view of later writers, Brigitte Hamann for instance. Metternich himself pleaded in 1843 (in a speech given to Emperor Ferdinand) for greater surveillance of Czechs in particular, as an effort to the control “Slavism” within the Austrian “Reich,” a movement that had been growing for a quarter century. He repeatedly refers to Austria as *Reich* in this speech. Haas, “Metternich and the Slavs,” 144–45 and passim.

But if Metternich employed the word *Reich*, he did so in a resolutely conservative way. Austria was to become a cohesive, culturally German state whose radiant power would make it attractive and relevant in Germany, maintained as a *Staatenbund* of princes that would ward off all talk of a *Bundesstaat* of the people. In July 1847, Metternich told the Prussian ambassador “Austria is an empire [*Reich*] which includes under its rule peoples of differing nationality. But as a *Reich* it has only one nationality. Austria is German, German by virtue of its history, by virtue of the core of its provinces, by virtue of its civilization.”¹⁴ That same month he dilated upon the challenges to German rule in Austria to the Habsburg representative in St. Petersburg: within “our *Reich*” there were four types of Slavism of which the Polish was the most dangerous. This “evil” had to be fought in various ways.¹⁵

The primary one was to strengthen the monarchy’s Germans. After the 1846 revolution in Galicia, Metternich had written in an internal memorandum: “Galicia needs promotion of the German element. By this promotion I do not mean what might easily be considered to be Germanization. A people [*Volkstamm*] can only be transformed into another people with the assistance of time—a very long time. The promotion of the German element should be pursued by maintaining it and its influence *with all possible means*, that is, civilization in the real meaning of the word. These means include promoting the acquisition of property by Germans, raising up the German middle class, helping spread the German language in schools, and other ways as well.”¹⁶

Somewhat incongruously, Metternich added that in no *Reich* was nationality more honored than in the Austrian *Kaiserreich*; yet he did so precisely because the actual substance of nationality in his view was negligible. “Polonism,” he wrote, “is just a formula, a wording, behind which stands revolution in its most garish and extreme form. It is revolution itself, as we know from remarks made by the Polish emigration.”¹⁷

Like our day’s constructivists, Metternich thus believed that nationality and culture were easily malleable. In 1815, he had put forth a plan for dividing the monarchy into six zones, fostering a regional identity in each, while promoting the German element in all. Poles in Galicia, for example, would “forget they are Poles” and become Galicians, and their elites would be gradually germanized.¹⁸ Metternich also wanted to

¹⁴“Österreich ist ein Reich, das unter seiner Herrschaft Völker von verschiedener Nationalität umfasst, aber als Reich hat es nur eine Nationalität. Österreich ist deutsch so sagte Fürst Metternich eines Tages zu dem preußischen Gesandten, deutsch durch die Geschichte, durch den Kern seiner Provinzen, durch seine Zivilisation.” Report of Arnim from 20 July 1847. Cited in Hanns Schlitter, *Aus Österreichs Vormärz*, vol. 2: Böhmen (Leipzig, 1920), 115.

¹⁵Eduard Winter, “Nikolaus I, Metternich, Sevcenko,” in *Der Revolutionäre Demokrat Taras Sevcenko*, eds., E. Winter and Günther Jarosch (Berlin, 1976), 78. “Unser Reich ist reich an Slavismen der verschiedensten Art, selbst der entgegengesetzten . . .” He mentions Czech, Slovak, Illyrian, and Polish. “Metternich ahnte die Gefahr, die mit dem Sturme nationaler Leidenschaften über die Monarchie hereinzubrechen drohte. Er schilderte das Entstehen und Wesen des Slavismus und bezeichnete die Überwachung des Millionen in sich fassenden ‘Elementes’ als eine wichtige Aufgabe der Regierung . . . das Ubel müsse daher mit verschiedenen Waffen bekämpft werden.” Schlitter, *Aus Österreichs Vormärz*, vol. 2, 73ff.

¹⁶Galizien bedarf der Beförderung des deutschen Elementes. Unter dieser Beförderung verstehe ich nicht das, was leicht unter dem Wortlaute germanisieren verstanden wird. Ein Volkstamm kann nur durch die Beihilfe der Zeit—und einer langen Zeit—und ganz eigentümlicher Umstände in einen anderen umgeformt werden. Die Beförderung des deutschen Elementes muss in seinem eigenen Fortbestehen und in seinem Einfluss durch die ihm zu Gebote stehende Beihilfe, der Zivilisation im echten Sinne dieses Wortes, gesucht werden. Mittel zum Zwecke liegen in der Beförderung von Anläufen der Dominalbesitzungen durch Deutsche; durch die Erhebung des deutschen Bürgerstandes, durch die Beförderung und die Verbreitung der deutschen Sprache in den Schulen, und auf anderen Wegen.” “Metternichs Aphoristische Betrachtungen über die dermaligen Zustände in Galizien (zu amtlichem Gebrauch),” in *Aus Metternichs Nachgelassenen Papieren*, ed. Richard Metternich Winneberg, vol. 7 (Vienna, 1883), 209.

¹⁷“Der Polonismus ist nur eine Formel, ein Wortlaut, hinter dem die Revolution in ihrer krassesten Form steht; er ist die Revolution selbst, und nicht eine Abtheilung derselben; dies beweisen die bekannt gewordenen Aussprüche der polnischen Emigration.”

“Im Sinne der österreichischen Monarchie ist das Umtaufen der Benennungen—dieses Spielen mit Worten—nie gelegen. Sie hat Ungarn, Italiener und Polen nie Deutsche genannt, sondern ihre Fürsorge auf das Zusammenleben verschiedener Volkstämme im gemeinsamen in seiner Wechselwirkung heilsamen politischen Verbande gerichtet.” *Nachgelassene Papiere*, vol. 7, 207.

¹⁸Letter of 18 April 1815 in Haas, “Metternich and the Slavs,” 167. For more on Metternich’s plans to federalize the monarchy, leaning on estates, and weakening Hungary’s relative dominance as one element of the state (and the refusal of Francis to consider them), see Helmut Rumppler, *Eine Chance für Mitteleuropa: bürgerliche Emanzipation und Staatsverfall in der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna, 1997), 202.

promote Roman Catholics in Illyria, as supposedly more supportive of the Austrian state.¹⁹ Such proposals amounted to soft denationalization; if the state supported museums and primary schools in Czech that was from the self-confidence of a higher culture, sure that German civilization would prevail.²⁰ Metternich made aid available to Slavic scholars (funding the work of Ljudevit Gaj for instance), but that was in order to check Magyar pretensions. Yet supporting native cultures was an instrument to be used carefully; Metternich worried that Slavic “cultural” nationalism might act as a bacillus for transporting western liberalism into Central and Eastern Europe.²¹

This mixing of pragmatism and opportunism terrified advocates of the Slavic peoples who knew that slow assimilation had led to the disappearance of Slavs in Lusatia, Silesia, and elsewhere. And Metternich’s words only lightly shrouded a proto-racism; in his mind, Poles constituted a danger by their very being; Polonism had as its goal the “destruction of all common foundations which form the basis of society.”²² We see a further peculiarity of Austrian imperialism beyond its conservatism; unlike supposed ideal types of empire, the Habsburg state was not satisfied with difference and produced energies that would seek homogeneity (though never as radically or forcefully as the other European land empires).²³ For the time being, Austria of the 1840s presented soft imperialism, Habsburg half-measures. Was any property ever really transferred to Germans in Galicia?

Younger Austrian imperialists were bolder than Metternich, wanting their state to figure at the head of a united Germany but also much more. In one of most influential books to appear in these years, *Austria and its Future* (1847), the moderate-liberal Victor von Andrian-Werburg wrote that the Vienna settlement could not last forever and Austria had to absorb and make useful the forces of the age.²⁴ A prime consideration was its connection to two large regions, Germany in the west and the Danube valley in the east; to the former Austria was bound by a two thousand years of brotherhood, and to the latter by “trade interests.”²⁵ This project would transmute into a conservative “seventy million Reich,” and later, under German domination, *Mittleuropa*.

Andrian-Werburg did not ask about the desires of the peoples involved, yet, unlike Metternich, this liberal believed Austria should lead Germany to unity against the monarchical principle, getting people used to the idea that their interests differ from those of the princes, “loosening the bonds of dependence and deference between people and its princes.” Yet in the imperial civilizing mission, liberal and conservative were united.

Just months after these lines were printed, revolution broke out across Europe and Metternich fled to England. Now the term *Reich* burst out of hibernation, not only useful but necessary for Germans

¹⁹This was from Metternich, 24 May 1816. In A. Haas, *Metternich, Reorganization and Nationality, 1813-1818; a Story of Foresight and Frustration in the Rebuilding of the Austrian Empire* (Wiesbaden, 1963), 175. Metternich was not a clerical but recognized Catholicism’s potential for supporting non-revolutionary elements: he thought Protestantism by its nature was revolutionary. Max Lenz, “Die grossen Mächte,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 102 (1900): 278.

²⁰The result was not to stop nationalism, certainly not in Galicia, where the effect was more to hamper literacy. Henryk Wereszycki, *Pod berłem Habsburgów: zagadnienia narodowościowe* (Krakow, 1975), 67.

²¹Metternich called “Czechism” a social sickness, which “might easily lead to small aberrations if everything continues along the same old paths. But in a period of general excitement it will have the same effect on people that the eating of bean salad in the middle of a cholera epidemic might have.” Haas, “Metternich and the Slavs,” 134.

²²According to J. Feldman, a more moderate Josephinism was meant to Germanize the Slavonic and Romance populations; these principles were applied with particular intensity to the Polish element, which, together with the Italians, were regarded as the most dangerous to the monarchy. Robert A. Kann, *Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1918*, vol. 1 (New York, 1950), 224.

²³For empire as ideal type, which exercises rule through difference rather than assimilation, see the discussion in Valerie Kivelson and Ronald Suny, *Russia’s Empires* (Oxford, 2017).

²⁴*Österreich und dessen Zukunft*, vol. 2 (Hamburg, 1847), 198-99. For discussion of other Vormärz authors who hoped Austria would advance to leadership of a revived empire (*deutsch-österreichisches Kaiserreich*), see Rumpler, *Eine Chance*, 269-72.

²⁵Serbia, Romania, and Hungary could develop properly only in an intimate connection with Austria, and as the Austrian name had once stood at the pinnacle of the old Empire, Andrian-Werburg thought it would be easy to re-establish Austria’s position in Germany. *Österreich und dessen Zukunft*, 198. Rumpler sees Andrian-Werburg as one of many who resisted the idea of “Deutschland Erwache!” and promoted Austrian nationhood. *Eine Chance*, 271. But Andrian-Werburg was giving Austria a role in uniting Germany, to make it strong and united. *Österreich und dessen Zukunft*, 200; he argued that Austria was the true German power, able to fight back all attacks on German nationality (202).

imagining the future of Central Europe. For the history of a German *Reich*, the year 1848 would form a bridge between two understandings, reflecting the dualism in the German question itself, from the nominally unitary *Reich* before 1806, to two entities laying claim to this word after 1871, one officially (*deutsches Kaiserreich*) the other colloquially (*Habsburgerreich*). In 1848, a number of variants were suddenly on the table as the German question took on accelerated momentum to that linguistic dualism, and a splitting of the old imperial idea that would last until 1918.²⁶

The most popular variant was the liberal German one which aimed to include Germans in a constitutional monarchy called *deutsches Reich*, connecting to plans that had emerged in the wars of liberation.²⁷ Thinking of German unity in terms other than a *Reich* was not possible—the words republic and *Reich* seemed to imply one another—but the parliamentarians in Frankfurt were divided over whether Austria could belong, ultimately voting by a bare majority in favor. They did not, however, include Austria's non-German lands, and thus without saying so were opting to destroy the Habsburg monarchy. Austria's rulers understandably rejected this plan, and it became null and void in April of 1849 when the Prussian king refused the crown offered to him, while still harboring romantic notions of a Prussian-led resurrection of the Holy Empire.

On 9 March 1849, Minister President prince Felix von Schwarzenberg put forth to Frankfurt an Austrian counterproposal, calling for a *Reich* that would include the German Confederation as well as the Habsburg lands.²⁸ Such a *Reich* represented a quantum advance in his country's willingness to embrace its mission as empire; much more than a *Kaisertum*, it involved claims to legitimacy in an enormous space, larger than any European state since the days of Charlemagne, save Russia. Schwarzenberg also hoped that Austria would absorb the German national idea before that idea destroyed it. But in contrast to the hopes of German democrats to create an empire based in popular rule, Schwarzenberg's plan called for a union of princes, among whom the Habsburgs would be the leader.²⁹

Beyond Austria and Germany, 1848 was a springtime of many peoples, including those of the Habsburg monarchy. The Hungarians, with Habsburg consent, had passed a constitution in March 1848 that was recognized by the crown in April. Yet from the summer of 1848, the monarchy stepped away from its obligations, ultimately triggering war. Bohemia had been part of the Holy Roman Empire as well as the German Confederation so Frankfurt's constitution drafters assumed it would be part of their new Germany. Within Bohemia, Germans loyally voted for a German state, while Czechs staged a boycott, electing representatives to an Austrian *Reichstag* that met first in Vienna,

²⁶For fascinating insight into the multiple valences of *Reich* during the revolution, see the confidential remarks of later Austrian minister Anton von Schmerling from December 1848, in which Germany and Austria are both vaguely identified as *Reiche*. Austria is called a "Kaiserreich," but a very new one (only forty years old), and a future is contemplated in which Austria's German lands would belong to a "Reich" whose exact borders were unknown ("unbekannt ist, über welches Gebiet sich das Reich erstrecken wird"), but that was destined to reemerge, and, in light of German history, the German areas of Austria had a "holy right" to belong to that Reich. Adolf Rapp, *Grossdeutsch-Kleindeutsch. Stimmen aus der Zeit 1815-1914* (Munich, 1922), 93–94.

²⁷One serious and elaborate proposal for a rejuvenated *Reich*, under strong imperial leadership (from the House of Habsburg), but balanced by Reichstag and imperial judiciary, was drafted by Baron vom Stein. See "Denkschrift Steins für Hardenberg, Prag, August 1813," in: Freiherr vom Stein, *Briefe und amtliche Schriften*, eds. E. Botzenhart and W. Hubatsch, vol. 3 (Stuttgart, 1961), 742–44. The point was to make Germany a powerful state, ruled according to the "needs and wishes of the nation"; that state would have a federal character, as a confederation (*Bund*).

²⁸This proposal came just days after Francis Joseph dissolved the Kremsier Reichstag (4 March 1849) and promulgated a new centralizing constitution, subjecting all parts of the empire to control from Vienna. On 9 March, Schwarzenberg proposed that all Habsburg dominions (38 million) be united with the German Confederation (32 million); the empire would be administered by a directory of seven, assisted by a chamber of estates having thirty-eight Austrian and thirty-two German members. William Carr, *A History of Germany 1815-1945* (New York, 1979), 52.

²⁹In January 1850, Metternich said the only choice was between a *Reich* (he used this word in a letter otherwise in French) subordinated to an emperor, or an alliance of sovereign states. So, this was to a new kind of *Reich* really, in a sense a combination, not using that name; it should be a *Staatenbund* of princes not *Bundestaat*. From a letter to Hübner from 28 January 1850: "on n'a, tout comme en 1813, que le choix entre le Reich soumis à un empereur, et l'alliance d'états souverains." Cited in Brigitte Hamann, "Die Habsburger und die deutsche Frage im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Österreich und die deutsche Frage*, eds. Heinrich Lutz, et al. (Munich, 1982), 214–16.

then at Kremsier (more below on this body's crucial importance for the history of the Habsburg *Reich*).³⁰

The best-known proponent of the Czech boycott was historian and statesman František Palacký. In April 1848, he politely rejected an invitation to participate in the Frankfurt assembly, saying he was a Bohemian of Slavic origin. But he worried that by taking Austria's Germans into a Greater Germany, the Frankfurt Parliament would destroy the Austrian state. As is well known, he therefore lauded Austria and its necessary place in Europe. What is less known is that his response suffers from a mis-translation. What we usually read is the following:

“Truly, if the Austrian empire had not already been long in existence we would have to hurry and create it in the interest of Europe and in the interest of humanity itself.”

In fact, Palacký wrote *Kaiserstaat* and not empire. He did not allude to the tradition of *Reich*, which from the times of Otto I, had been a mostly German dominated entity.³¹ More important, he did not share Schwarzenberg's idea of a Central European union of princes, a *Staatenbund*. His idea, rather, was a *Völkerverein*, a union of peoples, a democratic confederation:

“the Southeast of Europe, along the borders of the Russian empire [*russisches Reich*] is inhabited by a number of peoples who are distinctly different in heritage, language, history, and behavior—Slavs, Romanians (*Walachen*), Magyars, and Germans, not to mention Greeks, Turks, and Albanians (*Skipetaren*)—of which none is powerful enough, to defy successfully the all powerful neighbor in the East for all time. They can only do this if they are united by a single and strong bond. The true artery of this necessary union of peoples is the Danube.”³²

Putting these words into the context of our time, we can appreciate a paradox. The politician who in line with today's sensibility believed that nationhood was just a word and that, in line with a pronouncement of Ernest Gellner, nationalists create nations and not the other way around, was the reactionary jailmaster and peace and order keeper Metternich. The prince wanted to suppress nationalism because he worried what free human beings might do if they used principles of consent to create representative institutions.³³ And the politician who now seems antiquated and out of touch with our current wisdom was the liberal enemy of imperialism who thought nationhood was real and based in history and language.

Palacký was no “primordialist,” however; his vision featured a certain plasticity. Slavs for instance might form nations in various ways, as would Vlachs (Romanians). Palacký was also no chauvinist. His Austria had room for Germans and Turks as regional and not imperial peoples. The important thing was that nationhood was the state building principle. When people in Central Europe were permitted to imagine self-government in freedom, they would do so within the framework of nations. There could be a community of nations—in fact there had to be with the Russian Empire looming beyond

³⁰The average Czech, or “Stockböhme,” as Germans called them, had no idea they were officially part of the German Confederation. Kohl, *Hundert Tage*, 39. At his intimation that Bohemia was part of Germany Kohl encountered anger among the common people, who suspected an old German plot. Such reactions fell upon old popular recollections, reflected in colloquial expressions of contempt for things German. He also encountered deep knowledge of ancient Bohemian history among average Czechs of the provinces. *Ibid.*, 267.

³¹The exception being the reign of the partly Czech Luxembourgs in the fourteenth century.

³²“Sie wissen, dass der Süd-Ost von Europa, die Grenzen des russischen Reiches entlang von mehren in Abstammung, Sprache, Geschichte und Gesittung merklich verschiedenen Völkern bewohnt wird—Slaven, Walachen, Magyaren und Deutschen, um der Griechen, Türken und Skipetaren nicht zu gedenken—von welchen keines für sich allein mächtig genug ist, dem übermächtigen Nachbar im Osten in alle Zukunft erfolgreich Widerstand zu leisten; das können sie nur dann, wenn ein einiges und festes Band sie mit einander vereinigt. Die wahre Lebensader dieses notwendigen **Völkervereins** ist die Donau.” Franz Palacký, *Österreichs Staatsidee* (Prague, 1866), 82–83.

³³Metternich's eloquent biographer Wolfgang Siemann writes that the chancellor was ahead of his time by recognizing the dangers inherent in the principle of nationalism and agrees with recent historians that one has to “say goodbye to the fiction of the nation state.” *Metternich: Stratege und Visionär* (Munich, 2016), 866–67.

Austria's borders. And because Palacký believed in rule by the people, of the people, and for the people, for him the choice was either *national* self-determination or monarchy made honest by a multi-national constitutional structure.

In the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, the Habsburg state reformed despite the neoabsolutism of the new Emperor Francis Joseph, and dramatic advances took place in the economy and in state building.³⁴ We also see much more frequent employment of the word *Reich*, though the origins are difficult to discern. The historians Brigitte Mazohl and Karin Schneider have concluded that the word entered official and popular usage in a backhanded and unintentional way in early 1848, as Austrian citizens used *Reichstag* to denote the legislature meant to give definitive shape to the constitutional monarchy instituted by Ferdinand.³⁵ Why they chose that precise word is not clear—the Frankfurt assembly was called *Parlament*—but *Reichstag* as a venerable term for a representative body appealed to people across the political spectrum. The sudden and unplanned emergence of this word for parliament led to a “renaissance” in the use of the word *Reich* in the Habsburg lands after a half-century's absence.³⁶

In March 1849, Francis Joseph dissolved the *Reichstag*, but created an advisory body called *Reichsrat*, and Habsburg administrators, now habituated to the word *Reich*, used it unhesitatingly, producing a *Reichsgesetzblatt* and *Reichsstaatsbürgerschaft*, and much more. With its echoes of centralizing Josephinism—which Metternich had warned against—Francis's neoabsolutism also favored German as an efficient means of communication, and imperial bureaucrats decided which languages would count as *Cultursprachen*.³⁷ The court itself Germanized, while those who had hoped for Czech, Hungarian, or Polish self-rule (in the manner envisioned by Palacký) experienced these years as a time of humiliation.³⁸

Yet Austria's progress in state building took place in a competitive environment, and it soon fell behind its rivals in economic and therefore military terms. France and Prussia cut the monarchy down in two wars, first in 1859, forcing it out of much of Italy and onto the path of grudging constitutionalism, and then in 1866, expelling the Habsburgs from Germany, where they had been maintaining pretensions to leadership and keeping alive the flame of a seventy million strong state.

Now major claims on the term *Reich* shifted northward. After Prussia's victory against France in 1870, a *Kaiser* in Berlin presided over a *Kaiserreich*, with Otto von Bismarck the undisputed *Reichskanzler*. This occurred although millions of Germans, especially in Austria and Bohemia, understood that the Prussian-led state was a very incomplete successor to the old *Reich*; many felt left out and deeply aggrieved, later contributing to the formation of proto-fascist parties, strongest in Bohemia.³⁹

³⁴R.J.W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs* (Oxford, 2006), 269–70.

³⁵It met first at Vienna, then at Kremsier/Kroměříž. For the shift to constitutional rule and emergence of plans for a parliament in the spring of 1848; see Judson, *Habsburg Empire*, 190; C.A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1918* (New York, 1969), 330–32.

³⁶“Für rund ein halbes Jahrhundert verschwand das ‘Reich’ aus der Terminologie der Habsburgermonarchie. Erst nach den Umwälzungen der Revolutionsjahre 1848/49 und nach dem österreichisch-ungarischen Ausgleich 1867 erlebte der Begriff eine Renaissance: Als sich im Jahr 1848 ein erstes gesamtösterreichisches Parlament konstituierte, tagte diese Delegiertenversammlung als *Reichstag* in Wien und Kremsier. Nach der Auflösung des *Reichstags* mit Waffengewalt am 7. März 1849 kam es am 13. April 1851 auf der Grundlage der *Reichsverfassung vom 4. März 1849* zur Gründung eines *Reichsrats*. Dieser diente allerdings als reines Beratungsorgan des Herrschers in der Tradition des maria-theresianischen *Staatsrates* . . . Das *Kaiserthum* Osterreich wandelte sich—vor dem Hintergrund des wieder erstarkten Neoabsolutismus—auf diese Weise in seiner Terminologie immer deutlicher zu einem ‘Reich’: Seit dem Jahr 1849 erschien regelmäßig—in allen Sprachen der Monarchie—das amtliche *Reichsgesetzblatt*.” “Reichsidee,” 109.

³⁷Evans, *Austria*, 280.

³⁸“The German tongue was introduced for practically all public purposes right across the area, and readily identified with the positive features of the new programme. As the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* condescendingly put it in 1850: ‘Material advantage will prove a much stronger force binding the populations of the various crownlands together than the right, devoutly desired by spokesmen of the nationalities, to turn Austria into a second Babylon.’ It is no accident that the *Reichsgesetzblatt*, begun with a bold provision for publication in all the languages of Great Austria, appeared from 1852 in German alone . . . the dynasty never appeared so Teutonic in its ethos as during the 1850s and early 1860s.” Evans, *Austria*, 278.

³⁹Andrew Whiteside, *Austrian National Socialism before 1918* (The Hague, 1962). For the notion of Germany as “unvollender Nationalstaat,” see Otto Dann, *Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland* (Munich, 1996), 176; Theodor Schieder, *Das*

Meanwhile, in 1867, the House of Habsburg ceased being a *Kaisertum* and divided into the dual monarchy, Austria-Hungary, a realm with two citizenships, where a basic expectation of statehood, undivided sovereignty, no longer applied. Simply to maintain order Francis Joseph had cut a deal with Hungary's political classes, which had been boycotting Habsburg institutions and refusing to pay taxes. Thus, the Hungarian elite came to control more than half the old *Kaisertum* and the Kingdom of Hungary became a virtual nation state within the Habsburg lands.

Francis Joseph held onto the title "Kaiser," and in Vienna the *Reichsrat* became housed in massive neo-classical marble across from the Hofburg, while the *Reichsgericht* made do in a handsome if unspectacular Italianate structure in the Nibelungenstrasse just off the Ring. The monarchy's universities taught *Reichsgeschichte*, meaning Austrian history, and even the *Reichsapfel* remained among the symbols of legitimacy.⁴⁰ In a typical muddle, confirming old Austria's gift for operating comfortably in zones of shade and nuance, people called the monarchy's two halves "Reichshälften."⁴¹ Two halves, no whole. Yet if one listened to street conversations, just when empire no longer existed in any terms on Austrian territory, one heard people calling the monarchy not simply *Kaisertum* but *Reich*.

The expression *Habsburgerreich* was not unknown before 1867 but the proliferation of this word after about 1870 is startling, and by the 1890s, it was everywhere, referring not just to the past but also to the present. In part what was going on was a filtering down from the Habsburg administration which, as we saw, embraced *Reich* early in the rule of Francis Joseph; from the early 1850s, the usage was absorbed into schoolbooks and geographies. But as Pieter Judson has noted in his pathbreaking study, people called the monarchy not just *Reich* or *Habsburgerreich*, but *our Reich*. Judson argues that Habsburg subjects were not just bystanders but actively co-created the empire, and calls them "Austro-Hungarians" to emphasize their identity as imperial citizens, irrespective of ethnicity or religion.⁴²

However, if one takes the non-imperial view, one finds that many Austrian and Hungarian citizens, especially of Slavic nationalities, did not consider themselves Austrians let alone Hungarians. Did they also say, "our Reich"? Of special interest are the Czechs, whose political class was famously enraged by not getting a deal like that accorded the Hungarians, and therefore they periodically boycotted politics in Vienna.⁴³ Yet when we probe digitized sources from the late century, the story turns out to be very similar. Czechs hardly used "our *Reich*" [*naši říši*] before about 1870, but after that we witness a proliferation just like in the German lands. But what did the Czech speakers mean?

In 1887, Palacký's son-in-law, the Old Czech František Ladislav Rieger, along with the Bohemian noble prince Karl Schwarzenberg, put forward a resolution to the Bohemian Parliament for creating an institution that would show lasting reverence for Francis Joseph, who would soon be celebrating forty years of rule. The proposal passed unanimously. However, throughout his extensive remarks, Rieger called the monarch not just our *Kaiser* but also our king, meaning the king of Bohemia. Rieger was thus leveraging empire language for sake of the nation. Of course, he claimed, no nation was as loyal to the monarch as the Czech nation.

He was doing more than simply engaging with empire. Rieger claimed that the Czechs' forefathers, supposed proprietors of the Czech lands from time immemorial, had of their own free will, given the "impetus to create the Austrian empire in good conscience and reason, and in this empire they find

Deutsche Kaiserreich von 1871 als Nationalstaat (Wiesbaden, 1961), 86. The path to this was not foreordained. Real contingency lay in the role of Bismarck, without whom one can imagine a stronger Austrian role, for example through economic unity, which was desired by Austrian Handelsminister Bruck.

⁴⁰Otto Brunner, "Das Haus Oesterreich und die Donaumonarchie," *Südostforschungen* (1 January 1955): 122–44.

⁴¹The unofficial, colloquial usage of this term began in the early 1860s during discussions of a constitution for the monarchy. The earliest use in digitized source is by Dr. Johann Nepomuk Berger, a far left democrat in 1848, who a dozen years later anticipated that a recognition of Hungary's April laws by Francis Joseph would lead to a dividing of the monarchy into two halves; he also believed that Hungary possessed a centuries-old constitutional order, and thus dualism was a basic Habsburg reality ("Unser Ausgangspunkt ist der historische und zwar zunächst jener Dualismus, wie er zwischen der ungarischen und nichtungarischen Reichshälfte vor dem Jahre 1848 durch Jahrhunderte bestand..."). *Zur Lösung der österreichischen Verfassungsfrage* (Vienna, 1861), 27.

⁴²Judson, *Habsburg Empire*, 4, 333.

⁴³For the sense that Austrians were foreigners in the eyes of Czechs (of *Stockböhmern*), see Kohl, *Hundert Tage*, 290–91.

support and backing of the other united nations.”⁴⁴ That was why they were “eternally loyal to the dynasty. (Excellent! Applause).” Rieger said the Czechs loved the flowering of civilization brought by “our empire”; and he also found time to sympathize with the emperor and his difficult position, admiring how despite the realm’s complexity Francis managed to keep peace and promote progress among “all the Austrian peoples. (Much applause and salutations).”⁴⁵

Pieter Judson has called the Habsburg monarchy a “liberal empire,” but we can wonder whether that term applies here.⁴⁶ Rieger’s behavior, and that of the other Czech delegates who fawned on the monarch, was not liberal. Their tone was obsequious and opportunistic, reflecting the attitude not of citizens but of subjects, to whom rights had been accorded by the grace of a divine right sovereign.⁴⁷ In 1848, Rieger had wanted rule of the people and by the people, yet like other Central European liberals his liberalism atrophied as he pursued nationalism. By 1887, Rieger had become hyperloyal because of all the gifts he claimed the Habsburgs had showered upon the Czechs: progress and civilization. Where were we before 1849, he asks. What were we? Mostly poor peasants.

Again, he subordinated the rhetoric of empire to the interests of nationalism. Here, we have another paradox. As liberal democracy emerged in the early nineteenth century, it generated nationalism, that is, a political world where demands were raised for basic respect for nationalities and their cultures, and an end to the assumption of the natural superiority of German or Hungarian culture. Yet nationalism tethered to ultimate rule of a monarch—this was also true in Germany—could also corrupt liberalism. If one wants a whiff of liberal spirit in this time one can turn to John Stuart Mill who praised English peoples’ love of liberty and law and said: “In all questions between a government and an individual the presumption in every Englishman’s mind is that the government is in the wrong.”⁴⁸ The presumption in Rieger’s mind seemed to be just the opposite.

Yet Rieger’s loyalty did not achieve the desired results: at his death in 1903 political equality for Czechs in Bohemia was still far out of reach. This was the view not of right-wing nationalists, but of Czech Social Democrats, believers in class struggle, as internationalist as one got among Czechs or any Central European people. Like Rieger, Czech socialists cared deeply about the substance of nationalism, namely culture and language.

In contrast to the Czech mainstream, they only tersely eulogized Rieger, for despite consorting with non-democratic forces of the monarchy’s upper classes, he had failed to achieve equality for Czechs.⁴⁹ One socialist author wrote that for the German political class, right to left, any shack was still good enough for a Slavic school.⁵⁰ Like Rieger Czech socialists did speak of “our empire,” but they meant something different: the empire was not eternal; in fact, it had entered its “death throes” because of the undemocratic manner in the way it was constituted.

The most vivid evidence of its inexorable dissolution was the failure of Austrian and Hungarian negotiators to agree on the dual monarchy’s tariffs during their decennial meetings, threatening the

⁴⁴“Pánové, naši předkové byli to, kteříž svobodnou volbou dali podnět k utvoření ríše rakouské a v dobrem vědomí a rozumu, ze v této ríši najdou podporu a oporu od jiných ty spojených národů.” Remarks of 10 December 1887, *Stenographische Berichte des böhmischen Landtages* (Prague, 1887), 169–71.

⁴⁵“Když pak dále uvážíme to složení této říši, ty zvláště časté spory občanů a národů, ty mnohé sobe odporující zájmy jejich, musíme uznati, ze činí zajisté úřad vladařský v této říši neobyčejně obtížným. A při všech těch obtížích podařilo se poctivé snaze a moudré rozvaze Jeho Veličenstva udržet říši svou ve všemožném klidu a stálém pokroku uvnitř, a uhájit cest a důstojnost i váhu její na venek (Vyborne!) Ale nejen to, my můžeme pravěm říci, ze tato čtyřicetiletá doba panování Jeho Veličenstva byla cele říši blahodějná, ba ze cele té době j vším pravěm můžeme žehnat my a všichni národové rakouští...nebo v této době přišel poprvé k platnosti princip konstituční a svoboda, svoboda slova a svobodné zastoupení lidu přišlo za Něho k platnosti a k provedení.” *Ibid.*, 169.

⁴⁶In earlier work Judson perceptively notes that “nationalist movements . . . however radical or moderate, competed to demonstrate their loyalty to the emperor.” *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 9.

⁴⁷According to Miroslav Hroch, only in two places in Europe, Denmark and Sweden, did the “establishment of a constitutional regime take place exclusively through reforms from above.” *European Nations: Explaining their Formation* (London, 2015), 89–90.

⁴⁸Cited in Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples* (New York, 1946), 25.

⁴⁹*Socialistická Revue Akademie* 7 (1903): 182.

⁵⁰“Hlídká politická a sociální,” *Socialistická Revue Akademie* 6 (1902): 160.

two imperial halves with dissolution into two medium-sized powers. Yet the socialists asked if that would be so bad. The point of an agreement on finances after all was to permit Austria-Hungary to maintain its pretensions to being an empire, at the cost of its peoples. This was, as we have seen, a syndrome going back a century from the demise of the old *Reich*. The monarchy's governing concern was to seem an empire with all the grandeur of Rome or of the Hohenstaufens.⁵¹ In 1903, that meant funding as many warships as the imperial neighbors, the Hohenzollerns, while education, justice, public wages, and workers' insurance took a back seat. And so it let the empire dissolve into two states.⁵²

For the socialists, the empire's political system was absolutist and not liberal. Ultimately, the *Reichsrat*—which never shook its function of being a consultative body—had no decisive say in foreign policy, meaning that top officials operated in the unchecked realm of their obsessions and fears, ironically about and of nationalism. Yet the fact that these socialists could produce incisive critiques indeed attests to a certain liberality in Habsburg practice. Perhaps due to their faith in history, the Czech left did not despair: Austria's future lay in democracy. Socialists assumed that when Austria became a democracy it would evolve into the kind of order Palacký had imagined:

“We urgently need a parliament with a broad European perspective, into which the conviction from the lower layers of the citizenry will penetrate that linguistic equality and national federation are the only basis on which Austria's future can be built as an international federal state in the heart of Europe.”⁵³

Federal state, not empire. Implicitly socialists raise the question whether any state called an empire could be ruled by the consent of the governed.⁵⁴ What they understood was that states that constrained liberties of self-expression, whether through Czech or any other language, could not be liberal in the sense of a liberal democracy. The notion that the empire really was their empire was an illusion.

Conclusions

Perhaps because Robert A. Kann composed his major works in English, he could take a commonsensical approach to the question of empire. In American English as standardized by Webster, there is little question about whether the Habsburg monarchy qualified: it featured extensive space and numerous peoples, and was therefore an empire.⁵⁵ Yet when the German word *Reich* intrudes, the issue is trickier, and the monarchy had difficulty using that word to describe itself after the Congress of Vienna. Prince Metternich and Francis worried about misunderstandings, suspecting rightly that once people of their age tried to recreate the *Reich*, the consequences would be revolutionary.

⁵¹Mazohl and Schneider say the Habsburgs believed they presided over an improved empire, the transition between the two between 1804 and 1806 had occurred “sang und klanglos,” with an assumption of most of the symbols and pageantry; the working rooms and apartment of the Reichserzkanzler in the Hofburg had simply been “translated” into its updated purpose, “Reichsidee,” 117.

⁵²“My máme všeobecnou povinnost brannou, ale rakouský parlament nemůže volati k zodpovědnosti ty lidi, kteří armádou vládnou. Parlament nerozhoduje o armádě, a tím je také dána všechna jeho ubohost a nicotnost. Jeho význam rovná se tu nulle. A kdyby nastávající celni rozluka vedla k dalšímu úplnému oddělení od Uher a odstranění delegací, mohli bychom to jen vítat. Hlídka politická a sociální,” *Socialistická Revue Akademie* 6 (1902): 259–60.

⁵³“**u nás zrovna řve** zejména aby se výstřední živly německo-nacionální presvědčily o naprosté illusi svých tužeb a snů. Potřebujeme naléhavě parlament s velikými hledisky evropskými, do něhož by ze spodních vrstev občanstva proniklo přesvědčení, že jazyková rovnoprávnost a národnostní federace je jedinou základnou, na níž lze zbudovati budoucnost Rakouska jako mezinárodního spolkového státu v srdci Evropy. Hlídka politická a sociální.” *Socialistická Revue Akademie* 6 (1902): 230.

⁵⁴Ronald Suny has written that as an ideal type, the nation state represents a principle of rule the “same for all members of the nation,” whereas empire is the opposite: “inequitable rule over something different.” *Red Flag Unfurled: History, Historians, and the Russian Revolution* (London, 2017), 127–28.

⁵⁵According to Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* an empire is “An extended territory, usually comprised of a group of nations, states or peoples under the control or domination of a single sovereign power.” Cited in Robert A. Kann, “Dynasty and Imperial Idea,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 3, no. 1 (1967): 11.

Their hesitance gradually receded from the 1840s. If one wanted to contest power in Central Europe, whether as monarchist or democrat, liberal or conservative, whether Prussian or Austrian, one had to invoke this word. The Austrian *Kaiserreich* began doing so right after Metternich's departure, probably assisted by the sudden, seemingly natural emergence of the word *Reichstag* to describe the first popular representation of Austria. Perhaps people of the Habsburg lands knew of the allusions to an institution that once had met at Regensburg; certainly the House of Habsburg always took for granted the continuity between their *Kaisertum* and the Holy Empire.

The Austrian state's view of empire tended to coincide with the interests and perceptions of the monarchy's German-speaking cultural elite. When German speakers used the term *das Reich* or *unser Reich*, they assumed a German dominated entity, with a mission to spread civilization eastward to Ficker's *Nachbarvölker*. That had been the tradition from time immemorial, and there was no break, from Joseph and Metternich to the pan-Germanists and even Austro-Marxists, for whom a proper *Gymnasium* was of course German.⁵⁶ As Robert Kann tells us, "the German national group could . . . operate without difficulty as a specific entity in all geographic areas and in all fields of cultural activities," and thus the imperial idea became "almost exclusively identified with German culture."⁵⁷ The Habsburg Empire was not multi-ethnic in its essence, Kann continues; its imperial idea did "not reflect the geographic, social, and political profile of the various peoples in the monarchy in terms acceptable to the nationalities who comprised the majority of its inhabitants."⁵⁸

Thus, it is no surprise that the nationalities considered Austrians to be foreign rulers: they were on the receiving end of imperialism. The Austrian Crownlands of the Habsburg monarchy, Cisleithania more accurately, were relatively tolerant compared to other empires of that time, however, the basic relation was the same: of imperial rulers, here in Vienna, there in St. Petersburg or Berlin, assuming they represented a superior civilization. Therefore, calling the Czechs Austrians or the Slovaks Hungarians is like calling Poles and Ukrainians living under Tsarist rule Russians, or, going further afield, calling the Irish British. Among the Habsburg subjects who rejected such inclusions in imperial vocabulary were the time's most sensitive democrats, representatives of workers, like Czech or Polish Social Democrats.

To see the non-imperial view, one has to focus on what was at stake: not the economic development and material civilization that Rieger lauded but language and culture. The point of the East European national movements, something western writers on nationalism tend to underrate, is that languages are specific and not interchangeable. Many words can only be roughly translated, or not translated at all.⁵⁹

People of the region, above all Czechs, have noted a double standard in how westerners view Eastern Europe, a view we can appreciate by going just outside the borders of the old monarchy, to the lands of the emerging *kleindeutsch* Empire. In April 1848, Germans went to the polls for the first time, in Bavaria, Hesse, Bohemia, Prussia, and elsewhere, casting ballots, hoping to create their national state. No text describing these elections implies that Germans were behaving irrationally; no one says: they were or should have been nationally indifferent. Germans were doing what the French had done in the 1790s. To be free human beings, wrote one Austrian 1848er, Germans had to overcome "Zersplitterung" and govern their own affairs in their own state.⁶⁰ So if it was fine for Germans to form a national state, why not Czechs? The United States is a nation state, as is virtually every democracy.

To go back to the issue of untranslatability let us consider the word *Reich*. It is not empire, at least not precisely. *Reich* tended to be more homogenizing, and was situated where North Americans least expect empire, not across oceans and continents but at the heart of Europe, where the colonial peoples

⁵⁶John Connelly, *From Peoples into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton, 2020), 274.

⁵⁷"Dynasty and Imperial Idea," 19. At the same time, the Habsburgs "must be absolved from the charge of furthering outright aggressive nationalism." *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁸"Dynasty and Imperial Idea," 20.

⁵⁹On the incomprehension among German thinkers of the "French" notion that languages are interchangeable, see Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, 1999), 44–45.

⁶⁰For an Austrian liberal voice making this point, see Joseph Wagner, *Österreichs Constitution, Pressefreiheit, und Nationale Garde* (Klagenfurt, 1848), 7 and passim.

appear to be of the same culture as the colonizers. The ambitions of *Reich* to dominate were registered not in far-flung outposts, but in places we recognize not as colonies at all, like Prague. What is telling about Julius Ficker and his invocation of a sacred imperial tradition is that he was not a right-winger, nor a nasty nationalist let alone proto-fascist, but a man of reason. Yet he stated clearly the basic expectations evoked by the word *Reich*: rule not just of many human beings but of many peoples.⁶¹

Finally, neither the Habsburg *Reich* project nor the more assertive Prussian version proved stable; the very word *Reich* perhaps made that impossible. Among Germans, the great German (*grossdeutsch*) idea was popular far beyond the pan-Germans, and after the collapse of Habsburg and Prussian German empires in 1918 populations of both entities wanted unity, as a *Reich*, including Austrian and Bohemian lands. The Allies did not permit this to happen. Nevertheless, the parliamentarians in Weimar called what we call the Weimar Republic *das Deutsche Reich*. It turned out that this democracy could not live up to the standards of an empire—ultimately there is no liberal empire—and when after 1933 a chancellor from Austria promised to make a *Reich* including most of the old empire's territories, many if not most Austrian and Bohemian Germans found the idea irresistible, even many Social Democrats.

Virtually everyone who embraced the *Reich* term after the decline of the old Empire in 1806 was playing with fire: prince Metternich is among the few who understood this fact. And maybe it's no coincidence that only in 1945, with the *Reich* dismembered, dead, and soon buried, that Austro-Germans could finally be what they are now, simply Austrians, with the aspiration of governing themselves, but not *Nachbarvölker*.

⁶¹For a prescient critique from a left Hegelian standpoint of the Habsburg monarchy, arguing that it could not be made democratic precisely because of its imperial nature, see Andrea Luigi Mazzini, *Italien in seinen Beziehungen zur modernen Zivilisation*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1847), 365.