

10 Fin-de-Siècle and Empire's End

The Young Czechs dominated the political scene from the elections of 1891 until 1906, but they faced more competition from other Czech parties than the National Party had. Multi-party politics did not lessen the influence of nationalism, since the parties competed with each other over who truly represented the national interest. The radical nationalist parties tried to control the national discourse to define the parameters of politics, and in response, the Young Czechs increased their own appeals to nationalism.¹ A similar process affected the Bohemian Germans, leading to obstruction in the land diet and Reichsrat, and spilling over into street violence. Before 1914, the struggle among the national movements in Cisleithania, however bitter, remained a struggle over relative position *within* the Austrian state, not *against* Austria.² The stresses and strains of four years of war eroded this situation, until in 1918 the Habsburg monarchy collapsed, to be succeeded by a new and supposedly more just order in Central Europe, whose legitimacy rested on the ideologies of nationalism so disruptive to the old one.

POSITIVE POLITICS,
OPPOSITION,
OR OBSTRUCTION?
(1891–1914)

After 1891 the Young Czechs struggled to hold together their victorious electoral coalition of Old Czech defectors, Masaryk's Realists, and vocal elements of the petty bourgeoisie, radical students, and working-class youth. As the party debated how to move beyond rejection of the *punktace*, influential figures such as former Realists Kaizl and Kramář called for a more moderate, gradualist approach, which they called a politics of stages or positive politics.

The Young Czechs and the Challenges of Success

The first to part company with the Young Czechs was the Progressive Movement, which had originated among Czech university students in 1887.³ After 1891, the Progressives joined the Social Democrats to agitate for universal suffrage in street demonstrations that took on an anti-dynastic tone by the summer of 1893.⁴ After protesters repeatedly clashed with police and the army, the governor, Count Franz Thun-Hohenstein, declared martial law in Prague and arrested many Progressives. The ensuing mass trial of a supposed secret conspiracy, "Omladina" (Youth), resulted in sixty-eight prison sentences ranging from several months to eight years.⁵

During the Omladina trials the Young Czechs protested in the Reichsrat but accomplished little else. At a party conference in Nymburk in November 1894 the Young Czechs distanced the party from the demonstrations, calling for a determined and constructive opposition to the Vienna government. They also declared the Moravian People's Party, established in 1891–92 by Adolf Stránský, and its newspaper *Lidové noviny*, a special Moravian Young Czech organization. Masaryk resigned both his diet and Reichsrat mandates after the imposition of martial law in Prague in 1893, and at Nymburk he left the party leadership.⁶ Masaryk criticized Young Czech policies in a series of works, especially *Česká otázka* (The Czech Question, 1895). Masaryk set forth his own views on the meaning of Czech history and the Czech question, while

attacking the Young Czechs from an independent position. Kaizl responded for the Young Czechs in his *České myšlenky* (Czech Thought, 1895), expressing reservations about Masaryk's wider philosophical and historical views and strongly defending the party's practical policies.⁷

The Young Czechs' program was more than a version of the Old Czech policies they had once derided as "picking up the crumbs under the table." The Young Czechs called for professional, experienced, qualified politicians, capable of formulating practical policies. In a lengthy Reichsrat speech in December 1895, Kaizl rejected the all-or-nothing attitude of the radicals. The Czech goal of Bohemia's state right, he said, would be won "by stages," each tending in the same general direction. The first two stages were franchise reform and further revision of the language statutes.⁸

Franchise reform brought down Taaffe's government in November 1893, ending the longest tenure by a minister-president in the history of dualist Austria. His immediate successor, Prince Alfred Windischgrätz, had no better luck. In October 1895 Count Kazimierz Badeni, a former Galician governor considered a political strongman, took over the office. Badeni eased some press restrictions, lifted the state of emergency in Prague, and amnestied the eleven Omladina prisoners still serving their sentences. With resulting Young Czech support, he forced his electoral reform through the Reichsrat. The system retained the four curiae (lowering the tax hurdle for the two lower ones to four gulden), but added a fifth, in which all males older than twenty-four (even those who had a vote in one of the other four) could vote.⁹

New Reichsrat elections in March 1897 gave the Young Czechs all but two mandates in the Czech Club, but the successes of the relatively new Christian Socialist Party and the Social Democrats warned of coming challenges. The Young Czechs continued the tradition of reasserting Bohemia's state right in the opening session. In response, the five Czech Social Democrats rose with an Anti-State Right Declaration, protesting against "the excavation of threadbare historical privileges and documents" and demanding "modern institutions for ourselves and all nationalities of Austria." The socialists called for the abolition of political inequalities based on birth or means, and denounced the Young Czech program as the "fantastic, state-rights, erroneous path."¹⁰ This attack on state right touched off a nationalistic anti-socialist campaign, and

paved the way for the formation of the Czech National Socialist Party a year later.

The major agenda item at the Reichsrat was the upcoming decennial agreement with Hungary. The Young Czechs' price for supporting Badeni was revision of the language ordinances. In April 1897 Badeni issued new regulations for Bohemia and Moravia that extended the use of Czech in public contacts to three further ministries, and provided that cases would be handled internally in the originating language. Employees would have to be bilingual by July 1, 1901. German was still the language of internal business, and of communication with Vienna, but otherwise Badeni's decrees gave Czech equality with German on the entire territory of Bohemia and Moravia. The Young Czechs ended their opposition.

In buying Czech support through language concessions, Badeni sowed the wind: he reaped the whirlwind. German obstruction prevented the Reichsrat from functioning for the remainder of the session, while during the summer recess, demonstrations throughout Cisleithania (especially in the German towns of Bohemia) demanded the preservation of Cisleithania's German character by repealing the ordinance. From imperial Germany the Pan-German League denounced Badeni's decrees as undermining the Austro-German alliance of 1879. The famous German historian Theodor Mommsen wrote to the Vienna *Neue freie Presse* on October 31, 1897, calling the Czechs "apostles of barbarism" who would swamp German cultural achievements in "the abyss of their *Unkultur*." The German response, he noted, had to be tough, because "the Czech skull is impervious to reason, but it is susceptible to blows."¹¹

Such toughness was the order of the day when the Reichsrat reconvened in September. Mass street demonstrations in Vienna were echoed in the Reichsrat, where the Pan-Germans Georg von Schönerer and Karl Hermann Wolf led ever more violent obstruction. The crisis peaked on November 26, when Kramář, acting speaker of the Reichsrat, called the police to eject eight German obstructionist delegates. After another day of unabated obstruction in parliament and fresh street riots in Vienna, Badeni resigned, to German celebrations. Czech resentment, rumors of anti-Czech violence, and a march by Prague's German students in honor of the obstructionists set off a violent Czech response. On November 29, groups of Czechs attacked German demonstrations, beat students, trampled imperial banners, stoned the houses of German politicians,

and vandalized German and German-Jewish shops in Prague. On December 2, the Bohemian governor proclaimed a state of emergency. The police and army restored order with fixed bayonets, but the violence of 1897 made the prospect of any future compromise remote.

New Political Parties Emerge

In 1897 former Progressives established a separate Radical Progressive Party.¹² Early in 1899, some of their associates who still supported state-right tactics, such as Alois Rašín and Karel Baxa, counsel for the defense in the Omladina trial, founded the State Rights Radical Party. The State Rights Radicals and the Radical Progressives remained parties of professionals and intellectuals. Like them, the Czech People's Party, founded in 1900 by Masaryk and several associates, remained numerically small but intellectually influential. When Alois Hajn brought a splinter group of the Radical Progressives over to Masaryk's party in 1906 it renamed itself the Czech Progressive Party, but it was commonly called the Realist party.

In April 1898 a meeting of Czech workers and tradesmen established the Czech National Socialist Party under another former progressive, Václav Klofáč. The National Socialists agitated against Germans and two Czech parties: the Young Czechs for being insufficiently democratic and radical, and the Social Democrats for betraying the nation.¹³ The Czech Social Democrats, operating as the Austrian party's autonomous Czech section, competed with the National Socialists for Czech working-class votes. The Social Democrats also suffered from national tensions, reacting hesitantly to violence between Czech and German workers during 1897. At a party congress in Brno in 1899, therefore, the Austria-wide party adopted a nationality program that urged the democratization of Austria-Hungary in self-governing districts on national criteria, in place of historical political units.¹⁴ Cooperation between Czech and Austrian-German socialists continued on this basis until a definitive separation in 1911.

Of these parties, only the Social Democrats and the National Socialists offered serious competition to the Young Czechs. Certainly the Old Czechs were completely cast into the shade: aside from the House of Lords their representation was negligible in the Reichsrat after 1891, and in the Bohemian land diet after 1895. In the Moravian diet elections

of 1896, however, the Old Czechs still clung to thirteen mandates, and they remained influential in the organs of local self-administration and in various cultural, scientific, and economic institutions.

The Agrarian party (emerging between 1899 and 1905) also challenged the Young Czechs. The franchise reforms of 1882 and 1897 encouraged a group of former Old and Young Czech agrarian leaders to establish a Czech Agrarian Party in 1899, which absorbed Štátní's Peasant Union, and merged with regional organizations in 1905. In May 1905 the Czech Agrarian Party joined with its Moravian and Silesian counterparts to create an Agrarian party for all the Bohemian crownlands. Under the slogan "The Countryside is One Family," the Agrarian Party claimed to represent all country-dwellers against socialist threats to property, and the Catholic parties' clericalism. Already before 1914 Antonín Švehla was emerging as a future leader.

Political Catholicism developed during the 1890s in Bohemia in reaction to the staunchly anti-clerical Young Czechs. Two distinct trends emerged, one representing a national Czech version of traditional clericalism, and the other, stimulated by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum*, calling for social justice for the "little people" whose interests the Young Czechs ignored. A Christian Social party emerged out of various organizations in 1899. Led by the Moravian theologian Jan Šrámek it became a strong advocate of socially conscious Catholic activism. The Christian Social Party was strong in Moravia, but weaker in Bohemia, where it competed with Agrarians and Social Democrats for the same voters. The Czech Christian socialists had difficulty cooperating with German clericals, in spite of similar world-views.

Among the German liberals a division between "old" and "young" also emerged. Eduard Herbst and Ernst von Plener, both Bohemian Germans, held various strands together in the United German Left until the 1880s. A group of dissidents adopted a critical program at Linz in 1882. One of them, Schönerer, mixed nationalism with virulent anti-Semitism in his Pan-German Party, creating a corrosive movement that undermined Austrian liberalism.¹⁵ A German-Austrian Christian Socialist movement also weakened liberalism after 1890. Karl Lueger, its major figure, also used anti-Semitism as a weapon against liberalism.¹⁶ At the height of the Badeni disturbances almost all German parties formed a common German Front, and in 1899 they agreed on a minimum program.

Czech Politics into the Twentieth Century

The Czech Agrarians and the Czech and German radical nationalists cut slightly into the strength of the established parties in the 1901 Reichsrat elections. Under a competent government headed by a permanent civil servant, Ernst von Koerber, the Young Czechs pursued an opportunistic policy. Two Young Czechs successively served as ministers for Czech affairs in Koerber's cabinets, but the party adopted nonviolent obstruction in the Reichsrat to gain more concessions on language. After Kaizl's death in 1901 Kramář continued this version of "positive politics." It achieved some practical results, such as government support for flood control along Bohemia's rivers, the urban renewal of Prague, an art gallery in Prague, and a Czech pedagogical school in Silesia. The Young Czechs failed to establish a second Czech university in Brno, and Koerber could not get agreement on language issues in 1900 and 1903. Koerber, called by one historian "perhaps the most able Minister President in Austrian history," achieved what he did by relying on the administrative bureaucracy and making use of §14 of the constitution of 1867.¹⁷

Czechs and Germans eventually reached an agreement in Moravia. The Moravian Pact, approved by the emperor on November 27, 1905, added a fourth, universal suffrage curia to the diet franchise, similar to the Reichsrat reforms of 1896. Under the Moravian Pact, however, the lower three curiae were divided along national lines, with Czechs and Germans allotted a fixed number of seats. Voters declared themselves either Czech or German and were recorded in national registries. Each national group then elected only its allotted members, avoiding nationality as an electoral issue. Language regulations applied to the autonomous administrative bodies and school boards effectively divided administration in Moravia on national lines.

This agreement has sometimes been cited as evidence that Austria-Hungary's nationality problems were not insurmountable. Nevertheless, the Moravian Pact had serious flaws. It preserved the undemocratic electoral system that greatly overrepresented the aristocracies of birth and wealth, and slightly overrepresented the German element. By forcing voters to choose Czech or German identities, it sharpened divisions and placed national identity above all other interests. The specific situation of Moravia (a higher proportion of Czechs in the total population but a lower intensity of national strife) contributed to the success of compro-

mise there, and its repeated failure in Bohemia. In the final analysis, piecemeal compromise could probably never have resolved national conflicts, which were now the prism through which all issues were viewed, while a thoroughgoing restructuring of the empire would endanger its continued existence.¹⁸

Further franchise reform might loosen the logjam in Cisleithanian parliamentary life. The government threatened to extend the franchise in Hungary in 1902 in a quarrel over military recruits, but the idea also reinvanized the Cisleithanian struggle.¹⁹ The Russian Revolution of 1905 added further impetus to demonstrations in Bohemia culminating in a massive protest in Prague on November 5, 1905. A general strike that brought out 300,000 Viennese workers and nearly 100,000 in Prague reinforced Francis Joseph's order to the government to introduce legislation, finally passed in the Reichsrat on January 26, 1907.²⁰ A new chamber consisting of 516 members elected under general, equal, direct, and secret ballot by all males over twenty-four years of age replaced the old House of Delegates. The Bohemian crownlands received 194 seats—130 for Bohemia, 49 for Moravia, and 15 for Silesia—of which 108 were in Czech-majority districts.²¹ The land diets retained their undemocratic franchise, however, while without ministerial responsibility to the Reichsrat, the parliament did not genuinely govern Cisleithania.

Some had hoped that giving the vote to peasants and workers would dampen the nationalist quarrels that kept parliament from functioning smoothly, but the two elections under the new franchise, in 1907 and 1911, though they showed changing support for Czech and German parties in the Bohemian crownlands, did not produce that result (see Table 1). The Czech parties usually held together on national questions, with the Young Czechs, the Agrarians, and Catholic parties formally coordinating their policies. The Czechs also cooperated with other non-socialist Slav parties, notably with the South Slavs. Trading support for concessions produced little progress on either of the major Czech goals, the creation of the Czech university for Moravia and the further Czechization of the bureaucracy in the Bohemian crownlands. By 1913 the Czech parties were once more in opposition, the Agrarians and the National Socialists even reviving obstruction. Finally, in March 1914, the Reichsrat was adjourned, and when World War I began in the summer it had not yet been reconvened. It would not gather again until the penultimate year of the war. Elections to the Bohemian diet in 1908 confirmed Czech dominance, and the Bohemian Germans began permanent

TABLE 1
ELECTION RESULTS FOR CZECH AND
GERMAN PARTIES, 1907 AND 1911

	Popular vote %, 1907	Mandates, 1907	Popular vote %, 1911	Mandates, 1911
<i>Czech parties</i>				
Social Democrats	38.1	24	35.3	26
Agrarians	19.65	28	24.0	38
Young Czechs	11.1	18	9.1	18
Catholic parties	17.3	17	19.7	7
National Socialists	7.15	9	7.0	16
Other parties	6.7	11	4.9	3
<i>German parties</i>				
Social Democrats	38.25	21	37.7	10
Agrarians	16.55	19	16.9	22
Progressives	10.05	14	8.6	12
People's Party	9.1	13	5.5	9
German radicals	11.25	12	14.05	22
Christian Socialists	10.3	1	9.3	1
Other parties	4.5	3	7.95	7

SOURCE: Otto Urban, *České a slovenské dějiny do roku 1918*, 2d ed. (Prague: Aleš Skřivan ml., 2000), pp. 240–41.

obstruction in the diet. The continued paralysis of the Bohemian diet led the government to promulgate the St. Anne's Patents (July 26, 1913). They dissolved the diet until elections at a more "convenient" time, and replaced the land committee with an appointed administrative commission.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE

By the turn of the century, Czechs and Germans stood on effectively the same social and cultural level, and the Bohemian crownlands were one of the most socially and economically developed regions of Austria-Hungary. Economic development underpinned the increasingly pluralistic political life of the crownlands. One barometer of this connection between economic and social change and politics is the fact that the Bohemian crownlands, together with Upper and Lower Austria

and the coal and iron regions of Styria and Carinthia, gave the Social Democrats their most significant electoral base, while they also had the strongest radical nationalist parties.

Economic and Demographic Development

The ongoing spread of the industrial economy meant that the agricultural share of the population in the Bohemian crownlands declined from nearly 55 percent in 1869 to just over 52 percent in 1900 and only 42.5 percent by 1910, while the industrial share (including small workshops as well as factories) rose from slightly more than 29 percent in 1869 to well over 33 percent in 1900 and 38.4 percent by 1910. Most factories were still small (only 2 percent of them employed more than twenty workers), but the large factories employed nearly half of all industrial workers. Overall, the Bohemian crownlands had by some measures surpassed France and were gaining on Germany, though they still lagged far behind Great Britain.²²

Infrastructure in the Bohemian crownlands kept pace with the growth of the industrial and agroindustrial sectors of the economy. The railroad network was completed and supplemented by local and connecting lines, and new forms of urban and suburban transportation grew along with the cities and metropolitan areas. Electric lighting spread rapidly, until by 1914 the Bohemian crownlands hummed to the activity of 290 generating plants, supplying about 1,500 communities with 3.8 million inhabitants, roughly equivalent to one-third of the land area. The telephone had joined the telegraph, with the first local exchanges in Prague in 1882, followed rapidly by Brno, Liberec, and Plzeň. By 1914 there were around 200 telephone exchanges in the Bohemian crownlands, with 35,000 subscribers. Transportation reflected the dawn of the automobile era: by 1911 there were over 2,000 automobiles and nearly 4,000 motorcycles registered in the Bohemian crownlands, and the first official traffic regulations were issued in 1905.²³

In spite of growing emigration, the population increased from 8.7 million to 10.1 million between 1890 and 1910 (nearly half a million inhabitants had emigrated). Lower Austria, especially Vienna, attracted most emigrants, though overseas destinations including the United States accepted a rising share. Bohemian and Moravian cities absorbed almost all the population increase. Typical small towns of up to 10,000 people showed lively growth, but the greatest expansion took place in

the large urban centers. Prague by 1910 had already more than 600,000 in its metropolitan area; Brno had grown to over 200,000. Other large urban centers included Ostrava with 167,000 and Plzeň with 109,000 inhabitants.²⁴

The balance between Czechs and Germans remained stable, with Bohemia just over 60 percent Czech, Moravia over 70 percent Czech, and Silesia only 24 percent. The location of the language frontier still did not shift greatly overall, but this stability did not dampen the mutual Czech and German nationalist propaganda conflict that had emerged in the 1880s.²⁵ Dramatic local changes took place in some sensitive spots, such as Prague, where by 1900 the city was overwhelmingly Czech with a German minority of little more than 7 percent. Some industrial areas near the linguistic frontier also saw major changes, such as Most and Duchcov (Dux), where a Czech minority of less than 10 percent in 1880 had grown to over one-quarter by World War I. In Moravia, Uherské Hradiště, where Czechs leaped from less than half to more than 80 percent of the population, and Kroměříž, where the Czech proportion went from three-quarters to 90 percent, were the most dramatic cases. Jihlava, Mikulov (Nikolsburg), Šumperk (Schönberg), and Znojmo preserved their ancient German character and greater than fourth-fifths German majorities; the two largest Moravian cities, Brno and Olomouc, were still two-thirds German in 1900. In Moravská Ostrava (Mährisch Ostrau), in fact, Czechs actually declined from 76 percent of the population in 1880 to slightly more than 50 percent in 1910. Opava in Silesia remained more than 90 percent German.²⁶

Cultural Trends

Turn-of-the-century nationalist tensions arose in part out of feelings of being threatened by uncontrollable change, especially among German-speakers. The completion of the process of social development and differentiation among the Czech-speaking population that began in earlier decades reinforced these feelings. At every social level there were now self-consciously and even assertively Czech elements, who half a century earlier would have naturally assimilated to German culture. The further expansion of education in the Bohemian crownlands since the mid-nineteenth century played a vital role in this development of Czech society.²⁷

Elementary schools, and the proportion of Czech schools among the

total, had steadily increased throughout the second half of the century though they still did not quite reach the proportion of the Czech population. Statistics on literacy rates confirm their significance: in 1900 the percentage of illiterates over six years old was 4.26 among the Czechs and 6.83 among the Germans.²⁸ Czech classical and practical gymnasia and other technical secondary schools built on these achievements, and their growth was one of the successes of practical politics. By 1912 the proportion of Czech secondary schools corresponded to the proportion of Czechs in the total population. The Czech university in Prague capped this system after 1882. The Czech university was a unique and central part of Czech culture, while in contrast, the German university in Prague was one of nearly forty such institutions in German-speaking Europe. The Czech university was twice its sister institution's size in 1909, and rivaled it in reputation.

The development of education, the rise of Czech nationalism, and growing Czech-German tension affected the Jews in the Bohemian crownlands. Since German liberalism carried the torch of Jewish emancipation and civic equality, until the later nineteenth century most of the Jewish commercial and intellectual strata supported German liberalism and assimilated into German culture, without entirely losing Jewish identity. As demagogues like Schönerer made political anti-Semitism a powerful weapon against liberalism, the Jews' identification with German liberalism bound them to a declining force. At the same time both Old and Young Czech national liberals equated Jews with Germans, while the Czech radicals, especially the National Socialists under Klofáč, reached for the same anti-Semitic weapons used by Schönerer. Czech clericals expressed a more conservative and traditional anti-Semitism.

The trial in September 1899 of a Jewish youth, Leopold Hilsner, for the ritual murder of a Czech girl brought these hostilities into the open. The nationalist and clerical press unleashed a virulent anti-Jewish tirade not only against the unfortunate defendant but against anyone who spoke up for him. Masaryk set himself against this stream, publishing a brochure demanding a revision of the original guilty verdict. The social democratic, student, and realist press lined up behind Masaryk, but he was bitterly attacked in the rest of the Czech press and at the university. The supreme court overturned the verdict, but a retrial still found Hilsner guilty, though Francis Joseph commuted his death sentence to life imprisonment. For Masaryk, this case (like the manuscripts affair in the 1880s) was an unpopular cause that he took up on principle, arguing

that the national movement had a moral and ethical dimension as well as a practical and political one.²⁹

The tensions in the coexistence of Germans, Jews, and Czechs in the Bohemian lands at the turn of the century, especially in Prague, created a cultural milieu that produced many significant writers. Among those whose works helped define the idea of “Central European literature” for the twentieth century, pride of place must go to Franz Kafka. His close friend Max Brod, talented in his own right, also deserves credit for saving Kafka’s work for us. Gustav Meyrink, Egon Erwin Kisch, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Franz Werfel also contributed to shaping and recording Prague’s cultural scene.³⁰ Since these writers, dramatists, critics, poets, and scholars wrote in German, their names were widely known in Europe, and they belonged to the German and German-Jewish cultural world of Prague and Vienna. Their Czech contemporaries produced works of a similar literary standard, though less well known abroad. By the 1890s, Czech literary life was no longer organized around the rivalries between the *lumírovci* and *ruchovci*. In 1895, a loose association of younger writers and critics published a manifesto announcing the arrival of Czech modernism.³¹ The Czech Modernists denounced the artistic and political attitudes of their day and called for complete liberty, including liberty in artistic expression. Their insistence on the individuality of artistic vision was reflected in the lack of a single, dominant literary trend during a period in which older styles of romanticism and realism coexisted with neoromanticism, symbolism, naturalism, expressionism, and decadence.

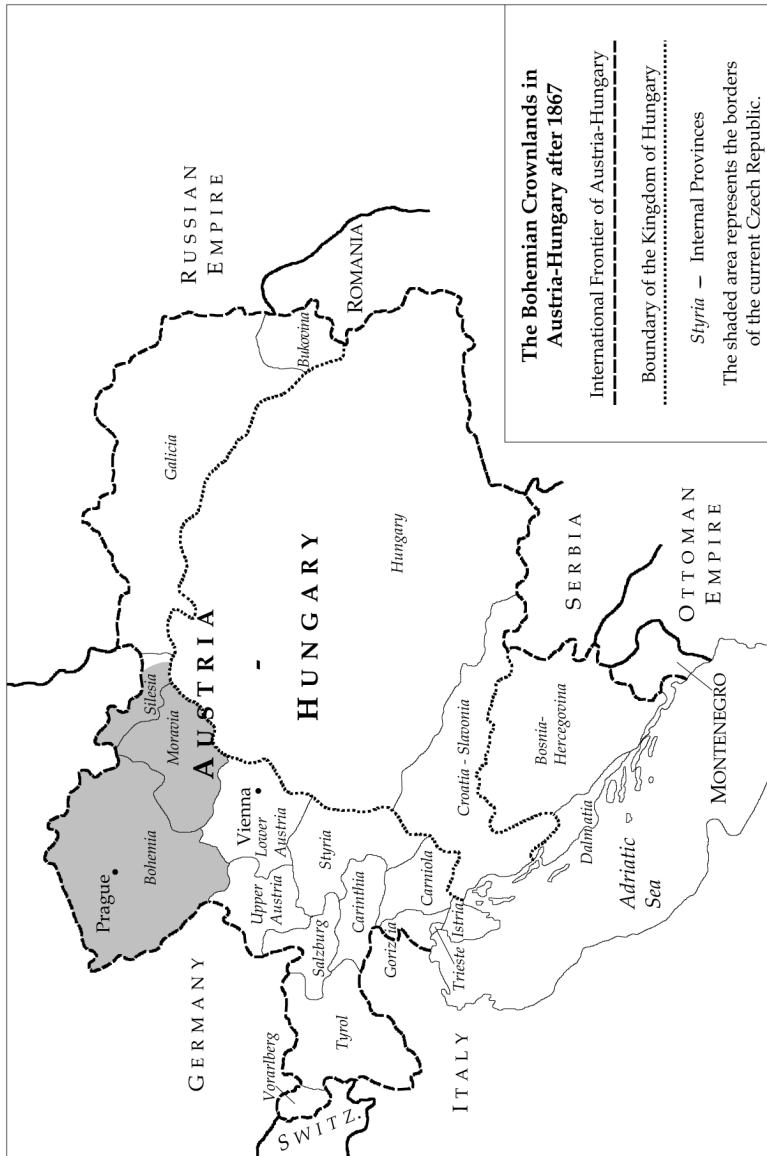
Many writers engaged in social and political issues, while others expressed their rejection of bourgeois philistinism in the lively cabarets and bars of Prague’s “Bohemian” underworld. Probably the best-known denizen of Prague’s “Bohemia” is Jaroslav Hašek, whose fame, if not fortune, was sealed by the postwar publication of the *Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk*. Among prose writers the genuine heavyweights, at least in popularity, were the historical novelists, especially Alois Jirásek, whose monumental works expressed his generation’s historical consciousness. Jirásek’s friend Mikoláš Aleš brought his characters to life vividly. Aleš found scope for his talents, generally unrecognized by formal artistic circles, in murals and mosaics decorating new public buildings in such places as Písek, Plzeň, and Prague.

These buildings were part of a prodigious boom in construction accompanying the growth of cities and the maturation of middle-class so-

ciety. Entirely new city quarters sprang up, and town councils undertook extensive reconstructions of historical town centers, including Prague's major urban renewal between 1893 and 1908. Modern cities demanded new public works, not only the theaters, museums, schools, and galleries of cultural life, but the railway stations, administrative buildings, and even water towers and sewage systems of the everyday. New apartment blocks established better living conditions, not only for the middle classes but even for at least parts of the working class. Historicist styles predominated, with Czechs favoring neo-Renaissance (the National Theater and National Museum), although classicism (Prague's German theater, today the State Opera) and neo-Gothic were also popular. The ambitious program to finish St. Vitus's cathedral in Prague, ultimately completed only in 1929, was not the only neo-Gothic project on church or other buildings. By the turn of the century Art Nouveau or Secessionist style predominated, exemplified by such structures as the main railway station in Prague and the Municipal House erected next to the Powder Tower on the edge of Prague's Old Town.

Those who cared to could follow debates about art in a wide range of serious and intellectually demanding journals. An outstanding achievement both of Czech publishing and Czech intellectual life was the encyclopedia published by Jan Otto, *Ottův slovník naučný* (28 volumes, 1888–1909).³² Newspapers spread at all levels. Typically, daily newspapers were linked with a political party, and journalists competing for circulation often expressed themselves much more radically than parliamentary deputies. Beside the nonofficial Young Czech *Národní listy*, Herben's *Čas* and the Social Democratic Party's *Právo lidu* (The People's Right) also upheld high standards. The National Socialist newspaper *České slovo* (Czech Word) provided many a fiery editorial on political, social, and cultural issues. Of course many people limited their reading to calendars, entertaining supplements, lurid pulp fiction, romantic novels available in installments at low cost, and other forms of mass writing.

The Jubilee Exhibition of 1891 perhaps catches the atmosphere at the close of the nineteenth century most vividly.³³ Honoring the centenary of the exhibition that accompanied Leopold II's coronation in 1791, it reflected the confidence in technological progress and the pride in productivity and development typical of the successful Czech businessmen and industrialists who were involved in organizing it. When agitation over the *punktače* led the German-Bohemians to withdraw os-



Map 4

tentatively from participating, the Czechs went ahead and organized the exhibition anyway, turning it into a Czech national manifestation. It proved to be a tremendous success, demonstrating in public the achievements of the Czech nation and giving weight to its claims for political, cultural, and economic recognition.

WORLD WAR I (1914–1918)

On July 29, 1914, subscribers to *Národní listy* could read with varied emotions Francis Joseph's declaration that though "it was my most fervent wish that I could consecrate to the works of peace the years that may still be granted to me by God's grace, . . . the machinations of an opponent filled with hatred have forced me, in order to defend the honor of my state, to protect the esteem and power it enjoys, and to secure its possessions, to take up the sword after long years of peace."³⁴ After years of mounting tension, Austria-Hungary had declared war on Serbia. That declaration set in motion forces that soon had every major power in Europe involved in a war that would bring down in ruins the monarchy whose honor it had been started to protect.

The Czechs and Austro-Hungarian Foreign Policy

The Habsburg monarchy's road to Sarajevo followed basic signposts that were established by the wars against Italy in 1859 and Prussia in 1866. Thereafter it had little choice but to concentrate its interests, and stake its reputation as a Great Power, on the Balkans. Here it came into conflict with Russia, unfortunately for Austria-Hungary a genuine power, whatever its weaknesses. Since the 1870s, Austria-Hungary pursued three basic methods of dealing with Russia: cooperating in a genuine entente, limiting Russia's freedom of maneuver by linking potential Russian clients to itself, or deterring Russia with the support of another major European power.³⁵

Austria-Hungary had defended its interests through the first method for most of the nineteenth century, most recently (1897–1908) by a direct understanding with Russia. The annexation crisis over Bosnia in 1908 ended this entente, and the second method faltered after the Serbian change of dynasty in 1903. Hungary resisted lowering agricultural tariffs for potential clients, while Russia sponsored a league of Balkan

states. That left the method of finding another power to support the Habsburg position, but by now the list of possible supporters was perilously short. France feared Germany, welcomed entente with Russia, and accepted its influence in the Balkans. Britain was also concerned over Germany, and had just resolved its colonial rivalries with Russia in 1907. Italy, an Austrian ally since 1882, had its own aims on Ottoman territory in North Africa and Albania. Only Germany remained as a potential Great Power supporter. Yet German support was not a foregone conclusion, nor an unmixed blessing. Since the 1890s Germany had asserted its interests without taking account of Austria-Hungary's position. Austria-Hungary was the weaker power, who offered advantages only if Germany needed support. That was the case in 1908 and again in 1914, but Germany threatened to be such a dominant partner that Austria-Hungary would cease to exist as an independent Great Power, win or lose.

The Czechs remained frustrated that, in spite of their political, social, and economic progress since the 1860s, they had no influence on Austria-Hungary's foreign policy. Of course, parliament did not control foreign policy, as the fall of the German liberals after 1879 showed. The delegations, however, did debate the funding for the ministry of foreign affairs, and there Kramář, Masaryk, and later Klobučák, expressed a Czech view of Austria-Hungary's foreign policy. The major Czech parties realized that Austria could not ignore Germany, but they argued that overreliance on Germany was against Austria-Hungary's interests and a threat to its non-German peoples, and pleaded for closer ties with France and Russia.

Masaryk emerged as a leading supporter of the South Slavs when, in a Reichsrat speech in May 1909, he criticized the Zagreb treason trial.³⁶ In the related libel suit by Serb and Croat politicians in December 1909, Masaryk demonstrated that key documents in the case were forgeries emanating directly from the Foreign Ministry. This embarrassment and Masaryk's continued criticism of the monarchy's Balkan policy increased Czech sympathy for the South Slavs.³⁷ Masaryk had already forged personal links with leading Serb and Croat intellectuals at the Czech university in Prague, where he became a full professor in 1897.³⁸ Similar ties linked Masaryk with Slovak students. Several of them established a journal, *Hlas* (The Voice), where they advocated cooperation with the Czechs. The 1895 Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague included displays devoted to the Slovaks, and stimulated the creation of

the Czechoslovak Union in 1896. It sent books to Slovakia, supported Slovak students in Prague, and encouraged Czech investment there. It also published a collection of readings (1911) and a revue, *Naše Slovensko* (Our Slovakia, 1907–10). The frontier between Cisleithania and Hungary still limited Czech and Slovak cooperation, but these connections provided some foundation on which cooperation during World War I could build.³⁹

Kramář supported Neo-Slavism, which flourished between 1908 and 1913, and reflected his views in its fundamentally pro-Russian outlook.⁴⁰ Two Slav congresses, modeled on the meeting of 1848, were held in Prague in 1908 and in Sofia in 1910. The aim of the Neo-Slav movement was a new foreign policy agreement with Russia similar to the defunct Three Emperors' League. In the atmosphere of Balkan competition after the Bosnian annexation of 1908, this goal proved totally unrealistic. The Balkan Wars of 1912–13 touched off a sympathetic reaction among many Czechs, who cheered as the Balkan Slavs drove the Turks out of Europe, and looked with hostility at Austria-Hungary's efforts to limit Serbia's gains.

Thus by the time the heir-apparent, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, went to Bosnia in June 1914, Czech attitudes to Austria-Hungary's foreign policy were at odds with its direction. Neither the future emperor's personality nor his probable policies generated Czech enthusiasm. He was a notorious clerical and ardent militarist; he was married (against the emperor's wishes) to a Bohemian countess with Slavic ancestry, but his political views were centralist and sympathetic to the Germans; he toyed with constitutional reform, but Trialism—the idea of replacing dualism with a three-way structure including a South Slav unit—offered the Czechs nothing, and was clearly intended to break the Magyar position in Hungary, not benefit the Slavs.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the assassination of the Archduke and his wife in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, was a great shock.

During the four weeks between the assassination and the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war, the clouds apparently receded, only to gather rapidly again with the presentation of an ultimatum to Serbia. A complete account of the origins of World War I here would be superfluous, but certain features bear repeating. Austria-Hungary sought a war with Serbia, believing that they must settle accounts sooner or later. It sought and received Germany's support, in spite of the knowledge of Russia's commitment to Serbia, and of the likelihood that both France

and Great Britain would be drawn into the conflict. The war had myriad causes, and “war guilt” can be spread widely, but in the final analysis World War I began when and where Austria-Hungary chose. Most people who lived through it looked back on the war as a watershed separating one era from another. At the time, nearly everyone had only vague or erroneous ideas of what modern war would be like. The next four years would provide a cruel enlightenment.

The First Years of War, 1914–1916

The war began in an upsurge of patriotic fervor that was cooled only by the first baptism of fire. In Austria-Hungary the Croats, Germans, and Magyars evinced the same kinds of war excitement as did the French, British, and Germans. Among Austria-Hungary’s Serbs, Ruthenes, and Czechs, however, the situation was different.⁴² Czech soldiers reported to their units, but neither they nor the Czech public exhibited exceptional enthusiasm. The sullen bewilderment of many was captured by a verse reportedly carried on a banner by some Czech soldiers on their way to the front: “Červený šátečku, kolem se toč, pudeme na Rusa, nevíme proč” (Red-colored handkerchief, wave through the sky, we fight the Russians, though we don’t know why).⁴³

The immediate situation provided little in the way of a convincing “why.” German propaganda about the struggle with Slavdom would hardly whip up Czech enthusiasm. The Reichsrat had been prorogued in March and was simply left in adjournment. The government ruled through the bureaucracy, and in areas near the front direct military administration took over. Klofáč, the most outspoken antimilitarist Czech politician, was arrested in September 1914, and political newspapers were suspended or censored. Czech political parties were reduced to silence or to consulting among themselves about what to do.

Russia’s offensive in August 1914 stirred up some Czech pro-Russian sympathies as it pushed into Galicia. In mid-September the Russian Supreme Command issued a manifesto to the peoples of Austria-Hungary with vague promises of freedom and justice. Copies or imitations with more concrete promises of Czech independence circulated among the people. The Czech front-line soldiers showed signs of wavering loyalty, especially early in the war. After scattered cases of Czech desertion, the 28th Prague Infantry Regiment surrendered almost to a man in the Carpathians on April 3, 1915. The 36th Mladá Boleslav

Infantry Regiment followed its example a month later, and both regiments were dissolved as a sign of their "disgrace."⁴⁴

The Russian steamroller, however, faltered and the Galician front stabilized. A counteroffensive by the Central Powers in May 1915 accompanied a further tightening of domestic controls. The governor of Bohemia, Thun, had been forced to retire in March because the General Staff considered him too pro-Czech. In May, Kramář and Rašín were arrested along with the head of the Prague Sokol, Josef Scheiner. The Sokol was disbanded in November 1915. Other sources of trouble such as the long-planned anniversary of Hus's martyrdom in 1915 were quashed. The names of the executed leaders of the Bohemian Estates were removed from Prague's Old Town Hall, textbooks were rewritten, books removed from the libraries, even pictures on postcards, playing cards, and matchboxes were censored.⁴⁵ Tried between December 1915 and July 1916, Kramář and Rašín were convicted of treason and sentenced to death, though they were not executed for the time being.

Austria-Hungary showed more serious signs of economic trouble sooner than the Western powers or even its German ally. Fixed prices failed to stop inflation, and the authorities introduced food rationing by the spring of 1915. The coupon rationing system was extended to include most articles of consumption, but supply problems meant that often there was simply no food in the shops. Mobilization disrupted the agricultural labor force, and the harvests of 1915 and 1916 were much worse than in 1914. On top of that, the Hungarian government, burdened with supplying the army, released to Cisleithania only what it could spare, and that at high prices. Though there were muted protests as early as April 1915, the people generally suffered and grumbled, but did not yet take action.

By 1915 the Czech political parties began to shake themselves out of their lethargy. Their policy of "activism" worked within Austria-Hungary for specific Czech interests in the traditions of the nineteenth century. It also countered the wartime assertion of a "German" character for Cisleithania. On November 19, 1916, the Czech members of the last prewar Reichsrat created the Czech Union, and most Czech political parties formed a National Committee. Thus when Francis Joseph died two days later, the Czech political parties had agreed on a common approach and established common organs.

Several Czech political figures chose to go into exile, where they organized a movement aimed at destroying Austria-Hungary. Though

not the first, Masaryk proved by far the most significant. Masaryk went abroad during the winter of 1914–15 to try to influence Entente policy toward Austria-Hungary while maintaining contact with the Czech lands through a secret group of collaborators known as the *Maffie*. In Geneva on July 6, 1915 (the anniversary of Hus's martyrdom), he called for the destruction of Austria-Hungary and the creation of an independent Czech state. Masaryk tried to build support for his movement among Czech and Slovak emigrants, but distance and rivalries divided them, especially the Russian communities and those in France, Great Britain, and the United States.

A pro-Russian orientation initially flourished, though Masaryk opposed a Russian-ruled Bohemian state. In turn, the Tsarist authorities looked on him with suspicion.⁴⁶ In Russia, formal permission to organize Czech military units (the Czech *Družina*) came at the beginning of August 1914, but they were kept small and used mostly for intelligence. Czech and Slovak émigré organizations in Russia united in a formal umbrella organization only in March 1915. With Kramář and Rašín under arrest, no other prominent Russophile politician was likely to go abroad, and after his Geneva speech Masaryk began to gain recognition as a Czech spokesman.

In September 1915, Edvard Beneš joined Masaryk in Paris, where Milan Rastislav Štefánik, a Slovak serving in the French air force, added his contacts with French leaders to the cause. Together they coordinated the various strands of the Czech and Slovak movement abroad. One success came in Cleveland on October 22, 1915, when American Czech and Slovak groups adopted a declaration promising to cooperate. On November 14 Masaryk announced the creation of a Czech Committee Abroad. In February 1916 it became the Czechoslovak National Council, with Masaryk as chairman, Josef Dürich and Štefánik vice-chairmen, and Beneš in charge of its secretariat in Paris.⁴⁷ In the summer of 1916 trouble arose in Russia, where Dürich had gone to coordinate activity. Instead, in January 1917 Dürich became chairman of a Russophile and pro-Tsarist Czechoslovak National Council in Russia. When the Russian monarchy collapsed a few weeks later, however, he lost all influence.

Francis Joseph's death in November 1916 brought his grand-nephew Charles to the throne. Charles and his newly appointed Foreign Minister, Count Ottokar Czernin, promised to seek peace, but they had to coordinate their efforts with their allies. American president Wood-

row Wilson intervened on December 20, asking all warring powers to state their aims. A formal Entente response dated January 10, 1917, specifically listed “the liberation of the Italians, Slavs, Romanians, and Czechoslovaks” from foreign rule as one of the Entente’s war aims.⁴⁸ In response, Czernin orchestrated declarations of loyalty from Austria-Hungary’s political parties. On January 31, 1917, the Czech Union insisted that “the Czech nation sees its future and the conditions for its development now, as always in the past and in the future, only under the Habsburg scepter.”⁴⁹ This declaration was a setback to the Czechoslovak National Council’s claim to represent its fellow countrymen at home. Within the next few months, however, two events fundamentally altered the situation: the Russian Revolution and the U.S. entry into the war.

*The Final Phase of the War and the
Collapse of Austria-Hungary, 1917–1918*

The fall of the Tsar and the creation of a provisional government in Petrograd dismayed Kramář and Rašín (who heard the news while still in prison), but encouraged Masaryk. He could now go to Russia, where he arrived in May, as the first provisional government was crumbling. Masaryk’s objective was to establish an independent Czechoslovak army in Russia. The Tsarist regime had finally expanded the Czech *Družina* to battalion size by recruiting prisoners of war. After the Czechoslovak units distinguished themselves during the battle at Zborov on July 2, 1917, the Russian high command and Kerensky’s government recognized Masaryk’s Czechoslovak National Council as the political authority over the Czechoslovak army units in Russia. In August 1917, Beneš won permission to establish a legion in France, followed in December by recognition of Czechoslovak political authority over the troops. The Italians began using Czech and Slovak prisoners of war in labor battalions in December 1917, but efforts to create independent military units there bore fruit only in April 1918.

The Russian revolution increased Austrian fears, as the grumbling of the previous year changed into open protests about the worsening food supply situation.⁵⁰ The Austrian government under Count Heinrich Clam-Martinic convened the Reichsrat (based on the 1911 elections) for May 30, 1917. On May 17 a group of 222 writers and scholars published a manifesto calling on the deputies resuming their Reichsrat seats

“to champion Czech rights and Czech demands most decisively and most selflessly, for now the Czech fate will be decided for entire centuries!” If they could not, they should resign.⁵¹ At the Reichsrat’s opening session, František Staněk read out a declaration on behalf of the Czech Union denouncing dualism and demanding, based on the right to national self-determination, “the joining together of all branches of the Czechoslovak nation in a democratic Czech state, including also the Slovak branch of the Czechoslovak nation, living in a coherent unit with the historic Czech homeland.” Though not an open rejection of the common state, the call for union with the Slovaks—including thanks to Vávro Šrobár, a Hlasist who was in Prague to consult with the Czech Union—implied the end of Dualism and the breakup of the monarchy.⁵²

Kramář, Rašín, and Klofáč were released under an amnesty in July 1917, speeding up a Czech political reorganization. The Social Democrats replaced the “activist” Šmeral with Gustav Habrman in September 1917. When they could not agree on a merger with the Social Democrats, Klofáč reorganized the national socialists as the Czechoslovak Socialist Party on April 1, 1918. The agrarians changed policies but kept Švehla, while the Catholic parties held the activist line until summer. Kramář and Rašín reassumed leadership of the Young Czechs, and on February 9, 1918, merged with other right-of-center groups into the Czech State Right Democracy. At the beginning of March the Old Czechs joined the new party.

Both exiled and domestic politicians realized that the Entente powers and the United States still hoped for a separate peace with Austria-Hungary. From the time of Charles’s initial peace feelers in March 1917 until his definitive failure in April 1918, the Entente powers would not commit themselves to Masaryk or his Yugoslav colleagues. Wilson delayed declaring war on Austria-Hungary until December 7, 1917, and even in his famous Fourteen Points speech of January 8, 1918, only called for “autonomy” for the peoples of the monarchy. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George also reassured Austria-Hungary in January that its destruction was not one of the British war aims. The Sixtus Affair finally brought this hesitation to an end. When Czernin made a slighting public reference on April 2, 1918, to French offers of a separate peace, the French premier Georges Clemenceau published a letter from Charles to his brother-in-law, Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma, in which he promised to support France’s “just claims” in Alsace-Lorraine. Charles denounced the letter as a forgery, but Czernin resigned on

April 14, and on May 12 the Habsburg emperor and his generals made a humiliating pilgrimage to German headquarters, to reaffirm their loyalty in terms that left them effectively under German control.⁵³

The Bolshevik revolution in November added to the complications facing all sides. The Bolsheviks immediately issued a decree on peace, and offered to negotiate with other nations on the basis of “no annexations, no indemnities.” Instead, after an armistice on December 5, 1917, the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk clearly constituted an old-fashioned dictated peace. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1918, enabled Germany to concentrate forces in the West for what it hoped would be a decisive offensive. The prospect kept Austria-Hungary’s leaders from risking the serious concessions required for a separate peace from the Allies, until the Sixtus Affair made it impossible to extricate themselves from their ally’s embrace.

In April 1918 Italy held a “Congress of Oppressed Nationalities” in Rome. There, representatives of the Czechs and Slovaks, together with the South Slavs, raised demands for self-determination. Under the impact of the Sixtus Affair and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the United States shifted its position. Secretary of State Robert Lansing expressed on May 29, 1918, the U.S. government’s “earnest sympathy” with the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav desire for freedom. The British, French, and Italian prime ministers associated themselves with his declaration on June 3. By then Masaryk was in the United States, where he scored a diplomatic success when he and the American Czech and Slovak organizations signed an agreement at Pittsburgh on May 30, promising to work for a common state with federal institutions and a separate Slovak diet.⁵⁴

The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia constituted a disciplined, well-armed, pro-Entente force of tens of thousands.⁵⁵ Hopes of reconstituting an Eastern Front died hard, and strategists worried that war matériel sent to Russia might fall into German hands, raising the strategic value of the Czechoslovak movement. Masaryk insisted that the Legion should stay out of Russia’s internal quarrels, and negotiated to get it to the Western Front, where it could fight the Central Powers. During evacuation on the Trans-Siberian railroad to Vladivostok, friction with local authorities led to conflict. Beginning with an incident at Cheliabinsk on May 14, 1918, the Czechoslovak forces quickly occupied the entire Trans-Siberian railway, precipitating a new stage in the Russian civil war and encouraging an Allied intervention. The Czechoslovak “Anabasis”

in Siberia also caught the public imagination in the Entente. On June 30, 1918, the French government recognized the Czechoslovak National Council as an authorized representative of the Czechoslovak people, and the British did the same on August 3. The United States in its note of September 3 recognized the Czechoslovak National Council as “a *de facto* belligerent government,” entitled to “direct the military and political affairs of the Czecho-Slovaks.”⁵⁶

On January 6, 1918, Czech Reichsrat and diet deputies issued a declaration demanding independence for the nation “in its own state, sovereign, with complete rights, democratic, socially just, and built on the equality of all its citizens within the frontiers of its historic lands and seat and that of its Slovak branch.”⁵⁷ The “Epiphany Declaration” was the strongest domestic statement of support for Masaryk’s policies yet. Jirásek’s “National Oath” read aloud to a meeting at Prague’s Municipal House on April 13, 1918, also supported the exiles. On July 13 the National Committee, which had been dormant since March, was reconstituted. All Czech parties participated in proportion to their vote in the 1911 elections, with Kramář as chairman, Švehla and Klofáč vice-chairmen, and František Soukup secretary. On September 6 the two socialist parties created a Socialist Council to coordinate the Left.

By the late summer of 1918, the Central Powers could no longer fight. Both Germany and Austria-Hungary addressed separate notes to Wilson on October 4 requesting an armistice on the basis of the Fourteen Points. On October 16, Emperor Charles published a manifesto federalizing the Austrian half of the monarchy. Masaryk responded with a declaration of Czechoslovak independence, dated in Paris on October 18, 1918, but handed to the Allied governments on October 17. The Americans’ reply to the Austrian note on October 18 stated that only the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav movements could decide what Austrian actions were a satisfactory foundation for negotiations.

On October 21, 1918, the German-Austrians, basing themselves on the manifesto of October 16, formally withdrew from the Reichsrat and constituted themselves the provisional national assembly of independent German-Austria. On October 24, the Italians began their last offensive and Austrian resistance collapsed. Meanwhile, the domestic Czech leaders sent a delegation to Geneva, where on October 28, unaware of events in Prague, they held talks with Beneš.

On October 27 the Austrian authorities accepted Wilson’s conditions, and asked for an armistice. The news reached Prague by

10:00 A.M. on October 28. The interim leaders of the National Committee, Rašín, Jiří Stříbrný, Soukup, and Švehla, organized a meeting for that evening in the Municipal House. Fortuitously, Šrobár had just returned to Prague, so when the National Committee issued its first law, stating that “the independent Czechoslovak state has come into being,” a Slovak was present. Independently of events in Prague, on October 30 a meeting of Slovak leaders in Turčianský Svätý Martin created a Slovak National Council and asserted their right to self-determination as a branch of the “Czechoslovak nation.”⁵⁸

While the negotiators in Geneva were approving the exiles' actions abroad and creating a government, in Prague the local Austro-Hungarian military command was surrendering authority to the National Committee. On October 31 the Geneva talks agreed on a democratic Czechoslovak republic with Masaryk as president, Kramář as prime minister,



Crowds flood Prague's Wenceslas Square on October 28, 1918. (ČTK photo)

Beneš as foreign minister, and Štefánik as minister of war. The delegation returned to Prague on November 5, two days after the Austrians signed an armistice. On November 11 Emperor Charles announced his withdrawal from the affairs of his people, and the next day German-Austria was declared a republic and announced its annexation to Germany. On November 13 the National Committee adopted a provisional constitution creating a Revolutionary National Council, which elected Masaryk president and invested Kramář's new government on November 14. The four centuries of association between the Czech lands and the House of Habsburg were formally at an end.