

**MANFRIED RAUCHENSTEINER**

# **UNDER OBSERVATION**

**AUSTRIA SINCE 1918**





Translated from the German  
by Alex J. Kay and Anna Guettel-Bellert

Manfried Rauchensteiner

# UNDER OBSERVATION

*Austria since 1918*

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## Foreword

**O**tto Dix, one of the great painters and graphic artists of the twentieth century, lent me his eyes. His picture 'To Beauty', which provides the cover of this book with colour and expression, has been reduced to a detail. In the process, the painting is forced into a sort of straitjacket, which allows for a reinterpretation. It is the eyes that count, the stern look of a person whose attention, it appears, nothing can escape. It might be the case that the look also expresses something approaching disapproval. It is a self-portrait. The elegant couple in the background seem to be completely self-absorbed and evidently unaware that they are under observation. Only the present counts. That gives them a timeless quality. And it cannot be identified.

Like the painting, this book is also reduced to a detail. It deals with Austria, and it looks at events over a period of one hundred years. The deliberately stern gaze, seemingly external, is simultaneously a mirror image. The fact that narcissism also plays a role here corresponds to the subject. In the same year that Otto Dix painted 'To Beauty', 1922, Austria threatened to become ungovernable. It lurched between self-abandonment and visions of the future, and it was rescued with the help of the League of Nations. A conglomerate of historical entities, which first had to find a new commonality, was facing an uncertain future. It was no longer that which the Czech historian František Palacký had characterised it as in 1848, something indispensable, a European necessity, but instead a hard to define residue. Austria had gone from being indispensable to being in a quandary. But the country was under observation from day one. And the looks that Austria encountered were not always friendly. Concern, suspicion, pity, mistrust and greed were mixed with indifference, contentment and benevolence.

It was watched by the victorious powers of the First World War, the successor states to the Habsburg Monarchy and the League of Nations. But it was not only the others who watched. The internal gaze also reflected the full range of emotions that could be discerned among neighbours near and far. Austria was not a country in which great emphasis was placed on self-determination. And the will to assert itself emerged only at a late date. The awkwardness remained. Violence dominated. And in the eyes of many observers, contentment could be seen shining forth regarding the calm that descended

on Austria in 1938. 'Thank goodness, Austria is out of the way,' said one British politician. This was followed by the rueful realisation that the disappearance of one problem, Austria, had been swapped for new problems. In 1945, it was as though the reset button had been pressed. Much had changed. Austria was located between two blocs, liked to think of itself as a bridge and played a role in which it experienced a new form of oversight, more direct than anything that had gone before, and ultimately plunged into a time in which general contentment took hold. The country was over the worst. The awkwardness had suddenly become a stabilising factor. Admittedly, one thing did not change: every time something happened in Austria, the land was under observation. And even when nothing happened. Time and again, it was regarded as a problem zone, then as a special case, as a model pupil, and on multiple occasions as a naughty boy, on whom a sharp eye had to be kept.

An account of all that cannot be evenly spread out. Likewise, there can be no question of each event and every protagonist being described in all available details. Here and there, we must pause for a moment to make use of the parallelism and the flow of time for the narrative thread. We cannot always rush through the different time periods. One thing should be achieved, however: that the reader understands the history of a country that sometimes does not take itself seriously as important for the overall development of a continent and can admit that it is a stimulating history. It is no less interesting when one attempts to survey a long time period. In the process, some things will have to be brought to light that are already known and others that are unknown, but where the view over a long period of time also offers possibilities for comparison that invite us to stop and think: did not something similar once happen; are events or non-events so unusual that it is impossible to find a precedent? And time and again the question will arise: What would have happened if ...? – If, for example, Ignaz Seipel had acceded to the request of Bavarian authorities and again conferred Austrian citizenship on Adolf Hitler in 1924, if the Dollfuß assassin had missed, if the Allies had agreed in Moscow in 1943 to divide Austria, if the Soviets had reoccupied Austria in 1956, as Marshal Zhukov wished, or if Jörg Haider had not been killed in an accident in 2008? It is not a question of thinking the impossible but of thinking the possible. It is also an invitation to see that which is transient.

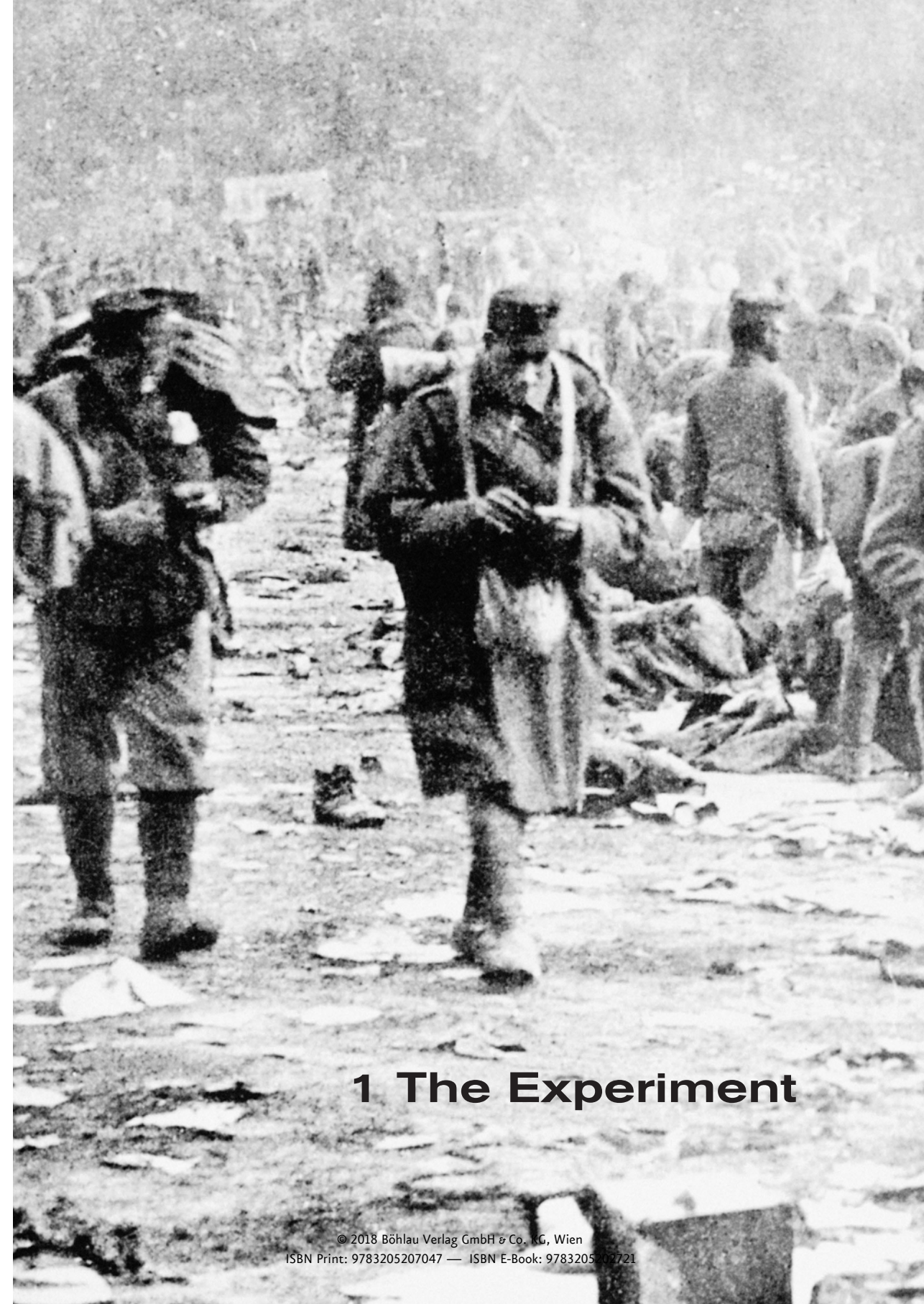
When taking a walk through history, one passes many sites. They present themselves with a never-ending willingness. One can take a break in the villa of Senator Giusti near Padua or in Saint-Germain, Geneva, Berlin, Berchtesgaden, Sopron/Ödenburg, Kragujevac, Stalingrad/Volgograd or Prague. Austrian history was written in London, Moscow, Paris and Washington, and has also left its mark there and created sites of remembrance. Ultimately, there is not a single place that would not hide a story, no monument, no cemetery, not even a field or a meadow that could not be linked to an event or a person.

It is frequently the case that stones and hallways divulge their stories only to those who live there and feel just as addressed by the ‘moss on the stones’ (Gerhard Fritsch), the glades and the furrows as those who allow themselves to reflect on monuments, statues or ‘Stolpersteine’ and like to make use of the narrative phrase ‘Once upon a time ...’.

No place exists of which it can be said that events took place there uniformly. And no cemetery exists in which those who one perceives to have been either the ‘good guys’ or the ‘bad guys’ do not lie side by side. Cemeteries, especially, are deeply democratic sites of remembrance, because to them applies most of all the interpretation offered by G. K. Chesterton of the tradition by which ‘the most obscure of all classes’ is given the vote – our ancestors (Chesterton, ‘The Ethics of Elfland’).

All of this is to be found in the history of a century. Towards the end, the narrative becomes slower, more tentative. Nothing will change regarding the awareness of being observed. No more than regarding the necessity to form an opinion ourselves. Nothing is yet concluded; it is in a state of flux. In the well-known stream of time.





# 1 The Experiment

- 1 The armistice signed in the villa of Senator Giusti del Giardino near Padua on 3 November 1918 ended Austria-Hungary's final war. More than 300,000 soldiers of the Imperial and Royal Army went into Italian captivity. Most of them were interned only for a short time. Some of the prisoners, however, remained in Italian camps until 1921. At that point, Austria (not including Burgenland) still counted around 20,000 prisoners of war and more than 22,000 missing persons. (Photo: Austrian State Archives / War Archives)

**T**he queues in front of shops became ever longer. In 1918, the fifth year of the war, the people of Austria-Hungary were going hungry. At irregular intervals, posters were put up in the larger cities by means of which the people were called upon to collect stinging nettle leaves for textile production, coffee extract for oil extraction or cockchafers as chicken and pig feed. On the exceptional occasion that there was coal, this was also announced, likewise the release of potatoes, flour and milk. Donations were requested for those blinded in the war, war invalids, military widows, orphans and dozens of other groups of people in need. Farmers established watch posts in order to prevent potatoes and turnips being stolen from the fields. The confidence still in evidence in December 1917 to the effect that the war would soon be over, was replaced in January by widespread disappointment. In some large cities and industrial centres of the Habsburg Monarchy, the war was boycotted. Then the people returned to work, briefly renewed their hope and were disappointed once more.

The distress stemmed not only from hunger, however. Most people not only had nothing left to eat, but also scarcely any hope or prospects. They did not know whether Austria-Hungary would continue to exist or whether it was approaching dissolution. The people often did not even know what they should hope for. The speech of American President Woodrow Wilson in Congress in Washington on 8 January 1918 had only made everything more difficult. In announcing his Fourteen Points, Wilson had named as Point Ten: 'The people of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be assured the freest opportunity to autonomous development.' Self-determination thereby became a special topic that was seized upon by all belligerents. The eleven nationalities of the Habsburg Monarchy were no exception. The question was merely: did this apply to all peoples?

Between 13 and 15 June 1918, the Austro-Hungarian troops lined up from the Dolomites to the Adriatic for their final offensive. The Allies knew about the timing of the attack and had no difficulty in repelling the oncoming armies. From late June, Austria-Hungary was unimportant as an adversary. Now it was no longer necessary to bring American troop formations to Italy. Instead, they were sent to France. Discipline was as yet still being maintained among the combat troops of the Imperial and Royal Army, but it deteriorated by the day. Aversion and the long-simmering, mutual hatred among the peoples of the Habsburg Monarchy, which arose with increasing regularity, gained ever more ground. In view of the dismal situation at the front and in the rear, Emperor Karl attempted at the last moment to find a solution that might ensure the survival of



his empire. The response of the Slovene Anton Korošec, 'Majesty, it is too late,' basically said it all.<sup>1</sup> The Emperor unilaterally took steps to bring about a peace. The Allies reacted merely with the observation that first Germany had to surrender; only then could Austria-Hungary's wishes be addressed. Another hope had been dashed.

## The Dissolution Order

One month later, on 16 October 1918, Emperor Karl issued a so-called 'People's Manifesto', according to which Austria-Hungary should continue to exist as a league of free nations.<sup>2</sup> The Hungarian government, however, managed to prevent the manifesto from also applying to the Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen. But even Hungary could not escape the unavoidable fragmentation of the Empire. Reactions to the manifesto demonstrated, however, like the words of the Slovene Korošec, that it had come too late. It was regarded as *carte blanche*, as a type of dissolution order permitting all the peoples of the Habsburg Monarchy to go their own way. And the enemy powers did everything to encourage the decline. On 24 October, the Italian army commenced the final offensive together with British and French troops. It was the anniversary of the great victory of Austro-Hungarian and German troops over the Italians a year earlier. A counteroffensive was out of the question. The front began to disintegrate after two days.<sup>3</sup> One of the last regular holidaymakers to travel to the north was Territorial Infantry Lieutenant Engelbert Dollfuß. He overnighted in Trento (Trient) in the same hotel as the armistice commission, which had been sent to South Tyrol as a precaution and had been waiting since early October to make contact with the Italians. An almost fateful encounter of past and future. Emperor Karl finally made the long-delayed resolution to request an armistice or a special peace, irrespective of Germany. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Gyula Andrássy, declared the alliance with Germany at an end. Austria-Hungary could not do anything else but act unilaterally. Now the time had come. The head of the Austro-Hungarian armistice commission in Trento, General Viktor von Weber, was instructed that he was empowered to conclude an armistice. He was allowed to accept all conditions, aside from those that the army's honour did not permit or that amounted to a complete disenfranchisement.

The Austrian commission was brought to the villa of Senator Giusti del Giardino near Padua, the guesthouse of the Italian Army Command. In the night of 1/2 November, the demands formulated by the Allied Supreme War Council in Paris were handed over. They amounted to an unconditional surrender and did not signal any willingness to compromise. The Habsburg Monarchy was to be crushed to the extent that it did not dissolve itself. There were admittedly some among the victorious powers who championed the retention of the Monarchy, but the Entente had done everything to accelerate

the dissolution and signalled to the Northern and Southern Slavs that they would be recognised as belligerents on the side of the Entente. Italy itself had in any case been in the Allied camp since 1915. Thus, all considerations for retaining a reduced Habsburg Monarchy at least as a rump state were more or less obsolete. And after the real union between Austria and Hungary had been dissolved on 30 October, nothing remained of the Empire but memories.

Half an hour before midnight on 2 November, Emperor Karl empowered General von Weber to conclude the armistice. At the same time, the monarch surrendered supreme command over his troops to Field Marshal Hermann Kövess von Kövesshaza. The armistice demanded:

1. Immediate cessation of hostilities at sea, on land and in the air.
2. Complete demobilisation of Austria-Hungary and the withdrawal of all troops.
3. Withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1914.
4. Freedom of movement for Allied troops on the entire territory of the Habsburg Monarchy.
5. Withdrawal of all German troops from Italy and the Balkan front within 15 days.
6. Immediate repatriation of all prisoners of war and internees.<sup>4</sup>

There were also provisions for the fleet, but it had already been transferred by Emperor Karl at the suggestion of the last Commander of the Fleet, Rear Admiral Miklós von Horthy, to the National Council in Zagreb (Agram) on 31 October. The Allies, therefore, had to agree among themselves what would happen to the fleet. Italy then created a *fait accompli* by sinking the flagship of the Imperial and Royal Navy, the *Viribus Unitis*, in the bay of Pula (Pola) with limpet mines. The dreadnought could not be allowed to fall into Southern Slav hands. And then there was a special inaccuracy in the armistice agreement: it repeatedly mentioned Austria-Hungary and its territory, but only the Italian front featured in the detailed agreements, though not Romania or Serbia, let alone Russia or Ukraine. For the latter, the peace treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest, concluded in March 1918, were regarded as applicable. Therefore, future developments in the east and the southeast were addressed least of all in the Villa Giusti.

The Imperial and Royal Army High Command ordered the Austro-Hungarian troops early on the morning of 3 November 1918 to cease hostilities, even before the armistice agreement had been signed. Whether this was premature or negligent is contested to this day. Over 300,000 Austro-Hungarian soldiers ended up in Italian captivity. On 3 November 1918, at 3 p.m., the armistice document was signed. Twenty-four hours later, the ceasefire took effect. The war lagged days behind political developments.

## The German Delegates

On 21 October, the German delegates of the Austrian Imperial Assembly (Reichsrat) had gathered in the Lower Austrian regional diet (Landtag) on Vienna's Herrengasse to discuss what would happen if the Habsburg Monarchy were really to disintegrate. By way of precaution, they had already been invited to this meeting on 17 October,<sup>5</sup> and they adhered to the provisions cited in the 'People's Manifesto'. 106 German nationalists from different parties, 65 Christian Socials and 38 Social Democrats, as well as one Free Socialist,<sup>6</sup> including delegates from Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, drew the consequences from the hopeless situation of the Empire and sought a minimum consensus. Earlier that same month, they had already made attempts to explore what options might be available after the approaching end to the war and the probable disintegration of the Monarchy. Representatives of both parties of the masses, the Christian Socials and the Social Democrats, had sketched out two scenarios: in the event of a dissolution of the Monarchy, a loose association of state might emerge, or instead an annexation of the German territories of the Habsburg Monarchy by Germany. The latter could by all means be interpreted as a threat. If the others – the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians, Italians, Southern Slavs – no longer wanted to maintain an alliance, then there would just have to be a Germany enlarged by the German territories of Austria-Hungary. The term 'German-Austria' (Deutschösterreich) was even already used.<sup>7</sup>

For the time being, the German delegates constituted on 21 October as the Provisional National Assembly. It was a step located somewhere between resignation, despair and hope. The chairman of the body, Viktor Waldner, began with the term of salutation 'Valued ethnic comrades' and described the purpose of the gathering. His speech and the contributions of the delegates were repeatedly interrupted by applause and calls of 'Heil', as the minutes of the session demonstrate. In fact, 'Heil' was the most common word of agreement. An executive committee was elected as the core of a future German-Austrian government. Other committees followed. The provisional state chancellor ought to have been the director of the library of the Imperial Assembly, Karl Renner, though it could not have been assumed that the Social Democrats would become the strongest political force. But they had a clear objective in view: the end of the Monarchy.<sup>8</sup> No one had a drift into isolation in mind, and the leader of the Austrian Social Democrats, delegate Viktor Adler, remarked: if the other states, the Romanian and the Slav, whom he congratulated on their independence, did not want to join Austria, then Austria would attach itself to the German Reich as a special federal state. This was proposed as a motion. The next session was scheduled for 30 October. In the nine days until then, Renner drafted a constitution, in which it still remained open what type of political system would be launched. It could be a monarchy or a republic, independent or part of a new whole.

The time had come on 30 October: the Provisional National Assembly adopted a resolution for the establishment of the state of German-Austria. The German delegates were the last ones to break with the Empire. They evidently feared that the peace would have its price and that most nationalities would blame the two dominant peoples of the Empire up to this time, the Germans of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Hungarians, for the war but also for the mistakes made under the governments of Emperor Franz Joseph I and Karl I. Attempts by Emperor Karl to share responsibility for the past and the future with representatives of the political parties had failed. Above all, the Social Democrat politicians strictly refused to assume government responsibility in an imperial cabinet. Karl Renner would admittedly have done this without further ado, but his party wanted to signalise a type of 'political innocence',<sup>9</sup> in order to make an attempt at a new start unburdened by the past. Thus, the pacifist and internationally-renowned expert on international law Heinrich Lammasch became the last Imperial Austrian prime minister. But he could only watch how an empire that had also been his was liquidated. The Council of State of German-Austria did everything to make it clear that it did not want to be associated with the past. Thus, its representatives consistently refused to contribute to the conclusion of an armistice. It had not been German-Austria's war, and therefore the 'factor' that had declared war should also be the one to end it. Emperor Karl could only respond by pointing out that he had also not been that factor, but he had to attempt to make the laying down of arms still appear like a sovereign act.

Germany wanted to recognise German-Austria. For the enemies of Austria-Hungary, this was an irrelevant procedure, because they were still at war with the Habsburg Monarchy and needed an adversary in order to be able to dictate a peace, and not a new creation.<sup>10</sup>

In order to avoid the necessity of having to elect a head of state – an 'anti-emperor', as it were – and because it was still impossible to predict whether and how Emperor Karl would seal the fate of the Monarchy, the Provisional National Assembly made do with a particularly cumbersome construction: three presidents were elected, or rather chosen, of which one would chair the National Assembly, another would be chairman of the Council of State and the third chairman of the Cabinet Council. The three had to alternate in their functions on a weekly basis. But it was only intended as a provisional measure, just as everything was provisional for the time being.

After the act to establish the state had been adopted, speeches were held in due form. Outside, on Herrengasse, the people were standing shoulder to shoulder. The majority cheered and shouted 'Heil'. Black-red-gold and red flags could be seen. There was some rioting. The Emperor was not mentioned.

A state of limbo existed. While a new statehood emerged and parallel institutions to the Imperial ministries appeared, the latter continued to work. At 7 Herrengasse in Vienna, the Imperial and Royal Prime Minister Heinrich Lammasch held office and, like

the Imperial-Royal ministries of the Austrian half of the Empire, which were spread over the Imperial capital and seat of royal residence, attempted to administer something that no longer existed. Only a few doors down, the German-Austrian Council of State carried out its activities. The three joint ministries of Austria-Hungary continued to exist, which considered themselves responsible for foreign affairs, war and finances of the Habsburg Monarchy and whose heads met on Ballhausplatz in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Not to forget the Imperial Assembly, which was housed in the parliament building on Ringstraße and whose officials – although it had been adjourned – sat in the offices that had once been assigned to them and into which the staff of the Provisional National Assembly of German-Austria now forced themselves.

The new Austrian statehood started with a mistake. The end of the war had been expected in spring 1919, not in November 1918. But that is not what happened. Emperor Karl had hoped that Austria-Hungary would retain some type of commonality, preferably in the form of a league of states – he was mistaken. The German delegates of the Austrian Imperial Assembly feared total chaos as soon as the old political system collapsed and sought advice and assistance one after another from the Imperial and Royal Army Command, the victorious powers and, above all, the leadership of the German Reich. They all said it was not their responsibility. The next and most fundamental mistake was that the German Austrians of the Habsburg Monarchy were under the illusion that their state would not be so small. This had been casually stated on 21 October and could be found nine days later in the (first) state constitution. The territories to which a German Austria laid claim were then counted: German Bohemia, German southern Bohemia (Bohemian Forest Region), German southern Moravia, the German territory around Nová Bystrice (Neubistritz), the Sudetenland and the German linguistic enclaves of Brno (Brünn), Jihlava (Iglau) and Olomouc (Olmütz). This land mass, which was admittedly not contiguous but nonetheless considerable, would in any case possess sufficient resources to grow into an orderly state. And regarding the other peoples of the disintegrated Empire, after disengaging they would surely also search for some sort of commonality. This also proved to be incorrect.

Everyone automatically gave thought to the future and would have gladly undone past events. They could at least be suppressed somewhat. It was therefore least of all the case that they self-critically questioned whether it was above all Austria that bore a greater degree of responsibility for what had happened than others did. And it was then only a few who, like the editor-in-chief of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Friedrich Austerlitz, made the rhetorically-sounding question of the ‘Deserved Fate’ the subject of an editorial on 5 November 1918. Not only the victorious powers wanted to saddle Austria and Hungary with a historic guilt, but also those who regarded themselves as ‘oppressed nations’. They had ultimately also played their part in events, in the successes and the failures, right up to the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy. But they exclu-

sively blamed the German Austrians and the Hungarians. It was they, therefore, whom the 'deserved fate' should befall.

Who, however, were 'the' Austrians, and where was their place in post-war Europe? Should that which American President Woodrow Wilson had said about the right of all peoples to self-determination not also apply to them? There were good reasons to grant the same status to the entity emerging from the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy – the 'residue' as French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was said to have briefly and accurately formulated it<sup>11</sup> – as to the non-German and non-Hungarian parts of the Empire, which were then simply successor states. An argument against this, however, was not least the sense of self-worth that was especially typical of the German Austrians. They did not regard themselves as a 'residue'. The Habsburg Empire had, after all, emerged from the German core or hereditary lands. Austria had always borne a greater responsibility as well as burden than others, had always been at the centre of things and had identified itself with the Empire to a far greater extent than the other parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. But what was Austria really?

There was broad agreement that German-Austria (South-East Germany, as it was also occasionally called, if one did not want to go so far as to use portmanteau words like 'Ostass', 'Danube-Germania', 'Treuland' or 'Teutheim')<sup>12</sup> should become a democratic republic. This was conditional on having a bourgeois order and a political system comparable to that of the Western democracies. And something else: the 'trench community' of Germans and Austrians, as Karl Renner had described it,<sup>13</sup> should become a Central European state. It was assumed that this would happen in unison with Germany. For several days in November 1918, it was admittedly unknown whether the forms of government could be reconciled, because whereas German-Austria had made a clear commitment to the democratic republic, Germany was still an empire. Only two days after 9 November, it could be established that the necessary agreement existed. The German Kaiser Wilhelm II fled to the Netherlands and cleared the way for a German republic. Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the republic in Berlin. Now it was again Austria that had to follow and take the last, decisive step towards a republic.

Initially, it was a question of the person of Emperor Karl. He fought to retain his power, but he no longer had any instruments of power. To the last, he had still claimed that there would be a common future for him as well as for the Habsburg Empire: 'It will be possible,' he said in late October to the General Council of the Austro-Hungarian Bank, Michael Hainisch.<sup>14</sup>

The Emperor had even made a concession that was designed to make him acceptable even for the radicals: on 6 November, he amnestied Friedrich Adler, the son of the leader of the Social Democrats, who had been sentenced to death in 1916 after the murder of the Austrian Prime Minister Count Karl Stürgkh and whose sentence had then been commuted to life imprisonment. Should Karl have hoped to have earned

some kind of reward for the release of Friedrich Adler, he was also mistaken. But no one yet wanted to simply ignore him. In spite of his inability to lead Austria out of the war in any other way than via unconditional surrender and as a shattered state, there was still a high degree of loyalty and respect towards the monarch. And the Allies perhaps preferred to negotiate with him than with representatives of the new creation of German-Austria. The monarch should admittedly be removed as a political factor, otherwise the reference to a democratic republic would not enjoy any validity. After lengthy hesitation and many objections, the Emperor consented on 11 November to renounce any claim to participation in the political affairs of German-Austria. The document, which was burned in July 1927, stated: 'I renounce any part in affairs of government.' The Emperor was thus not removed and banished from the country but was instead edited out of events in a very moderate way. He removed the last Imperial government from office, left the Schönbrunn Palace and relocated to the Marchfeld in order to await further developments in Eckartsau Castle. There, on 13 November, he signed a waiver for Hungary, similar to that which he had accepted for Austria two days earlier.

As the Emperor had no power henceforth and the last Imperial government and the Army High Command would only be permitted to liquidate the Empire and its armed power, the question remained as to who would empower the new state. The problem, namely, was that German-Austria only had a chance of making a fresh political start if it also possessed the power to implement the resolutions of the Provisional National Assembly and their legislative acts and earn respect. Therefore, on 30 October 1918, a start was already made on the establishment of a new military institution, the People's Militia (Volkwehr). Banally enough, it was a question of guaranteeing the new state a minimum level of security, because the city commander of Vienna, Major General Baronet Johann von Mossig, had only four companies at his disposal, that is, around 500 men, with which he was able to prevent neither plundering nor the rioting of repatriated soldiers, not to mention a more far-reaching change, a Bolshevik revolution. Returning soldiers were compelled to exchange the Imperial colours on their caps for red cockades. Officers occasionally had their insignia torn off. For several days, the Council of State feared that the government could be overthrown. And Renner is supposed to have said: 'Whenever I now pass a lamppost, I always have a strange feeling.'<sup>15</sup> He openly stated that the coalition of citizens, peasants and workers was a very fragile construction and rejected by the working class.<sup>16</sup> But it was only a few radicals who wanted to use violence. And it was not least they who should be disciplined by means of the People's Militia. The vast majority of the tens of thousands of members of the People's Militia were in any case content to have a roof over their heads and free of the most pressing existential worries. They had no thought of revolution. Before long, the

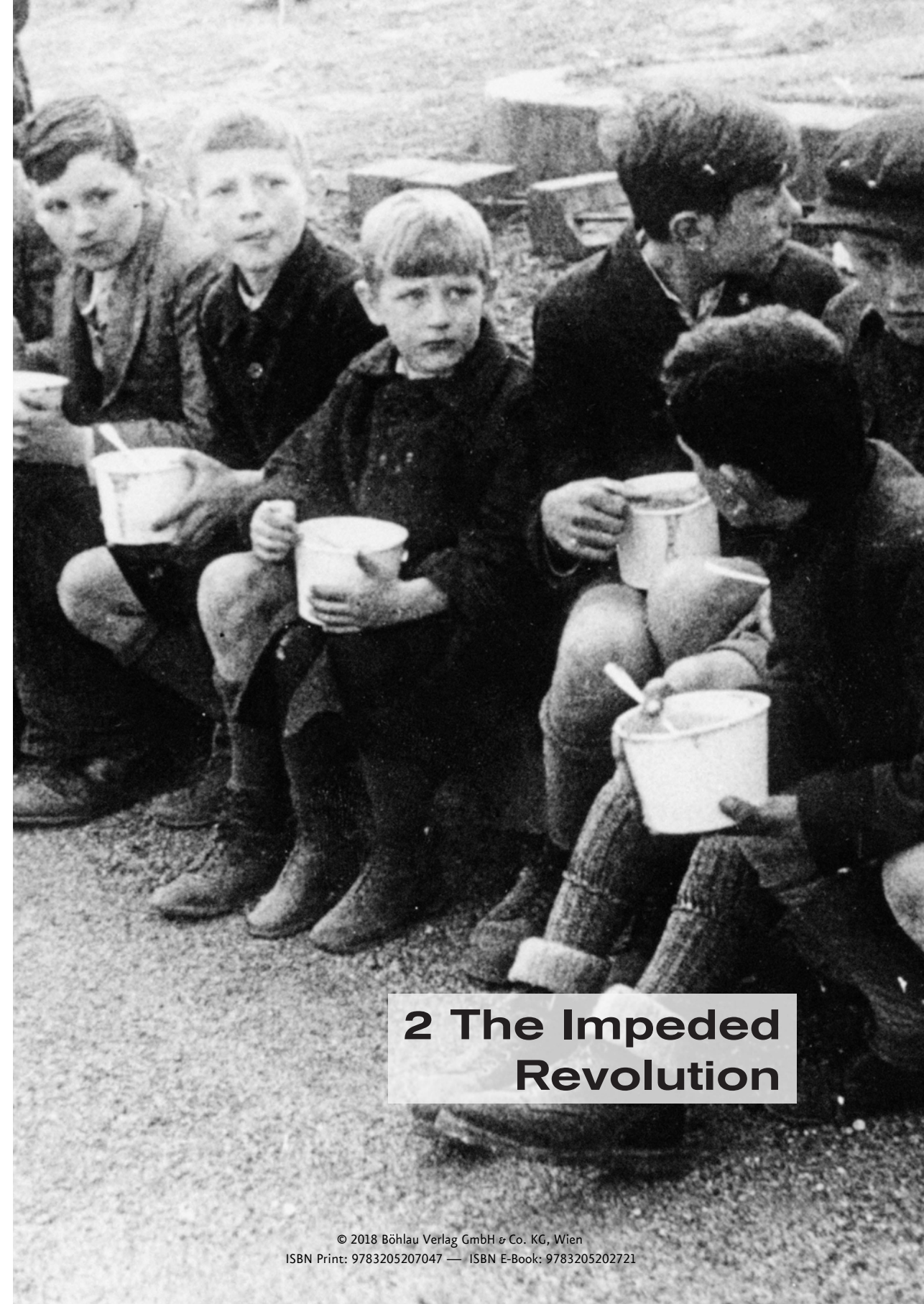
People's Militia then became far more a social institution rather than actually being called on for military operations.<sup>17</sup> This very soon became clear.

In early November, Slovene troops from the new Southern Slav State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (SHS) began to occupy the southern territories of Carinthia and Styria, which were partially populated by Slovenes. They initially encountered only the resistance of local citizens' militias. An armed conflict was looming. The People's Militia did not play any part in it. Salzburg and Tyrol as far as the Brenner Pass were occupied by Bavarian troops from 6 to 11 November. On 9 November, Italian units began to advance northward, crossed the Brenner Pass and eventually occupied Innsbruck. As one of the victorious powers, Italy was entitled to do this. It remained completely unclear where the frontiers would be drawn in the north and the east. The People's Militia, in any case, was unable to exert any influence on this.

Violence gained ground. Instead of granting the state executive power and solving security problems, the People's Militia became part of the problem. The idealistic assumption that the new state would be able to manage without a military, as advocated, among others, by the last chief of staff of the Isonzo Army, Colonel Theodor von Körner, and reflected in the rhyme 'Ohne Waffen, ohne Pfaffen wird die Jugend sich die Zukunft schaffen' (Without weapons, without papists, the youth will create the future),<sup>18</sup> did not match the reality of the post-war period. Red guards and soldiers' councils were time and again willing to use violence. And they did not want to simply watch how a new state defined itself, in a very orderly and thoughtful fashion, always taking administrative procedures into account, preserving legal continuity and to a certain degree legitimate. A handful of radicals believed that now the time had come to set up councils, like in Russia, and trigger a Bolshevik revolution. In fact, it was still unknown what the state would look like; not even the name was beyond dispute. Both parts of the word German-Austria were unsatisfactory. And once doubts were raised as to whether the victorious powers might understand the term Austria as a cue to saddle this one remaining Austria with the entire war guilt – then no one was satisfied any longer with the official name. Nonetheless, the word continued to be used, not least in the provisional constitution and in the draft law for the political system, in which it was specified that German-Austria was to be a democratic republic. § 2 stated: 'German-Austria is part of the German Republic.' Thus, this was not an expression of intent but rather a pretence that everything was already certain. Only a single delegate hesitated. The Christian Social Wilhelm Miklas would have liked to see the decision regarding the system of government subjected to a popular referendum. But it was decided that the minimum consensus should be preserved; so Miklas relented.







## 2 The Impeded Revolution

- 2 Free meals for children in Vienna, 1919. In the months after the end of the First World War, the urban population was able to survive only by virtue of foreign aid. At the start of the free meals campaign by the Anglo-American Society of Friends, it was ascertained that in Vienna and Lower Austria 72 per cent of schoolchildren between the ages of six and 14 were poorly or very poorly fed. In order to provide effective assistance, 300,000 free meals were distributed every day during the first years after the war. Half of them were accounted for by Vienna and the rest by the other federal states. In 1919, 40,000 children found foster parents, above all in Switzerland and the Netherlands, who took them for three to six months. Foreign committees, such as New York's Vienna Milk Relief, operated their own childcare institutions. (Photo: Vienna City Library)

It could be one of the more difficult questions in a quiz: on which day did the First Austrian Republic begin, 30 October or 12 November 1918? The answer would perhaps result in a debate. Legal historians could argue that the beginning was marked by the resolution of the Provisional National Assembly on the founding of the state of German-Austria on 30 October 1918.<sup>19</sup> Karl Renner instructed in 1947 for the 'proclamation of the Republic on Herrengasse on 30 October 1918' to be recorded in a painting by Max Frey, which was intended for the Museum of the First and Second Republic, initiated by Renner. A watercolour by Moritz Ledeli records the same scene from a different perspective. The argument that the founding of the state had been executed with the resolution on the basic institutions of state power could be countered by pointing out that the session in the Lower Austrian regional diet (Landtag) was merely a declaration of intent, because on 30 October Austria was still a monarchy. Only after Emperor Karl's renunciation was the path clear for the proclamation of the Republic. The history of the Republic thus began on 12 November 1918 with the resolution of the Provisional National Assembly on the Provisional Constitution and with the proclamation of the Republic before parliament. It's certainly the case that this day has taken hold in historical memory, that the memorial to the founding of the state not far from the parliament building bears this date, that the section of Vienna's Ringstraße between Bellaria and the town hall was called 'Ring of 12 November' from 1919 and 1934, that on 25 April 1919 the Constituent National Assembly declared 12 November to be a national holiday<sup>20</sup> and that on 1 May 1934 – the day on which the end of the Republic had come – it was heard that now 'the Austria of 12 November 1918' was being 'carried to its grave'. Accordingly, 12 November 1918 would be the correct answer. This day and the events before parliament were also recorded in a painting by Rudolf Konopa.<sup>21</sup> The paintings by Frey and Konopa unmistakably carry the designation 'proclamation of the Republic'. Only the places and dates are different. What is correct? Let us abandon the debate.

## A State Emerges

The 12 November 1918 did not end so peacefully as it had begun. On the afternoon, it was intended that the Provisional National Assembly adopt the state constitution and that the, as it were, official proclamation of the Republic take place. Everything was

prepared, the individual marching columns, which were supposed to meet in front of parliament, had been given detailed instructions. The crowds were estimated to number 150,000 people. Light rain could not spoil the festive mood. Most people, men and women alike, were well dressed. Hats were worn. When the members of the Provisional State Government stepped on to the ramp of parliament after the adoption of the Provisional Constitution, in order to proclaim the founding of the Republic to a crowd waiting in the falling darkness and the red-white-red flag was raised, which replaced the old black-yellow of the imperial era, a few members of the Red Guards pulled the flag down again. They tore the white of the middle stripe and hoisted the red rags, tied together, as a symbol of the beginning of the revolution. Subsequently, speeches were held and the Workers' Choral Society sang a song. Then, however, a dozen Red Guards attempted to force their way into the parliament building and began a wild shootout. Calm could be restored only with difficulty. But the spectre of the revolution began to take shape. The fact that it did not thrive was only because the future of the country appeared relatively secure in spite of all loans. At the outset, there was no question of Austria's inability to survive. People continued to hope that German-Austria would have a sizeable state territory. In the Law on the Scope and Borders of State Territory from 22 November 1918, those regions and cities were finally named to which territorial sovereignty should extend, and these were primarily areas and linguistic enclaves in which German was spoken but which were also claimed by the Southern Slav SHS state and the new Czechoslovakia or were located in Poland, like Bielsko Biała (Deutsch-Bielitz), for instance. It was unrealistic. In such a way, an artificial construct would have emerged that would have been without any coherence. But the very one-sided declaration with which Vienna decreed what belonged to German-Austria and what should ultimately have a seat and a voice in the intended new parliament with 225 seats had in any case not been reconciled with the other successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy. And they had no intention whatsoever of complying with German-Austria's notions.

In German-Austria's leading economic circles, too, a sense of cautious optimism still prevailed in November 1918. This was based not least on the fact that a type of government of national unity had been formed and gave the impression that all political forces wanted to assist in the construction of a new state. The country was regarded as a state of national unity and not as the wreckage of a great empire. And then they added together everything that this new state would have – always provided that those things would fall to it that it had made a claim on from the start: productive industries, iron, timber, hydropower and above all capital. Vienna had been the banking centre of the Monarchy, and there was still plenty of money. After all, Austria-Hungary had not been bankrupt in November 1918. The company directors in Vienna also believed that the Bohemian industries obtained their loans primarily from German-Austrian institutes. The war profits would have to be invested and the factories adjusted to new products,

and when all this was under way the viability even of a downsized country would not be an issue. As long as the state ensured internal order, the people would surely soon place their trust in it.

Unlike in Germany, there was no seeking of refuge in the myth of the stab-in-the-back to which Austria-Hungary had supposedly fallen victim. Admittedly, as during the war years themselves, the attitude of the Northern and Southern Slavs was regarded as causal for the collapse, but at the same time with a certain satisfaction that one was now free to make decisions. Now there was no need to take consideration of Hungarians, Czechs and other peoples of the Habsburg Empire readily perceived as the 'gravediggers' of the Monarchy; now German-Austria could go its own way, undeterred. Politicians, the public and, not least, the Catholic Church agreed on this, and it was especially the latter who successfully accomplished the transition from a pillar of the Habsburg dynasty to a pillar of the democratic republic comparatively harmlessly. It might be that it remained a 'bloody wound',<sup>22</sup> but it could be concealed. The clergy was called on to exhort the faithful from the pulpit to display 'unconditional loyalty towards the now lawfully existing state of German-Austria'.<sup>23</sup>

That which had changed and would happen admittedly had to be explained and the children were a good starting point. For this reason, reading material in primary schools stated:

Some of the things the grown-ups are currently talking about, you ultimately cannot yet understand. They are presently saying: our fatherland is now Austria – no, they now call it German-Austria – German-Austria is now a republic and we are republicans. What might that mean? ... We who speak the German language now want to join together and set up house as we please. No individual ought to be able to dictate anything to us; instead, we want to do that which the majority of us regards as good. ... Yes, but we are ten million people in German-Austria. Should they always be asked what they want? Surely not, because that would be too cumbersome. Therefore, the ten million people elect from time to time people whom they trust. These people then get together and make laws, with which we all have to comply. That is how it is done in a republic. ... When you grow up, our beloved German-Austria should be a happy, joyful country again and you should be proud of your fatherland.<sup>24</sup>

The transition from monarchy to republic appeared to be so natural that, though most people were aware of the caesura, they also experienced it as an experiment, of which they were a part. No one had any experience of democracy. In spite of all indications of a secure future in a democratic state, for the mass of the population existential worries came to the fore and the desire for stability in a world falling to pieces. Union with Germany appeared to be the solution to everything. The Greater German parties and the Austrian Social Democrats advocated this out of complete conviction; the Chris-