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Jeremy King: Budweisers into Czechs and Germans

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Introduction

Budweisers into Czechs and Germans

“In Southern Bohemia, there are three nations, namely Germans, Czechs, and Budweisers.” So, in and around Budweis/Budějovice, went an early twentieth-century saying in both the Czech and the German languages.¹ Embedded in it are an ahistorical assumption and a historical insight. Budweisers were no “nation.” In the nineteenth century, though, what might be termed a nonnational or more-than-national category of Budweisers did exist. By excavating and understanding it, we can better understand Czechs, Germans, “nations,” and modern politics more generally in the Bohemian lands.

In August 1861, months after the Habsburg Monarchy had begun moving in the direction of constitutional rule after a decade of repression, the mayor of Budweis/Budějovice made a public statement. A second middle school was being built, at which instruction would take place not only in German, as had long been the case at the original middle school, but also in the less prestigious Czech language. The mayor and the senior aldermen had decided on this new policy of “equality and progress.” They had also decided to request that the governor of Bohemia assign a new school inspector to town, because the current inspector had an imperfect command of Czech. “Ultra-Germans,” though, led by “Germanomaniac” [*deutschthümlische*] members of the town council, had objected. Claiming that the mayor had acted at the instigation of an “Ultra-Czech deputation,” they had also questioned his honesty. He now responded by branding the talk of a deputation a lie and by stating the following, in the German language that both newspapers in town at the time employed:

As regards myself, and claims that I circulate among Germans as a German, and among Czechs as a Czech, I am in truth proud to have learned how to do this. People will surely find my comportment quite natural, and all the more forgivable when they consider that it is desired by the government, in which both nationalities are to be represented. That I have been equally correct toward both is proved by my recent reelection as chief executive of the mature and worthy burghers of both tongues, who thereby expressed their considerable trust in me.²

The outcome was a compromise. The mayor—who called himself Franz Josef Klawik in German and František Josef Klavík in Czech—retained the support of the town council, yet the school inspector kept his post. Ultra-

Germans and Ultra-Czechs alike found reason for disappointment. That fall, dispute erupted again, this time over the classical high school, or gymnasium. The governor of Bohemia had recently ordered that here, too, instruction should be made officially bilingual, at least for those students who wished to learn both German and Czech. Eighteen of the thirty-six aldermen opposed this change, and in November, they succeeded in passing a municipal resolution that urged the governor to rescind his order. Only four aldermen, including Klawik/Klavík, voted against the resolution. Fourteen failed to attend the meeting.³

Ultra-Germans immediately attacked one of the four aldermen, Vicar Ottokar Haug, for forgetting his “completely German origins” and for going over “lock, stock, and barrel” to the other camp. He defended himself in a public letter, stating that he had not forgotten those origins and that he loved Germandom as he did his parents. He had dedicated his life, though, to the welfare of both his German and his Czech countrymen. To that end, he wished to help elevate the Czech language from a “mere peasant dialect.” “Of a camp to which I have *gone over lock, stock, and barrel*,” Haug continued, “I know nothing. As a priest, I strive only to promote culture, and know no other camp than that of Christian civilization.” He concluded, “What the Germans already have, the Czechs should be able to strive for as well. This may produce passing tensions, but in the long run leads to peace.”⁴ The governor seems to have agreed with Haug, because the addition of bilingual classes to the gymnasium proceeded as planned.

What, then, were Budweisers? Klawik/Klavík defined himself as both a Czech and a German, and as a person committed to equality between the two “nationalities”—which he defined by “tongue.” He claimed to have backing from both the municipal electorate and the state for his stance, but also labeled it “natural.” Indeed, it was so natural, or at least seemed so natural, that he lacked a precise name for it. In German, the word *Budweiser* (the plural of which is also *Budweiser*) at first meant simply a person or people connected to Budweis/Budějovice. The equivalent in Czech was *Budějovičan* (plural *Budějovičané*). Gradually, through such conflicts as those just described, a second meaning developed, of a particular kind of person or people—or what Ultras came to call a “third nation.” And in the 1870s, far away in the United States, there developed yet another meaning, a brand of beer marketed by two brewers in St. Louis named Anheuser and Busch. In Southern Bohemia, Czech-speakers succeeded in disambiguating the second meaning from the original, broader one by folding the word *Budweiser* into their language (sometimes spelling it *Budwajzr*, plural *Budwajzři*). In 1861, however, such changes were only beginning. Klawik/Klavík lacked a word in either language to distinguish

clearly his category, which applied almost universally in town, from the competing and as yet marginal categories of Czech and German Ultras.

Haug, another Budweiser, considered himself a German, but not a Czech. Ultra-Germans agreed with Haug, at least about his German origins. Ultra-Czechs, for their part, did not try to claim him as one of their own men, even when they later threw their support behind him in an election. If he spoke Czech, he probably spoke it with a German accent, and made grammatical errors.⁵ Certainly one did not have to be bilingual in order to count as a Budweiser. No hard data were ever collected concerning bilingualism in the Bohemian lands. But in 1865, *Budivoj*, a new Czech newspaper in Budweis/Budějovice, estimated that the rate there was about 60 percent. Other observers agreed that the figure in town, although unusually high, fell well short of 100 percent.⁶ More important to being a Budweiser than bilingualism, according to the Budweiser view, was an insistence on defining Germanness and Czechness as a question primarily of language, and thus as a matter of no great importance in many aspects of life. Ultras, from this perspective, could try to make a political issue of nationhood, but would succeed in stirring up only “passing tensions.” Or to quote a satire published early in 1861 by the *Budweiser Wochenblatt* [*Budweis Weekly*], a newspaper that took a Budweiser stance: all would end with “splendid reconciliation,” “under the provision that for all eternity the Ultra-Germans are to speak nothing but Czech, the Ultra-Czechs nothing but German, and all others nothing but *reasonably*.”⁷

Budweisers misunderstood and underestimated Ultras, however, and thereby committed a political error of the first order. Ultras, meanwhile, misinterpreted Budweisers, and thereby hit on a remarkably successful strategy. “Tell me,” began a short “Conversation between Two Politicians,” printed in 1863 by Budweis/Budějovice’s Ultra-German newspaper, the *Anzeiger aus dem südlichen Böhmen* [*Gazette for Southern Bohemia*], “what does it mean when someone says that he’s nationally uncommitted?” The answer: “You green fool, when nothing’s at stake, then people say it, even when they aren’t. But when something decisive comes up, then they simply go over to the Czech camp.” Czech Ultras, like German ones, preferred to view “uncommitted” residents as closet Ultras or as Ultras in the making, rather than as Budweisers.⁸ Or to stop using the vocabulary of the 1860s and to start using a more recent one: leaders of the German and Czech national movements understood potential recruits to be not so much nonnational or more-than-national individuals as Germans or Czechs of a latent, unconscious, ethnic sort. According to this view, the two “nations” were mutually exclusive and very important. National indifference was an inconvenient fact that national lead-

ers denied and minimized. Indeed, they even nationalized it: hence, by about 1910, the amusing oddity of a “nation” of Budweisers.

In the spring of 1862, Czechs, Germans, and Budweisers clashed again—and the national contestants scored a victory. Three burghers, all Czechs, demanded that the *Liedertafel*, or Choral Society, in town change its informal policy of practicing and performing Czech songs “as conditions allow” to a formal policy of making every third piece a Czech one. Rebuffed by a German faction, the three men and others seceded to form a new choir, the *Beseda*—which means “chat” or “get-together” in Czech. In May, the *Budweiser Kreisblatt* [*Budweis District Newspaper*], a successor to the *Wochenblatt*, printed two letters to the editor (signed “Ein . . . Budweiser” and “Der Budweiser”) that denounced German efforts at blaming the split on Czech intolerance. And in June, the newspaper skewered both national sides with hilariously hyperbolic prose, even while lamenting that the affair was dividing some families. Before long, the *Beseda* decided to sing only Czech songs at its first concert, by a vote of 30 to 33.⁹

Remaining members of the *Liedertafel*, meanwhile, gave a recital in November 1862 at which they performed Ernst Moritz Arndt’s composition from 1813, “What Is the German’s Fatherland?” Some burghers stood up as they sang the words in German, presumably to add emphasis to the claim that the German’s fatherland reached “as far as the German tongue sounds.” Other burghers, though, walked off the stage, removing their choir badges. Two weeks later, the now more German *Liedertafel* gave another recital, in a new German club, and sang the same song—not once but twice. It provoked a storm of cheers. But as the *Anzeiger aus dem südlichen Böhmen* reported with some annoyance, among the German-language cries of *hoch* could be heard Czech-language cries of *výborně*. Shouting “bravo” in Czech was how some members of the audience, and perhaps of the *Liedertafel* itself, saw fit to join in the German, anti-Czech enthusiasm. A Budweiser choir split into two choirs, one Czech and one German. Burghers now had difficulty expressing a Budweiser stance through song. When Wenzel/Václav Bernhart, an alderman, died in 1863, both choirs paid him their final respects, but separately—the *Liedertafel* at the church service and the *Beseda* at graveside.¹⁰

Today, when almost all politics is national politics, the Budweiser worldview may seem odd and confusing. It may seem trivial, too. Yet it can be understood, and should be—because Budweisers practiced a local variant on a form of politics that was once pivotally important in Habsburg Central Europe. How to name that form? Contemporaries often called it “Austrian,” after one of the several names for the Habsburg Monarchy. Today’s small nation-state of Austria, though, has complicated the meaning of the word. Joseph Roth, in his early twentieth-century fiction, came closer than almost anyone else to evoking and to naming the imperial

Austrian political ethos. He idealized and exaggerated, though, and used inconveniently long phrases: “a great mansion with many doors and many chambers, for every condition of man,” for example, and “a powerful force with the ability . . . to unite what seems to be trying to fly apart.” Historians have written of “local patriotisms,” but in ways that miss the coming together of those disparate allegiances into a loose, overarching one.¹¹ Best, perhaps, are the old term “Habsburg-loyal” and a derivative: simply “Habsburg.” They point to the Habsburg dynasty and to the nonnational and then more-than-national state that Klawik/Klavik invoked in defending his Budweiser stance. As Budweisers became Germans or Czechs, Habsburg loyalists more generally became national too. Peasants, burghers, nobles, and other Habsburg subjects gradually became Germans, Czechs, Poles, Ruthenes, Romanians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Italians, or other nationals. The Habsburg Monarchy, which had long rested on the principle of rule by divine right, came to rest more and more on multiple national variants on the principle of popular sovereignty—not just on one, as in France, where all peasants and other subjects famously became Frenchmen.¹² The new, national forms of politics became an ever larger part of politics in the Habsburg Monarchy, which contained their mutual incompatibilities ever less successfully. Conflict among Budweisers, Czechs, and Germans in Budweis/Budějovice formed part of a contest for the Habsburg succession in Central Europe.

Budweisers, other Habsburg loyalists, and their state, however, did not disappear overnight, and in the meantime shaped the contest for their succession in vital ways. Between 1848 and 1918, by setting and enforcing many rules to the political game, the Habsburg state influenced powerfully the political content and demographic dimensions of individual national movements—which kinds of Budweisers tended to become Germans, for example, and which kinds Czechs. The Habsburg state was also more accepting of national movements than of other kinds of movements. That policy perhaps contributed to the failure by believers in class, religious, or racial conflict to make “the people” in popular sovereignty not “nations” but workers and peasants, Christians, or Aryans. After 1900, the Habsburg state even embraced a cluster of nationhoods, by moving to institutionalize them as subcitizenships among which citizens had to choose.

After the collapse of the monarchy in 1918, the contest for the Habsburg succession was reduced to a struggle of national movements or “camps” alone. The new states, including Czechoslovakia, turned out to be not so much contestants in their own right as resources controlled by this or that national movement. Nationhood triumphed, at least generically—in the Bohemian lands, in both German and Czech forms. Vicar Haug’s “passing tensions” continued. Only a generation later did his pre-

diction of a lasting national peace in the Bohemian lands come true after all. But that outcome was far from inevitable, and took a form that he had not wanted: a specifically national, Czech victory. That outcome also followed events that he could not have imagined: a world war, the disappearance of the Habsburg Monarchy, a Nazi occupation, a second world war, the Holocaust, and the expulsion of all Germans. The Bohemian lands became wholly Czech, and part not of Central Europe but of a Slavic East separated from the West by a nuclear Cold War.

Historians have long viewed the contest for the Habsburg succession, consciously or unconsciously, from national perspectives. A central consequence has been to misinterpret and to neglect the Habsburg state and Habsburg loyalties. In 1966, at a landmark conference concerning “The Nationality Problem in the Habsburg Monarchy in the Nineteenth Century,” Arthur Haas made the telling criticism that there were “a dozen or so papers on the Slavic nationalities alone but none at all explaining the government’s position.”¹³ Writ large, that criticism still applies today. Over the past two decades, a new consensus has emerged among scholars to the effect that nationhood is not ancient and natural, as nationals often think. Rather, it is modern and “constructed.”¹⁴ Yet almost all histories of Bohemian politics between the 1840s and the First World War still amount to mere variations on the long-standing national understanding of a German-Czech duel. German and Czech movements constructed themselves, runs the implicit argument, and did so in such a way as to reduce nonnational or more-than-national actors rapidly to political insignificance.¹⁵

Enabling historians’ neglect of Habsburg politics has been an emphasis on ancient “races,” “peoples,” or “ethnic groups” instead. Czechness and Germanness supposedly did not emerge from Habsburg loyalties through a struggle over resources, but rather had always existed, in the form of ethnic Czechs and Germans. They “awoke” to national consciousness during the nineteenth century, above all through struggle against each other. The forebear to nationhood was not nonnational politics but nonpolitical ethnicity. As Jörg Hoensch wrote in his *History of Bohemia*, published in German in 1987, “the German national consciousness that burgeoned in the German states during the wars of liberation [against Napoleon] gripped only a few Germans in Bohemia.” And as Zdeněk Kárník has explained more recently and more explicitly, “In varying intensity, the Bohemian lands were the settlement area for at least seven centuries of three ethnic groups: the dominant Czech one, a strong German minority, and a less numerous but nonetheless influential Jewish minority. . . . Only the nineteenth and twentieth centuries elevated these relations—with variations in timing and in intensity—to a relationship among modern nations.” In various guises, this derivation of each new “nation” from an old

ethnic community has long been dominant among Bohemian and other Habsburg historians.¹⁶

Historians, in using that derivation, have confused scholarly analysis with political practice. National leaders in the Bohemian lands during the nineteenth century often argued that Czech-speakers or German-speakers should add, and indeed were fated to add, a Czech or German consciousness to their Czech or German “origins,” or ethnicity. That argument failed to convince Vicar Haug, yet proved remarkably successful in many other cases. In 1918, only irony made one person’s comment about his youth in Prague during the 1860s unusual: “Like Molière’s fellow who spoke prose without knowing it, we were Germans without knowing it.”¹⁷ The practical success of the ethnic argument, however, makes it no less misleading as an analysis of what happened. National approaches to nationhood generate what François Furet once called, in a different context, the “vicious circle” of “commemorative historiography,” and what Daniel Gordon calls the “mimetic pitfall.”¹⁸ Historians can go beyond commemoration or mimesis. Although evidence abounds of solidarity among speakers of the same language long before the nineteenth century, other evidence testifies to bilingualism and to mutually unintelligible dialects of a Czech or German language that emerged only gradually, in contingent fashion.¹⁹ If languages divided a population vertically, into protonational columns, then corporative and socioeconomic solidarities divided it horizontally, into Habsburg layers—and had far more institutional anchoring and sociological significance. Yet almost all historians have joined nationals in downplaying the gaps and flaws in the “nations emerged from ethnic groups” explanation as mere complications and exceptions.

The Jewish ethnic group that Kárník and other Bohemian historians add to the German and Czech ones is itself an exception—and not only because that group is defined primarily by religion rather than by language. Both in the 1840s and far back into the past, Bohemian Jews figured as a tightly bounded community, its members (some of whom had no language in common) defined consistently by multiple institutions and practices. One can state with considerable precision and confidence that in 1846, for example, Jews made up about 1.7 percent of the population in the Bohemian lands. (In Budweis/Budějovice, Jews were banned as residents between 1506 and 1849. Thereafter, in 1857 and in 1869, surveys tallied 166 and then 250 Israelites, or 1 percent and 1.4 percent of the population.)²⁰ This well-defined group, though, did not turn into a “nation.” Between the 1840s and the 1930s, some Jews became Germans, and some Czechs; some of both also became Christians. A few became nationally Jewish, in the sense of Zionists. The Bohemian ethnic group for whose historical existence the best case can be made fits the ethnic explanatory model worst—unless one insists on viewing as predestined

the unification of much of European Jewry into a modern “people” by the Nazi regime, through genocide. Better is a different explanation: ethnic groups are not national antecedents but national products, projected ahistorically yet with history-making effect into the past. Far from constituting distinct and robust categories of historical analysis, the ethnic group and the “nation” stand in a relationship of mutual and constitutive dependence.

For that matter, to think of “nations” as the successors to ethnic groups is to misunderstand nationhood. As Rogers Brubaker wrote in 1996,

Countless discussions of nationhood and nationalism begin with the question: what is a nation? This question is not as theoretically innocent as it seems: the very terms in which it is framed presuppose the existence of the entity that is to be defined. The question itself reflects the realist, substantialist belief that “a nation” is a real entity of some kind, though perhaps one that is elusive and difficult to define.

Someone who is national understands a “nation” as a membership organization, as a large, real, and even countable community of people (“members”) characterized by a specific “identity.” Scholars, though, in order to explain such understandings, must exit them. And from the outside, “nations” are *imagined* communities, reifications of a modern form of legitimacy—nationhood—which might be defined as a set of mutually exclusive variants on the principle of popular sovereignty. To cite Brubaker again,

Reification is central to the quasi-performative discourse of nationalist politicians which, at certain moments, can succeed in creating what it seems to presuppose—namely, the existence of nations as real, mobilized or mobilizable groups. . . . As analysts of nationalism, we should certainly try to *account* for this social process of reification—this process through which the political fiction of the nation becomes momentarily yet powerfully realized in practice. This may be one of the most important tasks of the theory of nationalism. But we should avoid unintentionally *reproducing* or *reinforcing* this reification of nations in practice with a reification of nations in theory.²¹

Historians of Habsburg Central Europe, then, have tended to write national histories, rather than histories of nationhood. Deep links between history-writing and national politics in the region during the nineteenth century, as well as the national nature of the societies within which historians have lived more recently, explain that pattern.²² Yet history-writing concerning nationhood does not *have* to be national, and has not always been national in the same ways. The very term “ethnic” amounts to an innovation of the 1970s and 1980s—often misused, but also used to yield genuine insights.²³ Until its advent, after all, scholars of Habsburg Central

Europe had followed national leaders in regularly using the same vocabulary for nationally conscious and unconscious individuals, and thus in minimizing the distinction. Over the past several decades, social historians have pushed past vague understandings of national “awakening” to address why certain people did or did not become national at certain times and in certain ways.²⁴ Open displays of prejudice in favor of a particular “nation” have grown much less common among historians, and have yielded to national prejudice of a more subtle and generic nature—Czech *and* German, for example.²⁵

Some scholars have even challenged ethnic master narratives. Already in 1981, Gary Cohen argued, in a study of the German movement in Prague, that socioeconomic standing accounted better than did ethnicity for how residents became national: as Czechs or as Germans. His book, the first chapter of which bears the title “From Bohemians to Czechs and Germans,” shows that many poorer people became ethnically Czech only as they became nationally so. Cohen treats the pattern as far from exceptional or incidental. To be sure, the title of his book, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival*, almost invites readers to continue thinking of ethnicity as ancient and enduring. And his work remained within the spirit of its time by subscribing to what Brubaker terms a “groupist” understanding of nationhood, as well as by participating in the neglect of the state that characterized the pioneering generation of social historians. Yet after two decades, Cohen’s analysis of nineteenth-century Bohemian politics remains unsurpassed. The few scholars who have joined him in undermining ethnic readings of the Bohemian past have tended not to be historians. Vladimír Macura, who helped to historicize the Czech language and who dissected the central ethnic metaphor of awakening, was a semiotician specializing in literature. Andrew Lass, who has emphasized the national, history-making role of historians and who has situated the making of a Czech ethnic group or folk in modern times, is an anthropologist. And Peter Bugge, who has provided an overview of Czech “nation-building” without embracing the Czech understanding of ethnicity or neglecting the state, is a historical sociologist.²⁶

In 1899, Rudolf Hermann von Herrnherr, a professor of law at the University of Vienna, published a book that distinguished three interwoven strands to national politics in the Habsburg Monarchy: ethnic, historical, and centralistic.²⁷ He described the first strand as “very radical,” and as resting initially on “purely theoretical ground.” His second strand referred to understandings of certain “nations” as the successors to certain feudal orders or estates—the nobility of various duchies and kingdoms that became part of the Habsburg Monarchy between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. National leaders, by claiming their “nation” to be the heir to a small and real group in the past, bolstered their claims to

political primacy within the Bohemian, Hungarian, or other Habsburg lands in the present.²⁸ Von Herrnritt's third strand, centralistic, contained understandings of the "nation" as the entire citizenry of a state. Today called *civic*, this strand posited a Habsburg or Austrian "nation" for the Habsburg Monarchy, akin to the French and American ones for France and for the United States.

During the 1990s, Jiří Kořalka and Pieter Judson published studies that confirm von Herrnritt's apparently forgotten argument that many of the nationhoods in the monarchy were once rich amalgams, rather than overwhelmingly ethnic. Complementing ethnicity in the Czech case, but rarely given full attention by historians before Kořalka, was a historical, "Bohemian state rights" strand. And complementing, even overshadowing, ethnicity in the German case for a time were historical and civic strands—the first of which von Herrnritt himself, a German, failed to see, and both of which Judson explained in masterful fashion, but not from beginning to end.²⁹ Already in the 1970s and 1980s, meanwhile, István Deák, Péter Hanák, Andrew Janos, and Katherine Verdery explored the complex interplay among ethnic, historical, and civic strands to Hungarian nationhood.³⁰ Those studies, like von Herrnritt's and others mentioned previously, all point in the same direction. Ethnicity was only one form of nationhood among several in Habsburg Central Europe, yet one that came to dominate the others by the early decades of the twentieth century. To this day, both in real time and retrospectively, ethnic understandings convert dynamic interaction among socioeconomic interests into conflict between statically defined groups and obscure the political roles of the state.

Budweis/Budějovice is an exceptionally good place through which to press the challenge to the historiographical consensus regarding politics in modern Habsburg Central Europe. Vicar Haug, an ethnic German, did not become a national one. Nor did quite a few other ethnic Germans in town. In part, that was because many of them, if not Haug, were also ethnic Czechs. The high local rate of biethnicity contributed to another pattern unusual in the Bohemian lands: both a German and a Czech movement were present, in roughly equal yet asymmetrical strengths. As was the case elsewhere, those movements used ethnic rhetoric. Individual choice and national competition, though, slowed ethnic nationalization in Budweis/Budějovice and stripped the process of much of its seeming naturalness and irreversibility. Nonethnic understandings of nationhood received unusual emphasis. Czech and German leaders, in their pursuit of power, also appealed openly to socioeconomic interests as well as resorted to raw coercion of Budweisers and of other residents—perhaps no more than elsewhere, but certainly more visibly for posterity, because of mutual national monitoring and denunciation. The Habsburg, Czechoslovak, and

Nazi states, meanwhile, confronted with the Czech-German conflict in miniature, recapitulated their policies for the Bohemian lands as a whole.

Local histories, despite having played significant roles in the scholarly literatures concerning such topics as working-class politics and Nazism, have played only a small role in the literature concerning nationhood. In the Bohemian historiography, Cohen's book is the only major contribution that focuses on a small territorial unit over a considerable span of time. Equivalent studies concerning other parts of Central Europe are few.³¹ Farther afield, historians of late imperial Russia and of the Soviet Union have published superb studies in recent years of multinational politics in a nonnational or more-than-national state—but have heavily favored macropolitical approaches.³² Historians of Western Europe have written a handful of pathbreaking local histories of nationhood. Only Peter Sahlin, however, focused on two nationhoods rather than on just one, and he did so not within one state but on the boundary between two: France and Spain.³³

Local histories have their limits. A history centered on one town in Habsburg Central Europe cannot hope to explain the origins of national politics, which lie outside the region. Nor can such a study account for a pivotal national success in the region before 1848: the acceptance by Habsburg elites of the idea that Czech, German, and other "nations" existed, and rested at least in part on Czech, German, and other ethnic groups. A study centered on Budweis/Budějovice must also neglect a force that for some time played an important role in Bohemian politics as a whole, but played a minor one in town: the great landowning nobility. Its power, however, steadily declined, such that the triadic, Czech-Habsburg-German structure to politics in Budweis/Budějovice between 1848 and 1918 anticipated a Bohemian trend. Even national successes strictly within the town can be only partly explained through a local approach, because they form part of a global pattern in modern times. Yet such limits are actually quite broad. Within them, this book attempts to go beyond Czech, German, or Czech *and* German interpretations of Bohemian politics during the century after 1848—and in the process, to arrive at a better understanding of Czech and German nationhood.

Publications from Budweis/Budějovice provide the bulk of primary sources for this study. Before the collapse of Communism in 1989, one could have spoken of 1848 and 1948 as the beginning and end of a free press in the Bohemian lands. Censorship and other political constraints, tight during the 1850s and during the Nazi occupation, were relatively loose during the intervening eras of constitutional rule, as well as in the chaotic years of 1848–49 and 1945–47. The economic conditions for local publishing were also favorable. By 1864, a town with fewer than twenty

thousand inhabitants, together with its surrounding countryside, was supporting a German newspaper, a Czech newspaper, and a Budweiser one (in German). Over the following several decades, periodicals printed in Budweis/Budějovice mushroomed in number and covered ever more of the shifting political spectrum. Institutions and individuals, meanwhile, added many nonperiodical publications: political pamphlets, associational reports, collections of documents, memoirs, histories, fiction, and more. Circulation figures and print runs, unfortunately, tended to remain a trade secret. But literacy rates, quite high in Bohemia already at the middle of the nineteenth century, officially exceeded 94 percent in 1900.³⁴

Some comments about terminology are in order. In this book, the adjective “German” does not refer to the Germany that was founded in 1871. Nor do the nouns “Germans” and “Czechs,” when used without “ethnic,” refer to nonnational individuals who happened to speak a version of the German or Czech language. In direct quotations from German or from Czech, proper nouns are either translated into English or left in the original language. Otherwise, people, places, and things known in their time by both German and Czech names are called by both here, separated by a slash mark: hence “Budweis” in a quotation from a German-language source, “Budějovice” in a quotation from a Czech-language one, and “Budweis/Budějovice” in other contexts. Double naming was uncommon in the past, as was English-language writing about Habsburg Central Europe. To use only the Czech name or only the German name in English would be less cumbersome. Doing so, though, would favor one national side over the other, and neglect the third, Habsburg, dimension to Bohemian politics before 1918.³⁵ Historical practice, commemoration, or mimesis are one matter, and historical analysis another: scholars need not limit themselves to understanding the past only in its own terms. On the other hand, scholars should not tolerate anachronism. Thus this book does not follow the widespread practice—whose historical roots are explained in chapter 1—of translating *die böhmischen Länder/české země* as “the Czech lands.” If they became Czech, rather than Bohemian, then that was only after 1945.

In English, “nation” is often used to mean “state,” and “state” to mean a territory within a state. This book tries to avoid confusion by being consistent. “State” here means “country,” in the sense of a membership organization that asserts, to quote Max Weber’s classic definition, a “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”³⁶ “Nation” means an imagined community at the heart of a certain kind of modern politics, and remains always in quotation marks—which signal critical distance from national uses of the term. “Nationhood,” a word coined only recently, is used to replace “nationalism,” which has a pejorative ring for many people. “Czechness” and “Germanness” are shorthand

for Czech and German nationhood, i.e., loyalties and legitimacies expressed through reference to the Czech and German “nations.”

“Ethnic,” finally, means an understanding that a “nation” emerged from and rests on a homogeneous culture—defined in the Bohemian cases primarily by language, but also to some degree by religious heritage. In the United States, where nationhood has a strong civic component, “ethnic” often denotes a cultural quality that distinguishes some Americans from others: thus Italian-American, African-American, and so on, in the sense of Italian or African by ethnicity but American by nationhood and by citizenship. From an ethnic perspective in Habsburg Central Europe, though, someone Czech or German by nationhood must be Czech or German by ethnicity as well.

In the summer of 1918, Robert Scheu, a Social Democrat and journalist from Vienna who had little knowledge of Bohemia but excellent connections there, set out to “experience the national question” of the Bohemian lands, and to heighten that experience by visiting Czechs and Germans “where they mesh.” He started in Budweis/Budějovice, where he quickly realized that “things of global significance are taking place. But these are silent events that stretch over decades and cause not the slightest stir—no more than does the transformation of a deciduous forest into a coniferous one, which often comes about as a consequence of a single frosty night, and subsequently brings about a climatic change.” Originally, Scheu explained, the town had been German. Gradually, though, “through the work of generations of small people, massive dams have been undermined, to the point that the foundations can no longer bear the political superstructure. [Czech] [a]rtisans and small businessmen, united with intellectuals dedicated to the national cause, have conquered heavy industry and banking through tenacious work; they have founded schools, and gained space and ground. The Germans, as heirs [*als erbgesehen*], are on the defensive.” Indeed, by the time Scheu finished writing an account of his expedition, in 1919, the Bohemian lands formed part of a Czech state—Czechoslovakia. Why, he asked, had Germans not been able to keep pace with their competitors? “Probably a dramatist could give us the answer, in a sweeping novel that laid bare the driving forces over several generations. I recommend Budweis to him as the setting for the plot.”³⁷

Scheu proves himself nationally quite tolerant in his account. Yet he was a German, and like most other nationals of his era and of subsequent ones in Habsburg Central Europe, he was blind to nonnational politics. Budweis/Budějovice had not been at first German, then more German than Czech, and then more Czech than German. Rather, it had long been Budweiser, or Habsburg-loyal—and German only in the purely linguistic sense that most residents seem to have preferred to speak German until some

time after the middle of the nineteenth century. The transformation of which he wrote was both more complex and more vast than he succeeded in imagining. It involved not only a Czech triumph and a German defeat (whose dimensions in 1918–19 were dwarfed by those in 1945) but a national triumph and a Habsburg defeat—a transformation in the very nature of politics. Yet Scheu’s recommendation of Budweis/Budějovice as a setting is a good one, as one novel and several histories that cover life in town over several generations show.³⁸ Like Scheu’s own journalistic work, though, those others are quite national. And unlike it, they tend to neglect developments affecting the town from outside. No one has yet succeeded in laying bare driving forces by focusing on Budweis/Budějovice. This book takes up the challenge.