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# Introduction: Liberalism, Nationalism and the Austrian State

In the memoirs of his youth, the writer Arthur Schnitzler noted that:

The circumstances of my childhood and adolescence, an atmosphere that was determined by the so-called liberalism of the 1860s and 1870s, did not leave me unscathed. The basic error of this world viewpoint seems to me to have been the fact that certain idealised values were taken for granted from the start as fixed and incontestable; that a false belief was aroused in young people, who were supposed to strive on a prescribed way toward clearly defined goals, and then be able to build their house and their world on a stable foundation. In those days we thought we knew what was true, good and beautiful; and all life lay ahead of us in grandiose simplicity.<sup>1</sup>

Liberalism aimed at harmony through reason and open discussion. There was a belief that one true, definitive solution could be found, agreed upon and applied – hence liberalism’s ideological dogmatism and stubbornness. While it was a very optimistic and idealistic belief, it was also, as Schnitzler notes, simplistic and inadequate when faced by a diversity of incompatible, deeply held opinions.<sup>2</sup> Schnitzler continued: ‘But what purpose could all individual experience have if everyone were to come to the same conclusion?’<sup>3</sup> Pluralism was encouraged by the liberals (for example, freedom of the press, association) but this was based on the assumption that out of debate there would emerge a consensus or, at least, some form of harmony.

Austro-German liberalism developed its ideas with the intention of regenerating and modernising the Habsburg Monarchy – its state system, administration, economy and society in general. There was an unshakeable belief in liberal ranks that this vast, all-encompassing Austro-German liberal project was the only viable solution to reforming the Monarchy. The heart of the book is an investigation of this Austro-German liberal project – the development of its leading ideas, the interaction between them, their concrete application and the unavoidable realities of everyday politics.<sup>4</sup> Underlying the book is a dual interplay: first, amongst the principles of Austro-German liberalism and, second, between those principles and practical realities. The subject is political elites, their ideas, policies and

## 2 Liberalism and the Habsburg Monarchy

interaction with each other.<sup>5</sup> This study begins in 1861 – the year of the February Patent, the reintroduction of parliament and lifting of censorship – and ends in 1895 as the liberals suffered a number of heavy defeats, including the collapse of the final cabinet containing Austro-German parliamentary liberals, the end of German political unity in Bohemia and a stunning electoral loss of Vienna's City Council to the Christian Social Party.<sup>6</sup> This book aims to reconfigure the liberals' place in the history of the Monarchy – to recapture their idealism and vigour as well as the twisted, frustrating path that saw their policies bear such unintended and contradictory results. The journey was a long and difficult one for the Austro-German liberals, starting with optimistic dreams of a regenerated liberal Monarchy and ending in political impotence as nationalism, socialism and conservatism gained ascendancy within the political system, using techniques largely pioneered by the liberals. Such a trajectory was not inevitable and throughout the book I will point to contingencies, possibilities and the open-ended nature of events.

### Assessing Austro-German liberalism

The historical literature has passed a harsh judgement on the liberals. Criticised as too divided, too elitist, too doctrinaire, too focused on anti-clerical matters, too German nationalist, too rigid, exclusionary, distracted and riven with personal rivalries – Austro-German liberals are often dismissed as weak forerunners to the more permanent, even natural, political camps of conservatism, socialism and German nationalism.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the German nationalism of the liberals is often emphasised at the cost of giving due weight to the commitment to the Austrian state idea and to the liberal ideals of a constitution, working parliament and vigorous civil society. The Austro-German liberals were crucial to the political development of the Monarchy and put in place lasting achievements. They grappled with all the major issues of the time, set the agenda for many lasting reforms and provided a compelling, all-encompassing alternative world view to the traditional, conservative, class-based (*ständisch*), absolutist state and society. Infused with an idealism based on Enlightenment thinking, the liberals of the 1860s looked forward to a well-run, well-ordered society.

Nevertheless, the historiography on the Austro-German liberals is not vast. Compared to the wealth of studies on Imperial Germany, it remains a little researched topic.<sup>8</sup> The classic works on Austrian liberalism were written by the 'third generation' of liberals who tried to explain the collapse of liberalism from the perspective of the early twentieth century. Richard Charnatz, for example, attacked the liberals' ideological conservatism, their inability to work with the non-German nationalities and their failure to welcome the new democratic currents.<sup>9</sup> His interpretation provides the outline for the traditional interpretation of Austrian liberalism's fall. Similarly, Josef Redlich's weighty *Das österreichische Staats- und Reichsproblem*, which only covers events until December 1867, placed the blame on the liberals' German chauvinism.<sup>10</sup>

In the wake of incorporation into the Third Reich and the devastation of the Second World War, unsurprisingly, the general condemnation of Austro-German

liberalism continued. Published in 1955, Georg Franz's *Liberalismus: Die Deutschliberale Bewegung in der Habsburgischen Monarchie* takes a panoramic approach and covers the liberal movement from the *Vormärz* (pre-March 1848) through the 1848 Revolutions to 1867 in admirable depth.<sup>11</sup> He argued that the liberals were distracted by their dogmatic insistence on a liberal *Rechtsstaat* (rule of law) and the fight against the Church, instead of pursuing the real issue of preserving the German *Bürgertum's* (middle class's) hegemonic position. Georg Franz's book, like Redlich's, ends in 1867 and similarly the promised continuation never appeared. A much less substantial book by Karl Eder, written from the Catholic perspective, also claimed that the liberals were too doctrinaire and were misguided in their insistence on the *Kulturkampf* (religious struggle).<sup>12</sup> In a suggestive review of both books, Adam Wandruszka postulated that the most important aspect of Austro-German liberalism was not the *Kulturkampf*, but the liberals' special relationship with the bureaucratic state.<sup>13</sup> Wandruszka asserted that the liberals were over-reliant on their position within the Austrian state, resulting in a weak industrial *Bürgertum*. They were thus debilitated when Francis Joseph turned on them in 1879 and were unprepared for the new mass politics of the 1880s. While most other movements had constructed networks independent of the Austrian state, the liberals' organisational network had atrophied since their ascension to executive power in 1867.<sup>14</sup>

Understandably, the majority of books published since the end of the Second World War have looked at either the perennial topic of nationalism, the Monarchy's social changes or a specific regions or towns.<sup>15</sup> The various studies on the Habsburg national question have revolved around either discrete national groupings and reform projects or the contrast of centrifugal and centripetal forces.<sup>16</sup> The liberals are normally discussed in the context of their German nationality. For example, within the ongoing, monumental series of books under the rubric of *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918* the liberals have been discussed as 'Germans' in Volume 3, in the context of general parliamentary history in Volume 7 and political ideologies in Volume 8 but they have not been specifically addressed as a party or movement themselves.<sup>17</sup> Other recent books on Austro-German liberalism have either restricted themselves to a particular issue, region or a small time frame.<sup>18</sup> In particular, Thomas Götz's book on the Tyrolean *Bürgertum* and liberals from 1840 to 1873 demonstrates how grounded the movement was in local conditions and traditions, especially in its early years.<sup>19</sup> There is, however, little in his book on the wider Austrian liberal movement or the Constitutional Party in parliament. While Götz maintains a focus on local Tyrolean liberals, I have attempted to portray the dynamic interaction between town, region and central state.

Two recent historians have engaged fully with Austro-German liberalism as a wider movement over a considerable length of time and both have continued the focus on its German national dimension. Pieter Judson's book, which correctly stresses the importance of the liberals to the political landscape of the Habsburg Monarchy, analyses the Austro-German movement from the perspective of social inclusion/exclusion. His rich and allusive interpretation is the most substantial since Redlich's work. Judson focuses on organisational life and its model

4 *Liberalism and the Habsburg Monarchy*

of implicit hierarchy of active/passive citizenship, which, in the course of the 1880s, was recast into an exclusive concept of German nationalism. Thus 'liberal rhetoric and organisational practice actually determined the shape and content of nationalist mass politics well into the twentieth century'.<sup>20</sup> The trope of exclusion, Judson argues, permeated liberal ideology and was transferred into the later nationalist rhetoric, maintaining German *Bürgertum* hegemony at the local level. For Judson, German nationalism was the heir to Austro-German liberalism and, far from destroying the movement, reinvigorated it.<sup>21</sup>

However, the idealistic belief in universal rights, bourgeois values and German (Western European) culture often tempered this hierarchical thinking. Indeed, rather paradoxically, liberal thinking was both hierarchical and universal. As Till van Rahden has argued concerning the position of Jews in society: 'historians who examine the ambivalences of civil society should focus on the simultaneous promise of participation, on the one hand, and the potential for exclusion, on the other'.<sup>22</sup> This applies equally to the liberal movement. Membership was theoretically possible, regardless of nationality or social class, provided one assimilated (or acculturated) into the liberal, bourgeois world and adopted its values.<sup>23</sup> For example, the Casino in Klagenfurt, a liberal-minded social club and library, stated that its purpose was 'to form a meeting place of social interaction and enjoyment for educated persons of all classes (*aller Stände*)'.<sup>24</sup> In general, liberalism was striving for a meritocratic society, although many practical barriers and entrenched traditions remained. Of course, according to the liberals, education and economic independence (*Bildung und Besitz*) were required for voting rights and the process of assimilation – so important to liberal goals and its belief in universalism. Yet, under the liberal system, every citizen was entitled to the same legal rights, education was made compulsory and economic freedom facilitated social mobility. Exclusion, Judson's principal theme, seems a harsh word for a political system that provided universal civil rights and a place – albeit not in proportion to population and under German hegemony – for all the nationalities in the Monarchy. For example, the Austrian liberal newspapers never failed to contrast the repressive Prussian/German policies in the Prussian/German Polish provinces with the extensive legal and political rights enjoyed by the Galician Poles.<sup>25</sup> While elitist, the liberals provided for and encouraged a theoretically possible homogeneous *bürgerlich* (middle class) society. By contrast, the later German nationalists discouraged any assimilation or acculturation, especially for the Jews who, in general, had been staunch supporters of Austro-German liberalism.

Lothar Höbelt's book, which investigates the German nationalists in depth, begins its coverage in 1882 and reaches similar conclusions to Judson's. While concentrating on the political minutiae and machinations in the construction of the German national movement, Höbelt emphasises the continuity with liberalism, especially the desire to maintain German hegemony.<sup>26</sup> Yet the 1860s were very different from the 1880s and afterwards. Early liberalism was more idealistic, less entrenched and more prepared to fight larger battles – for a constitution, against the Church – rather than the desperate defence and pragmatic political deals that characterised the turn of the century. Like Judson, Höbelt stresses the

importance of local politics (the periphery is the term that he uses) in the continued political strength of the German population.

In many respects, my interpretation follows in the steps of Redlich and Wandruszka, although less negative in judgement. Liberalism – a remarkably diverse yet comprehensive vision of state and society – involved a bundle of beliefs that were often difficult logically to reconcile into a consistent ideology, although they also sometimes coalesced to form a compelling larger vision. German chauvinism was just one of its many components. Also integral to the liberals of the 1860s and 1870s was the building of an integrated state and the securing of a progressive, functioning constitutional system. Until 1879 the working definition of a liberal was someone who was committed to a central constitution regardless of nationality, hence the generic term of ‘Constitutional Party’ for the liberal parliamentary fractions. After 1879 the constitution was no longer directly threatened and the commitment to the Josephinist ideal of an integrated state came under attack from many German nationalists who were solely concerned with protecting the German *Nationalbesitzstand* (national property).<sup>27</sup> I look at the liberals’ German nationalism from the perspective of the wider liberal project and its breakdown, rather than from the construction of German nationalist associations and political parties.

Both Judson and Höbelt regard many of the later German nationalists as liberals since they retained elements of liberalism; namely, anticlericalism and an extension of individual rights. Yet these issues played a very minor role within the later German national movement – the overwhelming concern was the interests of the German-speaking population since the state could no longer sufficiently protect the German *Nationalbesitzstand*. This viewpoint was very different from the earlier, more moderate liberals who looked to the state to implement liberal policies and to create an enlightened, *bürgerlich* society. At a certain point, when German nationalism was *the* determining factor, this should be acknowledged. There is a subtle but important difference between a German liberal (with the associated German chauvinism) and a German nationalist (with leftover, relatively insignificant elements of liberalism).

To a large extent, the difference is one of emphasis and subject matter. German nationalism was both a part of liberalism and, in its later incarnation, a refutation of it (namely, a denial of a homogeneous *bürgerlich* society and a turning away from the Austrian state). Where Judson and Höbelt stress the continuity between the liberals and the German nationalists, I stress the differences. Thus while Judson and Höbelt have pointed to the individuals who began their political careers within the mainstream of German liberalism and ended up in the German national movement (the Bohemian Germans Josef Bendel and Ernst Bareuther, for example), I have looked at the individuals who refused to pledge their allegiance to a solely German national cause (the older liberals Eduard Herbst, Eduard Sturm, Ernst Plener and Johann Chlumecky).

To investigate the interplay and interaction of underlying cultural assumptions with the actual political and social forces, specific events will be looked at in great detail. For example, around 1879 there were a number of interrelated events that

require lengthy explanation and analysis. These events included a liberal constitutional challenge to the Emperor's executive authority in foreign policy and a possible Czech–German liberal alliance, followed by a liberal loss in the elections, the return of the Czechs to parliament and the liberal move to opposition.

To provide continuity and concrete examples of the Austro-German liberal experience, the careers and attitudes of five prominent liberals will be followed: Moriz Kaiserfeld, Eduard Herbst, Ernst Plener, Adolph Fischhof and Heinrich Friedjung.<sup>28</sup> Their backgrounds and social origins were quite diverse. Moriz Kaiserfeld (1811–85) was from Lower Styria, his family had Slovene-speaking roots but by the early nineteenth century had, through state service and education, thoroughly assimilated into the German-speaking world.<sup>29</sup> In 1837 he became an administrator of Schloß Birkstein and soon married the landowner's widow. During the *Vormärz* era he became a member of many voluntary associations, including industry organisations and the local music association. While a believer in the Austrian state and central parliament, he remained committed to regional politics in Styria throughout his political career. In a private letter dated 21 February 1868, written when he was serving as President of the Lower House of parliament, he conceded that he would rather resign his parliamentary mandate than his membership on the Styrian regional executive committee (*Landescommittee*).<sup>30</sup> Eventually he would serve as Styrian governor (*Landeshauptmann*) from 1870 to his retirement from public life in 1884.

Eduard Herbst (1820–92) was born in Vienna with distant family roots as Czech-speakers in Bohemia.<sup>31</sup> After spending his childhood and student life in Vienna, Herbst became a legal professor in Lemberg (1847–58) then in Prague (from 1858). He was thus less rooted in local and regional politics than Kaiserfeld. Elected to a northern Bohemian seat to the Bohemian Diet and then to the Imperial parliament, Herbst served as the *de facto* leader of the liberals through the 1860s and 1870s. An expert lawyer, Herbst was known as a fearsome intellect and an outstanding speaker, often using sarcasm, his immense knowledge of facts and a mastery of complex issues. His commitment to parliamentary rights pushed the liberals into opposition in the late 1870s and eventually led to the liberals losing the majority in parliament. While Herbst was in the mainstream of Austro-German liberalism, Kaiserfeld provides an ideological and provincial counterpoint.

Ernst Plener (1841–1923), the son of a prominent liberal and minister, succeeded Herbst as liberal leader. He came from a family with a long history of state service and while a youth moved with his father Ignaz Plener (a highly successful civil servant who would later have stints as Finance Minister and Trade Minister in different liberal cabinets) from Eger (in West Bohemia) to Prague and on to Bratislava. He thus studied mainly with private tutors until an intensive and enjoyable time at *Gymnasium* (high school) in Bratislava.<sup>32</sup> Following his father to another posting, this time in Lemberg, the young Plener completed his *Gymnasium* studies there. As a student at the universities of Lemberg, Vienna and Berlin, Plener read widely and showed a great interest in politics while also participating in the expected dissolute beer evenings. He passed the diplomatic exams and was posted to Paris and then London. English life made a great impression on

him and his experience of British parliamentary debates inspired a strong belief in liberalism and parliamentary government.<sup>33</sup> His upbringing and social circle resembled a typical aristocratic route rather than the more *bürgerlich* Herbst and the rooted regional politician Kaiserfeld. When he succeeded his father as parliamentary representative of the Eger Trade Chamber in 1873, a long career in a high public office beckoned. He would never quite fulfil the high expectations of his youth, spending two years as Finance Minister in the Windischgrätz coalition government without any major reform to his name.

Adolph Fischhof (1816–93) and Heinrich Friedjung (1851–1920) were not politicians (although both served shortly on representative bodies at various times) but were primarily liberal commentators.<sup>34</sup> Both were Jewish and both attempted to form new alternative liberal parties in the 1880s but failed. Fischhof was from the older generation, born in Budapest (he moved to Vienna at the age of twenty), he trained as a doctor and came to prominence in the 1848 Revolutions. He was heavily involved in the Viennese and Kremsier parliaments of 1848–49 and throughout his life called for national reconciliation. Friedjung, who was thirty-five years younger than Fischhof, began as a committed German nationalist. Only after being the target of an anti-Semitic campaign in the mid 1880s did Friedjung move gradually towards mainstream Austro-German liberalism. He would later become the most celebrated Austrian historian of his time and a strong Austrian patriot. In 1906 he wrote of the liberals: ‘how could it be possible that such prominent men, such as Schmerling, Anastasius Grün [Anton Auersperg], Hasner, Herbst have still not found any biographers!’<sup>35</sup> More than a hundred years later none of these Austro-German liberal politicians have been the subject of full biographies and nor have many of their generation.<sup>36</sup> By tracing the lives of five of them in the context of the Austro-German liberal movement, I wish to show the richness, diversity and significance of these neglected politicians.

### **The basis of Austro-German liberalism: ‘Austria, German nationality and freedom’ (Eduard Herbst, 1866)**

In December 1866 at a crucial meeting of Bohemian German representatives and at a time of great uncertainty – after military defeat and a period of domestic turbulence – Eduard Herbst proudly affirmed the major principles of the Austro-German liberals: ‘Austria, German Nationality and Freedom,’ he proclaimed, ‘We carry these three words on our flag, at the front, and we will stay loyal to them.’<sup>37</sup> In 1873 and in 1885 he made similar assertions in crucial speeches.<sup>38</sup> For Herbst and his audience these principles seemed self-evident. First, there was the idea of a powerful, central state; second, a belief in the universality and civilising power of German cultural achievements; and third, the concept of constitutionalism that emphasised the erection of a liberal institutional and legal framework. These were, as Herbst noted, the core principles of Austro-German liberalism.

Yet how mutually compatible were these three principles? Did they reinforce each other or ultimately conflict or were they a changing combination of the two? How realistic were such principles? What was the weighting and interaction

between them? This book will trace the history of Austrian liberalism by following these three contrasting strands as they overlapped and coexisted in a state of mutual support and tension from the 1860s to 1890s.<sup>39</sup> Of course, each person, liberal association and parliamentary *Fraktion* (grouping) had their own specific conception of liberalism and there were many variants on the basic ideas and policies. Indeed, Anton Auersperg, a celebrated poet in the pre-1848 era and a prominent liberal politician until his death in 1876, conceded liberalism's subjectivity and plurality:

Liberalism, an elastic word, under which one can think what one wants; a word which is greatly misused, a concept that is also used to its widest limits so that it represents things it really should not. The definition itself is difficult; it becomes even more difficult through use of the elastic phrase: 'freedom and progress'. In my opinion, a man is of liberal disposition if he really honours right and correctness in speech and truth – wherever it is found, where it is not believed to be found – who searches with good intentions, and where it is found, he indeed attempts to realise it.<sup>40</sup>

There is no doubt that in terms of ideology, organisation, traditions, social background and local conditions the Austro-German liberals were a motley political grouping. Yet one of my principal arguments is that there was a common commitment to three core principles and at critical moments the liberals rallied in defence of them, despite the obvious variety and division within the Austro-German liberal camp. The history of the Austro-German liberal movement until the 1890s can be viewed as grounded in deep regional, ideological, institutional and class divisions with occasional, crucial and significant periods of unity. The bases of this unity were the three core principles that together formed the ideological foundation of the Austro-German liberal project. This project was articulated in the 1860s, implemented to some extent in the 1867 constitution and by the liberal government in the 1870s and was then fundamentally recast when the liberals entered into parliamentary opposition in 1879. Gradually the balance between the principles shifted so that by the late 1890s German nationalism had become absolutely predominant.

Looking at the three principles in turn, the commitment to the Austrian state idea formed a long and deep tradition within Austro-German liberalism. Many liberals regarded Emperor Joseph II (1741–90) as a model. He envisioned a secular, enlightened, centralised integrated state (*Gesamtstaat*) with standardised laws, schools, taxes and institutions across the whole of the Monarchy.<sup>41</sup> In 1880, for example, the leading liberal Leopold Hasner, who had been Minister-President for a short time in the 1870s, described himself as a proud Josephinist.<sup>42</sup> An unmistakable implication behind the Josephinist integrated state was the Germanisation of the state and public sphere. There was an assumption that the integrated state would be administered by an elite, German-speaking bureaucracy. Thus the adherents of Josephinism were mostly high-ranking state officials and conservative-minded liberals who believed in a strong state. Fear of social upheaval, as occurred

during the French Revolutions and the 1848 Revolutions, lay behind much of their thinking. Nevertheless, the Josephinist liberals of the parliamentary era after 1861 were no advocates of an absolutist state. The Austrian state, according to them, should perform a reforming role in society and be based on strict principles and a legal framework – in other words, there should be rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*), especially for the bureaucracy and the executive government. The importance of the Austrian state and the Theresian–Josephinist heritage to the Austro-German liberal movement was clear to the liberals themselves. Eduard Herbst (leader of the German liberal party in the 1860s and 1870s) and Ernst Plener (the leader in the 1880s until 1895) both spoke passionately of their Austrian state patriotism. Eduard Herbst, described his time in the Finance Procurement Office in the early 1840s as a unique learning experience in Austrian statecraft:

Our study lay in the files, where the handwritten notes of Joseph II and Maria Theresia were scattered like rich deposits of gold dust. We believed in them like the Gospel ... these letters preached the task of the State ... they explained to us the State idea ... we learnt at this time that the meaning of the Empire as a whole is in reverse relation to the power of the provinces ... therefore we became Josephinists in the practical service of the Finance Procurement Office; so the Austrian idea matured in us, we saw in our hopes a unified Austria as a powerful state structure of the future.<sup>43</sup>

Other lowly civil servants in the Finance Procurement Office of the mid 1840s included Leopold Hasner, Carl Giskra, Alexander Bach and Josef Lasser (all would later become ministers). Indeed, the civil service throughout the whole period was a key training ground for many liberal politicians. From the next generation, Armand Dumreicher worked in the Finance Procurement Office in the late 1860s and then in the Education Ministry during the 1870s before entering parliament as a liberal representative in 1886. Similarly, Joseph Maria Baernreither was a young official in the Justice Ministry during the 1870s before gaining a seat in parliament in 1885 and becoming Trade Minister for short terms in 1898 and 1907. Thus Austro-German liberalism had a close yet ambiguous relationship with the state – seeking to strengthen the state's position, widen its scope and to use it as a vehicle for reform, yet also striving to restrict absolutist tendencies and to prevent any abuses.

The liberal belief in a certain German nationalism had two aspects: first, the historical significance of German speakers in the construction of the Austrian state and, second, the assumption of German cultural superiority. Liberal rhetoric always stressed the special role that the German-speakers had performed in Austrian history – constructing the state (especially in the Theresian–Josephinist period) and civilising the area. For the liberals, the wheels of the Austrian state could only be oiled by the German language. It was, according to this view, only 'natural' that citizens would learn German both for personal edification and for communication with state authorities. There was a general belief that the state required one standard language and, for historical and cultural reasons, this could

only be German. There were no active policies to eliminate languages, indeed in the 1867 constitution every nationality was granted language rights in the public sphere and these rights were in fact quite liberally interpreted, especially compared to the situation in Hungary, where from 1875 Magyarisation was prevalent.<sup>44</sup> The liberals could be magnanimous in the 1867 constitution because there was an absolute assumption that German would be the predominant language in the Monarchy.<sup>45</sup>

The second aspect of German nationalism – pride in culture – was based on the riches of German poetry, science, literature, academic works and, to a lesser extent, music. Around the time of the French Revolution, German culture was at a peak. Goethe, Schiller, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Kant, Hegel and numerous other luminaries had contributed to an outstanding period in German culture. German universities were rapidly becoming among the best in the world and in the German-speaking world there was an almost reverential respect for education (*Bildung*). German-speakers in Austria regarded themselves as participants in this German cultural renaissance. This sense of belonging to a wider cultural community was reinforced by membership of the Austrian and Bohemian lands in the old Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, subsequently the German Confederation. Moreover, the German language was a world language (*Weltsprache*) with 40 million speakers and, according to many intellectuals, the most developed language in the Monarchy. Surely, in the view of the liberals, even a Czech or Slovene patriot could acknowledge German masterpieces and would want to appreciate them. Yet, conversely, why should the Germans learn Czech or Slovene? According to the liberals, there was no significant literature or scientific studies in the Slav languages nor was Austria a Slav state. While the sons of the German liberals learnt French, English, Latin and Ancient Greek (and perhaps Italian), the Slav languages – from the Austro-German liberal viewpoint – did not afford comparable rewards. In Austro-German liberal circles German cultural superiority was almost always accepted as ‘natural’ and unquestioned.

This nationalist frame of thinking determined the Austro-German liberals’ views on the different nationalities in the Monarchy. The two criteria were history (whether there was a history of a state and what its place in world history had been and was) and culture (both in the narrow sense of the arts and in the wider sense of general life). In the liberal world view, if a nationality possessed a glorious state history, it had earned a place in world history and the right to form a modern state.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, if a nationality possessed a demonstrably great culture – with acknowledged masterpieces in literature, music and art – plus a generally civilised, humane way of life, it deserved recognition and self-government. Of course, a long state history combined with a high level of culture was the provenance of the ‘civilised’ nations; according to the German liberals, only the Germans could unequivocally claim this status among the Austrian nationalities.

This feeling of superiority encouraged the idea of an Austro-German cultural mission in the East – to some extent, a descendant of the historical Austrian mission to defend Christendom against Turkish invaders and of Enlightenment thinking. It also encouraged dreams of gradual assimilation into and widening of German culture in

the region. Assimilation was vital to the Austro-German liberal project. It was based on the premise that universal rights and freedoms plus the prestige of German culture would attract adherents to the Austro-German liberal project; both for practical reasons – to thrive within a state system – and for idealistic reasons, to participate in the riches of a ‘world language’. This process of assimilation into German culture had for centuries operated in harness with social and official advancement. Gundacker Wurmbrand, a leading liberal who would later become Trade Minister wrote in a letter that ‘the hegemony of the Germans in Austria has always been based on being the representatives of state thinking and therefore the other nationalities have tried to assimilate with us’.<sup>47</sup> Far from a militarist notion of subordination, the liberals framed the mission in the terms of the Enlightenment and benefit to the other nationalities, as the journalist Otto Bernhard Friedmann made clear:

The spiritual strength and education of all existing nationalities [in the Monarchy] has its roots mostly in the achievements of German culture. The real state of different national levels of education (*Bildung*), like the ability of each to assimilate [into the German sphere], depends on the openness with which a nationality acquires the fruit of German spiritual education then reproduces this according to their own unique national character.<sup>48</sup>

In response to the claims of Germanisation, the liberals replied that the values transmitted through German culture were universal human values. Thus German culture was not perceived as a monolith demanding conformity, but by nature cosmopolitan (*weltbürgerlich*).<sup>49</sup> Learning German opened up the world of European culture for the Slav- and Hungarian-speaking populations.<sup>50</sup>

The third core principle, liberal constitutionalism, stressed the restraint of absolutist tendencies in the state. Few liberals were in favour of strict parliamentary government but they all believed in a constitution and the rule of law. The ideal constitution, as Kant argued, would allow ‘the greatest possible human freedom in accordance with laws by which the freedom of each is made consistent with that of all others’ – a harmonious society.<sup>51</sup> Not only would the constitution and its laws (basing its authority on reason and justice) curb any police state excesses, but it would also regulate society to provide freedom for everybody – the famous Kantian vision of a civil society consisting of rational, independent, autonomous, free individuals. Part of the magical allure of the constitution was the idealistic belief in progress and a harmonious well-ordered society of individuals. This utopian vision of society lay behind much of the liberals’ constitutional thinking, especially in the optimistic era of the 1860s. In a nostalgic evocation of this era Adolf Exner, a prominent Professor of Law at the University of Vienna, tried to convey the idealism of the early liberals: ‘At the time [the 1860s] one thought that with the simple existence of a “constitution”, as if by a magic wand, all difficulties would be solved, our old severely tested Austria would be reborn and lifted above all peaks.’<sup>52</sup> The Austro-German liberals believed that, slowly, through progress and the intrinsic worth of liberal institutions, a revitalised Austrian population would fuse into one political and social entity – much as what appeared to have occurred in other

Western European countries. The liberal Justice Minister of the 1870s, Julius Glaser, neatly tied these threads together:

we still want an integrated Austrian right to citizenship (*gesammt-österreichisches Staatsbürgerrecht*), at least this side of the Leitha [a small river on the border with Hungary] ... on the ground of the constitution. We also want to join together our different nationalities (*Stammesgenossen*) into a higher unity (Bravo! Left) ... then in this coalescence into a higher whole ... the other nationalities will find, in our opinion, the best protection.<sup>53</sup>

The liberals' social engineering has been noted by Judson, who has stressed the intolerance of such a stance.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the liberals had good intentions – a fact often neglected by the non-German nationalities and by later historians. For example, the engineer and later prominent liberal Wilhelm Exner eloquently described a future liberal society to a doubting conservative aristocrat:

He [the conservative politician] said at the time, he doesn't understand how one could be a liberal politician. There was only one construction of society, which must be in different social classes – underneath the workers, the proletariats, then come the middle classes and at the top, a layer of oil, the aristocrats, the clergy and the military. Thereupon I opined, 'These levels can even be recognised with colours! Underneath grey-brown, the middle-classes clear water, and on top gold-yellow, the oil.' – 'Yes, yes', he replied, 'that is absolutely appropriate. A technician always finds the correct image.' – 'That is all very well', I answered again, 'but when somebody disturbs the glass the brown gunk overflows into the entire liquid. And what happens then with the levels?' – 'That is only an exceptional situation, it will settle itself again,' explained the Count. 'Never', as I closed this controversy, 'will it settle and your levels come back!' This highly conservative politician did not understand how one could advocate the equality of classes and individuals. The only programme for liberalism was indeed the equality of citizens in all classes, confessions and nations.<sup>55</sup>

Much of this idealistic thinking was evident in 1848 when the liberal call for a constitution assumed an instant transformation of Metternich's stagnant, reactionary regime into a liberal, modern, progressive society. As in much early liberal thinking, the faith placed in a constitution and new institutions was unrealistic.

Ultimately, all three core ideological strands in the Austro-German liberal project – Austrian patriotism, German pride and liberal beliefs – pointed to a certain liberal and German-centred arrogance or hubris. Liberal thinking firmly believed that the Austro-German liberals and their ideas were destined to run Austria. In short, history was on their side. This conviction was, the liberals argued, justified both from Austria's history and for its future development. By the late 1870s this had hardened into a rule of thumb for liberals: you cannot govern without the support of German-speakers. The liberals looked back to their own successful struggles against conservative, federalist governments of Richard Belcredi (1865) and Karl

Hohenwart (1871) as proof of this rule. In addition, their faith in a future harmonious, liberal society and in the civilising role of German culture reinforced this arrogance. Schmerling's 1861 centralist constitution and electoral regulations, incorporated into the 1867 Constitution, entrenched and institutionalised this belief.

Nevertheless, mixed with this arrogance was a great deal of insecurity. The liberals were aware of the strong conservative forces within the Monarchy opposed to their vision and policies: principally the Catholic Church, the conservative aristocracy and, most importantly, the Emperor, who was instinctively absolutist and resistant to change (attributable to his upbringing, experiences in 1848–49 and rule in the 1850s).<sup>56</sup> When the constitutional Monarchy was evolving through a series of steps in the 1860s, Francis Joseph only reluctantly conceded the minimum to the liberals when he could see no other alternative. Moreover, the liberals recognised that the German-speakers in the civil service and military, often invoked rhetorically as carriers of the Austrian state and German cultural work, were not necessarily supporters of the Austro-German liberal project. When the parliamentary Austro-German liberals were in executive and legislative control in 1867–68, their insecurity manifested itself in a frenzy of activity to embed the liberal system, its principles and its institutions, before a possible change of mind from the Emperor or an external event that would realign the constellation of forces within the Monarchy.

In addition, there developed a principled, even dogmatic, defence of the 1861/67 Constitution that made political alliances difficult. This included any possible alliance with liberal-minded non-German political groupings. Many of these national groupings were not entirely hostile to the liberal vision from the start – provided there was space for non-German languages and cultural development. The Slovene parliamentary representatives, for example, occasionally allied with the liberals as did the Ruthenians and Italians while various factions within the Czech camp contemplated a liberal alliance at different times. Yet over the years these groups gradually became alienated by Austro-German liberal arrogance and dogmatism.

The Austro-German liberal project involved an all-encompassing vision that postulated the fundamental regeneration of the state, society and individual citizens. In the 1860s and early 1870s the three strands of Austro-German liberalism combined to form a remarkably cohesive overarching conception of a progressive, liberal, German-dominated, centralist state. Over time and through the course of events, however, the ideological strands changed and the interrelated, intertwined principles of the Austro-German liberal project gradually began to move in different directions. Eventually, as the possibility of realising the Austro-German liberal project receded, German nationalism rose to become the dominant consideration in the movement. This process forms the latter third of the book.

### **From *Österreichertum* to *Deutschtum*: the process and dynamic of Austro-German liberal politics, 1861–95**

On 17 June 1880 the prominent liberal Julius Alexander Schindler completed the foreword to his book *Exkursionen eines Österreichers 1840–1879* at his residence in Palace Leopold's Crown, Salzburg. A collection of travel experiences in Austria and

Germany, the book's foreword described the author's experiences as a patriotic Austrian from the 1840s until 1879:

My fatherland is Austria ... [which] under the German Empress Maria Theresa and her hard-working son Emperor Joseph II existed ... I have until now only felt myself as an Austrian, a citizen of this vast Empire ... But the experiences of the recent days [the change to a conservative–Slav government under Eduard Taaffe] have forced me, in order to secure the general treasures of human civilization, for the present and for the time being to retreat into my threatened German national feeling [*Deutschtum*].<sup>57</sup>

A liberal in parliament until losing his seat in 1870, a decade later Schindler had moved from a strong commitment to liberal values and the Austrian state to increasing disillusionment and a retreat to the protection of German values.

The liberal movement in general, too, shifted in the 1880s towards a defensive position protecting German and liberal achievements. How did this process unfold? How did the core principles of the Austrian state idea, German cultural pride and liberal principles change and interact over this time? Nationalism, as Schindler's statement shows, had not always been the dominant issue within Austro-German liberalism and the Monarchy's politics. In 1859 Prague Germans and Czechs had joined in celebrations to mark the hundredth anniversary of Schiller's birth.<sup>58</sup> This was one of the first public events where Eduard Herbst made his mark. Two years later, Leopold Hasner, who spoke both German and Czech fluently, was offered the candidature in the Old City of Prague from separate German and Czech electoral committees. Eventually, after much consideration, Hasner decided to run as a German candidate. In his election speech he called for reconciliation and brotherhood between the two peoples.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, in the early years of Austrian public life, Hasner tried unsuccessfully to form a liberal political party for both Germans and Czechs.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, in his distinguished political career, including a short stint as Prime Minister, Hasner would defend the idea of the central Austrian state and the special importance of the German language and culture. There were also instances of politicians crossing camps in the early 1860s: German-speaking federalists and Czech-speaking Constitutional Party candidates in Bohemia, for example.<sup>61</sup> In these early years of constitutional life there was dialogue between the national spheres, mutual respect, some shared liberal goals and an overall common loyalty to the dynasty.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, despite their belief in the civilising mission of German culture and liberal values, the Austro-German liberals were not simple German chauvinists. Many had multinational backgrounds, came from mixed-language areas and spoke a number of languages. Ignaz Plener had a mother from a Hungarian Transylvanian family and spoke Hungarian with her. Ernst Plener maintained the family's Hungarian connection by marrying the daughter of József Eötvös (a prominent Hungarian liberal politician and intellectual). Other liberals such as Eduard Sturm, Joseph Schöffel and August Fournier spent years in Hungary and learnt Hungarian. Moreover, in Moravia and Bohemia there was a long tradition of learning both

German and Czech, especially amongst the rural population where an informal youth exchange system operated between German and Czech families.<sup>63</sup> In mixed areas, such as Prague, many could speak both languages (Leopold Hasner, for example). In Styria and Carinthia, however, there was greater resistance to learning a second language such as Slovenian that, according to many German-speakers, was of little use or value.

Assertive nationalism was not a large component of the early liberal movement. More important was the liberal vision of a well-regulated, harmonious *bürgerlich* society dominated by reason, responsibility and freedom.<sup>64</sup> A certain *bürgerlich* life was held up as the model in a future liberal utopian society and German culture was subsumed within this matrix of universal values.<sup>65</sup> A glimpse of this life can be found in the memoirs of Karl Banhans, the son of a civil servant turned minister, Anton Banhans. In loving detail Karl Banhans described his upbringing in the liberal circles of the 1860s and 1870s. A native of Prague, he would come home from school around midday and go through his studies with his father. In the afternoon there were two hours' tuition from a private tutor, which may involve excursions. At nights the men – many of whom were prominent politicians – would discuss politics either at home or at the Casino. Sunday nights were devoted to chamber music and singing.<sup>66</sup> Later, when the Banhans family moved to Vienna and his father was Trade Minister, there would often be card games or music. Josef Unger, a prominent jurist and minister, would frequently play piano while Anton Banhans played cello or sang. Every two weeks there would be 'fried chicken' (*Backhändl*) evenings at their house where Josef Lasser, the soul of cabinet and another prominent minister, would be in good humour. The Minister-President Adolf Auersperg was a frequent genial (*gemütlich*) presence at these evenings stating that: 'fried chicken is more digestible than a ministerial protocol'.<sup>67</sup> Karl Banhans followed the common *bürgerlich* route of legal studies at University (where many of his friends were also sons of prominent liberals) and lengthy civil service. He would eventually become Railways Minister in the final Austrian cabinet of 1918.

This milieu, which stressed self-control, hard work, independence, education, reason, moderation, order, civilised manners and an appreciation of high culture, was presented as a universal ideal. It could nevertheless also be repressive and overly critical.<sup>68</sup> An intense *bürgerlich* upbringing, supposedly based on natural and universal principles, was not for everyone. Alfred Berger, another son of a minister, was forced to learn Kant's theory of forms at the age of twelve and eventually rebelled against this environment of critical, sceptical, dialectic questioning. He pursued his interest in theatre, becoming a respected writer and the director of the k.k. Burgtheater in 1910.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, Ernst Plener flourished in a similar hothouse environment and followed in his father's footsteps, first into parliament and then as Finance Minister.

Public engagement and social activity were vital elements of this *bürgerlich* life. In the restrictive *Vormärz* era, reading clubs both at University and for the general public were important centres for learning and socialising.<sup>70</sup> At a time when printed materials were extremely expensive these clubs provided access to newspapers, journals and books as well as providing 'an independent social space

for the development of alternative social visions', in the words of Judson.<sup>71</sup> The formation of voluntary associations or reading clubs put liberal ideals and values in action: a society potentially open to all, self-administration, autonomous development, equality amongst members, free discussion, voting, compromise, self-improvement and instilling of moral values. Most famous of all the reading clubs was the Legal-Political Reading Association in Vienna formed in 1841 and, over the years, counting amongst its members a galaxy of future ministers, parliamentarians and high-ranking officials.<sup>72</sup> Also important in providing a forum for progressive ideas were the agricultural and industrial associations that could function as unofficial pressure groups on government policy.<sup>73</sup>

More socially oriented, the wave of Casinos that were founded from the *Vormärz* era to the 1860s further facilitated discussion, reading and communal entertainment as well as, in many cases, providing a focal point for political activism. This gradual development of sociability (*Geselligkeit*) was concentrated in towns and differed greatly depending on local traditions, individual actions and official attitudes. In Graz, for example, a Casino – mostly for nobles – was formed in 1818 and reawakened in 1858, while the more *bürgerlich* residents met in the Graz Reading Association formed in 1819. The Ressource, or *bürgerliches* casino, was subsequently founded in 1837 as an alternative and was extremely popular with military officers, bureaucrats, lawyers, professors and businessmen. In the 1860s and 1870s half of the Graz local council were members of the Ressource.<sup>74</sup> In Salzburg the Geselligkeitsverein (founded in 1849) and the Handels-Casino (founded in 1854) performed similar functions. In Klagenfurt the New Casino was only formed in 1865, although there was an older club for the nobles. In Prague the Czechs formed the Burger Club in 1846 and the Germans finally founded the German Casino in 1862. For the publically minded Prague German-speakers, the German Casino formed the centre for social and political activities. Before each election – whether local, Bohemian Diet or Imperial Parliament – the electoral committee (made up of respected 'trusted men') would sit in the German Casino's meeting-rooms and determine the official candidate list and electoral programme. These middle-class, liberal-oriented clubs were in general founded before comparable conservative, Catholic-oriented associations. Adolf Rhomberg, who was a member of the conservative Catholic *Bürgercasino* in Dornbirn (Vorarlberg) gave a vivid description of a typical evening:

[people played cards in the front rooms] ... while in the back rooms, the so-called 'Quarrelling Rooms' (*Streiterstüble*), the older men, priests, mayor, etc. sat and talked politics a lot. Rhomberg also sat there and often enthusiastically participated in the historical and political disputes.<sup>75</sup>

Along with social clubs, liberals were enthusiastic participants in the network of voluntary associations – gymnastics, hiking, music, nature, literature and education were amongst the most common – that arose in the course of the nineteenth century. Indeed, even the traditional summer stay in the countryside could promote the training of liberal minds.<sup>76</sup>

As Jürgen Kocka has convincingly argued in relation to the *Bürgertum* in Germany, this *bürgerlich* life with its principles and symbolic practices defined itself against the aristocracy, absolutist rule and religious orthodoxy.<sup>77</sup> It was a cultural definition rather than a strictly economic one, although a certain income was required for the property, servants, education and leisure time associated with such a lifestyle. It also aspired to universal application. There was a considerable overlap between the *Bürgertum* and liberalism, principally – as Dieter Langewiesche has noted – in the common goal of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (bourgeois society). Yet the link between particular social groupings and the liberal movement was dynamic and malleable. For example, one could be bourgeois without supporting liberalism (this was especially the case where the influence of the Catholic Church was strong and there were no large towns with an urban elite), while equally one could be a liberal and come from the highest aristocratic circles (for example, Carl Auersperg who led the constitutionally loyal Bohemian Great Landowners for decades and was Minister-President at the liberal high-water mark of 1867–68).<sup>78</sup> Ultimately what bound the liberal movement together was not membership in a social class; rather it was the adherence to common political beliefs and a shared vision of the future.

Many demands made during the 1848–49 Revolutions were inspired by these early liberal ideas for the fundamental reform of state and society. Political goals such as constitutions, representative institutions and fundamental rights were supposed to lay the foundations of a changed, universal *bürgerlich* society. Political reform was prioritised by liberals as a means of attaining wider goals in society. Yet along with change came street violence, war and deep-rooted conflict. The 1848–49 Revolutions sobered liberal dreams. Moriz Kaiserfeld, after participating in the Styrian Diet and the Frankfurt Parliament, supported the mildly conservative constitution of 4 March 1849 rather than the concurrent constitutional draft of the Kremsier parliament.<sup>79</sup> Through the neo-absolutist years, liberal ideals were retained and refined in local authorities (which remained in place after 1849, although without elections), chambers of commerce, voluntary associations, social clubs and parts of the bureaucracy, especially in education and trade. While continuing to lament the lack of a constitution, the power of the Church (especially the 1855 Concordat that gave the Church wide-ranging powers and autonomy), the stifling censorship and the state's absolutist decision-making, there was a certain respect for efficient administration and the importance of the executive. Many moderate Josephinist liberals such as Johann Chlumecky, Adolf Pratobevera, Josef Lasser and Ignaz Plener (all of whom would later become Ministers) contributed to the neo-absolutist state and the restoration of order. Within Austro-German liberalism the Theresian–Josephinist roots and a certain reformist étatism now became much more important; while in 1848–49 the liberal constitutionalism had been more to the fore. At the same time, the German nationalist strand of Austro-German liberalism increasingly moved away from unrealistic dreams of German unity or a Great Austria (*Großösterreich*) and concentrated on the German position within the Habsburg Monarchy.

A semblance of constitutional life arrived in the early 1860s. The October Diploma (1860) and February Patent (1861) were hesitant steps towards

constitutionalism and a functioning parliament. The executive, however, retained its immense influence and remained in the Emperor's hands. Characteristically, neither the October Diploma nor the February Patent was the result of a constitutional convention – both were issued as Imperial decrees.<sup>80</sup> Why was there no large convention in the 1859 or the early 1860s where a compromise acceptable to everyone could have been hammered out? First and foremost, Francis Joseph was completely against the idea. He was comfortable being the sole arbiter of policy in the Monarchy and only conceded power with great reluctance. The Habsburgs often used the different national, religious and interest groups for a policy of 'divide and rule' – a combined multinational liberal front against the dynasty was Francis Joseph's nightmare; a reminder of the violence in 1848.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Francis Joseph's natural conservatism was not tempered by any strong, trusted, forward-looking advisor. Second, there was unwillingness from the Austro-Germans to push for a multinational constitutional convention. The legacy of the neo-absolutist era was an enormous modernisation of the administrative system, economic policy and educational institutions, despite the illiberal return of censorship, the absolutist state and an all-powerful Monarch.<sup>82</sup> The backbone and major beneficiary of this state-based modernisation was the German-speaking population. In the economy, the state service, the schools and universities of the Monarchy, educated German-speakers formed the vital support of the centralised, standardising neo-absolutist system. The German liberals realised that a centralised, strong state retained their hegemony more securely than a laboriously negotiated compromise agreed by all the political interest groups of the Monarchy.

It was with the opening of the public sphere in the early 1860s – a relaxation of press censorship, a long-term sitting parliament, the rebirth of associational life, public debate – that the Austro-German liberals could widely publicise, articulate and debate their vision of a regenerated, progressive, constitutional Monarchy. Moreover, parliament, in harness with Schmerling's bureaucratic government, took concrete steps towards realising liberal reforms. There continued to be severe constraints as well, including boycotts of parliament (encompassing at various times the lands of the Hungarian Kingdom, conservative Bohemian nobles, Czech groupings), a reluctant state bureaucracy, an influential Catholic Church and a fundamentally conservative, cautious Emperor. These early years of the constitution, parliamentary life and an open civil society were fundamental to the development of politics in the Monarchy. The Austro-German liberal world view presented a wide-ranging, intellectually grounded vision of the Monarchy's future. Its opponents were forced to confront this challenge and to define themselves against the liberal ideas and practice, often using techniques and rhetoric pioneered by the liberals.

Once installed as the fundament of the new constitutional system, the Austro-German liberals were not prepared to concede their political and cultural hegemony. As the distinguished politician and historian Josef Redlich wrote:

The basic idea ... the real, leading idea of German-Austrian domestic politics, which remained until the end of the Empire, was: Austria, particularly the

entity linked in real union with Hungary since 1867 and allied with Prussia-Germany since 1878, can only exist as a unified state with German hegemony.<sup>83</sup>

The Austro-German liberal view on the nationalities was essentially based on the process of assimilation. A progressive, German-led, central state would, according to this view, implement widespread education and facilitate general economic prosperity. This would in turn facilitate the natural process of assimilation into a hegemonic, German-speaking, Austrian *bürgerlich* society. Ludwig Schlesinger, a Bohemian German liberal politician and historian, wrote that:

The Czech language island does not have anywhere near enough material and spiritual strength to develop a new land when surrounded by the heaving German oceans of culture ... Against the natural force of circumstances, all human struggles and efforts are futile.<sup>84</sup>

Schlesinger, like his fellow Austro-Germans, had absolute faith in the power of German culture, its role in bringing civilisation to the East and its eventual, deserved dominance of the area. Like many, he portrayed the area of Central and Eastern Europe as a cultural and linguistic meeting place of 'seas', 'land', 'floods' and 'islands'. In this indeterminate, malleable area the Germans who controlled the Austrian 'state ship' would justifiably shape the region and bring it firmly within the German cultural orbit.

The possibility of assimilation into a German-dominated, centralist state and society depended on specific local conditions, traditions and power relations. In Galicia, for example, the Poles had effective autonomy from 1868 since there was no sizeable German population and the Galician institutions traditionally had not been closely linked to central organs in Vienna. In Bohemia, Czech speakers may have constituted 63–65 per cent of the population but the administrative, business and cultural elite had for at least a century and a half been the German-speakers, who made up the remaining 33–35 per cent of the population.<sup>85</sup> Bohemia also had much longer and closer historical links to Vienna, especially since the great Theresian–Josephinist reforms, and many matters had been centrally administered for decades. Hungary was a special case. There had been periodic uprisings against the Habsburg control, the latest being in 1848–49 that led to a full-scale war on Hungarian territory and the temporary dethroning of the Habsburgs as Kings of Hungary. The administrative system was based on autonomous, self-administered districts called 'Comitats' (largely run by the lower gentry). While there was a significant number of German-speakers in Hungary, around 12.5 per cent in 1880, they were scattered across the Kingdom with groupings in the West, in Budapest, along the Danube and in Transylvania. The Austro-German liberals were divided over whether Hungary could be incorporated within a centralised state or its distinctive traditions and culture deserved political autonomy. In general, the Austro-German liberals were open to joint, transnational cooperation provided it was on their terms, namely acceptance of the centralist constitution and the implicit assumption of German hegemony.

The 'natural' process of assimilation into the hegemonic culture and ethos would then take effect.

Far from assimilating, however, the other nationalities concentrated on developing their own political goals and cultivating their own cultures and languages. The Hungarians relied on their relations with the Monarch, Hungarian parliamentary traditions and local administrative autonomy. With the 1867 *Ausgleich*, they achieved an independent government and parliament. The Czech politicians attempted to follow this example and stressed Bohemian state rights. They also began constructing a vast system of national organisations that provided an alternative infrastructure away from the state and along national lines. Early on they recognised that underlying the constitutional system was the assumption of German political and cultural hegemony in the Monarchy and, from 1867, in Cisleithania.<sup>86</sup> The Slovenes, too, followed similar tactics of constructing an alternative infrastructure based on voluntary organisations.

Most Austro-German liberals continued to believe in their vision. Two crucial political factors reinforced their belief. First, the Czechs and their allies, the conservative Bohemian nobles, decided to boycott parliamentary life from 1863 to 1879 – sixteen long years in which the German liberals (except for brief interludes) dominated central and regional parliaments as well as public life in general.<sup>87</sup> The Czechs emulated the Hungarian abstinence policy hoping for their own *Ausgleich*. Other political groupings followed suit at various times. In effect, the German liberals had, by the end of the 1870s, become accustomed to being the acknowledged masters of parliament and government, only negotiating with the Poles (and to a lesser extent also the Italians, Slovenes and Ruthenians). Much as the liberals in Imperial Germany had overestimated their appeal in the exceptional circumstances of German unification, faith in the strength and universality of Austro-German liberalism by the end of the 1870s was similarly artificially inflated.<sup>88</sup>

The second factor was the continued possibility of a complete change in system. Both sides believed their systems were incompatible: Austria could either be centralised under German dominance or have a federal system under Slav dominance. The conservative Bohemian noble–Czech leaders, especially František Rieger, waited for an international crisis – either in the West, between France and Germany, or in the East, with the slow collapse of the Ottoman Empire – to prompt an abrupt change in system, as had happened in 1859 and 1866. In 1871, this conservative Bohemian noble–Czech policy seemed on the verge of fruition as a conservative, federalist government under Count Karl Sigismund Hohenwart sought an accommodation with the Czechs. Thwarted by the Hungarians and foreign policy calculations in the Hohenwart negotiations, the Czechs remained in waiting another eight years. The possibility of a 'complete' victory where Francis Joseph would definitively decide for either a centralised state or a federal structure encouraged both sides to entrench their beliefs and refuse any compromises. Rhetoric on both sides reflected this 'all or nothing' battle – expressed in the weighted terms of 'constitution' and 'Bohemian state rights'. One of the most perceptive commentators on Austria, the Jewish doctor and liberal Adolph

Fischhof, wrote in the mid 1880s that the linkage between national demands and state rights had prevented an understanding between nationalities.<sup>89</sup> In other words, the 'struggle for the state', to use Karl Renner's term, did not encourage compromise or understanding.<sup>90</sup>

The 1879 election and its aftermath proved to be a decisive turn of events. The combination of a parliamentary challenge to the Emperor's executive prerogatives, the re-attendance of the Czechs in parliament and a divided liberal camp meant the first conservative-Slav constitutional government. The Minister-President was Eduard Taaffe, a politician trusted by the Emperor. Suddenly, the Germans were no longer at the helm of the Austrian 'state ship' and in opposition to the government and, to some extent, the state itself. Cast loose to face the 'countless masses' of Slavs, the Germans immediately felt embattled. The liberals had always been aware that the number of Slavs in the Empire outnumbered the Germans but superior German culture, the power of assimilation and historical political hegemony were thought to be more decisive factors. New census figures showed a smaller than expected number of German-speakers, while regional Diets began to fall to clerical or Slav majorities.<sup>91</sup>

Taaffe's government was based on minor concessions and compromises, with many regulations issued for specific regions (especially for the contentious issue of language use). Taaffe also used the time-honoured tactics of official appointments, ministerial regulations, government electoral interference and cynical deal-making. This approach to government, the liberals alleged, undermined the centralist constitution and the progress of the Austrian state. By complying with the letter of the constitution, if not the spirit, Taaffe took away the liberals' rallying cry to defend the constitution, which had served them well for almost twenty years. Under Taaffe's piecemeal approach the constitution was shown as relatively 'neutral' and not necessarily protective of the German position. In the circumstances, the ideal of constitutionalism rapidly lost importance within the Austro-German liberal movement.

Taaffe's government, which was in power from 1879 to 1893, brought about a fundamental change in the liberal camp. The talk was now of Slav 'floods', the need of a German 'dam' and the threat to German language islands (*Sprachinseln*), rather than an irresistibly expanding German cultural sea.<sup>92</sup> The desperate, defensive, German liberal frame of mind feared a pan-Slav alliance unloosing its inexhaustible manpower against German (and European) civilisation. Contributing to the hysterical, bunker mentality was the general belief that world history was leading to a decisive battle between German and Slav culture. In the circumstances, the younger generation of German nationalists began to discard talk about the unity of the Austrian state and instead spoke of the need, above all, to protect the German national property (*Nationalbesitzstand*).<sup>93</sup> Even the moderate Bohemian liberal Ludwig Oppenheimer wrote that: 'The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy ... is the only outer wall against the pan-Slav movement ... because trapped between the Slavs and the Romans, in the struggle for existence [the Monarchy] is forced into swordplay, encircled, with enemies on all sides.'<sup>94</sup> The *Neue Freie Presse*, the most prominent liberal newspaper in the Monarchy, described the first Czech language

school in Vienna in apocalyptic terms: 'A dark, gloomy cloud has camped above the flickering candles of the fir trees ... Slavism storms unstopably forwards, even the doors of the Imperial capital are opened to it.'<sup>95</sup> The turn-around, as a result of 1879, from confident conveyors of European civilisation towards the East to worried defenders of a threatened German culture, was unexpected and immensely dislocating for the liberals, especially for members of the older generation who had reached political maturity in the 1860s and had assumed indefinite Austro-German liberal hegemony in the political process.

What were the liberals to do in opposition, detached from 'their' state? At the outset they opposed Taaffe and waited for his government to collapse. Surely, reasoned the liberals, as the 'cement' of the state and the most developed of the nationalities, the system could not run without them, a basic tenet of liberal hubris. Yet as the Taaffe government and its coalition of conservatives, Czechs and Poles – know as the Iron Ring – continued in power and grew more secure, the German liberals were forced to reorient and redefine their beliefs. When in opposition they could no longer implement the Josephinist state idea, while the centralist constitution they had defended and believed in had not protected their position. Thus German national considerations slowly rose in importance and the liberals moved away from the state.

The style of politics was also changing. The older, moderate liberals had relied upon ad hoc committees of *Honoratioren* (local notables) publicly to recommend official liberal candidates in elections.<sup>96</sup> A mixture of respect and fear normally saw the official candidate elected – although not always. Yet by the 1880s the older generation that had participated in the 1848 Revolutions was slowly disappearing, to be replaced by transitional figures or more German national-minded liberals. Older liberals had held onto powerful and influential positions well into their sixties and seventies since there was no formal, accepted procedure for handing over to the younger generation. As a result the younger generation formed new organisations as alternative bases of power from which to challenge the liberals' claim of speaking for the whole of the German population.<sup>97</sup> Organisations and societies devoted to the defence of the *Deutschtum* (German interests) were set up and became heavily politicised, the classic example being the German School Association.<sup>98</sup> Increasingly, the German nationalist candidates either took over the election committees or challenged official liberal candidates with their own list of candidates. The German nationalists' mixture of heated rhetoric, grass-roots activism and electoral intimidation yielded significant electoral success. In short, politics was becoming more professional and organised. Rhetoric was also changing. Rational, universalist arguments were quickly replaced by a 'politics of feeling', epitomised by the irrational persecution of the Jews (the Austro-German liberals needed Jewish votes in Bohemia and Moravia).<sup>99</sup> In general, a willingness to use the new 'sharper key' (*schärfere Tonart*) was an indication of a German nationalist viewpoint.<sup>100</sup>

Ultimately, these processes of democratisation and professional political organisation worked to the disadvantage of the older, elitist German liberals, who had been dominant within politics and the public sphere for so long. The Czechs

already had in place an alternative system of organisations and cooperatives since they could not rely on the state to help Czech political and cultural initiatives. The Slovenes followed their example. The Catholic Church's ability to mobilise completely outstripped liberal membership in the Austrian countryside, while in urban areas the Socialists were beginning to organise the workers. Within the German *Bürgertum*, the German nationalists were rapidly creating a powerful organisational network. These various groups, not the older German liberals, profited from the gradual democratisation and professionalization of politics. In the 1880s and early 1890s, the liberal leaders were under pressure on all sides – from the government, from the bureaucracy, from regional Diets, from German nationalists, from the various non-German nationalists and from a resurgent Catholic Church.

While the German nationalists ran the network of German organisations and societies, the traditional-minded liberals placed their faith in a return to the executive. Once the liberals were back in cabinet and were running the state ship, so the argument went, they would show how indispensable they were to a functioning Austria while also protecting German interests through the full power of the state. The Windischgrätz government, in power from 1893 to 1895, was the last chance for these more moderate Austro-German liberals. It contained the parliamentary liberals Ernst Plener (Finance Minister) and Gundacker Wurmbrand (Trade Minister). The government had the full support of the Austro-German liberal bloc but eventually turned out to be a grave disappointment. Supported by an incongruous coalition of conservatives, Poles and Austro-German liberals, the government found it difficult to achieve unity on any measure and in the issue of parallel German–Slovene classes at the Cilli Gymnasium proved unable to protect the *Deutschtum* and stand up to Slovene demands. The fall of the Windischgrätz government signalled the end of Austro-German liberal power in parliament. After being the largest party in parliament for the last thirty-six years, in the elections of 1897 the liberals all but disappeared from the political landscape (surviving in isolated cases, mostly through the restrictive Great Landowners or chambers of commerce curias) – totally eclipsed by the protean German national movement.

The three strands of liberalism (Josephinist state idea, constitutionalism and German nationalism) were in the 1860s and 1870s mutually reinforcing to a large extent. What bound them together was a liberal vision consisting of a regenerated Austrian state and a *bürgerlich* society underpinned by universal values, including German culture and language. After 1879 there was a fundamental realignment. Calls to defend the constitution and liberal institutions could no longer mobilise significant public support and seemed irrelevant since all the political parties were attending the central parliament. The 1867 constitution was not seriously threatened by any party, despite the periodic statement reserving the Bohemian state rights argument by the conservative Bohemian nobles and Czech parties. Yet, even with the general acceptance of the constitution and the central parliament, the principle of an integrated Cisleithanian state was coming under pressure from Taaffe's policies and the demands of various non-German nationalities. Gradually, from the 1880s onwards, the liberals' universalist idealism and belief in

the central Austrian state gave ground to assertive German nationalism amongst German-speakers in the Monarchy. So, while the constitution, legal framework and institutions remained, the German liberals' actual political power was eroding quickly. On the defence throughout Austria, the German position in the 1890s was very different from the confident stance of 1860s and 1870s.

In 1871, during celebrations in Graz for the founding of the German Empire, Francis Joseph expressed his concern at the crowd's fervour to the Styrian Governor Moriz Kaiserfeld, who replied:

'Apart from the power of perseverance and the devotion to the dynasty, Austria still has one treasure (*Schatz*).'

'And that is?', asked the Emperor.

'The state ethos of the Germans.'<sup>101</sup>

This book is about the formation, implementation and breakdown of the Austro-German liberal project; from a vision based on universal principles and a progressive, modern, constitutional Austrian state towards a narrow defence of German national interests. A potent symbol of this change was Prague at the turn of the century. By the 1890s the Czech and German nationalities were, according to Friedrich Kleinwächter (a Prague-born, high-ranking German bureaucrat) living separately; hermetically sealed off from one another in their self-contained communities, despite sharing the same city. This had not always been the case, especially in the more fluid 1860s. Yet forty years later Kleinwächter described the situation in Prague in absolute terms: 'The separation was so sharp that even personal relations between Germans and Czechs were completely impossible.'<sup>102</sup> Within Prague's German society Kleinwächter never met a single Czech-speaker and when he suggested a visit to the Czech opera house he was threatened with exclusion from the salon of a prominent Prague German society lady. Kleinwächter, who spoke Czech, went to the opera and was duly banned from the lady's house.<sup>103</sup>

Kleinwächter's Prague was far removed from Kaiserfeld's confident state patriotism and the associated idealistic vision of a unified *bürgerlich* society committed to universal liberal ideals, German culture and a progressive Austrian state. The story of how and why this came about is one of lost opportunities, unforeseeable events and dangerous gamesmanship. While the given circumstances were full of difficulties, the course of the nationality issue in the Habsburg Monarchy was a contingent one – dependent on specific political situations, events and personalities. The Austro-German liberals created the institutions for modern politics and played a crucial role in subsequent developments. Their grand project of reform and regeneration stands at the heart of the Monarchy's final century.

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