




FORUM

“Yugoslavia is worthless . . . you can get neither sugar nor kerosene.” Food Supply and Political Legitimacy in the Slovene Part of Yugoslavia, 1918–1924

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Abstract

The new states that were established in the autumn of 1918 presented themselves as something new and better. Not only were they supposed to be the embodiment of the “national yearnings” of the formerly “oppressed nations” of the Habsburg Empire, but they were also meant to be more democratic and it was promised that their administrations would work better and their economies would flourish. In short, they were to be a decisive break with the imperial past. However, the new nation-states often could not deliver on these lofty promises, and, as a result, their legitimacy began to erode rather rapidly. In this context, the inability to quickly improve the food supply played an important role. In the Slovene part of Yugoslavia, the inadequate supply of basic foodstuffs, rationing, and increasing prices made the already volatile situation worse, as parts of the population began to grumble, protest, and yearn for the Habsburgs, looking across their northern and western borders. Police and court files, district captains’ reports, and various other sources indicate that after the proclamation of independence the mood of the population quickly soured, and that the legitimacy of the new state was often questioned.

Keywords: Yugoslavia; food scarcity; post-imperial transition; protest

Introduction

Even before the proclamation of the independent State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs on 29 October 1918, Yugoslav nationalists had made lofty promises. Not only was the new South Slavic nation-state supposed to be the embodiment of the “national yearnings” of formerly “oppressed nations” in the Habsburg Empire, but it would also be more democratic, the administration would work better, the economy would flourish, and harvests would be abundant. In short, Yugoslavia promised to be a decisive break with the imperial past.¹ The article “Kvišku srca [Lift Up Your Hearts]!”—which the former mayor of Ljubljana/Laibach and prominent liberal nationalist, Ivan Hribar, published in the liberal newspaper *Slovenski narod* [The Slovene Nation]—was a typical expression of such sentiments. It was a celebration of impending independence and a prediction of a much better future. The new country, Hribar assured his readers, would “fulfill all the preconditions for the wellbeing of its inhabitants.” It would be blessed with “almost inexhaustive natural wealth,” from mines, forests, and rivers to the fertile plains. Food supply would not be the slightest problem, Hribar promised, because

Croatia alone is capable, as the war has shown, of providing for the entire Yugoslavia. But there are also the Bačka and the Banat, with fertility comparable to the Nile delta. There is the

¹I use the term Yugoslavia for both the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, established on 29 October 1918, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, established on 1 December 1918. Throughout the article, I use place names that were in official use at the time. Hence, Ljubljana/Laibach before the establishment of Yugoslavia, and only Ljubljana afterwards. Places in disputed southern Carinthia, where I use both the German and the Slovene name, and those that have a standard English name, are the only exceptions.

brilliantly cultivated Morava Valley. There is the Bosnian *Posavina* and the *Pelagonija* and, finally, the historically fertile Kosovo polje, turned into a desert by the Turks and just waiting for diligent hands to start producing rich harvests once more.²

Hribar's text echoed similar declarations ethnolinguistic nationalists from all over the crumbling Habsburg Empire were making at the time. They insisted that nation-states were the future, whereas Austria-Hungary, a multinational empire, belonged to the past. In December 1918, the future president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš G. Masaryk, claimed that the "great multinational empires are an institution of the past"—the most famous of such statements.³ While propagandistic, assertions like these often betrayed a sincere belief in the ability of nation-states to solve not only the so-called national question but many others, too.

Food scarcity was perhaps the most pressing issue at hand, and Hribar's focus on fertile plains needs to be read in that context. By October 1918, the citizens of Austria-Hungary—civilians and soldiers alike—faced severe shortages of essential food staples, and many people were malnourished or even starving. The war had taken its toll and all over the empire hungry people, mostly women and children, stood in endless lines, buying what they could afford on the black market, stealing, bartering, borrowing, and doing whatever else was possible to keep themselves from starving—often in vain.⁴ The inhabitants of the Slovene part of the future Yugoslavia were no exception.⁵

Food scarcity and its consequences—coupled with suffering at the fronts, semi-authoritarian military rule in the Austrian half of the empire during the first two years of the war, and the internal displacement of more than a million people—resulted in unrest and a severe crisis of legitimacy which ceded plenty of room in the public sphere to those who wished to destroy rather than reform the Habsburg state.⁶ The turn of the German-speaking population from Austria and toward Germany, for instance, was at least partially motivated by their expectation that Germany would solve the subsistence crisis.⁷ Promising that the new South Slav state would bring abundance and riches comparable to those of the Nile delta was therefore a smart political tactic, but a risky one because it raised—as

²Ivan Hribar, "Kvišku srca!" *Slovenski narod*, 27 October 1918, p. 2.

³Quoted in Pieter M. Judson, "Where Our Commonality Is Necessary ...': Rethinking the End of the Habsburg Monarchy," *Austrian History Yearbook* 48 (2017): 8.

⁴Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge, 2004); Ota Konrád and Rudolf Kučera, *Paths Out of the Apocalypse: Physical Violence in the Fall and Renewal of Central Europe, 1914–1922* (New York, 2022); Rudolf Kučera, *Rationed Life: Science, Everyday Life and Working-Class Politics in the Bohemian Lands, 1914–1918* (New York, 2016). For the military, see Rok Stergar, "L'expérience des soldats austro-hongrois sur le front austro-italien: le problème du ravitaillement en vivres," in *Soldati e quotidianità della guerra*, eds. Giovanni L. Fontana and Marco Mondini (Ospedaletto, 2019), 13–30. For an overview of the economic situation, see Anatol Schmied-Kowarzik, "Die wirtschaftliche Erschöpfung," in *Die Habsburgermonarchie und der Erste Weltkrieg*, ed. Helmut Rumpler, *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 1 (Vienna, 2016), 11: 485–542.

⁵Maja Godina-Golija, "Hunger and Misery: The Influence of the First World War on the Diet of Slovenian Civilians," in *Food and War in Twentieth Century Europe*, eds. Rachel Duffet, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, and Alain Drouard (Farnham, 2011), 85–97; Bojan Himmelreich, *Namesto žemlje črni kruh: Organizacija preskrbe z živili v Celju v času obeh svetovnih vojn* [Black Bread Instead of Buns: The Organization of Food Supply in Celje During the Two World Wars] (Celje, 2001); Petra Svobljšek, ed., *Istra u velikom ratu: glad, bolesti, smrt = L'Istria nella grande guerra: fame, malattie, morte = Istra v veliki vojni: glad, bolesti, smrt* [Istria in the Great War: Hunger, Sickness, Death] (Koper, 2017); Mojca Šorn, *Pomanjkanje in lakota v Ljubljani med veliko vojno* [Shortages and Famine in Ljubljana during the Great War] (Ljubljana, 2020).

⁶Mark Cornwall, "Escaping a Prison of Peoples? Exits and Expectations at the End of Austria-Hungary," in *Nationalisms in Action: The Great War and Its Aftermath in East-Central Europe*, eds. László Szarka and Attila Pók (Komárom, 2023), 62–83; John Deak and Jonathan E. Gumz, "How to Break a State: The Habsburg Monarchy's Internal War, 1914–1918," *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 4 (2017): 1105–36; Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 385–441; Richard Georg Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner, and Arnold Suppan, *Innere Front: Militärassistentz, Widerstand und Umsturz in der Donaumonarchie 1918*, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1974).

⁷Holger Afllerbach, "Die Deutschösterreicher zwischen Staatsraison und 'Nibelungentreue,'" in *Die Habsburgermonarchie und der Erste Weltkrieg*, ed. Helmut Rumpler, *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 2016), 11: 671–72; Laurence Cole, "Questione nazionale e radicalizzazione degli austro-tedeschi," in *La Grande Guerra e la dissoluzione di un Impero multinazionale*, ed. Paolo Pombeni (Trento, 2017), 42–43.

Mark Cornwall has remarked in a recent text—“dangerous expectations.”⁸ If Yugoslavia somehow failed to deliver on those promises, trust could be quickly broken once more, and its citizens would start questioning the legitimacy of the new state as well.

The relationship between legitimacy and food supply is precisely what I aim to interrogate in this article. My focus is on the ability—or the inability—of the new authorities to solve the food supply crisis and the effect this had on the popular legitimacy of Yugoslavia in the immediate postwar era; this topic has been neglected by historians of interwar Yugoslavia thus far. To this end, my study concentrates on reactions to shortages and not on scarcity itself. Encouraged by historians who have shown that wartime and postwar food riots (and even queues) were expressions of politics, I look at the postwar era and see these reactions as at least implicitly political.⁹ In what follows, I study individual food-related complaints, food riots, strikes, and similar events in an effort to see if the population perceived the new Yugoslavia and its political system as legitimate, that is, as a state that had the right to make demands because it was able to fulfill its perceived obligations.

While I do not ignore the rest of Yugoslavia and the wider region, this article is not an attempt at comparative analysis. Instead, it focuses on territories that the new National Government of Slovenia (*Narodna vlada*) controlled after independence. They comprised most of Carniola, Lower Styria, southern Carinthia (until the plebiscite of 1920), and, after 1919, Prekmurje—the westernmost parts of the Hungarian counties of Zala and Vas—and were called “Slovenia.” This name was used not just in colloquial but often also in official settings, even though a province with that name was not formally established until 1945. Slovenia had an administrative and legal system inherited from Cisleithania that was preserved well into the 1920s. Even more importantly, the National Government in Ljubljana and its subordinate administrative bodies were exclusively in charge of food supply during the first months of independence, and its successor, the Provincial Government (from 25 February 1919), continued to be deeply involved, even if food supply had been officially centralized by then. This persisted until the Provincial Government was finally dissolved at the end of June 1921, after the first Yugoslav constitution was adopted, and—to a lesser degree—until the territories it had previously controlled were divided into two separate provinces (*oblasti*) in late 1923 and early 1924.¹⁰ The dissolution of the Provincial Government and the centralization of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes is also where my research ends. I limit my analysis to that point not only because of the administrative reorganization, but also because—as we will see—the most urgent problems were solved by that time and a new, more stable period began.

The Precarious State of the New State

On the one-year anniversary of independence, 29 October 1919, posters appeared in Ljubljana that called for a revolution and made an explicit connection between the subsistence crisis and radical politics: “Today, on the anniversary, there is no flour, no white bread and potatoes, no beans! We are naked and barefoot! Onto the barricades!” The police quickly removed the posters.¹¹ A difficult year had passed. The promised abundance had not materialized, and the population had grown increasingly restless. In mid-February 1919, the government assessed the situation as desperate and noted that riots were imminent.¹² In fact, riots had already started. In December 1918, workers in

⁸Cornwall, “Escaping a Prison of Peoples?,” 83.

⁹Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire*; Konrád and Kučera, *Paths out of the Apocalypse*. For an illuminating comparative case, see Rosario Forlenza, “Europe’s Forgotten Unfinished Revolution: Peasant Power, Social Mobilization, and Communism in the Southern Italian Countryside, 1943–45,” *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 2 (2021): 504–29. For a more general analysis, see Lynne Taylor, “Food Riots Revisited,” *Journal of Social History* 30, no. 2 (1996): 483–96.

¹⁰Bojan Balkovec, *Prva slovenska vlada 1918–1921* [The First Slovene Government 1918–1921] (Ljubljana, 1992), 49–50; Himmelreich, *Namesto zemlje črni kruh*, 82–94.

¹¹Pavle Čelik, *Slovenski stražniki 1918–1941* [Slovene Police Guards 1918–1941] (Ljubljana, 2002), 130.

¹²Peter Ribnikar, ed., *Sejni zapisniki Narodne vlade Slovencev, Hrvatov in Srbov v Ljubljani in Deželnih vlad za Slovenijo: 1918–1921* [Records of Sessions of the National Government of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in Ljubljana and the Provincial Governments for Slovenia 1918–1921], vol. 1 (Ljubljana, 1998), 363.

Trbovlje, an important coal mining town in central Slovenia, went on strike because food was not available in sufficient quantities. The striking miners broke into several stores, stealing whatever they could get their hands on.¹³ Less than a month later, there was unrest in Sevnica, a small town in Lower Styria. Workers from the local shoe last factory found a wagon of flour at the railway station and a rumor began to circulate that it was intended for export. The next day, the workers broke in and distributed the flour. They moved on, searching for food in the flour mill and at local stores. The unrest continued for two more days and turned into a minor riot after the gendarmerie and a detachment of Serbian soldiers arrested its presumed ringleaders. In his subsequent reports, the district captain tried to pin blame for the events on the German-speaking owners of the factory, but it was more likely that the supply crisis had caused them. At the beginning of December 1918, the Sevnica National Council already warned the government in Ljubljana about the increasingly precarious situation: the population had not received sugar since October and flour since the beginning of November.¹⁴ In February 1919, the Ljubljana police predicted a veritable women's "pogrom" directed at stores.¹⁵ While this did not happen, a month later women did stage a demonstration in front of a government building and the town hall, protesting shortages and rising prices. According to reports, there was much shouting and screaming, but a major riot did not break out.¹⁶

Throughout 1919 and the first half of 1920, food supply was still problematic in Slovenia, though scarcity was not as acute as it had been at the end of the war or in the first postwar months. There was certainly no famine, but flour, along with sugar, salt, meat, and fats, were often impossible or at least difficult to find. People were restless and violent flareups were frequent. All of this culminated in the April 1920 railway workers' strike. For a few weeks it paralyzed the entire state, only ending after the gendarmerie and the police shot and killed thirteen strikers in Ljubljana on 24 April.¹⁷

Such developments were especially worrying because Yugoslavia's political legitimacy had been questioned from the very beginning. When independence was proclaimed, a lot of enthusiasm was on display, yet significant parts of the population were not ready to acknowledge the new reality. Their reasons were complex, and several aspects were usually intertwined. However, the range of opinions arguably fell into two larger categories. In the first were those who rejected Yugoslavia; in the second, those who wanted a South Slav state organized differently.

The first category included legitimists not quite ready to accept that the empire and the Habsburgs were gone. It is impossible to quantify this group, but sources show that the dynasty certainly retained sympathies among the Roman Catholic clergy and parts of the peasantry. Sometime in August 1919, the parish priest of Domžale, a town not far from Ljubljana, wrote in the parish chronicle that a woman had told him that she did not "give a toss about our new state Yugoslavia," and went on to ruminate about the resurrection of "an even grander Austria."¹⁸ This illustrates the attitudes of legitimists in the immediate postwar period rather well. They were not especially vocal, at least not in public, and—despite some rumors to the contrary—did not act in an organized manner.¹⁹ Rather, they

¹³Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (=ARS), AS 2037, box 2, folder 2/2, chronicle of the Gendarmerie station Trbovlje. See also Ribnikar, *Sejni zapisniki Narodne vlade*, vol. 1: 195; Miroslav Stiplovšek, "Pregled stavkovnega gibanja na Slovenskem v letih 1917–1920 [An Overview of the Strike Movement in Slovenia in the Years 1917–1920]," *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 7, no. 1–2 (1967): 159.

¹⁴ARS, AS 61, box 2, folder 336/pr 1919; AS 61, box 3, folders 338/pr 1919, 1441/pr 1919, 1784/pr 1919; AS 61, box 4, folder 2087/pr 1919. See also Stiplovšek, "Pregled stavkovnega gibanja na Slovenskem v letih 1917–1920," 159, 160.

¹⁵ARS, AS 61, box 4, folder 1820/pr 1919, Ljubljana police directorate report, no. 277/1, 2 February 1919.

¹⁶Lojze Slanovec, "Ljubljanska kronika [Ljubljana Chronicle]," *Kronika slovenskih mest*, 1934, 144.

¹⁷Janez Kos, "Železničarska stavka aprila leta 1920 [Railway Workers' Strike of April 1920]," *Kronika* 16, no. 1 (1968): 1–15.

¹⁸Archdiocesan Archives in Ljubljana, "Kronika župnije M. B. v Domžalah: 27. okt. 1918 – 1. feb. 1920 [The Domžale Parish Chronicle]," available at https://www.knjiznica-domzale.si/Portals/0/Dokumenti/monografske_publicacije/Kronika_zupnije_Domzale_1918_1920.pdf.

¹⁹On the rumors, see Andrej Rahten, *Od Majniške deklaracije do habsburške detronizacije: Slovenska politika v času zadnjega habsburškega vladarja Karla* [From May Declaration to Habsburg Dethronement: Slovene Politics in the Era of Charles, the Last Habsburg Ruler] (Celje, 2016), 250, 251. For the wider region, see Christopher Brennan, "Hoch Den Kaiser!: The Legitimist Cause in Early Postwar Austria," in *Postwar Continuity and New Challenges in Central Europe, 1918–1923*, eds. Tomasz Pudłocki and Kamil Ruszała (New York, 2021), 114–72; Marco Bresciani, "The Battle for Post-Habsburg Trieste/Trst: State Transition, Social Unrest, and Political Radicalism (1918–23)," *Austrian History Yearbook* 52 (2021): 182–200; John Paul

indulged in nostalgia, spread rumors, grumbled in private, and hoped for a return to the “good old days.”

The first category also included those who hoped that their towns and villages might end up in German-Austria or—much less frequently—Italy when the borders would finally be settled. This group was occasionally indistinguishable from legitimists because it was often unclear which Austria the unsatisfied individuals were talking about. Quite possibly, some of them were unsure themselves. However, German nationalists from Lower Styria and parts of southern Carinthia temporarily occupied by Yugoslav troops between late 1918 and October 1920 knew perfectly well. It was not the Habsburg Empire, but German-Austria they longed for.²⁰ Some people, even Slovene-speakers, preferred Austria for economic reasons, because it did not have a standing army, or because it was a republic. In short, a non-negligible part of the population in regions bordering Austria did not want to live in Yugoslavia, something that British and US observers noted at the time and the results of the Carinthian plebiscite of 1920 clearly demonstrated.²¹

The second category comprised all those who did not reject the South Slav state, but imagined a different Yugoslavia, not the one that was taking shape after the declaration of independence and the unification with Serbia. From the second half of 1917, the peasantry in several regions of Austria-Hungary began actively avoiding military service and soon the so-called green cadres controlled several remote areas. Workers were striking and several military units rebelled.²² Similar developments occurred in the northwest of the future Yugoslavia as well.²³ Imperial authorities often labeled these people Bolsheviks. They sometimes called themselves that as well. Above all, however, they were a very heterogeneous group, united by a rejection of the status quo more than by a coherent political program.

Not surprisingly, this revolutionary unrest intensified after the empire collapsed. While the new government managed to prevent an all-out revolution in Slovenia, workers and peasants continued to entertain revolutionary thoughts and local flareups were not uncommon.²⁴ As late as November 1920, for example, the peasants from Vinica, a village on the border with Croatia, where one of the so-called peasant republics had been established in 1919, proclaimed that all the state offices and some taxes must be abolished. Threats of an armed rebellion were also uttered.²⁵ Revolutionary

Newman, “Shades of Empire: Austro-Hungarian Officers, Frankists, and the Afterlives of Austria-Hungary in Croatia, 1918–1929,” in *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States After 1918*, eds. Paul Miller and Claire Morelon (Oxford, 2018), 157–74.

²⁰Janez Cvirn, “Nemška manjšina na Spodnjem Štajerskem v času med obema vojnama (1918–1941) [The German Minority in Lower Styria in the Interwar Period (1918–1941)],” in *Migracije in slovenski prostor od antike do danes*, eds. Peter Štih and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana, 2010), 568–75; Filip Čuček, “‘Volkovi in hijene’: Primeri ‘obračuna’ s spodnještajerskim nemštvom (in vsenemške ‘obrambe domovine’) v prevratni dobi, [‘Wolves and Hyenas’: Examples of the ‘Reckoning’ with the Lower Styrian Germans (and the Pan-German ‘Homeland Defense’) during the Upheaval]” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 61, no. 2 (2021), 67–102.

²¹Jerome Jareb, “LeRoy King’s Reports from Croatia, March to May 1919,” *Journal of Croatian Studies* 1 (1960): 147ff; Tom Priestly, “Povezave med poročili Milesove misije in odločitvijo mirovne konference v Parizu za plebiscit na Koroškem leta 1919: Kakšen dokaz so poročila sama? [On the Link between the Miles Mission Reports and the 1919 Plebiscite Decision in Paris: What is the Evidence of the Reports Themselves?],” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 45, no. 1 (2005): 12–18; Maria Isabella Reinhard, “‘An Isolated Case’: The Slovene Carinthians and the 1920 Plebiscite,” *Sprawy Narodowościowe: Seria Nowa*, no. 48 (2016): 85–105.

²²Jakub S. Beneš, “The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918,” *Past & Present* 236, no. 1 (2017): 207–41; Plaschka, Haselsteiner, and Suppan, *Innere Front*.

²³Beneš, “The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918”; Stiplošek, “Pregled stavkovnega gibanja na Slovenskem v letih 1917–1920,” 151–58; Lojze Ude, “Upori slovenskega vojaštva v avstro-ogrski armadi [Slovene Soldiers’ Mutinies in the Austro-Hungarian Army],” *Zgodovinski časopis* 22, no. 3–4 (1968): 185–205.

²⁴Lev Centrih, “‘Govorile so celo strojnice!’ Boljševizem v prevratni dobi na Slovenskem: Med preprostim ljudskim uporništvom in vplivi ruske revolucije [‘Even Machine Guns Spoke!’: Bolshevism in Slovenia in the Revolutionary Period: Between Popular Unrest and the Influence of the Russian Revolution],” in *Slovenski prelom 1918*, ed. Aleš Gabrič (Ljubljana, 2019), 311–27; Franček Saje, “Revolucionarno gibanje kmečkega ljudstva v Sloveniji 1917–1919 [The Revolutionary Movement of the Peasant People in Slovenia 1917–1919],” *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 7, no. 1–2 (1967): 141–50.

²⁵ARS, AS 60, box 4, unit 44, folder 781/pr., Črnomelj district captain’s report, 16 November 1920. For the events of 1919, see Janez Weiss, *Viniška republika: stoletnica upora* [Vinica Republic: Centenary of the Uprising] (Črnomelj, Vinica, 2019). For

sympathies and anti-establishment outbursts were usually coupled with republicanism and a rejection of the new dynasty. Republicanism was rather widespread at first, and even some established political parties and groups supported it—among them the Catholic People’s Party (the largest Slovene party) and the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party.²⁶ The republicanism of the peasants and workers, however, was more radical and often prone to violence. In April 1920, for example, a speaker at a rally of the Peasant-Workers Union called for a republic and added: “We want to enact our principles, if not nicely then with a knife.”²⁷

Some forms of republicanism, especially among the workers, did not fall into the second category because they were not only explicitly anti-monarchist but also anti-Yugoslav. This is no surprise, as the idea that any nationalism goes against workers’ interests was well represented in the labor movement. That is why the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party, the party of Cisleithanian South Slav workers, opposed any form of Yugoslavia until the spring of 1918, and some of its dissidents maintained this line even after the party changed its course.²⁸ After its establishment, many workers remained skeptical of Yugoslavia and continued to support a Balkan or a Central European federation, and this was especially pronounced in the budding communist movement. A railway worker’s statement from April 1919—“We agreed with the Hungarians, the Germans, and the Italians that we would go on strike, and they would then march in and proclaim a unified state. Then Yugoslavia, King Peter, and [crown prince] Alexander could go fuck themselves”—was vulgar, but also representative in this regard.²⁹

The anti-Serb tenor of the statement was not exceptional either. Blaming the Serbs and their “Balkan habits” for almost anything was widespread and added another challenge to the political legitimacy of Yugoslavia. These declarations—shaped by crude stereotypes but also personal experiences from the Serbian front and prisoner-of-war camps—were often an accessory either to anti-Yugoslav claims or to criticism of the existing political order within Yugoslavia. Anti-Serb outbursts were common among legitimists and Austrophiles, but they could also be heard from individuals who were not opposed to a South Slav state in principle and wanted a different Yugoslavia. This was clear to see during the mutiny in July 1919, when rioting Slovene soldiers in Maribor chanted anti-Serb and anti-dynastic slogans but also called for the removal of their supposedly Germanophile officers and the establishment of a Slovene-Croat republic.³⁰

Food Shortages and Political Legitimacy

As we have seen, the destabilizing challenges to the legitimacy of the new state in the first few years of its existence had manifold causes, and not all of which were explicitly political. Analyzing them in

comparable developments in Czechoslovakia and Croatia, see Jakub Beneš, “The Colour of Hope: The Legacy of the ‘Green Cadres’ and the Problem of Rural Unrest in the First Czechoslovak Republic,” *Contemporary European History* 28, no. 3 (2019): 293–98; John Paul Newman, “Post-Imperial and Post-War Violence in the South Slav Lands, 1917–1923,” *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 3 (2010): 249–65.

²⁶For a very useful recent overview, see Cody J. Inglis, “Egy ‘jugoszláv köztársaságért’: A posztimperiális ‘köztársasági pillanat’ és a délszlávok, 1917–1921 [For a ‘Yugoslav Republic’: The Postimperial ‘Republican Moment’ and the South Slavs, 1917–1921],” *Múltunk* 56, no. 4 (2021): 42–69. For the People’s Party, see also Momčilo Zečević, *Slovenska ljudska stranka in jugoslovansko zedinjenje 1917–1921: Od majniške deklaracije do vidovdanske ustave* [Slovene People’s Party and Yugoslav Unification 1917–1921] (Maribor, 1977).

²⁷ARS, AS 60, box 4, unit 38, folder 79/pr, Črnomelj district captain’s report, 3 May 1920.

²⁸Dušan Kermavner, *Ivan Cankar in slovenska politika leta 1918* [Ivan Cankar and Slovene Politics in 1918] (Ljubljana, 1968); Janko Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo: politika na domačih tleh med vojno 1914–1918* [The First Decision of Slovenes for Yugoslavia: Domestic Politics during the War of 1914–1918] (Ljubljana, 1971), 185–205.

²⁹ARS, AS 307, KAZ VR-1919, box 1, folder Vr 565/19, Susanig court case files, VR VIII 565/19. For more on the communist anti-Yugoslavism, see Stefan Gužvica, “Jugoslavija ili Balkanska federacija? Dileme jugoslovenskih komunista u doba Oktobarske revolucije [Yugoslavia or the Balkan Federation? Dilemmas of Yugoslav Communists during the October Revolution],” *Tragovi* 4, no. 1 (2021): 102–33.

³⁰Janez J. Švajncar, “Slovenska vojska 1918/1919 in upor julija 1919 [The Slovene Army 1918/1919 and the July 1919 Mutiny],” *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 58, no. 2 (1987): 152–67; Milan Ževart, “Vojaški upor v Mariboru julija 1919 [Military Mutiny in Maribor in July 1919],” *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 7, no. 1–2 (1967): 129–33.

November 1919, the Kranj district captain, however, concluded that food was the “*punctum saliens* of the entire present-day situation.”³¹ Crucially, the shortages did not only engender general discontent, but also anger directed against the new authorities and the newly established state. A November 1919 report from Ptuj mentioned how hundreds of people had “besieged” the district office every day asking for food, and that “most dangerous remarks” could be heard from the crowd. “It is all Yugoslavia’s fault!” was how the Maribor report summarized popular opinion at the end of 1920.³²

Individual statements, recorded in police and gendarmerie files, in court cases, and in situation reports from the districts, suggest that this opinion was rather widely shared. At first, expectations were high, and many people really anticipated that independence and the end of the war—perhaps the latter more than the former—would quickly solve all problems. Soon, that optimism was gone, and the ability of the new state and its government to solve the crisis was questioned. With that, their legitimacy was also attacked, sometimes implicitly, often quite explicitly. The inherent logic of these outbursts largely correlated with the categories discussed above. Some expressed their dissatisfaction by presenting the Habsburg Empire, or one of the neighboring states, as examples of how things should have been done; others attacked the Yugoslav political regime; others still others blamed the “other Yugoslavs”—mostly Serbs but also Croats—for the shortages.

The first group was enormous, and the following examples are but a small sample. In January 1919, a certain Valentin Rotovnik was accused of proclaiming publicly in a Celje store that “Yugoslavia is worthless . . . [because] you can get neither sugar nor kerosene.” “Under the previous government,” he continued, “you could get all of this,” finally adding—bystanders alleged—that “King Peter is the biggest swine!” Under police questioning, he admitted to his criticism of Yugoslavia but denied having compared the new king with a pig.³³ Two months later, a sexton from Cerknica, a village on the Italian border, testified how he had referred to food shortages and rising prices when he said in a private conversation that “everyone can see how it is under Yugoslavia. It is worse than it was before.” Witnesses claimed he also said that “little Charles” (*Karolček*) would be welcome if only he would want to return, which the sexton denied.³⁴ That the Austria-Hungary of Charles Habsburg-Lothringen could be held up as a role model when it came to food supply is—to put things mildly—rather surprising, but these two cases were far from isolated. On the contrary, the late Habsburg Empire increasingly started to figure as a positive point of reference.

Perhaps even more often, people—especially in the border regions—contrasted Yugoslavia and one of its neighboring states. Italy was rarely mentioned, probably because its reputation among Slovene-speakers was not exactly stellar. Despite that, it occasionally figured as a positive example. In February 1919, the Provincial Court in Ljubljana deposed witnesses about a parish priest who had allegedly praised Italian authorities because they had provided plenty of food to people in occupied territories at the end of the war. The witnesses also alleged that the priest had disparaged Yugoslavia and had stated that “the people will go with those that will give them enough food.” The priest confirmed these allegations but claimed he had only been joking.³⁵

If pro-Italian declarations were relatively rare, praising German-Austria and imagining that food was more plentiful there was a regular occurrence in Lower Styria and southern Carinthia—and not just among German-speakers and German nationalists. Slovene-speakers expressed such sentiments quite often too, and Yugoslav authorities were extremely concerned about these developments, especially before the border was settled. They were right to worry; propagandists immediately instrumentalized food shortages. At the end of March and in early April, several district captains from the border regions reported that a plane flying in from German-Austria dropped a flyer with “treasonous

³¹ARS, AS 60, box 3, unit 31, folder 179/pr, Kranj district captain’s report, 24 November 1919.

³²ARS, AS 60, box 3, unit 31, folder 1977/pr, Ptuj district captain’s report, 22 November 1919; AS 60, box 4, unit 45, folder 442/preds. 1920, Maribor district captain’s report, 1 December 1920.

³³ARS, AS 61, box 2, folder 61/A/1/95-115, 360pr, Celje state police station report, 7 January 1919.

³⁴ARS, AS 307, KAZ VR-1919, unnumbered box, folder Vr VI 400/19, Turšič court case files.

³⁵ARS, AS 61, box 3, folder 1761pr, Matevž Sušnik’s letter to the National Government, 25 January 1919; AS 307, KAZ VR-1919, box 2, folder Vr II 253/19, Sušnik court case files, 8 February 1919; AS 307, KAZ VR-1919, box 1, folder Vr 1331/19, Sušnik’s request for pardon, Vr IX 253/19, 23 October 1919.

content.” It was written in Slovene and tried to persuade local Slovene-speakers to reject Yugoslavia and remain loyal to their homeland, Styria. (That the province would remain a part of Austria went without saying.) The flyer spoke about high taxes and other nuisances but did not fail to mention shortages: “In the state of SCS, we have a king, but we do not have salt, iron, sugar, petroleum, copper, we have no clothes and no factories; in the districts of Slovenj Gradec and Marenberg [today Radlje ob Dravi] there is not even enough flour.”³⁶

In Styria, organized propaganda mostly stopped after the Treaty of Saint-Germain was signed in September 1919 and the border was settled. The unfavorable comparisons, however, did not. In Carinthia, food played an outsized role in the run-up to the Carinthian plebiscite, which was to determine whether the southern part of the province would be assigned to Austria or Yugoslavia, as both sides vied for votes in the contested area. Throughout 1919 and up to the day of the plebiscite, 10 October 1920, food supply was one of the central issues for the Yugoslav occupation in southern Carinthia. District captains continuously badgered the government in Ljubljana to send more food and other necessities. Just before Christmas 1919, the district captain from Ferlach/Borovlje wrote that “[t]o keep the mood of the population at least somewhat positive until the plebiscite, the occupied territories need to be urgently supplied with sugar and kerosene.” A month earlier, his colleague from Völkermarkt/Velikovec had warned that “our position is getting worse, partially because food, kerosene, and sugar are scarce.”³⁷ In the easternmost corner of Slovenia, Prekmurje, the authorities faced very similar challenges. Here, the population was extremely suspicious of the incoming administration and retained sympathies for Hungary. Shortages of food only exacerbated the situation.³⁸

All the tendencies mentioned above—even Habsburg nostalgia—were present in every social group, not excluding urban and rural workers. What was characteristic for the latter group, however, was the rejection of the existing political system and a turn toward revolutionary republicanism. Again, shortages of food and other necessities, and resultant food price inflation, were some of the underlying causes for this turn. It was no coincidence that a worsening supply crisis and price hikes often preceded workers strikes and peasant riots. Unsatisfactory meals were also one of the things that triggered the mutiny of Maribor soldiers in July 1919.³⁹ It was also not a coincidence that rioters often targeted stores and those suspected of food profiteering and speculation.⁴⁰

Several politicians were convinced of the link between the lack of food and republican and Bolshevik tendencies among the population. In January 1919, Janko Brejc, the newly appointed president of the Provincial Government, warned about the spread of Bolshevik ideas among the population, asserting that “inadequate nourishment” was one of the main causes.⁴¹ The army, the police, and the administration came to similar conclusions. In his recommendation to the government in February 1919, General Rudolf Maister suggested that an ample supply of food would be the best countermeasure to the proliferation of Bolshevism among his soldiers. A month later, the gendarmerie in Ormož reported that, “in [the] district, an entirely republican spirit dominates. People are complaining it is the

³⁶ARS, AS 61, box 6, folder 3007pr. The rejection of Slovene and Yugoslav nationalism and the invocation of Styrian patriotism had a long tradition and managed to mobilize a fair number of Styrian Slovene speakers before the war. See Janez Cvirn, “Deželna in narodna zavest na (Spodnjem) Štajerskem [Provincial and National Consciousness in (Lower) Styria],” in *Avstrija. Jugoslavija. Slovenija: Slovenska narodna identiteta skozi čas*, ed. Dušan Nečak (Ljubljana, 1997), 74–84; Ivan Rihtarič, “Štajerc” in *Nemcem prijazni Slovenci v prvi svetovni vojni* [Štajerc and the ‘German-friendly’ Slovenes during World War I] (Murska Sobota, 2004).

³⁷ARS, AS 60, box 4, unit 35, folder 6067-19, Borovlje district captain’s report, 23 December 1919; AS 60, box 3, unit 31, folder 8263/III, Velikovec district captain’s report, 29 November 1919.

³⁸On the occupation and the attitudes of the local population, see Jernej Kosi, “Srečanje dveh svetov: prebivalstvo Prekmurja in nova ‘jugoslovanska’ oblast po zasedbi in priključitvi pokrajine [Meeting of Two Worlds: Population of Prekmurje and the New ‘Yugoslav’ Authorities after the Occupation and Annexation of the Province],” in *1919 v slovenskem jeziku, literaturi in kulturi*, ed. Mojca Smolej (Ljubljana, 2019), 79–86; Jernej Kosi, “The Imagined Slovene Nation and Local Categories of Identification: ‘Slovenes’ in the Kingdom of Hungary and Postwar Prekmurje,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 49 (2018): 87–102. On shortages, see Jernej Kosi’s article in this forum.

³⁹Ževart, “Vojaški upor v Mariboru julija 1919,” 131.

⁴⁰Saje, “Revolucionarno gibanje kmečkega ljudstva v Sloveniji 1917–1919.”

⁴¹Quoted in Šorn, *Pomanjkanje in lakota*, 156.

government's fault that they do not have enough sugar and clothes."⁴² People acknowledged the causal connection as well. In the summer of 1920, the district captain of Brežice reported that even "some of the best people in the district" confessed to him that "becoming a Bolshevik" is all that was left for them after another price hike.⁴³

Finally, there were the anti-Serb sentiments, which—as we have seen—were used to argue either against Yugoslavia or for a different Yugoslavia, one without the Serbs. While the subsistence crisis often engendered criticism of local politicians and the government in Ljubljana, it also often fueled anti-Serb feelings and critical attitude toward the government in Belgrade. In September 1920, the district captain from Ptuj let the Ljubljana government know that the situation in his district was "permanently uncomfortable" because scarcity continued to be a problem. It was instrumentalized for "anti-state agitation and incitement against the central government in Belgrade and the Serbs."⁴⁴ A report from Cerknica, a village on the border with Italy, claimed that there was a "noticeable shortage of food" and that the gendarmes kept hearing how people were not especially happy about the unification with Serbia at the end of 1918.⁴⁵ The district captain in Maribor neatly summarized the dynamics in November 1919: Shortages had generated "a very bad, even desperate mood among the people," and this often resulted in "anti-state, anti-Serb, yes, even anti-dynastic tendencies."⁴⁶

From the spring of 1919, the reestablishment of transport connections—into which the Yugoslav authorities had put a great deal of effort—the arrival of foreign aid, and better domestic harvests consistently improved the situation, and as the supply of food improved the disruptive potential of the subsistence crisis also waned. From early 1921, district captains almost entirely stopped talking about shortages in their reports, though inflation was occasionally brought up. Major riots stopped, and the fact that not even the communists mentioned food during the 1921 municipal electoral campaign was also telling. A flyer authored by the Workers and Peasants' Republican Group—a communist front organization—mentioned inflation, the class struggle, militarism, taxes, longer working hours, and the bourgeois parties and their supposed mismanagement of municipalities, but not food scarcity.⁴⁷

In short, except for the very poor, getting food was no longer a serious problem. The Slovene provincial and Yugoslav central governments still faced several challenges, and some problems persisted for years. But the overall situation stabilized by the early 1920s, not only because the food supply crisis subsided, but also because some rather heavy-handed policies managed to quell unrest. The Communist Party was banned while the government purged the administration and deposed hundreds of allegedly disloyal mayors and municipal councilors. German schools and cultural institutions were closed, many of those categorized as Germans were pushed across the border, and some left on their own. Similar things happened to Hungarians in Prekmurje. The borders were also settled, and Yugoslavia increasingly functioned as a unified state, not a mash-up of semi-independent territories with different currencies, legal systems, and governments.⁴⁸ The state did not fall apart—not until

⁴²Ribnikar, *Sejmi zapisniki Narodne vlade*, vol. 1: 323; ARS, AS 61, box 5, folder 2524, Maribor gendarmerie command report, 25 March 1919.

⁴³ARS, AS 60, box 4, unit 40, folder 220/pr, Brežice district captain's report, 7 June 1920.

⁴⁴ARS, AS 60, box 5, unit 54, Ptuj district captain's report, 19 September 1920, 1683/preds.

⁴⁵ARS, AS 60, box 5, folder 2963, Cerknica political office report, 9 January 1920, 7816.

⁴⁶ARS, AS 60, box 3, unit 31, folder 2088/preds., Maribor district captain's report, 29 November 1919.

⁴⁷ARS, AS 60, box 6, unit 61, Ljubljana police directorate report, 24 April 1921, 20/78/Preds.

⁴⁸Cvirn, "Nemška manjšina na Spodnjem Štajerskem v času med obema vojnama (1918–1941)"; Čuček, "Volkovi in hijene"; Aleš Gabrič, "Hitra slovenizacija šolskih in kulturnih ustanov [The Quick Slovenization of Educational and Cultural Institutions]," in *Slovenski prelom 1918*, ed. Aleš Gabrič (Ljubljana, 2019), 141–60; Stipica Grgić and Ivan Hrštic, "The Creation of the State: The Fate of Old Institutions of Political Power and the Creation of New Ones in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes from 1918–1923," *Historyka Studia Metodologiczne* 52 (2022): 185–203; Attila Kovács, "Številčni razvoj prekmurskih Madžarov v 20. stoletju [The Numerical Development of Prekmurje Hungarians in the 20th Century]," *Razprave in gradivo*, no. 48–49 (2006): 6–36; Dragan Matić, "Nemci na Kranjskem od druge polovice 19. stoletja do prehoda v jugoslovansko državo [Germans in Carniola from the Second Half of the 19th Century until the Transition to the Yugoslav State]," in *Migracije in slovenski prostor od antike do danes*, eds. Peter Štih and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana, 2010), 551–67; Rok Stergar, "Continuity, Pragmatism, and Ethnolinguistic Nationalism: Public Administration in Slovenia during the Early

1991—and it maintained its king and a dynasty until 1945; a Bolshevik revolution did not break out, at least not in the interwar period.

Conclusion

Was Yugoslavia doomed from the very beginning, was its failure “structurally unavoidable” as Ivo Banac claimed in the preface to the 1992 reprint of his *The National Question in Yugoslavia*?⁴⁹ Were the verbal eruptions and the general unrest indications that its inhabitants were not ready to accept the state as their own? Were these caused by some deep-rooted longing for a Slovene—or Croat—nation-state, as some of the post-1991 nationalist narratives would have us believe, or were they perhaps a consequence of a strong and indestructible attachment to the Habsburg dynasty and its empire, something an imperial nostalgist might suggest? Or were these events largely a continuation of wartime developments, something Claire Morelon has suggested for Bohemia,⁵⁰ and therefore not a serious challenge to Yugoslavia’s political legitimacy?

One thing is certain: the importance of the attitudes and events I have described in this article should not be overestimated. First of all, most of the sources that are available to us were produced by the administration and the police. Governmental narratives need to be taken with a large pinch of salt when it comes to the central topic of this article: political legitimacy. Simply put, not everyone described as pro-Habsburg, a German nationalist, or a Bolshevik in the reports of district captains or the police was anything like that. These categories were ambiguous, not at all neutral, and were employed arbitrarily—and threats to the new state were sometimes more imagined than real.⁵¹ That said, many of the sources do reproduce the views of the people rather faithfully. Court files, for instance, include transcribed depositions of the accused and witness accounts, and we often see that people proudly called themselves Bolsheviks.

Second, and more importantly, much of what happened were momentary reactions to a perceived injustice, to what was seen as a government’s failure to fulfill its—often implicit—promises. Alcohol was repeatedly involved, which made these outburst, proper fits of rage, even less indicative of a person’s real political inclinations. Was Franc Korošec—drunk on wine, fighting with a Ljubljana policeman, and yelling “Long live Austria! Fuck Yugoslavia! What did King Peter say when he was shitting in a hole?”—a drunk, or a dangerous Habsburg legitimist?⁵² Was Vinko Vičič, a drunk Zagorje coal miner, who—axe in hand—yelled at people passing by his house that he would “show those who dare to say red-white-blue [the colors of the Yugoslav flag], *poroka madona* [sic], I am a communist, fuck King Peter and that snotty [crown prince] Alexander,” trying to make a proper political statement, or was he just being obnoxious? During Vinčič’s trial, he certainly maintained that he was not a member of any political organization and that he was very drunk, something several eyewitnesses confirmed.⁵³

Probably it was a bit of both, yet these two men—and many more like them—were arguably not a substantial threat to the existing order. More importantly, even threatening statements and actions not induced by alcohol lacked persistence; the mood of the people changed rapidly. Shortages of food did trigger several major riots, and rioters occasionally made coherent political demands. But these riots and uprisings were local and failed to produce a sustained and coordinated movement.⁵⁴ Perhaps

Years of Yugoslavia,” in *Hofratsdämmerung? Verwaltung und ihr Personal in den Nachfolgestaaten der Habsburgermonarchie 1918 Bis 1920*, eds. Peter Becker et al. (Vienna, 2020), 179–92.

⁴⁹Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, 2nd paperback reprint (1984; Ithaca, 1992), 15. For a recent reappraisal of this seminal book, see Emily Greble and Vladislav Lilić, “Nations, Politics, and the Role of History in East Central Europe,” *The American Historical Review* 128, no. 2 (2023): 951–62.

⁵⁰Claire Morelon, “State Legitimacy and Continuity between the Habsburg Empire and Czechoslovakia: The 1918 Transition in Prague,” in *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States After 1918*, eds. Claire Morelon and Paul Miller (Oxford, 2018), 49.

⁵¹Bresciani, “The Battle for Post-Habsburg Trieste/Trst”; Centrih, “Boljševizem v prevratni dobi na Slovenskem.”

⁵²ARS, AS 307, KAZ VR-1921, box 2, folder Vr II 1558/21, Korošec court case files.

⁵³ARS, AS 307, KAZ VR-1921, box 2, folder 767/21, Vičič court case files.

⁵⁴Centrih, “Boljševizem v prevratni dobi na Slovenskem,” 312.

because they were mostly active in urban settings, even the communists—an organized mass movement—failed to systematically instrumentalize popular rural discontent partially caused by the food supply crisis. Already in November 1919, when the crisis was far from over, the district captain from Kranj calmly noted: “Such is the character of our people—it rants and criticizes a lot but even a tiny improvement in its tough situation makes it content and fills it with new hope.”⁵⁵ It is hard to overlook the fact that his analysis was informed by some dubious vernacular psychology, but the official nevertheless made an important point. The mood of most people was situational and contingent, it ebbed and flowed as the circumstances changed. Surely there were dedicated communists who pushed for the destruction of the existing political order even as food became available, and there were those who were not hungry but still hoped the Habsburgs would return. Many German nationalists in Carinthia voted for Austria even though they were aware that the shortages of food in the new republic were worse than in Yugoslavia. Most people, however, changed their minds as the situation did.

Looking at the population of Slovenia, there is no doubt that challenges to the legitimacy of Yugoslavia which emerged after its establishment were not especially persistent and did not evolve into a mass and organized rejection of the state or its political system. That, however, does not mean that they were unimportant. After all, we have come to realize that national identifications are also contingent and situational, that their attractiveness grows and wanes, they sometimes even disappear, but we nevertheless know that they are important. Because food was in short supply and because some people were hungry in the immediate postwar years, a Bolshevik revolution did not break out, a legitimist takeover did not happen, and Lower Styria was not incorporated into German-Austria. Yugoslavia did, however, lose the Carinthian plebiscite despite a Slovene-speaking majority in the disputed areas; a less than ideal food supply did influence voters’ attitudes.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, there was at least a lot of potential for different outcomes, something contemporaries were keenly aware of but many historians have chosen to forget since.⁵⁷ Had a Bolshevik revolution successfully spread over Central Europe, which looked likely after Soviet republics were established in Bavaria and Hungary in the spring of 1919, the axe-wielding coal miner might have done more than just spew insults.⁵⁸ Had Charles Habsburg’s coup in Hungary succeeded, the drunk from Ljubljana might not have been arrested for yelling “Long live Austria!” and the police officers might have joined him.

In these scenarios, the potential for a radically different outcome existed. That is why it is important to study these events and the role food scarcity had in them—as a cause or a trigger. It is important not to follow nationally inclined historians and be only interested in developments which fit a predetermined narrative, ignoring people and their concerns, their hopes and fears, and their visions of the future. When it came to coal miners, housewives, railway workers, poor peasants, etc.—taken together they represented most of the population—their views were not necessarily expressed through organized activities, in newspapers, or in various representative bodies. They often used their agency in a more unsystematic, even chaotic way, by rioting, robbing a store, spreading rumors, or getting drunk and insulting the ruling dynasty. Yet this was politics too. It was an expression of vernacular ideologies that need to be taken seriously despite their habitual incoherence.⁵⁹

Once we do, we realize that the situation after the breakup of the Habsburg Empire was even more liminal than previously thought, and that the new state, Yugoslavia, faced serious challenges in the

⁵⁵ARS, AS 60, box 3, unit 31, folder 179/pr., Kranj district captain’s report, 24 November 1919.

⁵⁶Philipp Jernej, “Osvoboditelji ali okupatorji: Jugoslovanska uprava na Koroškem 1918–1920 [Liberators or Occupiers: Yugoslav Administration in Carinthia 1918–1920],” in *Koroški plebiscit – 100 let kasneje*, ed. Danijel Grafenauer (Ljubljana, 2021), 77–79.

⁵⁷Rok Stergar, “‘We Will Look like Fools If Nothing Comes of This Yugoslavia!’: The Establishment of Yugoslavia from the Perspective of Slovene Contemporaries,” *Hiperboreea* 10, no. 1 (2023): 82–101.

⁵⁸On revolutions in Hungary and Bavaria, see Eliza Ablovatski, *Revolution and Political Violence in Central Europe: The Deluge of 1919* (Cambridge, 2021).

⁵⁹Analyzing the so-called green cadres, Jakub Beneš makes a strong case for the importance of popular reactions and vernacular ideologies, and the need to include them into our narratives. Beneš, “*The Colour of Hope*.” For what James C. Scott calls “Brechtian—or Schweikian—forms of class struggle” see also James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985).

postwar years. In Slovenia, there was a virtual consensus behind it among the established parties and the enthusiasm of their press, but a more reserved attitude toward Yugoslavia and its political system, or even an outright rejection, also existed. While poor peasants, industrial workers, war widows, and many others were not oblivious to nationalism and not necessarily hostile to Yugoslavia—although some certainly were—a South Slav nation-state was often not their primary goal. Sometimes, it was not their goal at all. It was not only that they were preoccupied with their daily chores—and getting enough food was one of them—but their actions and rhetoric often implied different visions of the future, where nationness was much less relevant than social justice. Some of this found its outlet in the budding communist movement. In other venues, peasants' discontent was instrumentalized by agrarian populists, something that the first national elections in 1920 nicely showed. But often it surfaced in street politics, in riots, vulgar outbursts, or wildcat strikes.⁶⁰ Therefore, it is important that the historians of post-imperial transitions in Habsburg Central Europe study them as much as political declarations, parliamentary debates, or newspaper polemics. Without that, any history of the postwar era will only tell a part of the story.

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⁶⁰Vasilij Melik, “Izidi volitev v konstituanto leta 1920 [Results of the 1920 Constituent Assembly Elections],” *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 3, no. 1 (1962): 3–60. For the wider post-Habsburg region, see Jakub Beneš, “Leftist Politics and Nationalism in the Post-Habsburg Lands, 1918–1928,” in *Das Erbe der Habsburgermonarchie in den Nachfolgestaaten (Brüche und Kontinuitäten)*, eds. Ulrike Harmat, Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918, Sonderband (Vienna, forthcoming).