

After Empire: The League of Nations and the Former Habsburg Lands

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Scholarly interest in the imperial origins of the new world order of 1919 has largely focused on thinkers and political figures from the British Empire and Anglo world more broadly. Yet that new order arguably took shape on the ground most palpably in Central and Eastern Europe, where problems of financial collapse, national minorities, endemic disease, and humanitarian aid emerged as domains where the League's institutional identity and political-legal authority were defined and tested. And in this region, international organisations and actors worked in the shadow not of the British Empire, but the Austro-Hungarian one.

In December 2015, scholars from Europe, the US, and Australia met in Vienna to explore the co-implication of regional and international orders in interwar Central Europe. The conference „After Empire“ analysed the symbiotic relationship between the successor states and the League's agencies as both sought to build their capacity and identity out of the rubble of collapsed empires and world war. International and transnational responses to the region's challenges confronted the legacies of Habsburg rule across social and scientific networks, epistemic communities, legal concepts, fiscal structures, trans- and supranational political imaginaries, horizons of expectation and spaces of experience. In excavating these links for the first time, „After Empire“ explored the possibility of treating the domain of former Habsburg rule as a (more or less coherent) region, and asked how the view from Central Europe might recast our broader histories of the interwar international order.

GLENDIA SLUGA (Sydney) gave a programmatic keynote in which she recovered

imperial and post-imperial Austria's international past as both historical phenomena and historiographical imperative. There was a „new movement amongst historians,“ she explained, „to take off the ideological blinders imposed by an older national and state-centric view of the international past and to recover a neglected history of transnational experiences and ideas.“ Seeking to rezone those internationalist experiences into mainstream historical narratives, she surveyed a broad tableau of thinkers and projects, including well-known figures such as Karl Polanyi, Robert Musil, Baroness Bertha von Suttner, Heinrich Lammasch, and Alfred H. Fried, as well as lesser-known ones like Erwin Hanslik and Emmy Freundlich.

MICHAEL DEAN (Berkeley) opened the conference with a paper which reconsidered the new literature on the mutual implication of imperialism and internationalism through the prism of Czechoslovakia rather than a great power. Small states provided a revealing perspective on these problems because of their deep reliance on international cooperation and organization. Czechoslovak political actors, he showed, embraced the language of imperial internationalism and staked their own claim to participation in the mandates system as a civilized state capable of supervising others.

ZOLTAN PETERECZ (Eger) traced the shifting relationship between Hungary and the League of Nations and the latter's role in shaping the contours of the post-Trianon Hungarian state. Despite its dissension from the League's underlying assumptions, Hungary felt compelled to engage with the new institution for want of other plausible means to revise the reviled Treaty of Trianon and for its financial reconstruction, illustrating the diverse motivations and the complex webs of mutual reliance that characterized international institutions in the interwar years.

REINHARD BLÄNKNER (Frankfurt / Oder), meanwhile, unearthed an episode in which the intellectual history of Austria tangled with diagnoses for the interwar settlement. The International Studies Conference convened conferences in 1936 and 1937 on „peaceful change“. At the 1937 conference, the Austrian intellectuals Eric Voegelin and

Otto Brunner placed the question in the context of „Danubian problems,” and argued that any assessment of the mechanisms for change must take account of the „political ideas” and ideological make-up of the population, which had emerged out of the crucible of the Habsburg Monarchy.

Few issues exposed the imperial legacies and the dilemmas of the interwar settlement like the question of national minorities. Yet, as STEFAN DYROFF (Bern) observed, Austria is rarely mentioned in the literature on the League and minorities. In uncovering the Austrian heritage of key political figures and scholars, Dyroff pleaded for studying this history „from its beginning” and not from its „end phase” in the late 1930s, when „German” minorities were organized by the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* in Berlin. Many key „German” campaigners (in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, for example) stemmed from the imperial lands. The empire’s legacy likewise shaped institutions like the Congress of European Nationalities, whose headquarters lay in Vienna. „Contrary to the assumption of most scholars,” Dyroff argued, „it was not the Polish-German antagonism that originated transnational discussions around the minority protection system, but the Austrian-Czech struggle on nationality rights.”

BÖRRIES KUZMANY (Vienna) took an alternate path through the same territory, tracing the fate of the Habsburg idea of national-personal autonomy in minority protection organizations. He cited the precedent of national „compromises” in Cisleithania (especially Moravia) and theoretical models developed by the Austro-Marxists. Figures like Rudolf Laun digested these Habsburg experiences. If Laun’s proposal was rejected by the peace conference in favour of a more individualized model of minority rights, various iterations of corporate rights were in circulation, and were discussed in Paris especially in connection to Jewish issues.

While Kuzmany explored versions of the personality principle in circulation amongst interwar Jewish political groups, JANA OSTERKAMP (Munich) zoomed in on the protean legal status of Jews at the moment of imperial collapse. Zwi Perez Chajes, Vienna’s chief Rabbi in 1918, secured Emperor Charles’ ap-

proval for the recognition of Jews as official nationality in the empire’s dying days. The late sanction of the notion of Jewry as a nationality divided the Jewish community, and this contested landscape of political-legal group identity persisted into the post-imperial order and framed debates about the status of Jews.

NATHAN MARCUS (St. Petersburg) used a minority rights case study to interrogate the counterfactual claim, voiced by Carol Fink, that the League’s efforts were counterproductive, as they rewarded greater politicization which led to the escalation of conflict rather than its reduction. Might governments and minorities have dealt with their differences more effectively without the League? As a minority problem that did not fall within the jurisdiction of the League’s minority system, South Tyrol proved a case well-adapted to testing Fink’s hypothesis. Marcus showed how the defense of national minorities intersected messily with security considerations and *Realpolitik*: inter-state conflict between Vienna and Rome over South Tyrol was largely avoided because of the Austrian desire to have new international loans approved, which Italy had the capacity to derail. If the Austrian government chose *Volkswirtschaft* over *Volksgemeinschaft*, the fact that no League treaty regulated the situation „made this kind of choice possible.”

A third panel on „national delegates and international work” opened with MADELEINE DUNGY’s (Cambridge, Mass.) paper on a Draft Convention on the Treatment of Foreigners. It was an attempt to remove obstacles placing foreign nationals at a commercial disadvantage. Under its auspices, the League would have become the guarantor of a new and expansive international regulatory order. Concerns about trade relations among the successor states played an important role: the convention’s origins lay in a Vienna Chamber of Commerce memorandum of April 1926 authored by Richard Riedl, who envisioned a continental economic system to „consolidate Austro-German influence in Central Europe.” The failure of the convention, Dungy argued, exposed the tension between the dual imperatives of economic reconstruction and a more universalistic understanding of commercial liberty.

In a paper on Polish, Hungarian, and Czech experts active in international bodies, KATJA NAUMANN (Leipzig) argued that networks and experiences from previous forms of „cross-border cooperation“ were crucial to the League’s capacity to establish its authority and „open up new fields of global regulation.“ She relied on three case studies: Count Albert Apponyi, the long-serving parliamentarian and Hungarian’s representative in the League Assembly; Stansilac Špaček, a Bohemian civil engineer who drove an international movement of „scientific management“; and the Polish bacteriologist Ludwik Rajchman, director of the League of Nations Health Organisation. All three knew how to „work the international,“ with a particular talent for moving between different „scales of action.“

MADELEINE HERREN (Basel) presented an ethnographic account of the League’s international civil servants as engineers of world politics. The international civil service in Geneva, she argued, was a sphere of personal reinvention as well as a workshop for the production of a new sort of global person. Taking Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer as a case study, she reconstructed the lifeworlds of the League’s civil servants, exploring its materiality, cultures of sociability and self-presentation, ties to „national“ identities, dilemmas of loyalty and neutrality, and paths of career development. Wertheimer invoked Austria-Hungary as a model of supranationality, and channelled experiences of two „failed“ international orders (Austria-Hungary and the League) into advice for the UN.

The fourth panel tracked epistemic communities and networks of experts. SARA SILVERSTEIN’s (New Haven) paper „Healthcare and Humanism“ made a case for Central Europe as the field in which Ludwik Rajchman and his colleagues pioneered new understandings of public health as „something more than a state’s concern.“ As the typhus epidemic of the immediate postwar years made palpably clear, health did not stop and start at state borders. Nevertheless, interwar public health projects continually ran up against principles of state sovereignty. Silverstein traced the gradual evolution of health programs that not only fostered collaboration between states but increasingly transcen-

ded state frameworks altogether. In re-casting the relationship between science and society, a Central European medical elite adopted aspects of old imperial laws and structures while reimagining those links for a new and pragmatically-minded order.

DAVID PETRUCCELLI (Vienna) redirected our gaze from liberal internationalist ideas to illiberal ones. He explained how, after earlier hesitation, the League was drawn into the domain of international crime in the 1930s as a result of the activism of the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC) and a group of jurists campaigning for the unification of penal law. The ICPC, known today as Interpol, was established in Vienna in 1923 and formed part of the geopolitical vision of Vienna police president and sometime Austrian chancellor Johannes Schober. These groups responded to the dislocation wrought by the war. They sought to rollback and supersede the liberalism that underpinned nineteenth-century legal thought and the League of Nations by replacing its individualism with an ethic of „social defence.“

MICHAEL BURRI (Philadelphia) likewise explored the internationalisation of Austrian experts. Having lost its multinational empire, Vienna became more internationalized in the 1920s thanks to „global resources devoted to emergency relief to children,“ with some 80 international organisations establishing offices in Vienna, and a whole cohort of entrepreneurial humanitarians working in the city. Foremost among them was paediatrician and director of Vienna children’s hospital, Clemens von Pirquet, who masterminded the relief effort to feed Austria’s hungry children and pioneered new anthropometric tests. The hungry child morphed into a „large-scale experimental subject“ and generated an enormous archive of health data. The biomedical tangled with the geopolitical: Rockefeller funding of the relief effort was designed to stave off health as well as political contagion, in an understanding of international order that tied child nutrition in Vienna to peace and security across the continent.

Vienna appeared more marginal to international projects in JOHANNES FEICHTINGER’s (Vienna) study of Austria’s involvement in the International Committee on Intel-

lectual Cooperation. The Committee sought to assist countries in which intellectual life had been most disrupted by the war and its aftermath, and judged Austria to be chief among them. In 1922, the historian Alfons Dopsch was chosen as „corresponding member“ and tasked with reporting on the state and needs of intellectual life in Austria. He conducted a vast survey and set up an Austrian sub-committee that later served as a role model for the Committee's program of intellectual exchange between countries. Dopsch grew frustrated with the Committee's French orientation and its failure to implement his suggestions, and eventually lost faith in the value of formal intellectual cooperation.

In the conference's final panel, PATRICIA CLAVIN and MARY COX (both Oxford) offered an empirically and conceptually rich paper on the „invention of 'positive security.'“ They presented Vienna as a „global node“ in which the hunger crisis „mobilized and shaped international networks that generated norms“ about humanitarian aid that were „institutionalized in a new global order.“ The „scientific opportunity“ of the crisis had methodological and political consequences. A preoccupation with *observation* pervaded relief efforts: „the search for demonstrable results in international intervention in child welfare was crucial in legitimating claims to organizational agency at the time.“ Moreover, the financial and food crises were linked. In grasping this interconnected picture, and in paying more attention to the League's actual activities rather than its abstract agenda, we might arrive at a thicker understanding of security beyond the simple protection of frontiers.

JÜRGEN NAUTZ's paper on economic experts focused on Richard Schüller, a distinguished scholar and civil servant in imperial and post-imperial Austria. Nautz deemed him a „new sort of ministry official“ who became a prominent figure in his own right, exploiting both the media and private networks. Schüller preferred the creation of regional market areas when faced with limited success at the level of international policy. In her paper „Financing the new Czechoslovakia,“ ANTONIE DOLEŽALOVÁ (Prague) reported on Czechoslovakia's fiscal policy in the interwar years in

light of the connection between balanced state budgets and international credibility, and explored ruptures and continuities with Austro-Hungarian traditions of budgeting.

All told, the conference probed the various ways we might understand the empire's regime of supranational administration alongside the League's version of the same. The paradoxes of this period emerged clearly into view. Perhaps more than any other region, interwar Central Europe compels us to view the twinned process of nationalization and internationalization in the same historical frame. „After Empire“ likewise proved extremely effective at revealing the interconnectedness of different regional challenges and their remedies: fiscal, national, social, health, intellectual, and political crises fused together in unpredictable ways. If this proved especially visible on the ground in Central Europe, then the regional approach might allow us to write histories that are not beholden to the League's own categorization of different domains of governance and organization of knowledge. In this way, the conference pointed towards a new phase of the League's historicization, and simultaneously suggested the contours of a new, unsentimental and non-provincial history of the empire's disappearance that was far more engaged with current developments in the fields of international and transnational history.

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: Empires and States: Public Campaigns, New Claims, and Political Legacies

Michael Dean (California), „The Imperial Internationalism of Small States: Czechoslovakia and the League of Nations, 1918-1938“

Zoltan Peterecz (Eger, HU), „Hungary and the League of Nations: A Forced Marriage“

Reinhard Blänkner (Frankfurt Oder), „Peaceful Change? The Austrian Memoranda-Group at the League of Nations' General Study Conference on Peaceful Change, Paris, June 28 – July 3, 1937“

Panel 2: Minorities and Nationalities between Empire and Internationalization

Stefan Dyroff (Bern), „The Minority Protec-

tion System of the League of Nations and the Legacy of the Habsburg Empire“

Nathan Marcus (St. Petersburg), „The League of Nations and National Minorities: The Case of South Tyrol“

Börries Kuzmany (Vienna), „National-Personal Autonomy. A Habsburg Concept Transferred to Interwar Minority Protection Organisations“

Jana Osterkamp (Munich), „Promoting Jews as a Nationality: The Perspective of Viennese Chief Rabbi Chajes“

Keynote Lecture

Glenda Sluga (Sydney), „‘Global Austria’ and the League of Nations: Reframing the History of Empire and Internationalism“

Panel 3: National Delegates and International Work: Refashioning the League

Madeleine Dungy (Cambridge, US), „Defending the Rights of Austrian „Foreigners“ in the League Economic Committee“

Katja Naumann (Leipzig), „Empowering the League of Nations: Polish, Hungarian and Czechoslovakian Officers and Experts“

Madeleine Herren (Basel), „International Civil Servants“

Panel 4: Epistemic Communities and Networks of Experts: Refashioning the Region

Sara Silverstein (New Haven), „Healthcare and Humanism: Imperial Legacies in the League’s Social Programs“

David Petruccelli (Vienna), „Fighting the Scourge of International Crime: Illiberal Internationalism and the League of Nations“

Michael Burri (Philadelphia), „Clemens von Pirquet and Children as Object of International Concern at the League of Nations“

Johannes Feichtinger (Vienna), „Expectations, Visions, and Frustrations: Alfons Dopsch and the League Intellectual Cooperation Program“

Panel 5: Economic Reconstruction and Legacies of International Governance

Patricia Clavin and Mary Cox (Oxford), „A Global Node, a Global Order: Austria and the

invention of ‘Positive Security’“

Jürgen Nautz, „‘...insoweit es möglich und sobald es möglich ist...’: Agency and Perception of Economic Experts – The Schüller Case“

Antonie Doležalová (Prague), „Financing the New Czechoslovakia“

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