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Soldiers in the Revolution: Violence and Consolidation in 1918 in the Territory of the Disintegrating Kingdom of Hungary

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In November 1918, as in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, a large wave of violence swept across the territory of the crumbling Kingdom of Hungary. Soldiers returning from the fronts played a key role in the acts of looting that were committed everywhere. At the same time, many of the soldiers joined the various paramilitary policing units that were being formed. In the traditional historiography, one finds essentially two attempts to explain the behavior of these soldiers. Left-leaning interpretations have tended to characterize the events as precursors to an early agrarian socialist revolution, while more nationalistic interpretations have seen them as the first steps in a national revolution. Drawing on archival sources which until now have remained unused, this essay discusses the background and motivations of the soldiers involved in the looting. It then analyses the circumstances surrounding the formation of law enforcement guard forces and the motivations of those who joined these forces.

Keywords: WWI veterans, green cadres, paramilitarism, brutalization, peasant violence, revolution

On November 3, 1918, the denizens of a small village called Adony, situated 50 km south of Budapest, held a popular assembly. The crowd wanted to raise flour rations, bring prices down to peacetime levels, and abolish the food rationing system. Last and in all likelihood not least, they wanted to open the taverns and put an end to the alcohol ban that had been in place. According to the official reports, the core of the rioters consisted of Austro-Hungarian veterans who had fought in World War I. The frightened notary, together with the merchants and landowners, appeared willing to meet their demands. Nevertheless, the crowd broke into the shops during the night and either stole or destroyed everything they found. The looters only plundered the stores owned by Jews, saying that they would break into the stores owned by Christians the next day. They never got the chance, however. A police force arrived from the barracks in the nearby city of Székesfehérvár and put an end to the upheaval. Two people were executed, and

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with the help of the local aldermen, a national guard was organized in the village consisting of men who had served as soldiers.[1]

This episode offers a clear illustration of two patterns of behavior that were typical of soldiers of Austria-Hungary returning from the fronts in early November 1918. As was the case in other successor states of the disintegrating empire, the members of the once proud Habsburg armed forces played a key role in the large-scale disturbances of the peace that were breaking out. At the same time, many of them were joining the various leftwing, rightwing, nationalist, or completely apolitical paramilitary formations which were springing up all over the country like mushrooms.

In the traditional historiography of the post-Habsburg states, one finds essentially two explanations for the behavior of these soldiers. According to the socialist revolutionary narrative, the events of 1918 were antecedents to a genuine Bolshevik revolution. The people at the heart of the disturbances were allegedly (according to this explanation) seeking to create a just communist society, but they were unable to do so in the absence of a political party to lead them.[2] This leftwing narrative appeared in this blunt, extreme form almost exclusively in Hungary in the successor states, it was often intertwined with a nationalist interpretation, and the two appeared together.[3]

According to this latter interpretation, the soldiers who were returning from the front rejected the rule of the "oppressive" empires and strove resolutely to create nation-states. For instance, in his narrative concerning the transformation of the region in 1918, Marián Hronský contends that, following the collapse of the old system, the Slovak peasantry, filled with an elusive sense of freedom, attacked their former oppressors. The fact that members of the Slovak intelligentsia were able to quell the riots offers, according to Hronský, a clear indication of the fundamentally nationalistic nature of the uprising. He argued that the people responsible for the disturbances recognized these elites as their legitimate leaders.[4] One finds similar interpretations in the traditional Romanian historiography as well. Gheorghe Iancu, for instance, argues that a "genuine Romanian national revolution took place" in November 1918, which

1 HL P. d. f.) B/10. d. 4039. 37.

2 Farkas, *Katonai összeomlás,* 285–305; 420–21.

3 See for instance, Matichescu, *The Logic of History against the Vienna Diktat*, 14 and Pascu, *The Making of the Romanian Unitary National State 1918*, 218–21.

4 Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon*. 67–69.

finally brought Transylvania under the control of the Romanian-speaking majority.[5]

In recent decades, modern historiography has tried to provide more nuanced analyses of the interwar transformation of the region. The current literature tends to emphasize the importance of continuity, especially on the local level, and it presents the transformation from empire to nation-state as a slow and gradual process.[6] This trend coincides with the emergence of new innovative studies discussing the role of war veterans in the interwar period. Most of these inquiries have dealt primarily with far-right groups which formed in the ruins of the disintegrating empires. They argue that the experiences of the returning veterans during the violent months of late 1918 an early 1919 led to their quick radicalization. These ex-servicemen continued to fight against the "internal enemies" of the nation, and their actions greatly contributed to the violent political culture of the region. In the case of Hungary, Béla Bodó published pioneering studies on Horthy's radical rightwing paramilitaries. He argues that their actions cannot be interpreted as a mere reaction to the Hungarian Soviet Republic. He claims that the atrocities they committed were patterned acts perpetrated in a time of perceived social crisis.[7]

The recent scholarship also highlights the important pre-1914 roots of the violence which broke out in the region. They argue that the social crisis caused by the war (especially in its latter years) catalyzed existing conflicts.[8] In the case of the former Hungarian Kingdom for example Miloslav Szabó points out the continuity of anti-Semitic political rhetoric in the territory of today's Slovakia and its influence from the late nineteenth century to the interwar period.[9]

Veterans returning from the war who were apolitical or significantly less radical, however, have never really been given comparable attention in the secondary literature. Jakub Benes's 2017 groundbreaking article on the green cadres took a new approach to the study of the armed groups, active in the hinterland of the Habsburg Empire. According to Benes, "the Green Cadres represented a major rural insurgency, […] which bore the hallmarks of peasant

5 Iancu, *The Ruling Council*, 23.

6 See for example the studies of the Nepostrans ERC research group: Egry, "Negotiating Post-Imperial Transitions: Local Societies and Nationalizing States in East Central Europe"; Egry, "Fallen between Two Stools?'; Kosi, "The Imagined Slovene Nation and Local Categories of Identification"; Jeličić, "To Ensure Normal Administrative Order, and for the Population's Greater Comfort?"

7 Bodó, *The White Terror*.

8 Böhler et al., *Legacies of Violence*, 3–5.

9 Szabó, "Because Words Are Not Deeds," 170–77.

revolts of previous centuries but was also a bid to influence, and participate in, post-imperial national politics."[10] Benes's study focuses primarily on Moravia, Galicia, and Slavonia and offers only a partial analysis of the events which took place in Hungary. His work has had an inspiring effect on Hungarian historians. New studies by Balázs Ablonczy, Pál Hatos, and Tamás Csiki have been published on the "forgotten revolution" in the Hungarian countryside. They persuasively point out the importance of these (neither red, nor white) peasant movements in the dissolution of the state administration on the local level.[11] This essay seeks to contribute to this new trend in the literature. While it challenges the dual explanation of the traditional national historiographies, it aims to provide a better understanding of the acts committed by veterans during the last months of 1918. The first section deals with soldiers who caused upheavals and disorder. It identifies the regions and places in the Hungarian Kingdom where the violence was the most intense and sheds light on the social backgrounds of the perpetrators. The second part investigates the nature of the violence. It aims to go beyond the traditional Bolshevik and national narratives and provide a more nuanced explanation of the motivations of the rioters. The third section strives to add nuance to the picture of a "revolutionary" soldier and examine the role of veterans in the consolidation of the countryside. It focuses on the social backgrounds of the men who joined the different paramilitary formations and considers their possible motivations for doing so.

The Peasant Revolution of November 1918: A Topography of Violence

Beginning in 1917, more and more violent acts were being committed in the hinterland of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Armed groups of deserters were able to bring whole regions under their control, for the most part in Slavonia. This was less true in the territories of the Kingdom of Hungary than it was in Cisleithania, but there were several groups of deserters who were active in the valley of the Vág River and the mountainous western regions of Transylvania. In some cases, rebel soldiers were able to take control of entire city districts. On May 20, 1918, for instance, soldiers who were protesting against orders to go to

10 Beneš, "The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918," 208.

11 See for instance Hatos, *Az Elátkozott Köztársaság*; Csíki, "A parasztság 'forradalma' 1918-ban"; Ablonczy, *Ismeretlen Trianon*.

the front seized and, for a short time, held the train station in the city of Pécs, a regional center in southern Hungary.[12]

The situation in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary became critical after the victory of the Aster Revolution on October 31, 1918. Although the regime change led by Count Mihály Károlyi, took place relatively bloodlessly in Budapest, at the news of the collapse of the monarchy, a wave of violence swept through rural areas of the country. Although the violence caused by the returning soldiers and the peasantry was typical of the entire territory of the collapsing Hungarian Kingdom, the situation was the most serious in the northern and eastern parts of the country, which were mainly inhabited by members of the national minorities.[13] The upheavals lasted for about two weeks, and by mid-November, consolidation had begun in the central lowlands and larger cities of the country. However, in some areas, the Budapest government failed to hold its grip on power.[14] In Transylvania, the Hungarian administrative bodies in the Metaliferi Mountains had lost almost all influence over events, and Árva County (today Orava County, Slovakia) in the north was almost completely lost to the Károlyi government. In these places, especially in Transylvania but also in the northern part of present-day Slovakia and in the eastern part of Transcarpathia, the newly formed national councils took over.[15] In many places, the Hungarian administration essentially abandoned the countryside and withdrew to the larger cities, where they tried to unite the remaining law enforcement units and solidify their positions. In Hunyad County (mostly congruent with Hunedoara County today, in Romania), for example, at the beginning of December 1918, all gendarmerie units were summoned Déva (today Deva, Romania), the county seat.[16] In Máramaros County (today Maramureş County, Romania), on November 10, all "at-risk" gendarmes were already stationed in Máramarossziget (today Sighetu Marmaşiei, Romania). Similar measures were introduced in the northern part of Upper Hungary. The gendarmes who had been withdrawn from Liptó County (today Liptov County, Slovakia) and Árva County were all sent to Kassa (today, Košice Slovakia), and the soldiers of Trencsén County (today Trenčín County, Slovakia) and Zsolnai County (today Žilina, Slovakia) retreated to the

12 Plaschka et al., *Innere Front*, 97.

13 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3611. 249.

14 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3610. 190.; B/8. d. 3905. 135.

15 Ablonczy, *Ismeretlen Trianon*, 157–58. In the case of Transylvania see HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3625. 975.

16 MNL VeML, XIV. 9. d. 253.

town of Žilina.[17] The topography of violence can be observed on a micro level as well. Certain sites in the rural parts of the country were especially dangerous in the first days of November 1918.

These zones of violence can be divided into two groups. The rebels attacked buildings in which there were items valuable enough to merit looting, for the most part food, tobacco, and even money. In November 1918, the railway stations were, from this perspective, the most critical sites. The riots usually started at the train stations and then spread to the rest of the settlements. The railways were prominent sites for the disturbances for two reasons. First, most of the soldiers travelled by train, so suddenly, several hundred or even thousands of hungry, cold, and often armed soldiers would show up at the stations on the major railway lines. Second, there were usually plenty of military buildings near the train stations in which large quantities of munitions were stored.[18]

In the city of Kolozsvár (today Cluj, Romania), soldiers returning from the front pillaged the warehouses and train cars in the station on November 1, 1918 in search of food, clothing, and alcohol.[19] In some cases (especially when the soldiers drastically outnumbered the local authorities), they took the entire station under their complete control. In Tövis (today Teiuş, Romania), a city not far from Kolozsvár, the soldiers simply disarmed the railway personnel and the small number of armed guards at the station and then looted the ammunition and tobacco depots.[20]

Prisoner-of-war camps which had either been abandoned or which were in the process of being dismantled were also frequent targets of the people responsible for the uprisings and upheaval. Winter was approaching, so what little food remained in these camps was valuable, as was the wood that had been used to build the barracks. In the cities in which there were, for all practical purposes, no armed forces of any consequence, the soldiers even attacked the army barracks. On November 4, for instance, the soldiers in the city of Nagyszeben (today Sibiu, Romania) looted the army barracks, together with many locals. The mob stole not only the stocks in the food depots but also the cash and the government bonds in the regiment coffers.[21]

17 MNL (OL, K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 5/4. ö. e. II. k. 20; 5/5. ö. e. I. k. 10, 12–13.

18 Glaise von Horstenau, *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg*, 762–63.

19 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 2. Telegrams of military bodies. 13. d. 2/13 ő. e. 6.

20 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d 1/1 ő. e. I. k. 1.

21 MNL OL K 803. PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 5/6 ő. e. 27.

In most settlements, the soldiers' most common targets were the local stores and businesses. For example, on December 11 and 12, 1918, roughly 500 armed soldiers swarmed the streets of the city of Kaposvár (the seat of Somogy County in southern Transdanubia), where they broke into, pillaged, and set fire to many shops. Between 10 and 12 people were killed in the course of the looting.[22] In many cases, the looters shouted anti-Semitic slurs. On November 1, at the news of the revolution which had taken place in Budapest, in the small settlement of Tótkomlós in Békés County rioters looted shops owned by Jews and either beat or drove off the merchants they found there. They set many of the houses owned by Jews in the town on fire, and they murdered the Jewish cantor. As it was a market day, the soldiers were joined by peasants from the area, who later chanted the following anti-Semitic taunt in front of the building of the local savings bank: "Down with the Jews, down with the rich!" "Long live the republic!"[23] There were similar cases of looting and violence in northern and eastern Hungary as well, for instance in Bars Country (the territory of which today is in Slovakia) and Szilágy County (the territory of which today is in northwestern Romania), and also in Máramaros.[24] Although the sources clearly indicate the places where the acts of violence were committed, they are vague with respect to the perpetrators of the these acts. It is not easy to determine the social backgrounds of the rioting soldiers because most of the available sources were written by the representatives of the state authorities. They usually described the rioters as "scum," "shirkers," or a mob. Some sources, however, tried to draw distinctions among the particular groups and determine who could be blamed for the violence. They mostly reported that "poor peasants," "women," and "soldiers" were the most sizeable groups in the rioting crowds. The inclusion of the first two groups alongside the soldiers was based on earlier perceptions about the allegedly "unreliable," "irresponsible," and "hysterical" elements of society. The frequent appearance of soldiers as a distinct group could be explained by two factors. First, due to the lack of civil clothing at the demobilization stations in November 1918, many veterans were still wearing their uniforms even long after they had been demobilized and had returned to their home communities. These people could appear in the eyes of the state authorities as "soldiers," an easily identifiable group in the crowd. However, in all

22 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3571. 114, 119, 120, and Hatos, *Az Elátkozott Köztársaság*, 177.

23 Szincsok, *Tótkomlós története és néprajza*, 190–91; Balogh, *A tótkomlósi zsidók története*, 29.

24 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3421. 67; 2423. 132.

likelihood, the veterans did not have any separate or special agenda that differed from the goals of the "civilian" peasants of their own local communities.

Second, in many cases, former soldiers were the most radical and seemingly most dangerous perpetrators. Often, their arrival home provoked violent uprisings.[25] The chief judge of Zenta (today Senta, Serbia), for example, reported that, until November 2, 1918, in many settlements in Bács-Bodrog County (today's northern Serbia and southern Hungary), "there was nothing to complain about from the perspective of public order and safety." When the soldiers arrived the next day, however, they were joined by shirkers, and together, they "rioted with unbridled destructiveness, set fires, looted, and stole."[26] In other settlements, returning soldiers were catalysts for disorder. In Versec (today Vršac, Serbia), for example, after the military train arrived in the station, the people returning from the front immediately began to riot. Once the news spread, they were joined almost immediately by the reservists stationed in the city, as well as the civilian population.[27] Unfortunately, we know relatively little about the ethnic backgrounds of the rioting soldiers. From what sources we do have, it seems that members of all the ethnic groups living in the Kingdom of Hungary took part in the instances of upheaval and insurrection. Among the soldiers who looted warehouses and train stations, one finds young men of Hungarian, Romanian, and various Slavic nationalities.[28]

Fortunately, the sources contain more information about the social backgrounds of the veterans. As in the case of the 1918 German revolution, most of the participating soldiers were older reservists who had spent the second part of the war in the hinterland. We can be more or less sure about this, because at the time of the uprising, the actual frontline soldiers had not yet returned home. These veterans arrived in Hungary only in the middle of November, when the largest wave of violence had subsided.[29] One finds further support for this conclusion in the fact that the crisis hotspots did not break out in the western part of the country, where most of the units returning from the front arrived, but rather in the peripheral territories of the country, which even during the pre-war period had been under a less effective state control. The relative proximity of the soldiers to their homes would explain why they were

25 Csíki, "A parasztság 'forradalma' 1918-ban," 136–37.

26 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3431. 81.

27 HL P.d.f. B/3. d. 3491. 253.

28 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 1/1. ö. e. I. k. 1.

29 Révész, *Nem akartak katonát látni?,* 60.

able to take the side of the rebellious peasantry almost immediately and why they apparently identified with the grievances of the people living in the rural communities around them. Soldiers stationed in the hinterland knew firsthand the hardships faced by the civilian population, as they were able to keep in touch with friends and family members much more easily than the soldiers who were stationed on the Italian or the Balkan fronts, whose correspondence was subject to the censors.[30]

The Nature of the Violence

It is hard to determine the motivations of the thousands of people who participated in the massive uprisings in the autumn of 1918. There are, however, some distinguishable patterns of violence. Sometimes, the people involved in the riots were not motivated simply by the desire to loot or steal. In many cases, they attacked institutions or individuals who, in their eyes, represented the authority of the old state. Some of the violence that accompanied the riots remained symbolic. Portraits of the king, for instance, were destroyed and the officers' insignias were torn off.[31] In the majority of cases, however, they did not content themselves with these kinds of symbolic shows of discontent. Rather, they beat and, in many cases, killed local representatives of the government, including clerks, mayors, and officials.[32] According to some estimates, at least one third of the government clerks in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary were driven from their settlements. This was particularly common in but not restricted to the areas in which the local majority population did not regard itself as Hungarian. According to the reports, in the whole county of Maros-Torda (today Mureş-Torda, Romania), for example, all of the aldermen in the towns and villages were driven from their posts. In the area around the city of Óbecse (today Bečej, Serbia) in the south, all the clerks fled. According to the deputy lieutenants in Gömör and Kishont County (the territory of which lies for the most part in Slovakia today,) in the north, in the early days of November, district clerks, chief magistrates, and in many places even forestry officials had to flee their homes.[33]

30 HL P. d. f. B/6. d. 3823. 332. On the maintenance of contacts among soldiers, see Hanák, "Vox Populi: Intercepted Letters in the First World War."

31 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 5/7 ő. e. 1–4; HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3430. 283.

32 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 1/1. ő. e. I. k. 58.

33 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3450. 785; HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3421. 32. 66. 67; Hatos, *Az elátkozott köztársaság,* 180.

The uprisings among soldiers in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary followed the choreography of a premodern peasant uprising. The acts committed by the people responsible for the upheaval can thus basically be interpreted as a kind of reactive violence.[34] Like the riots carried out in other areas of the collapsing Habsburg Empire, the rebellions were not intended to usher in a new system or lay the foundations for a new world, at least initially, but rather to restore a preexisting moral order, or at least a moral order that was seen in population imagination as having existed.[35] According to the peasant population and the soldiers, the local representatives of the state administration had expected them to make unjust and disproportionate sacrifices during the war.

In a November 8 report, the notary of the small town of Újléta in the Great Plain described the vulnerable position of the representatives of the state administration as follows:

> When the clerks were implementing the decrees issued by the state, they roused the anger of the people. They did not give wartime aid to anyone whose livelihood was secure because the government had instructed them not to. They could not exempt any individual soldier because they had not been empowered to do so. They could not give clothing to those who were cold or bread to those who were going hungry, because, in some cases, they themselves had none to give, and if they did, they didn't have much. First, they took the fathers for service, then the sons, and they withdrew military aid from the families of those who had fallen in battle because the state had instructed them to do so.[36]

In November 1918, news of the revolution in Budapest and the collapse of the monarchy essentially created a chance for the soldiers to settle accounts and seek some form of compensation for the injustices they felt, rightly or wrongly, that they had suffered. In the eyes of the peasantry (and this interpretation is arguably a motif in the traditional narrative crafted by the peasantry concerning oppressors), merchants and others in the world of commerce had also profited unfairly while, in the meantime, the majority had enjoyed none of the benefits of the war and, indeed, had fallen into poverty. In their understandings of the shifting circumstances, in general, the returning soldiers saw much beyond the borders of their own villages or the areas surrounding the towns they called

34 On the difference between reactive and proactive violence, see Tilly et al., *The Rebellious Century*.

35 On the use of the theory of the moral economy of violence, see Hagen, "The Moral Economy of Ethnic Violence," 217; Beneš, "The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918," 224.

36 HL P. d. f. B/6. d. 3711. 101.

home. Their visions of a just world would have been difficult to incorporate into a political party platform. The courthouses which were tied to the new liberal Budapest government fell prey to looters much as the manors and castles of the representatives of the old order did.[37] This sense of justice based on the local assertion of authority also explains why certain institutions and individuals were spared. In the aforementioned settlement of Tótkomlós, for example, all the shops were looted, but the building of the bank where the farmers kept their money went undamaged.[38]

Many of these attacks were fueled by strong antisemitism. As was true in the case of the pogroms that were committed in the city of Lemberg (today Lviv, Ukraine), there were essentially two motivations behind these atrocities.[39] Clearly, some of the attacks were fueled by envy and the desire to steal. In many parts of the country and especially in the smaller settlements, a significant proportion of the people involved in commerce were Jewish. Their shops were simply the most obvious and, often, simply the only target for the looters.[40]

The ideological antisemitism had deeper roots in the Hungarian countryside, however, especially in the northeastern parts of the country, where most of the atrocities took place. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the new agrarian political parties, which were very popular among the region's Greek Catholic elite, connected the economic development of the region with Anti-Semitic ideas. They promoted selective anti-Semitism against the "foreign" eastern Jews, who were allegedly "exploiting" the local peasantry and hampering its social, economic, and cultural development. The propagated aim of this Christian agrarian movement was to achieve social justice through the quick and radical redistribution of wealth, which would be taken from the "foreigners" and given to the local peasantry. This idea was often supported by the liberal Hungarian state administration as well.[41] These ideas became more and more popular during World War I. The need for "social justice" became particularly acute due to the massive economic hardships experienced by many peasants during the latter years of the war. Thus, it is no surprise that the tensions that were kindled as a consequence of the practice of scapegoating the local Jewish

37 Hatos, *Az elátkozott köztársaság,* 175.

38 Szincsok, *Tótkomlós története és néprajza*, 190–91.

39 Hagen, "The Moral Economy of Ethnic Violence," 219.

40 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3421. 67; 2423. 132.

41 Szabó, "Because Words Are Not Deeds," 170–77.

communities for (perceived or real) social injustices became one of the main motivations for the anti-Semitic attacks in November 1918.

In many cases, the peasantry saw the atrocities as acts of just punishment committed against the Jews for their alleged sins and wrongdoings. According to the peasantry, with its conduct both during and after the war, the Jewry of Hungary had broken an unwritten social contract which specified its place in the social hierarchy. For instance, in the case of anti-Semitic atrocities committed by Ruthenian-speaking communities, in many places, news of the alleged arming of the Jewish population was cited as an explanation (or pretext) for the acts of violence (as was true in places in Galicia).

In many settlements, the word "Jew" was understood as a synonym for "rich" or for "war-profiteer," so the acts of violence committed against Jews were motivated both by "ideological" anti-Semitism (i.e. the identification of Jews as belonging to a different religious community) and by the perception of their economic status. Though admittedly the relationships between these perceptions are often blurred. Seemingly the latter (i.e. the perception of economic difference) was in some cases more important than the former. For instance, in Tótkomlós, all the shops owned by Jewish inhabitants of the town were looted with the exception of one, the Vogel bakery, because it was the place where "bread for the poor man was baked." The fact that the head of the family was serving on the front at the time (and thus was doing his "fair" share) may also have played a role in the decision of the locals to spare his store.[42] In other areas and especially in northeastern Hungary, where many of the local leaders in the public administration were Jewish, many of the members of the Slovak-speaking or Ruthenian-speaking population saw them as representatives of the Hungarian state. In Alsóvis (today Vişţea de Jos, Romania), for example, the clerk was made the target of the anti-Semitic attacks, and he was forced by the mob to resign.[43] In these areas, anti-Semitism and anti-Magyar sentiment often meant the same thing, as the majority of the Magyar-speaking elite were Jewish.[44] In the spring of 1919, the invading Czech legionaries adopted essentially the same logic when they attacked the Jewish citizens of the towns in what had been Upper Hungary.[45]

42 Balogh, *A tótkomlósi zsidók története*, 30.

43 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3616. 341.

44 Hatos, *Az elátkozott köztársaság,* 182–84. On the role of the local Jewry in Hungarian nation building in northern Hungary on the basis of the examples of Nyitra and Ungvár, see Varga, *The Monumental Nation*.

45 Konrád, "Two Post-War Paths," 11.

In several places, uprisings did indeed break out as national conflicts, and the change of rule was interpreted in this context. In the areas in which the majority population was Hungarian-speaking, this often meant a revival of the anti-Habsburg traditions of 1848. For example, on October 31, 1918, in the city of Várpalota, a detachment assigned to the railway station tore off the insignia on the soldiers' caps that were signs of the Habsburg House and demanded that the soldiers wear the cockade that was used as the symbol of the Hungarian National Council as a sign of the country's newly won independence.[46] The uprisings took on national connotations primarily in settlements in which the efforts to cultivate a sense of Romanian, Slovak, Serb, or Ruthenian national identity had met with success towards the end of the nineteenth century. In many of these communities, the local national elites were at the forefront of the groups leading the uprisings. They felt that the time had come to seize power from the Hungarian majority.

In Tornova (today Târnova, Romania), near Arad, for example, in early November, two lieutenants of Romanian nationality had the local population swear allegiance to the Romanian National Council in the church. The crowd then allegedly set fire to all the houses in the town which were home to Hungarian speakers and chose individuals from among themselves to form the new prefecture.[47] At the town hall of Apahida (today in Romania) near Kolozsvár, a newly arrived Romanian lieutenant proclaimed that "power is in the hands of the Romanians," and that from that moment on, "Romanian laws apply." In the second week of November, the Romanian national councils around Balázsfalva (today Blaj, Romania) resolved to replace the "foreign" gendarmerie (which in many places consisted largely of Romanians) with Romanian national guards.[48] In Szancsal (today Sâncel, Romania), a lieutenant in the Romanian National Guard took control of the gendarmerie barracks and proclaimed that he does not want to see any gendarmes anymore."[49] The conflicts were especially violent in regions in which the Romanian-Hungarian atrocities dated back to the mid-nineteenth century. For example, in Fehér County the Hungarian elite was in constant fear of an ethnic conflict similar to what had happened in 1848–1849. These interethnic tensions were particularly acute after the unsuccessful

46 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3430. 283. The tradition of the 1848 revolution was an important tool of political legitimation for the Károlyi government. See Hatos, *Az elátkozott köztársaság*, 244–45.

47 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3605. 16.

48 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 1/1. ő. e. II. k. 70, 73.

49 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 1/1. ő. e. II. k. 64. 65. 66. 72.

Romanian military campaign in the region in 1916.[50] The situation was not the same in all regions of Transylvania, however. In many places, for a long time, there were clear signs of cooperation rather than conflict. In many of the settlements in the eastern part of the Hungarian Great Plain which had a Romanian-speaking majority, the atrocities committed by the soldiers did not seem to be motivated by any kind of attachment to national identity.[51] In Máramaros, the Romanian-speaking population remained basically peaceful, in contrast with the pro-secession Ruthenian groups. According to one report, "the Ruthenians are already openly saying that they want to belong to Ukraine, and they are calling on Ukrainian troops for help, and then they will finish with the Hungarian population here."[52] However, the situation in the Ruthenian-speaking communities in Transcarpathia was also not uniform. Here too, Ukrainian nationalist ideas were stronger among the elites, especially in the more isolated region around the town of Kőrősmező (today Yasinia, Ukraine).

In the southern parts of Hungary, the riots and upheaval were mainly caused by soldiers from the rapidly disintegrating Balkan army, which was stationed nearby. Here too, the crisis was dire, as succinctly put in a telephone report received by the Ministry of Defense from Nagybecskerek (today Zrenjanin, Serbia): "The situation is as bad as it could be."[53] There were relatively few reports of nationalistic uprisings in the southern region, though reports of these kinds of disturbances became more frequent with the arrival of the Serb military forces. In Szabadka (today Subotica, Serbia), for example, the day before these forces arrived in the city, members of the local Slavic communities in the area stormed the army barracks.[54]

Serious atrocities took place almost everywhere in Upper Hungary, though there was some variation from county to county and settlement to settlement. The city of Rózsahegy (today Ružomberok, Slovakia), for instance, which according to the reports was the centre of the Slovak national movement, was in a state of complete disarray (at least according to the reports). In Alsókubin (today Dolný Kubín, Slovakia), the soldiers forced the local authorities to fly the Slovak national flag on the town hall, and in Bártfa (today Bardejov, Slovakia), the returning soldiers marched down the main street shouting, "Long live freedom!

50 Ablonczy, "Sérelem, jogfolytonosság, frusztráció."
51 Romsics, *Erdély elvesztése, 1918–1947*, 58.
52 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3423. 132.
53 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3424. 144.
54 HL P. d. f. B/19. d. 4661. 53–54.

Long live Slovakia!" In contrast, according to the reports from Liptószentmiklós (today Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovakia), the town was calm, though it was also home to a large Slovak-speaking majority.[55]

In the case of Upper Hungary, however, it seems clear that in most places, the arrival of units from the surrounding countries gave new impetus to the various national movements, and the Hungarian administration only vanished completely after the occupying troops had arrived in the towns and cities. In the case of the aforementioned Árva County, it was the arrival of Polish units that strengthened the local nationalist efforts, while in the northwestern region, it was the Czech units slowly coming across the border from Moravia who gave further momentum to the Slovak nationalist cause. In both cases, these units were essentially what remained of the earlier Habsburg reserve formations, which hardly constituted a significant military force, but these units often enjoyed the support of and were joined by members the national guard forces, who for the most part were Slovak. This took place, for instance, on November 10 in Nagybiccse (today Bytča, Slovakia) in Trencsén County.[56] The people who led the attacks in Upper Hungary usually targeted clerks and Hungarian civil servants. 52 clerks fled Pozsony County, the territory around Bratislava alone.[57]

Consolidation and Mobilization: The Creation of the Paramilitary Units

Soldiers were not only the vanguard of the uprising but also contributed to the quick consolidation of power in the countryside. These Austro-Hungarian veterans constituted the bulk of the countless new paramilitary groups formed in the region in the autumn of 1918. However, these were not always radical rightwing paramilitary groups.[58] Law enforcement agencies, labor unions, landowners, and even the leaders of large factories tried to hire as many people as possible to protect themselves from the people causing the upheavals. These spontaneously formed units often clashed with one another and committed bloody atrocities. In Jósikafalva (today Beliş, Romania), not far from Kolozsvár, for example, a paramilitary squad that protected the manor house of local landowner János

55 Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon*, 68; HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3424. 136. On Slovak national identity, see Nurmi, *Slovakia, a Playground for Nationalism and National Identity*.

56 Fogarassy, "Felvidéki gerillaharcok a Károlyi-kormány idején," 226.

57 Hronský, *The Struggle for Slovakia and the Treaty of Trianon*, 70.

58 HL P. d. f. B/8. d. 3905. 135; Romsics, *Dokumentumok az 1918/19-es forradalmak Duna-Tisza közi történetéhez*, 170, 173–74.

Urmánczy from looting staged a serious massacre and slaughtered Romanian peasants. A paramilitary group recruited by Urmánczy's brother killed at least 20 to 30 people, but probably as many as 90. All this put the Károlyi government, which was negotiating with the Romanian delegates at the time, in a very difficult situation.[59]

The Budapest government quickly sensed that these groups were threatening its authority in the collapsing country, and it therefore tried to regulate the spontaneously formed paramilitary units as quickly as possible and restore its own monopoly on the use of force. On November 12, 1918, the so-called National Guard was established, under the umbrella of which most of the internal security policing units were to fall.[60] The organization of national guard units proved surprisingly successful. At the beginning of December, a total of 100,000 people served in some such paramilitary unit in the Kingdom of Hungary.[61] One has a sense of the importance of this force if one compares this number with the number of soldiers who were serving in the regular Hungarian army at the time, which was barely 37,000. Even the National Army under Miklós Horthy, who would soon assume control of Hungary, had less than 100,000 soldiers in its ranks. Indeed, only the Red Army organized by the short-lived Soviet Republic under Béla Kun was able to mobilize more soldiers (between 120,000 and 200,000).[62]

There were significant regional differences, however, within the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. As a proportion of the local population, most national guard units were formed in the Great Plain and the central part of the country. These were usually counties which had Hungarian majorities and which were relatively close to the capital. Separate Romanian, Saxon, and Hungarian national guard forces were established in Transylvania. According to reports, at the end of November, 6,616 Hungarian national guards were stationed in the region, along with roughly the same number of Saxons and about 3,700 Romanian national guards. The number of the latter may have been higher, but in all likelihood some of the Romanian commanders no longer bothered to report these soldiers to the Hungarian authorities. Most of the Hungarian

59 Romsics, *Erdély elvesztése, 1918–1947*, 101–2. OSZKK, 301. f. 31. d. Emlékirat-töredék 1918 őszéről, 15–17.

60 Tóth and Józsa, *Magyarország hadtörténete*, 196.

61 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3620. 477; B/5. d. 3640. 9.

62 Bodo, "The White Terror in Hungary, 1919–1921," 139; Révész, *Nem akartak katonát látni*, 197.

and Saxon national guards served in the larger cities, while the Romanian units tended to hold the rural areas under their control.[63]

For the most part, mobilization was carried out not by the official state bodies but by the municipalities, in cooperation with the officers of the remaining local military formations. In early November 1918, several calls were issued to the local press. The population was called on to defend "law and order." An article in *Dunántúl* (Transdanubia), a journal published out of Pécs, informed its readership that, in order to ensure internal order and peace, the establishment of a civil guard and a national guard had been ordered in all villages, because the region was endangered by "neighbouring Slavonian-Croatian gangs of rioters."[64] These kinds of claims were not new. Before 1914, the middle class had offered similar explanations for the establishment of its shooting associations, which were allegedly founded in order to protect "law and order."[65] In 1918, law enforcement guards were usually recruited in public buildings, mostly the town hall but also in the police and gendarmerie barracks. In some places, enthusiastic military officers went out into the streets and tried to gather people. In Arad (today in Romania), people were recruited by officers in cars in front of the city cafés, where the officers present held patriotic speeches.[66]

Rural National Guard units were usually led by reserve military officers or career soldiers who had already served somewhere in the hinterland by the autumn of 1918. Unfortunately, we have very little information concerning the individuals who joined the National Guard. Based on the few surviving sources, most of the members seem to have had similar social backgrounds to the rioters. They were older servicemen, who had served in reserve formations at the end of World War I. Many of them were already in the hinterland in the early days of November 1918.[67]

The mobilization of the formations established in early November 1918 followed two patterns. Most of the paramilitary units were essentially mobilized by the old elite in an attempt to consolidate their positions.[68] In the more prominent cities, they were created by renaming the replacement formations *(Ersatzbattalion)* of the old regiments. In Nyitra (today Nitra, Slovakia), for

63 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3639. 1028.

64 "A helyzet Délbaranyában." *Dunántúl,* November 8, 1918, 2.

65 Morelon, "Respectable Citizens," 12.

66 "Vigyázzunk Arad népére!" *Arad és Vidéke,* November 2, 1918, 3.

67 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3449. 726–27.

68 Morelon, "Respectable Citizens," 22.

example, the National Guard detachments were formed out of what remained of the 13th and 62nd infantry regiments. In many cases, the national guard units in smaller settlements were established by renaming some kind of gendarmerie or police formation or even a volunteer fire brigade.[69] These units used the existing gendarmerie and police infrastructure. In larger settlements, national guards were usually given lodgings in empty military barracks, while in smaller settlements, they were housed in public schools or other buildings previously used for military purposes. They then set out from these locations to patrol the area. Police and gendarmerie headquarters were also responsible for providing them with food and equipment. At the head of the emerging national guard units, one usually found professional soldiers or, in many cases, reserve officers (or in the case of villages, non-commissioned officers).[70]

In larger settlements, the bulk of the national guard forces consisted of university and high school students. In Kolozsvár, a volunteer corps of university students was formed in the military barracks under the leadership of former Habsburg and Hungarian officers living in the city.[71] In other settlements, many of the people who served in the national guard units were students in local high schools. In Nagyvárad (today Oradea, Romania), for example, the oldest grades of the local military school disarmed soldiers arriving at the train station in the city.[72] The mobilization of students followed patterns which had existed already at the outbreak of World War I. As had happened in 1914, the students, under the guidance of their teachers, marched into the nearby barracks and began to perform auxiliary services.[73] It is thus hardly surprising that, in November 1918, when a crisis began to break out in the hinterland because of the soldiers returning from the front, the mobilization of students was a matter of course for both schools and the civilian authorities.

However, in November 1918, some of the paramilitary units that were formed were not created under the control of the elite from the Dualist Era. In many places in the areas with Hungarian-speaking majorities, returning soldiers

69 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3631. 798; HL P. d. f. B/3. d. 3480. 1.

70 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3444. 581–82; MNL VeML XIV. Kratochwill Károly hadosztályparancsnok iratai 9. d. László Bartha.

71 OSZKK, 301.f. 31. d, 15–17.

72 MNL VeML XIV. Kratochwill Károly hadosztályparancsnok iratai 9. d. Egy tatabányai bányatisztviselő visszaemlékezései, 217.

HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3631. 799.

73 See for instance Loinig, "Patriotismus und Opfersinn Die Schulen Niederösterreichs im Ersten Weltkrieg."

replaced the local gendarmerie and created new law enforcement formations. In the village of Guta (today Kolárovo, Slovakia), for example, the returning soldiers completely took over the civilian administration, and they also selected the leaders of the National Council from among themselves.[74]

The role of soldiers in the change of elites was most spectacular in the peripheral areas of the country. New Romanian national guards were formed in certain areas of Transylvania, mainly in the areas with Romanian-speaking majorities. The sources suggest that most of these units were made up of returning veterans, and the equipment and clothing they used had been taken from the military warehouses they had seized.[75] Romanian national guard units were usually led by members of the local Romanian elite, former Austro-Hungarian officers of Romanian nationality. In Szászváros (today Orăştie, Romania), for example, under the command of a lieutenant colonel of Romanian nationality, the members of the national guard took supplies from the barracks of the former 82nd Infantry Regiment and then set out and tried to disarm the Hungarian gendarmes. Initially, the Károlyi government supported and oversaw the establishment of the Romanian National Guard. After a while, however, most of these units only took instructions from the Romanian National Council. However, this did not mean that each national guard followed exclusively and consistently the instructions of its own political leadership.[76] On November 21, 1918, in Dés (today Dej, Romania), in the central part of Transylvania, for example, a mixed Romanian-Hungarian detachment disarmed soldiers who were outraged because of their pay.[77] In larger cities such as Nagyszeben, a Romanian national guard numbering 1,000 men, a Saxon national guard of 700 men, and a Hungarian national guard of 120 men were present at the same time.[78]

On November 16, 1918, the Hungarian government tried to reach an agreement with the Slovak National Council to maintain order. The Slovak national guard forces would have had authority over the northernmost counties, while the Hungarian national guards would have been responsible for what today is southern Slovakia. It was also agreed that Hungarian-speaking officers would serve in the Slovak national guard forces and Slovak-speaking officers would

74 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3421. 69

75 HL P. d. f. B/1. d. 3411. 57.

76 HL P. d. f. B/5. d. 3665. 829.; HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3586. 11. 19; Pascu, *The Making of the Romanian Unitary National State 1918*, 217.

77 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f. 5. 67. d. 1/1. ő. e. II. k. 90.

78 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3478. 750.

serve in the Hungarian national guard forces in order to ensure that they would be able to quell conflicts that might arise in linguistically mixed areas.[79]

In Transcarpathia, the region which at the time was in northeastern Hungary, the Ruthenian elite was divided. In the area around the city of Ungvár (today Uzhhorod, Ukraine), the majority accepted the plans sent from Budapest concerning the creation of an autonomous region, while a smaller group supported accession to Czechoslovakia. However, in the areas furthest from Budapest, around Máramaros, the returning soldiers, like some of their Ukrainian comrades in Galicia, established a short-lived independent state.[80] At the beginning of January 1919, under the leadership of Stepan Klochurak, a 23-year-old former ensign, the independent Hucul Republic was proclaimed in Kőrősmező. Ukrainian veterans formed their own guard forces, which drove off the Hungarian national guard forces in the region. Klochurak's ultimate goal was to join Ukraine, but the state was destroyed by invading Romanian troops in the summer of 1919.[81]

Perhaps the most unusual self-defence force that was created in the Kingdom of Hungary in the turmoil which came in the wake of the war was the so-called Jewish Volunteer Squadron. The squadron was founded by Adolf Strausz, who learned about the anti-Semitic atrocities which were being committed against Jews in rural parts of the country in early November. Strausz was a leading figure in the Hungarian Zionist movement, and he used his contacts to recruit reserve officers and students from the Maccabean associations to the corps. The unit, later renamed the Volunteer Police Squadron, was stationed in Budapest under the command of a Zionist engineer and captain in reserve Ármin Beregi.[82] According to estimates which seem inflated, by the time it was dissolved in February 1919, it numbered roughly 2,000 soldiers, including many Christians.[83]

The different ethnic elites were not the only groups to establish new law enforcement formations. Representatives of the Social Democratic Party, which was gathering strength, also did. After the victory of the Aster Revolution, in the cities, the Social Democratic Party created the largest law enforcement units. In many settlements, union members formed their own self-defence units

79 HL P. d. f. B/1. d. 3411. 52.; B/5. d. 3665. 835.

80 Beneš, "The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918," 236–37.

81 Ablonczy, *Ismeretlen Trianon*, 157–58.

82 Újvári, *Magyar zsidó lexikon*.

83 Róbert, *Egyenlő jog a hősi halálra*, 106–7; Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon*, 350–51; Hatos and Novák, *Between Minority and Majority*, 79–80.

under the leadership of local heads of the Social Democratic Party. In certain working districts of Budapest and in the industrial zones of Kispest and Újpest, these units were essentially the only forces engaged in and responsible for law enforcement. Here, local union leaders simply dismantled the factory guard forces, which consisted for the most part of older soldiers who served in the reserve battalions, took their weapons, and used them to arm their own men. Thus, it is not surprising that in many places the internal hierarchy of the new workers' guard forces was almost identical to that of the unions in the factories.[84] Because they could use the existing organizational structure which had been put in place to enable workers to represent their interests, these units of workers were able to mobilize much more rapidly and efficiently than other "normal" national guard forces.

The workers played a key role in maintaining order not only in Budapest, but also in many other, smaller cities which had major industrial parks. In Debrecen, for example, the largest and most reliable law enforcement force consisted of employees who worked for the national railway.[85] In some large industrial centers, workers almost completely took power from the municipalities. Their best-known organization was the Zsilvölgy National Council in Transylvania, in the mining area around the city of Petrozsény (today Petroşani, Romania). In early November 1918, this body quickly put power into the hands of the local Social Democratic Party.[86] According to their report, they almost immediately dismissed the military units supervising the mines, but the council of local workers and the civilian authorities were able to maintain order.

However, the important role of trade unions in setting up law enforcement units was only rarely an attempt at some kind of revolutionary takeover. In most place, the workers' units were able to work relatively well with local law enforcement. The government leaders had few reliable soldiers on whom they could depend in the hinterland, so they often gladly entrusted the Social Democrats with the task of securing the industrial parks. In Kolozs County (today Cluj County, Romania), the military headquarters directly called on the "socialist workers" to form their own guard units and protect their factories from the looting crowd.[87] Even in the aforementioned city of Petrozsény, which was the settlement which was most at the tipping point of revolution, the three-

84 HL MTK 1218. Vöröskatona visszaemlékezések 128. d. 33. Kaiser Nándor.

85 HL P. d. f. B/4. d. 3637. 969; "Védjük meg Aradot!," *Arad és Vidéke,* November 2, 1918, 1.

86 Romsics, *Erdély elvesztése, 1918–1947*, 98.

87 MNL OL K 803 PTI 606. f 2. 5. d. 2/1 ő. e. I. k. 1.

person law enforcement patrols were assembled to include one member of the old gendarmerie, one "civilian" national guardsman, and one trade union worker.[88]

One might well ask why the campaigns to mobilize soldiers were so successful, to which one obvious reply would be that the establishment of self-defence units was a natural and foreseeable reaction to the waves of violence. However, the situation was more complex than this answer might suggest. No clear link can be established between the extent of the violence and the effectiveness of mobilization. The largest number of paramilitary formations were not necessarily formed in the places the riots were most destructive. As Mark Jones has already shown based on the example of Germany, violent acts in given settlements are not a precondition for intensive mobilization by public authorities. If senior officials perceive themselves or their communities as facing potential threats (a perception which is usually created by rumors circulating in the press), this perception itself is more than enough to prompt mobilization campaigns.[89] There was no shortage of these kinds of rumors in the press in Hungary in November 1918. On the contrary, the newspapers contained innumerable reports of murders and robberies, not to mention claims concerning prisoners of war who were allegedly eager to take revenge.[90]

Alongside the fear of looters, very material considerations may also have played a significant role in the successful mobilization. In early November, the government and several municipalities offered people who were willing to serve high daily wages, which must have been particularly appealing, given the widespread postwar unemployment. It is thus hardly surprising that, when there were pay-cuts, the Ministry of Defence received numerous reports concerning frustrated guardsmen who wanted to leave the force.[91]

The opportunity to join the National Guard may also have been appealing simply because most of the soldiers found themselves in an unusual, precarious, and transitional situation at the end of the war. They had been decommissioned, and the process of integrating these young men back into traditional (mostly peasant) society after a period during which they had been severed from their roots for several years did not seem simple. As Tamás Csíki has suggested, the

88 MNL OL K 440 PTI 607 f. 3. d 38. ő. e. 4. Minutes of the Petrozsény National Council.

89 Jones, *Am Anfang war Gewalt*, 336.

90 HL P. d. f. B/5. d. 3647. 244.

91 HL P. d. f. B/2. d. 3450. 769–770.

returning soldiers found themselves in a liminal position for a long time.[92] In some ways, the national guard forces offered an institutional framework for this transitional situation. The young men who served in the guard forces were able to preserve their military identities and function as important members of the community again.

There may have been one other important factor behind the successful mobilization of war veterans in these paramilitary formations. As the monarchy was disintegrating, local authorities were able to reach out to civilian institutions in the hinterland, such as schools and trade unions, which had a significant number of members suitable for military service. At a moment at which the state was essentially collapsing, these institutions played a major role in shaping the daily lives of ordinary people. In the big cities, this phenomenon was most visible in the case of the Social Democratic unions. In the second half of the war, with the formation of the so-called *Beschwerdekomissions*, the unions began to exert a decisive influence in employment services, and they often had the final say in who would remain on the frontlines and who would be able to return home. Not surprisingly, they generally showed a bias, in their decisions, for the interests of active union members. Thus, there was rapid growth in the number of organizations which represented different interest groups, and quite understandably, the people who were exempted from service were even more closely linked to their own leaders, as they had been "saved" from service on the frontlines. The leaders of the labor unions, furthermore, had already gained considerable practical knowledge, in the course of the organization of protests before the war, of how to mobilize the members of the unions.[93]

In rural areas, teachers and landlords usually played the leading roles in the organization of law enforcement units. They were individuals who already had prominent roles in their communities, so it was almost taken for granted that they would be entrusted with the task of leading the various self-defence forces. Furthermore, by organizing the law-enforcement units, they were able to strengthen their positions within their communities, which was particularly important at a moment which was bearing witness to the collapse of the state. This is essentially what took place in the multinational areas as well. The local (and this was true mostly in the case of Transylvania) Romanian elite may have been motivated by a desire to create some form of armed forces as quickly as

92 Csíki, "A parasztság 'forradalma' 1918-ban," 139, 146.

93 Varga, *Háború, forradalom, szociáldemokrácia Magyarországon*, 28–38; Bódy, "Szociálpolitika és szociáldemokrácia Magyarországon az I. világháború idején," 1459–60.

possible to serve in the place of the Hungarian gendarmes, who had been driven off. This desire to create a new armed force in some cases overrode national or ethnic considerations, as even in several settlements in which gendarmes themselves were Romanians, the gendarmerie was still expelled.[94]

Conclusion: Soldiers in the Revolution: Uprising and Consolidation

The massive unrest in Hungary caused largely by the returning war veterans in November 1918 fits well into the general trends of the region history in the wake of the war. Like the population of the former Habsburg and Romanov Empires, people living in the territory of the collapsing Hungarian Kingdom experienced a massive wave of violence. As was the case in Slavonia or Moravia, the riots were particularly violent in the rural, distant, mountainous regions. Here, the power of the state had often been very weak before 1914, and the local administration was further weakened in the last years of the war. The social backgrounds of the perpetrators and the victims of the violence also fit well into the general trends of the region. The riots were mostly led by Austro-Hungarian veterans who, upon having returned to their home communities, became the vanguards of the local peasant movements. Unlike the Green Cadre in Slavonia and Moravia, however, these people were not deserters. They were mostly stationed in the reserve units in the hinterland and only rioted after news arrived of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian state.

The nature of the violence in Hungary is also comparable to the acts of violence in other areas of the region. The peasant-soldiers attacked the representatives of the state and the members of the local economic and political elite. In the countryside, these attacks were mostly the results of entangled sociocultural and ethnic tensions. It would be misleading, however, simply to characterize the series of uprisings that broke out in Hungary in November 1918 as stages in either a socialist or a national revolution. For the most part, the instances of violence seem to share affinities with premodern peasant uprisings. The soldiers and peasants who committed the acts of violence were not bound by any shared ideology, nor did they have leaders who they all accepted. Essentially, the acts were motivated by the desire to address social injustices, perceived and real, that had developed during World War I. The goals of those who took part in the uprisings generally concerning local issues and grievances, and the

94 Romsics, *Erdély elvesztése,* 122.

participants did not really articulate national political demands. In this respect, there were no major differences between the areas inhabited by Hungarian speakers on the one hand and members of the national minorities on the other. In some regions, however, the national and social dividing lines coincided, and here, insurgents often expressed their demands using the linguistic toolchest of nationalism or even anti-Semitism. The events which took place in Hungary did not differ significantly from the events which were unfolding in other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The acts committed by the green cadres in Galicia, Slavonia, and Moravia were similarly motivated by a desire to exact (perceived) justice on the local level. The anti-Semitic nature of the attacks was not unique either, and similar events took place in Galicia in a much bloodier form.[95]

The intensity of the violence depend often but not exclusively on the pre-war political developments. As has been pointed out in the recent literature concerning other cases of the region, there had long been tensions, and the hardships of war aggravated these tensions. This was most clear in the case of Transylvania, where ethnic conflicts dated back to 1848–1849 and had been reinforced by the Romanian campaign of 1916. In northern Hungary, anti-Semitic attitudes and practices had long been part of the culture of the local elites, as had the idea of taking the allegedly undeserved wealth of the Jews and redistributing it among the peasants.

Despite the many similarities, the Hungarian case has some unique characteristics. In comparison with the acts committed by the Green Cadres, the riots in Hungary in November 1918 had a much smaller impact on the country's interwar politics. In Slavonia, some of the leaders later became legendary figures of the local folklore, and they were never really integrated into the political platforms of the newly emerging nation-states.[96] In contrast, the uprising which took place in Hungary in November 1918 was more or less forgotten. There are two main reasons for this. First, while the Green Cadres ruled for months or years, in Hungary, the interim "stateless" period lasted only a few weeks. In the central regions of the Carpathian basin, the Hungarian state was able to restore its rule very soon, while in the peripheral areas, the advancing Romanian, Serb, and Czechoslovak armies had taken control by the end of 1918 at the latest. These new nation-states began to organize their public administration and suppressed any kind of uprising. Second, in Hungary, a powerful "culture

95 Hagen, "The Moral Economy of Ethnic Violence," 218.

96 Beneš, "The Green Cadres and the Collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918," 221.

of defeat" developed immediately after the Treaty of Trianon was signed in 1920. The story of a spontaneous uprising led by the "'glorious" soldiers did not harmonize well with the stab-in-the-back narrative propagated by the interwar Hungarian regime.

The Hungarian case also demonstrated clearly that the return of millions of war veterans could contribute, admittedly, to the destruction of state power, but could also further the consolidation of state power. The local elite almost immediately perceived the situation as a deep social crisis, and it began to organize self-defense forces consisting of local soldiers. The general fear of a Bolshevik-type revolution and the collapse of the social order became a powerful mobilization tool in the hands of institutions, municipalities, and trade unions. They were able to recruit large numbers of law enforcement units in response to the wave of violence. The mobilization campaigns were so successful that there were far more people serving in the national guard forces that had been created all over Hungary by November 1918 than later served in either the so-called white or red guards put together. And the local elites had done little more, in order to assemble these forces, than use the same tools that they had used in order to mobilize the civilian population in 1914. This was all part of a larger European trend. In other parts and provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, large numbers of similar law enforcement units were created, building in many cases on the existing *Bürgercorps*.[97] In the spring of 1919, there were roughly one million people serving in the so-called *Einwohnerwehren*, which were locally organized self-defence militias in Germany—far more than in the far-right *Freikorps*.[98] In the territory of the disintegrating Kingdom of Hungary, non-Hungarian elites also sought to establish paramilitary units. These formations were also usually built on the former k. u. k. military units and the memberships of nationalist associations. The involvement of high school, university and college students was not unique at all. The Polish volunteer army recruited many young boys who were college and university students. The *Burschenschaft* students also participated in the *Kärtner Abwehrkampf* in massive numbers. They also followed the patterns of mobilization established during the first years of the war. Surprisingly, the social-democratic paramilitaries also consisted of members of existing

97 Morelon, "Respectable Citizens," 22–23.

98 Bergien, "Paramilitary Volunteers for Weimar Germany's 'Wehrhaftmachung'," 191–92; Böhler, *Civil War in Central Europe, 1918–1921*, 132.

communities, mostly the local trade union cells. Similar developments can be observed in the Ruhr region as well.[99]

In Hungary, however, many of these local elites belonged to the non-Magyar ethnic groups. They began to form new local guards which represented new national ideas and visions of the future. These were mostly established in the regions in which the local Slavic and Romanian nation-building efforts were powerful enough to gain traction and the Hungarian state administration was weak.

Due to the heterogeneous nature of these units and the rather conservative approach of their mobilization, the general fear of revolution does not necessarily seem to have led to the establishment of radical paramilitary groups. The violent ultra-masculine communities described by Béla Bodo fit into this trend, but they constituted a minority of the many paramilitary groups and formations established in this period. In many cases, these forces were led by moderate political forces and became tools for political consolidation.

In this sense, the acts committed by war veterans in the last months of 1918 contributed to the further collapse of the state but at the same time also reinforced some of its structures. These acts, including both violence and the quick mobilization was largely influenced by the ideological, economic, and social circumstances which had prevailed before the war. They not only mark the end of an era but also showed remarkable continuity on an institutional and personal level, especially in the more rural regions of the country.

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