

Summer Social Science Research Grant

I spent this summer in Vienna, Austria, researching World War I German nationalism in multilingual areas of the Habsburg Empire. I assisted Professor [redacted] in his work on a new book on Central and Eastern European nationalism meant to contest the traditional historiography that looks at nationalism as an inevitable phenomenon resulting from the development of “nations” – whose definition is typically limited to oversimplified linguistic differences – each with its own isolated history. This work was also rewarding for me, as nationalism and Central European history are two fields that I take a particular interest in.

To conduct this research, I spent seven weeks in Vienna, where most of the Habsburg archival material is housed. Our research began at the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* (Austrian National Library), where I looked through the late 1918 issues of a nationalistic German-language newspaper, the *Reichenberger Deutsche Volkszeitung* (Reichenberg German People’s Paper), in a city, Reichenberg, with a significant Czech population and which is now in fact part of the Czech Republic. I went through entire volumes of this paper cataloguing instances of anti-Czech propaganda, especially as related to reports of Czechs hoarding or refusing to deliver a fair share of food, a precious commodity in starving wartime Austria. Approaching the Habsburg government’s collapse, I began looking for records of the very interesting *Deutschböhmen* (German Bohemian) government, an unofficial entity proclaimed in the last desperate weeks before the arrival of the Czech army. I later looked at the same paper from 1915 to early 1917 and made the observation that anti-Czech propaganda – and blaming Czechs for food shortages and misery – seems to have increased as the Austrian position in the war grew more dire. We also concluded that this nationalistic newspaper did not report all incidents of popular unrest, food riots, etc., for which we found ample evidence in other, more objective sources.

In addition to the National Library, I also did a large amount of very rewarding research at the *Österreichische Staatsarchiv* (Austrian State Archive), where Professor [redacted] and I sifted through cartons of materials looking for *Stimmungsberichte*, reports that the Habsburg government put out on the overall mood its population and of the various nationalities. Here too we observed the same bias that credited German speakers with more patriotism than “Czechs” (the quotation marks indicate a problem with the official censuses used to determine nationality, in that they had no room for the very common phenomena of bilingualism or mixed national identity). As the reports continued from 1917 into 1918, they invariably depicted a progressively bleaker situation, among Germans as well as Czechs, revealing that the effects of war were clear even to biased state officials.

Overall, this research experience was a very positive one for me. It exposed me to how one conducts historical research, navigates a library, and sorts through cartons of archival materials. I felt I contributed to Professor [redacted]’s research and learned a lot on my own as well.