5 Recovery and Renaissance

The ongoing jousting for influence in the Bohemian crownlands took place in a dramatically altered world. The rise of the Turkish threat in the Mediterranean stimulated navigators from Portugal and Spain, followed quickly by the English, French, and Dutch, to embark on the high seas in search of alternate routes to the riches of the East. The "Voyages of Discovery" shifted the political and economic center of gravity in Europe to the former European periphery through the conquest of overseas empires and the subsequent commercial revolution. The widening of the physical horizon had its counterpart in the theoretical understanding of the heavens and the beginnings of the scientific revolution. These changes echoed in cultural life, where the Renaissance superseded the late Gothic, and Italian humanism found ready imitators throughout Europe. In the Bohemian crownlands these new trends provided fruitful stimulus to local cultural developments, resulting in a synthesis in which they took on locally specific forms.

THE BOHEMIAN KINGDOM IN THE HANDS OF THE ESTATES (1485–1620)

Changes on the European stage also affected the Bohemian crownlands and the Czechs. The looming Turkish threat directly con-

tributed to the eclipse of the Bohemian-Hungarian Jagiellonians by the Habsburgs. While the rise of Muscovy distracted the Polish-Lithuanian Jagiellonians, the Habsburgs united the crowns of St. Stephen and St. Václav, once a bone of contention among Přemyslids, Luxemburgs, Mátyás Korvin, and Jagiellonians. Thus it was the Habsburgs who faced the Reformation at the head of the Catholic side. The Protestant Reformation struck rich soil in the Bohemian lands, breaking the isolation of the Czech Utraquists. Lutheranism spread rapidly among them and their German-speaking countrymen, while Calvinism influenced the Unity of Brethren. Since the Habsburg king of Bohemia was also Holy Roman Emperor after 1556 and thus secular leader of universal, Catholic Christendom, conflicts between crown and the overwhelmingly Protestant estates in Bohemia over political power intersected with, and reinforced, religious divisions.

Society and Economy in the Estates Monarchy

The estates were fundamental to the structure of society, still theoretically based on the medieval doctrine of the threefold people, lords, clergy, and others. Each estate within this order was fixed and supposedly immutable, though contemporaries complained that pride drove some to seek to rise above their station.[1] There were several marginalized groups who had no settled place in the order, including vagabonds and beggars, the poorest town-dwellers, wage-laborers, and those considered infidels, such as Jews.[2] In the narrower sense, the estates were those whose ownership of land gave them political rights. In this sense the Estates were a political community, and each Bohemian crownland had its own Estates. By the end of the Hussite revolution there were three Estates represented in the Bohemian diet: the lords, the knights, and the free towns.[3] In Moravia and Lower Lusatia the church retained its position in the diet. Upper Lusatia's diet had only two Estates, the lords and the towns; in Silesia there were dietines for some of the individual principalities, and a general diet of the princes.[4]

These Estates competed among themselves and with the crown. When Vladislav II assumed the throne, as the Old Czech Annals noted, "the new king was still young, had no money, no idea how to wage war, and the royal estates and castles were firmly in the hands of the Czech lords who were his supporters."[5] Royal authority in the Bohemian kingdom weakened further after 1490, when Vladislav also became king of

Hungary and moved to Buda. Thereafter, he returned to Prague on two occasions, and then only briefly. The king's absence meant that the affairs of the kingdom were left in the hands of the Estates.

The most important political institution of the Estates monarchy was the Land Diet. The diet approved the ruler's requests for taxes, but it could also legislate, grant citizenship, permit local military forces to be used abroad, and generally seek the common good. The diet's decisions were written into the Land Registers, which made them law. By the late fifteenth century, they appeared in print. The land diet of Bohemia considered itself first among the lands of the Bohemian crown, claiming the right to elect the king. There were local dietines for some frontier areas and the fourteen circuits into which the kingdom was divided. The dietines elected the knightly representatives to the land diet and dealt with circuit affairs. The king could summon a general diet of all five crownlands to meet in Prague. General diets met for royal coronations or to consider pressing matters of defense, religion, or security; eleven times between 1530 and 1595 they were summoned to provide men or money to meet the Turkish threat. Ferdinand I tried to convoke a meeting of the Estates of the Bohemian kingdom, the Austrian duchies, and Hungary, but the Bohemian and Hungarian Estates refused to leave their own lands.[6]

The Land Court was the highest legal instance in the land. An exclusively noble tribunal, it had no representation for the towns. The king presided over the court if he were present, and the supreme burggrave in his absence. Its officers included the land judge, the supreme notary, who kept its records, and the supreme chamberlain, who maintained the land registers. These and other holders of land offices amounted to a "government." Many officials had originally been direct servants of the ruler, but now swore allegiance both to the king and the Estates community. The supreme burggrave of the Prague castle, who represented the king in his absence, was the most important of them. The supreme chancellor gave his consent to the publication of the more important royal decrees, and commanded a chancellery that extended to all five lands of the Crown of St. Václav. The chamberlain administered the royal estates including the royal towns. Other officials included the burggraves of Karlštejn and Hradec Králové. The knightly Estate provided the land notary, the burggrave of Hradec Králové, and sometimes the chamberlain (who otherwise could be a burgher of Prague Old Town); all the other offices were filled by the great lords. These officers made up the

royal council, granting a relatively small group of powerful lords and knights a preponderant influence in the affairs of the kingdom. This structure remained in place until after 1620.[7]

Without a strong royal power, conflict within the Estates surfaced easily, especially after the religious peace of Kutná Hora. In earlier decades an alliance between the Utraquist lesser nobles and the towns usually countered the largely Catholic greater lords, but shortly after 1485 a realignment took place setting the towns against the nobility (both the lords and the knights). These conflicts arose not only out of the lords' long-established attitude that they had a special right to decide the kingdom's affairs, but also from economic motives.

The tumultuous century from 1380 to 1483 had a dramatic impact on the lords' incomes.[8] Cash payments from subject peasants and towns declined owing to population loss and inflation, and the lords had to search for other sources of income. Efforts to prevent peasants from leaving their lands culminated in a diet decision of 1487 strictly limiting their rights to move without the lords' permission. Landlords also increasingly used subject labor, or *robota*, on their own manorial land. The best way out of their problems, many noblemen found, was through their own economic activity. They supported the crafts and products of their subject towns and established their own enterprises, especially fishponds and breweries (a lucrative source of income). These activities directly violated the rights of royal free towns, already affected by the limitations on migration from the countryside, and the burghers refused to accept them unchallenged.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century a new legal document, the Vladislav Land Ordinance, strengthened the lords and knights against both the crown and the towns.[9] The towns protested against limits on their judicial independence, participation in the diet, and traditional rights to market, brewing, and other privileges, but the king supported the lords. By 1513, armed conflict between towns and lords threatened, but before it came to blows, Vladislav II died. In the St. Václav's Treaty (1517), all three Estates, "as people of one language and from one kingdom," reached a compromise.[10] The lords accepted traditional town rights in judicial matters, but the towns had to give up their exclusive medieval economic privileges.

Vladislav's son and successor, the young king Louis (Ludvík, 1516–1526), resided in Buda, and intervened directly in the Bohemian crownlands with only limited success, failing to curb the great lords' powers

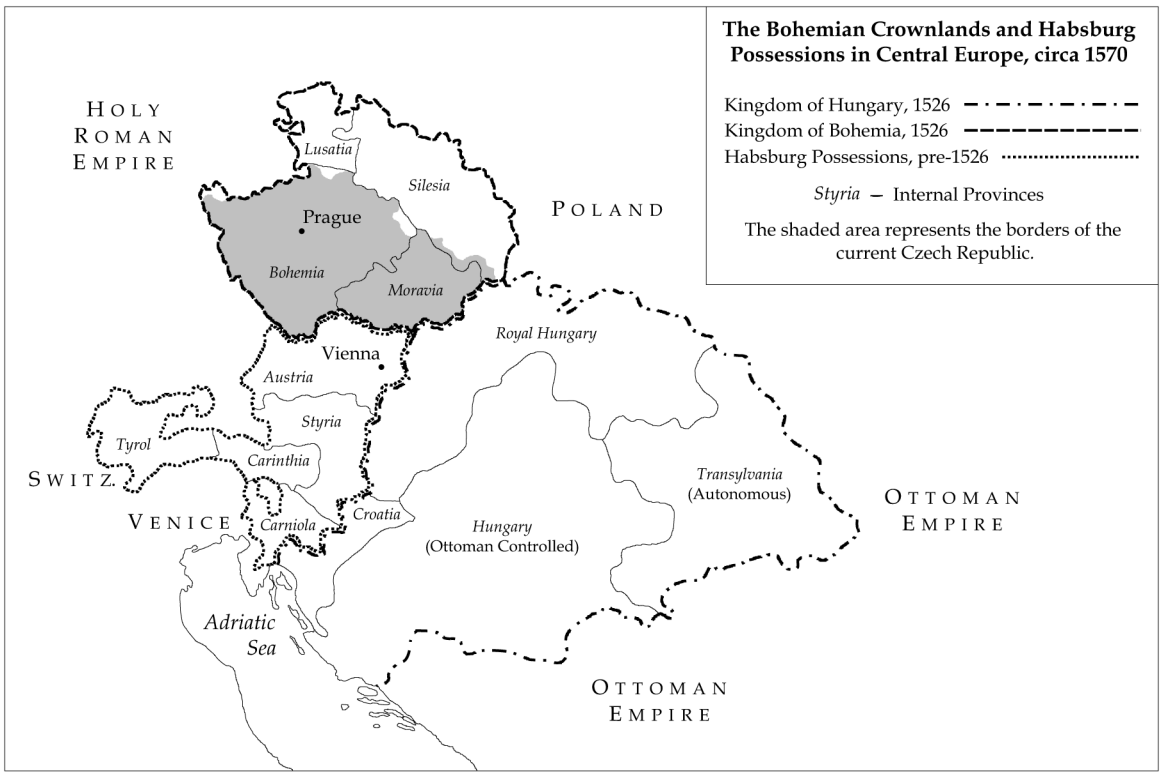
or to cope with the impact of the Lutheran Reformation. These problems, which would surely have dominated much of his reign, remained unresolved when an Ottoman invasion of Hungary called the twenty-year-old king to the defense of his realm. On August 29, 1526, the Hungarian army (with some Bohemian allies) was destroyed near Mohács, and Louis drowned during the retreat.[11]

Vladislav II and Maximilian I, the Habsburg emperor, had arranged marriages in 1515 between Louis and Mary, Maximilian's granddaughter, and between the emperor's grandson, Ferdinand, and Louis's sister Anna. When Ferdinand claimed the throne, the Bohemian Estates refused to recognize his hereditary right to the crown, but after some hesitation—and his promises to accept their conditions—they elected him king on October 23, 1526. The other lands of the Crown of St. Václav, stung by the Bohemian Estates' refusal to let them take part in the decision, accepted Ferdinand as king by right of succession through his Jagiellonian wife, Anna.

The Estates Monarchy under the First Habsburgs

The election of Ferdinand I (1526–1564) to the Bohemian throne had significant consequences for the Bohemian crownlands and all of central Europe.[12] After the great Hungarian nobles offered him the crown of St. Stephen, Ferdinand ruled (in theory) over a widespread realm centered in the Austrian, Czech, and Hungarian lands. The Turkish conquest of a large part of Hungary (the Turkish army besieged Vienna in 1529), and their support of a native rival to his claim, limited Ferdinand's control of Hungary. The Habsburg king ruled in so-called Royal Hungary, basically today's Slovakia, western Croatia, and a strip of territory bordering his Austrian possessions. The royal capital moved to Pressburg (Pozsony, Prešpurk, today's Bratislava). The struggle to regain all of Hungary increased the significance of the Bohemian crownlands as a source of men and money, but the association with the Habsburgs also involved them in other European conflicts affecting the family's interests.

Thanks to the Protestant Reformation, "heresy" no longer isolated the crownlands, and as reformed teachings spread, links developed to other Protestant areas. Under the stimulus of Lutheranism, the Utraquist church developed two tendencies, the Old Utraquists, who were content with the *Compactata* and prepared to draw closer to the Catholics, and



Map 3

the Neo-Utraquists, who were ready to establish a separate church organization. The Unity of Brethren represented a third current of Bohemian reformed religion. After 1490, when they dropped the requirement of voluntary poverty, the Brethren gained adherents among the well-to-do burghers and nobles. From the middle of the sixteenth century, they established contacts with the Calvinists in Germany and France. Thus both Lutheranism and Calvinism influenced and supplemented the domestic legacy of the Hussite revolution.[13]

In this situation, the Estates' efforts to defend their position against the king, and the religious tensions already existing in the Bohemian crownlands (now strengthened by the Protestant Reformation) intersected. In Ferdinand I, however, the Estates faced a gifted and determined politician, adept at using the cleavages within his realm to his own advantage. In addition, unlike the Jagiellonians, Ferdinand's family ruled over a vast and wealthy realm. Ferdinand's share included the Austrian lands as well as the crowns of Bohemia and Hungary, and in 1556 he became Holy Roman Emperor. In his lands he strengthened royal power in French and Burgundian style, and worked to restore Catholicism.

Ferdinand banned meetings of the dietines or the free towns without royal permission, and he separated the administration of Prague's towns. He seized for the crown the mines at Jáchymov (Joachimsthal) in 1528, where since the early sixteenth century the Counts Šlik had been mining silver and minting their own coins. In 1530, Ferdinand dismissed the greatest magnate of the Jagiellonian era, Zdeněk Lev of Rožmitál, signaling his determination to strengthen the crown's authority. To do so, he created offices directly under the monarch in Vienna, including the Privy Council, the Court Council, the Court Chancellery, and a central financial office, the Court Chamber. The court chamber in Vienna directed the Bohemian one in Prague and the Silesian one in Breslau. The growing royal administration offered positions to ambitious Bohemian nobles, and a pro-Habsburg faction developed within the Estates, including the lords of Hradec, the Popels of Lobkowicz, and the Berkas of Dubá.

The Estates sought to check Ferdinand's assertiveness. When war broke out in the empire between the Lutheran princes of the Schmalkaldic League and Charles V in 1546, the Estates opposition in Bohemia used the opportunity to undo Ferdinand's moves against their traditional powers. When Ferdinand summoned the kingdom's military levies

to help his brother, the Estates prevaricated, but stopped short of armed resistance, especially after Moravia and Silesia refused to join. Charles V's success in Germany on April 24, 1547, left them without allies and their opposition collapsed.[14] Ferdinand punished only the most radical noblemen (especially the Brethren) by confiscating their estates or imprisoning them, instead concentrating on the royal towns. Two knights and two burghers were executed in Hradčany (Castle Town) Square in 1547. Ferdinand levied heavy fines against the towns, removed their privileges, disarmed them, and placed them under royal officials. He also removed their legal autonomy, erecting a court of appeal at the Prague castle that was superior to the town courts. After 1547 the nobles were the only real power in the Estates.

In religious affairs Ferdinand supported Catholicism, in keeping with his family tradition and his position as Holy Roman Emperor. He insisted on the preservation of the outmoded *Compactata,* refusing any changes in the religious situation as it was in 1485. In 1535 he prevented an attempt to grant legal status to the Brethren, and between 1539 and 1543 refused to allow a separate, Lutheran-style church structure for the Utraquists.[15] Noble power was enough to force Ferdinand to move indirectly against Protestantism in the crownlands.[16] In 1556, Ferdinand invited the Society of Jesus to Bohemia and gave them the Clementinum in Prague's Old Town. From this base the Jesuits worked, through preaching and education (in which they achieved remarkable levels), to win over especially the children of the nobles and the wealthy burghers for the renewed Catholic faith. In 1561, Ferdinand restored the Prague archbishopric, thereby creating a firm base for a renewed Catholic church administration. A year later, he asserted royal control over appointments to the Utraquist consistory, removing the native Hussite church from Estates control. In 1564, Ferdinand gained papal confirmation of communion in both kinds, but this satisfied only the Old Utraquists.

When Charles V abdicated in 1556, Ferdinand succeeded to the imperial title. His other possessions he divided among his sons, making the eldest, Maximilian, his successor in the Bohemian kingdom and Hungary. In 1564, when Ferdinand died, Maximilian also became emperor. Maximilian II (as Bohemian king Maximilian I, 1564–1576) lacked the political determination of his father, and was religiously indifferent, if not personally inclined toward Lutheranism. During his reign the Neo-Utraquists, Lutherans, and Brethren drew closer together, eventually ac-

cepting a common statement of faith at the diet in 1575. Based largely on the Lutheran Augsburg confession, this Bohemian Confession nevertheless represented a minimum common position for all the non-Catholic Estates. Maximilian traded verbal, not written, approval of the Confession for the Estates' agreement to accept his son Rudolf as king.[17]

Thus, when Maximilian died in 1576, Rudolf II (1576–1611) became Bohemian king. Rudolf was an intelligent, artistically sensitive person, Spanish-educated but not a bigoted Catholic.[18] He was also sickly and mentally unbalanced. When he moved his court from Vienna to Prague in 1583, he inaugurated one of the most fascinating periods in the history of the Bohemian crownlands. During his reign Prague became a cultural center, where thanks to his patronage a host of artists, scientists—including the astronomers Tycho de Brahe and Johannes Kepler—and charlatans gathered around his court.

CROWN, ESTATES, AND CULTURE IN BOHEMIA IN THE RENAISSANCE ERA

Cultural life in Bohemia under Rudolf II developed on foundations laid in previous decades, as the new movements of Humanism and the Renaissance made their way into the Bohemian crownlands.[19] Education occupied an important place in this culture, driven by urban development and economic change.[20] The ability to read, write, and do sums gained importance in trade and production, and a mastery of foreign languages became increasingly necessary with the linking of the lands of the crown of St. Václav to the other Habsburg possessions. German was the primary second language of the Czech lords and knights, reinforced by the Habsburg monarch, the Lutheran reformation, and renewed German colonization in the borderlands. Italian and Spanish were also popular among Catholics and nobles close to the court. Particular schools remained the basic type of educational institution, though the Greek term *gymnasium* was increasingly used for schools teaching the humanities. Gymnasia in the Bohemian crownlands followed their founders' religious orientation, so most of the town schools were non-Catholic. The Utraquist university of Prague main-

tained oversight of the majority of particular schools, but after the mid-sixteenth century the reputation of Brethren's gymnasia rose.

Jesuit gymnasia, established at Prague's Clementinum in 1556, in Olomouc in 1566, in Brno in 1578, and in subject towns belonging to great Catholic families such as the Rožmberks of southern Bohemia earned the order a high reputation. The Jesuits also expanded the Clementinum and their college in Olomouc (1573) to the university level.[21] In comparison, the Prague university still suffered from its fifteenth-century isolation and the Utraquist masters' opposition to humanist influences. Rudolph II's court proved more attractive than the university environment. There the Danish astronomer Tycho de Brahe worked and died (his tomb is in the Týn church on Old Town Square), and his pupil and successor, Johannes Kepler, developed two of his planetary laws of motion.[22] Other figures at Rudolph's court included astrologers and alchemists, whose services were also sought by great magnates such as Vilém of Rožmberk.[23]

Those who could afford it studied abroad, and during the sixteenth century many scions of Czech noble families, but also many burghers, studied or traveled in other parts of Europe. The Czechs' horizons also widened toward the Balkans and Near East, whence the Turkish threat originated and whither their taxes flowed and their soldiers marched. Some among them traveled there as diplomats in royal service, others as individuals interested in the Muslim lands or in the ancient sites of the Holy Land. Several such travelers wrote accounts of their adventures, the most famous of which, for its literary quality as well as its picaresque story, is the *Příhody* (Adventures) of Václav Vratislav of Mitrovice.

Renaissance architecture arrived in the late fifteenth century, and though Gothic showed remarkable tenacity in sacred building, secular structures increasingly imitated the new styles. Italian influences had to be adapted, not least to the transalpine climate. The result was a localized Czech version of Renaissance, in which domestic artisans learned from and absorbed the immigrant masters, usually Italians, who were brought into their midst by royal and noble patrons. Noblemen abandoned their Gothic castles in uncomfortable and inaccessible locations, now rendered obsolete by advancing military technology. Instead they devoted resources to reconstructing or creating new, more comfortable seats in Renaissance style. The royal court continued the rebuilding of the Prague castle complex, with the summer palace for Ferdinand I's wife, Anna (the Belvedere, built between 1536 and 1563). In the cities

and towns, where the narrow Gothic lots did not allow for major structural changes in the houses, the impact of Renaissance features can be seen in the fluid façades, often decorated with *sgraffito*, designs scraped into layers of plaster to create geometric and other effects.

Eventually, under the influence of later sixteenth-century models from Saxony and the Low Countries as well as Italy, the love of decoration outweighed function in the style known as Mannerism, foreshadowing the later Baroque. Mannerism flourished at Rudolph II's court, where the monarch amassed a treasure trove of works by artists of the first order.[24] In retrospect the appearance of Mannerism in the Bohemian crownlands seems to express the tensions of a society riven by political and religious strife, in a world whose very physical contours were changing. Those accumulated tensions would eventually erupt into open rebellion.

THE COMING OF THE BOHEMIAN REBELLION

At the end of the sixteenth century, the situation in the Bohemian crownlands changed dramatically in favor of the Catholic side.[25] Between 1598 and 1603, supporters of post-Tridentine Catholicism held the highest offices in both Bohemia and Moravia, threatening renewed actions against non-Catholics.[26] To defend themselves, the Estates opposition used a quarrel between Rudolf and his brother Matthias over Protestant rights in Hungary to extract the Letter of Majesty from Rudolf on July 9, 1609. This document affirmed the Bohemian Confession of 1575, extending the right to religious freedom to nobles, burghers, and subject peasantry. A month later a similar Letter of Majesty was granted to the Silesian Estates, fully legalizing Lutheranism.[27] Rudolf's Letter of Majesty was a document without parallel anywhere else in Europe. Not only did it guarantee religious liberty to free subjects, it extended freedom of conscience to the subject peasantry.[28] It was also a step that Rudolf took only under extreme pressure, and hoped to undo as soon as possible. In 1611, with the help of an army sent by his cousin Leopold, bishop of Passau, Rudolf attempted to crush his opposition and defeat his detested brother at the same time. The Passau army pillaged through southern Bohemia on its way to Prague, where it devastated the Lesser Quarter, provoking resistance not only from the Estates

opposition but also from Archduke Matthias. Rudolf resigned the throne to his brother, who also became emperor on Rudolf's death in 1611.

Matthias (1611–1619) once more united the lands of the Bohemian crown and the other Habsburg possessions in central Europe under one rule, but he continued in the centralizing and pro-Catholic policies of his predecessors. After 1612, he moved back to Vienna, ruling the Bohemian crownlands through personally appointed lieutenants. The "Spanish party," the pro-Catholic faction of the Estates, demonstrated its recovering strength at the land diet of 1615, which granted Matthias his tax demands for a period of five years.[29] A more burning question was the succession. Neither Matthias nor his brothers had legitimate heirs, so the next king would come from either the Spanish Habsburgs, or the junior, Styrian branch. By a secret agreement of 1617, the Spanish Habsburgs renounced their claim, so the family decided that the succession would pass to Ferdinand of Styria. Because Ferdinand had relentlessly driven the Protestants out of Styria, his selection did not augur well for the non-Catholics in the Bohemian crownlands. Nevertheless, in spite of some lords' strong opposition, the land diet in 1617 accepted Ferdinand as Matthias's successor, after gaining his promise to recognize the Letter of Majesty of 1609.

Emboldened by the writing on the wall, the Spanish party provocatively destroyed Protestant churches on estates belonging to the Benedictines and the archbishop of Prague. When the non-Catholic Estates met in March 1618 to protest to Matthias, he rejected the protest and strictly forbade any further meetings. The opposition defiantly gathered at the Prague Carolinum on May 21, 1618, and the next day the radicals met in secret to plan a decisive action. On May 23, 1618, a delegation of the disaffected Estates entered the office of the king's representatives in the Prague castle, and after an improvised trial, threw the two royal lieutenants, Vilém Slavata of Chlum and Václav Bořita of Martinice, out of the window. The Defenestration of Prague of 1618 symbolized a decisive break between the Estates and the Habsburg king.[30]

The Estates elected a government of thirty directors, ten from each estate, and hired an army of their own. At a general diet in Prague in July 1619, they established a confederation of the Estates of Bohemia, Moravia, Upper and Lower Lusatia, and Silesia, incorporating the Letter of Majesty in the constitution. The diet deposed Ferdinand, and elected a prominent Calvinist ruler, Frederick of the Palatinate, king (1619–

1620). Frederick's wife was the daughter of the English king James I, and the Estates hoped in vain that Britain would support them.

Without significant allies (Britain, France, the Netherlands, and even the league of Protestant princes in Germany remained neutral), the Bohemian Estates were also weakened by internal divisions. The towns regained the status they had had before 1547, but the lords limited their participation in administration while ensuring that they bore the brunt of the financial burdens. The subject peasantry suffered from the mercenary armies of both sides, and showed no great enthusiasm for the struggle. The Bohemian rebellion remained an uprising of the privileged and powerful Estates, not a movement that united all social classes, as the Hussite revolution had done.

Twice during 1619 the Estates' army attempted to take Vienna and failed. In 1620 the situation took a sharp turn in Ferdinand's favor. His imperial troops, supported by a Bavarian army, invaded Bohemia from the south, while the elector of Saxony threatened it from the north (the Saxon ruler, though Lutheran, had designs on the Lusatias and Silesia). The Estates' armies had to fall back toward Prague. On an elevated site outside the city called White Mountain (Bilá Hora) the tired, poorly organized, and ill-paid soldiers of the Estates faced a slightly larger force loyal to Ferdinand. In a two-hour battle on November 8, 1620, they suffered a catastrophic defeat. Shortly after news of the disaster reached Prague, Frederick and his court fled the city, never to return. The rebellion of the Estates was over. The Thirty Years' War had just begun.[31]