

Austria—once part of mighty empire—has not done very well in 20th Century world conflicts

By Allegra Branson
UPI Staff Writer

VIENNA (UPI) — The Austro-Hungarian monarchy was once the largest European empire next to Russia.

Then came the First World War and its dismemberment and what is left is Austria — about one-eighth the size of the land ruled by the Hapsburgs before 1918.

Austria has an area slightly smaller than the state of Maine—32,375 square miles. It has a population of 7 million, about one-quarter of whom live in the capital city of Vienna.

German is the official language but the nationalities of the old empire — Czechs, Hungarians and Yugoslavs — make up sizable minorities.

Austria has not done well out of world conflicts. The first one cut her down to a minor power. Then came Anschluss (or linkup) inflicted by Hitler's Germany and for seven years the name of Austria even disappeared from the maps of Europe.

The last allied occupation troops did not leave the country until 1955 although the restoration of Austria as a free and independent land was recognized by the Allied Control Council in 1945, in return for a pledge of political neutrality.

From a distance and even to the tourists at first hand Austria is the pleasant land of Mozart (who wrote its national anthem) or the waltz king Johann Strauss. But in the harsh economic realities of today, the heart of most Austrians does not beat in three-quarter time.

The cost of living has been rising, bringing with it the threat of inflation and disaster for thousands of low paid government employees or retired persons. And this despite the fact that the average family of three people pays only \$5 a month rent for three rooms in the government-subsidized housing developments.

Medical, dental and hospital care are also part of a national health scheme.

Austria is a land of contrasts. The family may have television but no running hot water; an automobile but only enough income to run it weekends; a modern kitchen but no bathroom. There are 2 million radios and 400,000 television sets but there are 250,000 families whose water taps are outside their apartments and only 14 percent of homes have their own bathrooms.

Some 300,000 apartments inhabited today were built before 1900.

The average Austrian goes to the movies once every 17 days, attends the theatre twice a year, the opera once a year and a

classical music concert once every four years. Yet Vienna is the only town in the world with three full-time opera houses — which run at a state subsidized loss of \$6 million a year.

The status symbol is the private car. There are 500,000 registered in Austria at present, many of them bought at the price of eating dark bread and lard for supper in order to meet the installments.

The Austrian is hungry for durable consumer goods but he can hardly afford them at today's prices. Only 41 percent of homes have refrigerators. 36 percent washing machines and the steam iron is rare. Much of the apartment is furnished from money earned after hours or in weekend jobs.

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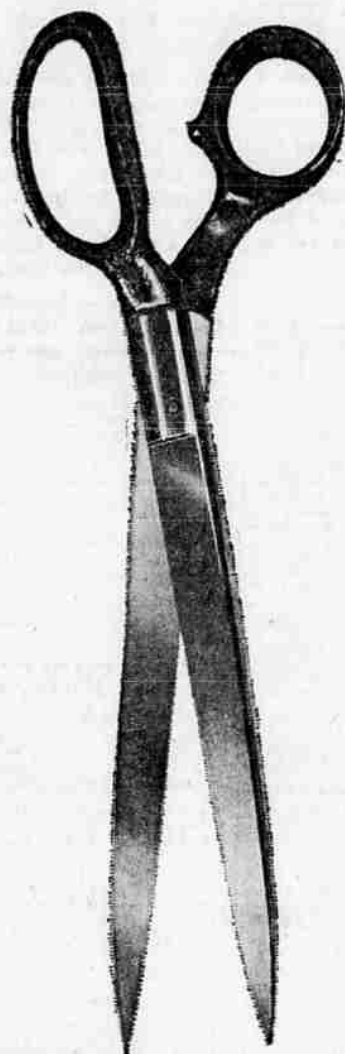
The Austrian family is generally small. The cost of raising children and the shortage of apartments are the main reasons. Many couples have their first child years after marriage. "We couldn't afford apartment, furnishings, a car and a child all at once," runs the usual explanation.

Schooling in Austria is virtually free. A child attends the Volksschule for four years, then either a Hauptschule for another four years or a "Gymnasium" (a combination high school and junior college) for eight.

Austrian universities turn out graduates with the title of "doctor" at such a rate that waiters in the tradition-bound coffee houses can safely address as "herr doktor" any male customer they know is not "herr baron."

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