

Holy Roman Empire #Chapter 13: The Fall of the Military Star - Read Holy Roman Empire Chapter 13: The Fall of the Military Star

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"The glory of the nobility cannot be profaned!" Archduke Louis said fiercely.

Franz knew he had gotten what he wanted. He had risked it all in order to provoke a conflict between the nobility and the capitalist class.

He had made a series of preparations, and then Franz had finally inspired a sense of crisis in this conservative leader. It was time to depart after having made his mark.

Obviously, Archduke Louis was not yet ready to let Franz go, asking directly, "Franz, what kind of plan do you think we should make to fight the capitalist class?"

Franz knew that it was time for his most powerful move; otherwise, all his previous efforts would be wasted.

"Uncle Louis, this is a rough idea without a detailed plan: we can create a Labor Protection Act.

We should work hard on the investigation of wages, working hours, and labor security to start with, then send someone to investigate the current state of affairs, after which we will make a detailed plan that will tie everything together in a coherent way.

For now, the most important thing is to divert public attention and write up a draft quickly, since the reformists always keep a close watch on us, don't they?"

Archduke Louis felt a sudden sense of relief in his tension-ridden heart. All the people over Austria were shouting for reform, and each reform plan was more radical than the next. He, the leader of the conservatives, had almost broken down under such immense and brutal pressure.

For the time being, a Labor Protection Act would drag the capitalist class down by drawing public attention to them and their doings.

From then on, there would be no conservatives in the Austrian Empire. Everyone would be reformists, and the differences between people politically would be nothing more than different plans for reform.

The capitalist class could recruit supporters with the liberation of serfs, the constitution, the parliament, and the national elections; on the other side, the nobles could give them a head-on blow with labor protection, wages, and working hours.

In those days, it was still the nobility who were in charge of Austria. The capitalist class was limited to advertising, while the nobility's counterattack could become law immediately.

How could the working class possibly refuse assistance from the government to protect their interests, reduce working hours, and raise wages?

Once this set of plans was carried out, it would perhaps not be as easy for the capitalists to encourage workers to make trouble again.

Archduke Louis was already thinking about the future: undoubtedly, if the Labor Protection Act were law, labor costs would increase dramatically for the capitalist class, and profits would naturally decrease.

At the time, the power of Austria's capitalists was limited, and it would be difficult for them to continue to expand after the decline in profits.

If the rise of the capitalist class was successfully curbed, it would smooth the rougher edges of the domestic conflict, as the demand of the capitalist class for labor declined.

Then Archduke Louis, as the leader who succeeded in suppressing the capitalist class, would be the hero of the nobles and even perhaps take Metternich out of the office and become the Prime Minister himself.

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Franz knew nothing about Archduke Louis's presumption. Besides, it was enough for him to know that someone was charging forward. Be it Archduke Louis or Prime Minister Metternich, it did not matter to Franz as long as he himself did not have to go in front.

Franz did not think the capitalists would sit still waiting for death. They were going to kill for their interests. As the public leader of this plan, Archduke Louis was certainly going to be on the capitalists' blacklist.

When he thought of this, Franz decided that, once the Labor Protection Act had been passed, he would not go around publicly, especially with Archduke Louis. In case of accidental injury, there would be no place for him to go to recover.

He did not believe that a law like the Labor Protection Act alone could curb the growth of the capitalist class. The lower authorities had countermeasures to deal with the policies of the higher authorities.

The capitalists were all smart people, and the workers of the age were still relatively easy to fool. As a result, Franz reckoned that even if there were legal protection, it would be difficult to implement.

If nothing else, it could dumbfound the vast majority of workers when they learned that their payments were in arrears. If they wanted to bring a lawsuit, the costs of litigation would not be affordable for ordinary workers.

Of course, in the short term, the plan would work. The nobles had plenty of lawyers working for them to get the capitalists into trouble.

The government departments would be working full steam to squeeze the capitalists by taking advantage of this opportunity. As long as they were targeted, it was almost certain that they would be sucked dry, considering Austria's social situation.

Having accomplished his two small goals, Franz said goodbye to Archduke Louis and returned to Sch?nbrunn Palace, satisfied.

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The next day, Franz was brewing a cup of tea, holding the latest edition of the Vienna newspaper, and then carefully sipping and reading.

In an age lacking entertainment, Franz had to cultivate a good habit of reading books and newspapers.

"Your excellency, I just now heard from Archduke Karl's housekeeper that he had an accident last night; he is dying and wants to take one last look at you!" Jenny the maid said in a soft voice.

Franz's facial expression greatly changed. He stood up and said, "Get ready at once; I'm going there, right now!"

Just then, Franz remembered the fact that the time was right for Archduke Karl to drop dead, according to history.

Life and death: these were things Franz could do nothing about. Archduke Karl was born in 1771 and was 75 years old when he died.

In a time when the average lifespan was less than 40 years, he had already lived a long life.

Franz had hoped that Karl would live to be a hundred years old because, with his presence, the pressure on Franz would be significantly reduced.

Whether for the military reform or the impending civil war, Franz really needed this ally to be present to help him bear the weight.

Franz got on the road as fast as possible, and on the way, he finally figured out the situation—Karl had had a drink last night, and then accidentally fell.

As a result, he sustained a lumbar fracture, and in this age of medical underdevelopment, there was no treatment.

The doctors had made the prediction that he would be dead soon. A political figure had to give his last words at the last moment of his life, and Archduke Karl would not be an exception.

Franz, as his self-appointed favorite student, had to be there with him. Without telling his last words to Franz, Archduke Karl would not be at ease even after his death.

When Franz arrived, there were already many senior military officers in Archduke Karl's house. Franz was in no mood to acknowledge them, and he went straight to the inner chamber.

"Grandpa Karl, Franz has come to see you!" Franz said sadly.

"Well, Franz!"

"Keep in mind that soldiers must only shed blood, not tears!"

"Albrecht, give Franz my unfinished army reform plan. Remember my words, Franz. If Austria is to be truly strong, reform must be carried out!"

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Karl's speech was so broken that Franz could only guess at some of his meanings. In general, he told Franz to follow in his footsteps and carry on military reform.

"Let your heart be at ease, Grandpa Karl. I, Franz Joseph, promise in the name of God that I will carry the military reform through to the end!"

Having heard Franz's promise, Karl smiled with relief before finally closing his eyes.

Chapter 14: The Scapegoat

On April 30, 1847, the sudden death of Archduke Karl, the greatest militarist of his generation, brought about the end of an era.

The funeral of Archduke Karl was very grand. Franz's uncle, Ferdinand I, personally came to attend the farewell ceremony, and all the major nobles in Europe sent representatives.

Franz was in a bad mood. Even though he had reincarnated, Death was still not a simple thing to face.

Even with the legacy of Archduke Karl, Franz lost interest in life. People, unlike plants, have thoughts and feelings. Unfortunately, as an heir to the throne, he could not show much of the emotion that he was feeling.

"Your excellency, Mr. Bowenfield from the newspaper office seeks an audience with you!" his maid Jenny whispered.

Franz was a bit puzzled about the arrival of this uninvited guest. There seemed to be nothing in the office big enough for his personal attention. "Bring him in!" said Franz.

"Dear Archduke, something big has happened!" Bowenfield said.

"Tell me about it, but do it calmly, for Christ's sake; it's not the end of the world," Franz said placidly.

Austria had a newspaper censorship system, and the government put a permanent staff in his office to review the content of the newspaper. Franz did not think there could possibly be anything big.

Did someone in the newspaper dare to publish prohibited papers in private? If that was the case, Franz didn't mind cleaning up the office. freewebno vel.co m

Misbehavior of the peer competitors? At most, it would just be normal business competition, and he did not think anyone would dare to cross the line!

"Recently, some newspapers called for a campaign to enact the Labor Protection Act, and we were involved in that," explained Bowenfield.

"Go ahead, I don't think there's anything wrong with that," Franz said, unconcerned.

Bowenfield glanced over Franz's face and continued uneasily. "We became one of the leading players among the newspapers, and so as to make more people pay attention to the lives of the people at the bottom, we made a series of reports."

"For the love of all that is holy, just spit it out, man!. What's the hesitation for? Cat got your tongue?" Franz remarked, frowning.

Franz disliked hesitation during conversation, especially screeching halts at key moments.

"Based on the information we've collected, the editors at our office put forward a proposal, suggesting that capitalists should provide a sense of security to the working class. Unexpectedly, it aroused the attention of the government, so it will probably turn into law!" Bowenfield said in horror.

Then, Franz finally understood what concerned him: it was normal for everyone to shout their political opinions in the newspapers, and since everyone was used to it, it was fine to be radical. However, it would be a different story once those opinions became law.

If the capitalists knew that the Labor Protection Act was drafted by the newspaper "We Want Bread, We Want Cheese," then Bowenfield, the chief editor, would, without question, be a dead man.

Not only would he be in trouble, but all the employees in the office would follow him to hell. Maybe even Franz, the big boss behind the scenes, would be affected.

Franz was caught in a dilemma when this happened. He could not stay out of this situation by blaming it all on his staff, but nor could he, the Crown Prince of Austria, apologize to the capitalists. So what on Earth was to be done? He had no choice but to bite the bullet.

"Show me the proposal you drafted, and don't tell me you're not ready!" Franz grumbled. Actually, Franz did not blame him for it, as the office hadn't done anything wrong. What they did, without knowing the internal political struggle, was totally in accordance with their purpose.

"Yes, your excellency. The plans are with me. Here they are," Bowenfield said uncomfortably.

At the moment, he was reliant solely on Franz. Even if he, the Imperial Crown Prince, had a confrontation with the capitalists, it was extremely unlikely for him to lose, so long as he had the support of the nobility.

Once the big players appeared on the stage, all the small potatoes like him would be ignored, and when the struggle was over, it would not be the winners who had to pick up the mess.

Franz took the documents and glanced over them. The more he looked at them, the more familiar they felt—was this not this a replica of the "996" working schedule?

Apart from ten hours a day, a total of two hours for meals and a break, and a paid day off a week, the government should set minimum wage standards, the capitalists must not withhold wages arbitrarily, the employers must not dismiss employees without cause, and the factory should take responsibility for injuries occurring on the job.

Franz did not think there was anything wrong with this proposal, and if later generations of European capitalists saw these standards, they would wake up from their dreams, laughing.

Franz said responsibly, "Mr. Bowenfield, your people did nothing wrong here, and you don't have to worry about retribution. I'll try to deal with it. The office is right next door to the police station, and I'll inform them!"

Having heard what Franz said, Bowenfield put his worries to rest. Since the big boss would take responsibility, there was nothing to worry about.

The capitalists were so smart that no single one would stick out like a sore thumb if it were not necessary. Perhaps the whole capitalist class was too much for Franz, but it would not be a problem for him to deal with one or two of them.

"Your excellency, we should continue what we are doing?" Bowenfield asked hesitantly.

"Of course, get on with it, but know that there is tension. You should avoid provoking the capitalists by going too far, as that would cause unnecessary trouble," Franz said thoughtfully.

A change in position was the least desired thing. Since Franz had offended the capitalist class, he simply needed to put all his eggs in one basket. In that way, he could at least get the support of the public.

The worst way to deal with this kind of situation would be to try to please both sides. In the end, he knew he would please neither.

Additionally, they were not the only newspaper to support the Labour Protection Act. Besides, the conservatives had been taking action, and Austrian public opinion was generally sympathetic to the working class.

"Yes, your excellency!" Bowenfield replied.

After he dismissed Bowenfield, Franz started again to consider the problems he faced. Usually, the best way to suppress a hot topic was to create a more burning one.

What kind of topic was able to attract the attention of the capitalist class? There was no doubt that at the moment, it was the Labor Protection Act.

For example, should they compress further the 10-hour working system by including the workers' meal and rest time?

Or should they increase the punishment for work-related injuries a little bit, or even set a minimum wage standard that would hurt the capitalists?

All in all, as long as the Labor Protection Act existed, was finally enacted by the government, and went further than the contents of the proposal, everyone's attention would be diverted.

The likelihood of the capitalists' rage damaging his newspaper, too, would be minimized.

When these thoughts came into his mind, Franz smiled in satisfaction: he already thought of someone to take the blame for him. Prime Minister Metternich could not be at ease if he did not want to be replaced, since the Labor Protection Act had been proposed by Archduke Louis on behalf of the nobility.

Chapter 15: Down with the Emperor

Wanting to fan the flames, Franz went to visit another major figure of the Conservative Party, Count Koloft, to express his concern about the situation.

Everyone was well informed about the recent goings-on, and the role Franz played in this political conflict was no secret at all among the top players of the government.

Franz was naturally on conservatives' side because of his origin, or at least they were in the same boat when facing the reform of the capitalist class. In addition, everyone at the highest levels of government was quite principled, so no one would leak information to the outside.

And even if someone leaked the information, nothing would change, since the contradiction between the nobility and the capitalist class could no longer be resolved. Everyone simply had to do what they had to do.

Should they allow the nobility to give up suppressing the capitalist class? Or let the capitalist class abandon their attempt at grabbing power?

At the moment, no one would compromise, nor would they even dare to attempt such a thing. If one were to step back, it wouldn't be a wide sea they saw, but rather a vast abyss.

If not for the advantage of being young, Franz would have to go up onto the political stage.

Really, it was less his age and more that the Regency Council did not want to give up their power so early; as a result, they had to take the pressure and the blame.

Putting Franz on the frontline against the capitalist class would advance his agenda in political affairs and result in the termination of the Regency Council of the Empire.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Metternich would have a tough time of it because he, a representative of the interests of the nobility, claimed to be a reformist.

When the two parties in Austria were locked in a bitter fight over benefits, Franz knocked around between them, and then, to add to the difficulty, the conservatives interfered in the reform.

Frequently in the past, people had attacked the conservatives, claiming that they used serfdom as a weapon, deprived serfs of their personal freedom, cynically exploited them, and then obstructed Austria's progress.

This was the time for the nobles to fight back. People found there was something even worse, comparing the lives of workers and serfs.

The nobles, even as morally depraved as they were, would not make serfs work 15 or 16 hours a day except during the busy farming season because they simply did not have all that much work to do.

Indoor lighting was not cheap at that time. The capitalists would make money by making workers work overtime at night, while the noble would lose money if they did the same to the serfs.

Generally speaking, the lives of workers and serfs were the same — bitter!

But relatively speaking, the life of workers of this age was worse. The factory was like a prison. Once you got inside, it was hard to get out, and any carelessness could lead to a punishment.

As for payments, it was totally dependent on the moral integrity of the capitalists: one could get paid a little under a conscientious boss, while one could owe his boss a load of money after years of hard work without getting paid if under a vicious boss.

Demanding payments had been a problem forever.

Happiness was out of the question as a way to compare things; so was misery.

Because of the manipulation of the nobility, the working class suddenly realized that they were the most miserable class of all. Then, they certainly had to support the government on the Labor Protection Act.

The so-called constitutional reform, national election, and the abolition of serfdom were all put off indefinitely, to prioritize matters concerning their own interests.

The same was true of the capitalist class: they were tough and would not take one step back when it came to self-interest. Patriotism was long forgotten by everyone.

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Prime Minister Metternich, caught in the middle, had a headache. He was strong in diplomacy but seemed powerless to resolve internal conflicts.

Just as with the previous issue of serfdom abolition, he was still negotiating with representatives of the capitalist class in an attempt to come up with a compromise acceptable to everyone.

"Prime Minister, I would like to know: when will the Labor Protection Act be passed?" asked Count Koloft indifferently.

How could he not push him around, as a political enemy of Prime Minister Metternich? Even without Franz's suggestion, he would still have taken action, but now his target was more precise.

"Count Koloft, any law will have to wait a while before it can be enacted, because we have to carry out the actual investigation and then conduct a comprehensive analysis. Please be patient," Metternich said disdainfully.

He did not bother to be polite to a political opponent. Besides, they would remain enemies no matter what he did.

"Prime Minister, it is not me who cannot wait; it is the workers outside. As you know, every day in Austria, hundreds of workers die due to being exploited ruthlessly by the capitalists!

Don't they claim to be patriots? What are they doing to the workers while they are accusing us of immorally depriving serfs their freedom?

Are the workers not Austrian citizens? You know, most of these workers are serfs that we have released. Instead of making their lives better, the capitalists have them in an abyss! fre(e)webnov(l).com

What's worse, this abyss is going to swallow everything and, in the end, destroy the whole of Austria!" Count Koloft roared, as he jabbed a finger up at Prime Minister Metternich's face.

What a checkmate! The aim of liberating serfs was to make them live a better life, but all the evidence showed the opposite had occurred: they were suffering more.

This was a heavy blow to Metternich's advocated abolition of serfdom, and the problem would stop all his work until it was solved.

But to solve this problem would mean that he had to break with the capitalist class, who were in support of the abolition of serfdom, or even beat them down.

Because most of the reformists in the country were capitalists, doing that would shake his position as prime minister, unless he was totally in favor of the nobility.

Well, Prime Minister Metternich himself was the representative of the great nobles and had always stood with them, save for the abolitionist movement. He did not hold anything against compromising with the nobility again. The question was, how would he do that?

He could not force them to take his side; it was a matter of leadership. What Metternich wanted was to be the leader of the nobility, not their proxy.

"Well, Count Koloft. A reply will be given by the government as soon as possible. You can go back and wait for the news!" Metternich said, frowning.

"I hope so; otherwise our Prime Minister will end up being a disappointment," Count Koloft said pointedly.

After Prime Minister Metternich dismissed Count Koloft, his face instantly darkened. It would be strange to be in a good mood after being pressured by someone like that.

After a moment of contemplation, Metternich hit the table with his hand. "Count Koloft is really getting old and senile if he thinks he can squeeze me out with such a little trick," he said to himself.

He said that as if he were very young, when in fact Metternich, born in 1773, was already 74 years old himself.