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Werner Gatty, Gerhard Schmid, Maria Steiner, Doris Wiesinger, eds. *Die Ö?ra Kreisky: Ö?sterreich im Wandel 1970 bis 1983.* Innsbruck and Vienna: Studien Verlag, 1997. 184 pp. DM 40,80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-7065-1195-7.

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Austria under Social Democratic Rule: The Kreisky Years

Bruno Kreisky, leader of one of the most successful postwar socialist parties in Western Europe, headed the Austrian Republic as federal chancellor from 1970 to 1983. He pursued full employment at the expense of deficit spending, expanded and solidified the welfare state, worked toward the democratization of the nation's social and economic life beyond the political realm, presided over a number of significant reforms on social issues, and in his time also attracted considerable worldwide attention for his initiatives in international politics, a number of them quite controversial.

What is the lasting legacy of the reign of *Kaiser Bruno*, as he was dubbed by the press, and of his embrace of the state as an engine for change toward social democratic values and goals? This is an important question that has yet to be answered, particularly in light of the subsequent decline of the Socialist Party and its ideological appeal, and the corresponding resurgence of neo-conservative politics and policies.

Notwithstanding its rather ambitious title, *The Kreisky Era* is a modest collaborative work. It does not purport to be the definitive study either of the period of modern Austrian history shaped by a series of one-party SPOe governments, or of the *Phaenomen Kreisky* more specifically. The fruit of a seminar under the motto "50 Years Second Republic: The Kreisky Era, 1970-1983," this collection is best characterized as a political retrospective. The gathering that produced it was organized by the *Paedagogische Institute des Bundes* in Vienna as a continuing education event for vocational education teachers in May 1995. It brought together a diverse group of presenters in Kreisky's former residence, which now houses the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue.

Spanning fourteen short chapters, the book recounts the key events, political issues, conflicts, and accomplishments of Kreisky's political career; it offers reminiscences, assessments, and tributes by sixteen contemporaries of Kreisky, all of whom apparently knew him personally and worked or dealt with him in one capacity or another. Many of them are fellow party members of the SPOe or otherwise sympathetic toward Kreisky and the political ideas he embodied. Even OeVP member Kurt Vorhofer of *Die Kleine Zeitung*, a conservative Catholic paper, makes a point of identifying himself as being on the left wing of his political group (p. 150). Not surprisingly, the contributors find little to disagree on in their overall appreciation of Kreisky as an individual, as a politician, and a statesman. For critical perspectives on Kreisky's performance as a political leader, and on the legislative record of the SPOe under his leadership, one will have to look elsewhere.

In the first of two biographical chapters, Werner Gatty takes the reader through the major formative experiences in Kreisky's youth: from his bourgeois family background, early involvement in the socialist movement, and political experiences during the First Republic to his conviction for treason and imprisonment by the authoritarian regime, his arrest and "protective detention" (*Schutzhaft*) by the Gestapo in the wake of the Anschluss, to his subsequent exile in Sweden. Gatty provides an overview of Kreisky's activities there, specifically of his efforts on behalf of fellow Austrians (including emigres and deserters from the Wehrmacht), whom he organized and loyally served as a leader notwithstanding his marriage to a Swede and his increasing integration into the society of the host country. After the end of the war Kreisky became Austria's representative in Sweden and was charged with preparing the establishment of an embassy there. He returned to Vienna in 1951, began to work for the foreign office, and later became foreign minister.

Gatty suggests that Kreisky's experiences in Sweden and contacts with the political elite there informed some of his later initiatives as a political leader and policy maker in his homeland (e.g. Keynesian economic policy, the social partnership concept in the area of industrial

relations, and the introduction of an ombudsman, which was established in Sweden as early as 1809). Kreisky's own writings and speeches are cited amply by Gatty to support his points. This also includes Kreisky's rejection of the charge that he sought to import "the Swedish Model" into Austria wholesale. But Kreisky certainly agreed with Olof Palme and his Swedish socialists in their pragmatism: A revolution was not needed to transform society because the goal of structural reform could be achieved democratically. The diffusion of ideas across countries and the collaboration on matters of joint interest through the Socialist International as well as through Kreisky's close personal relationship with other leading Social Democrats in Europe (in particular Willy Brandt and Olof Palme) are recurring themes in other chapters as well.

In the second biographical chapter, Gerhard Schmid sketches Kreisky's ascent to the leadership position within the Socialist Party (SPOe) after his return from Sweden, and on to the pinnacle of power in Austrian politics. There he remained for more than a decade, serving first as Chancellor in an SPOe minority government tacitly supported by the FPOe, and then–following the attainment by the SPOe of an absolute majority in 1971–the first of three terms as head of Socialist single-party governments.

At the beginning of his post-war career his responsibilities in public office involved Kreisky in the negotiations and politicking surrounding Austria's future geopolitical status, the issue of neutrality, and the conclusion of the State Treaty, resulting in the withdrawal of the occupation forces in 1955. In his review of the future chancellor's role in these important events, Schmid presents Kreisky as a founding father of sorts of the Second Republic as a sovereign state. (One may recall that Austria's national day, 26 October, commemorates the completion of the withdrawal of foreign troops, most importantly the Red Army.) He also stresses Kreisky's neutralist and anti-Communist line as state secretary and as foreign minister, along with his role as a mediator between the governments of the US and the USSR and his efforts to develop amicable relations with the leaders of the East European satellites.

In 1971 Kreisky became the first Social Democrat to lead a government in Austria. The SPOe presented an ambitious legislative program to demonstrate its commitment to change. The minority government achieved a moderate reform of the penal code, elimination of discrimination against illegitimate children and a (self-serving) revision of the electoral system. A year later the SPOe won an absolute majority for the first time in history and embarked on even more ambitious reforms. Among the most important ones were: introduction of marriage grants (*Heiratsbeihilfe*), free school books, mother-child pass (a pre-natal/post-natal care and infant health program), introduction of VAT, forty-hour work week legislation, a major reform of the penal code, sex equality legislation, and measures to restructure state industries. Kreisky also sought accommodation with the Catholic Church. Nevertheless his government legalized abortion during the first three months of pregnancy (*Fristenloesung*), a major point of conflict with the church, and also decriminalized adultery after one year of separation.

In the area of economic policy the Kreisky government employed deficit spending in pursuit of the Socialist government's, and Kreisky's, higher-order goal: full employment. Kreisky continued his reform course during his third term, which saw enactment of four-week minimum annual vacation, establishment of the office of ombudsman, reordering of the law of parentage, consumer protection legislation, social security coverage of the self-employed, and other measures. Kreisky suffered a major set-back in 1978, when he called a national referendum–a first in Austria–on the peaceful use of nuclear energy and a majority voted against it. Nevertheless, the Socialists under his leadership performed even better in the parliamentary elections of 1979. Kreisky increasingly devoted himself to foreign affairs while domestically the economic situation deteriorated, state-owned industries were piling up losses, and major corruption scandals rocked the political stage. When his party lost its majority in the 1983 elections, he stepped down.

Even a mere summary of the legislative record of the Austrian Socialist Party under Kreisky's leadership should put to rest the proposition entertained by some political scientists that the partisan (and thus ideological) complexion of government has little, if any, effect on the substance of public policy.

In the foreign realm, Kreisky was involved in the CSCE process and pursued humanitarian goals. He earned acclaim as well as notoriety through his initiatives in the Middle East conflict: he extended a welcoming hand and diplomatic invitation to Yassir Arafat, and maintained contacts with international outcasts such as the leader of Libya. Kreisky was also an advocate for the Third World and promoter of the North-South dialogue. As "elder statesman" he continued to devote himself to many of his favorite causes, including the fight against unemployment (through the "Kreisky Commission"). He

died, at age 79, in 1990. By then the period of socialist predominance in Austrian politics was long over. It had been succeeded by new era, marked by a series of grand coalition governments led by a another popular SPOe politician: Franz Vranitzky (since replaced, after a decade in office, by Viktor Klima).

The biographical overview of Kreisky's life and career by Gatty and Schmid is followed by appraisals of Kreisky's personality.

Though one might have expected more personal reflections on Bruno Kreisky as "Man, Father, and Politician" (title) from his son, Peter Kreisky expounds mostly on the political disagreements with his father (and his party)–many of which were quite public–during the time the junior Kreisky was a firebrand radical in Socialist youth and student organizations while his father was at the helm. In their relentless criticism of the status quo, doctrinaire stances and zeal for political protest, the young Socialists were quite an irritant to the SPOe. According to Peter, the elder Kreisky did not want a party within the party and was enraged that his son was fueling the rift (p. 48). The latter, in turn, accused his father of being a Leninist. "So what" (*Meinetwegen*), Bruno Kreisky supposedly quipped. Still, the older Kreisky undoubtedly left an indelible mark on his son. As Peter sums up his predicament: "For me as a young left-wing social democrat it wasn't easy to deal with the sometimes overwhelming political and human example set by my father." (p. 60). Peter Kreisky's exposition of the various strands of thought and action within the left and the people involved in them are interesting from a political science viewpoint. They serve as testimony of the enduring importance of the socialist youth and student organizations as channels for political recruitment and as training grounds for future SPOe politicians.

In a brief tribute to "Bruno Kreisky–A Man with Qualities," Margit Schmidt sketches a portrait of Kreisky's character and persona based on her recollections of many years of working for him. (The title is an allusion to Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*). She stresses her former boss's approachability (even his phone number was listed) and ease of dealing with ordinary people despite his erudition (a "terrible simplificateur," but also a man who had already read important books before they were even translated into German). While acknowledging that his staff frequently felt aggravated, Schmidt lauds Kreisky for his humor, spontaneity, creativity, intellect, his humanitarianism, and his commitment to help the underdog. Schmidt is now the director of the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue and helped organize the conference. The Forum continues to be active on themes and topics that were important to Kreisky and are still current: Europe after 1989, the peace process in the Middle East, and the North-South dialogue, development, respect for human rights, and the fight against unemployment.

A set of chapters specifically addresses domestic and foreign policy dimensions of Kreisky's record in government: On the domestic side there are separate discussions of economic policy (Austro-Keynesianism), of the reforms in the educational system and those in the area of social policy (including labor law)–by Herbert Ostleitner, Hermann Schnell, and Josef Cerny, respectively. There are some nuggets of insight here for scholars interested in public policy and the politics of policy reform, provided by commentators who were themselves also participants or otherwise close enough to the action to share the perspective (and access to information) of the insiders. Kreisky's ventures in the international realm are covered by Erwin Lanc, a former foreign minister, and Karl E. Birnbaum, a historian and political scientist. Lanc gives Kreisky credit for trying to make Austria's policy of neutrality respectable at a time when it was not even known by this name and praises his efforts to reach out toward the east (*Nachbarschaftspolitik*) during the Cold War, although that proved particularly difficult with what was then Czechoslovakia. Covering much of the same ground, Birnbaum elaborates on the good-neighbor policy, and focuses on Kreisky's contribution to detente by serving as a discussion partner for leaders in East and West, and as an intermediary and clearinghouse ("Kreisky als Entspannungspolitiker"). Well-known Austrian actor Fritz Muliar, finally, remarks on Kreisky's relationship with the arts and with the artistic community.

Only a few of these contributions aspire to scholarly significance. Most noteworthy is Oliver Rathkolb's survey of the Kreisky years as a research topic in the field of contemporary history, although the chronology of key historical phases and events is somewhat duplicative of the material in the biographical chapters. Rathkolb also points to the gaps in this literature and the constraint posed by the inaccessibility of official archival source material. Hopefully the recently founded Bruno Kreisky Archive, which also provided support for the seminar, will mitigate this problem somewhat until Austrian government records are opened to scholarly inquiry after the turn of the century.

The contribution by Charlotte Teuber-Weckersdorf, a U.S.-trained political scientist, purports to present a po-

litical science analysis of the Kreisky era, but for the most part exhausts itself in the author's narration of anecdotes. Still, she uses them to good effect to buttress her assessment of some of the key character traits of Kreisky: his astuteness as a politician, his pragmatism in political action notwithstanding his commitment to principles, and his intense personal loyalty, as seen in his perseverance in backing his scandal-plagued finance minister and protege Hannes Androsch. In regard to Kreisky's Middle Eastern policies and initiatives and his cantankerous dispute with Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal back at home, Teuber-Weckersdorf opines that Kreisky was "the living example that Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism are not the same thing" (p. 117).

The penultimate chapter differs from the singly authored contributions. It reprints remarks by a number of foreign correspondents and by a prominent Austrian newspaperman at a round table examining Kreisky as a newsmaker. It provides some interesting insights into the way the "media chancellor" (p. 12), who himself had worked as a reporter in Sweden, handled the press–and individual journalists. What makes Kurt Vorhofer's contribution particularly enjoyable is his discussion of how Kreisky's phrases and figures of speech came to influence the way Austrians talk ("In Zeiten wie diesen," "Schauen Sie ...," "Ich bin der Meinung ...," etc.).

With the possible exceptions of Peter Kreisky's discussion of ideological squabbles within the Left and his critique of neo-conservative tendencies, and Ostleitner's interpretation of Austro-Keynesianism and defense of Kreisky's economic policies, the book is an easy read. Indeed the foreword touts the effort to keep the flair of the spoken word in the redacted versions of the individual conference contributions. Some may even come across as chatty. Bruno Kreisky, known and liked for his unassuming prose and down-to-earth manner, no doubt would have been pleased: both with the brevity of the contributions and with the diligent avoidance of jargon.

This volume can hardly be considered even a parsimonious assessment of the Kreisky reign and its accomplishments in all of its dimensions and all its complexity, much less a critical appraisal. Still, it is informative and enjoyable, mainly due to the diversity of perspectives brought together by the contributors and the wide range of circumstances from which they knew and experienced Kreisky and "went with him part of the way," to use a Kreisky metaphor. Their generous use of stories and reconstructions of dialogues with Kreisky vividly brings back to life the memory of a great Austrian politician, and of a great communicator–the greatest Austria has yet produced, if Teuber-Weckersdorf is to be believed (p. 123). As the first volume in a new series titled "Bruno Kreisky International Studies," *Die Aera Kreisky* is a good start, and one likely toenjoy broad appeal. One hopes that more thematically focused and more rigorously scholarly volumes will soon follow.

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