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George V. Strong. *Seedtime for Fascism: The Disintegration of Austrian Political Culture, 1867-1918.* Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998. x + 197 pp. ISBN 978-0-7656-0189-6.

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Seedtime for Fascism?

George V. Strong's disappointing *Seedtime for Fascism*, a book treating "The Disintegration of Austrian Political Culture, 1867-1918," appears designed to attract the attention of university teachers. Publishers have recently produced several books seemingly intended for use in undergraduate courses on Habsburg history. Among available publications, university teachers can assign textbooks that summarize Habsburg history in clear and concise chapters and include translations of important and interesting primary documents, thus providing an overview suitable for undergraduates making their first acquaintance with Habsburg history.[1] Other works evaluate recent historiography on the monarchy and challenge students and historians to confront some of the more interesting questions of late Habsburg history.[2] In addition to recent books, classic works continue to appear on undergraduate syllabi.[3] Though its scope is ambitious, *Seedtime*'s weaknesses make it a poor choice to complement or replace available undergraduate texts. Some of the major shortcomings of the book are discussed below.

First, *Seedtime* never seriously addresses the issue raised by the title: Was the period from 1867-1918 truly a "Seedtime for Fascism"? According to the book, national socialism, "a sense of belongingness founded in rooted national communities combined with the need for social security that was promised by the political leadership within those same communities," was the result of the acceptance of socialism by adherents of "national communities," like Karl Lueger and Karl Vogelsang. This national socialism, supposedly evident at the turn of the century and later promoted by the "lugubrious Adolf Hitler," overwhelmed the international socialism advocated by social democrats (pp. 192-93). *Seedtime*'s argument fails to connect this "national socialism" with "fascism" (a word that seems to appear only once in the text [p. 109] and is never defined) or to tie fascism to the "disintegration of Austrian political culture." For a serious discussion of the Habsburg monarchy as a cradle of national socialism, one must turn to other sources.[4]

The book's main argument is also inadequately developed. The author argues, as have many historians before him, that the "state tried to hold itself together while the nation was bent on dismantling the state. In time it was the centrifugal forces that prevailed" (p. 15). In support of this assertion, the book offers discussions of "Nation and State in Danubia," the "Kaiser as Political Icon," "The Austrian Idea," Socialism, and the First World War. Though this argument raises questions relevant to the inevitability debate (albeit without the author ever making his position clear [see pp. 4, 15 and 24-25]), the book makes no reference to scholarly contributions on this subject. In fact, the book presents no discussion of Habsburg historiography whatsoever. The text refers repeatedly to "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces acting on the state, for example, without citing or commenting on Oscar Jaszi's classic work.[5] The text endeavors to document the deleterious effects of "nationalism" on Austrian political culture, but it does not offer a satisfactory definition of this term. With no references to scholarly writing on the topic, *Seedtime* defines nationalism as "a sort of tribalism," "a kind of cultural 'scent"' (pp. 192-3).

The book's cohesiveness is also undermined by a lack of clear organization. The text is organized thematically, rather than chronologically. Although this is not in itself a fateful choice, the first chapter does not explain the subject of the book, nor does it clarify the relationship among the subsequent chapters. The reader must struggle to understand why the book treats certain issues and not others, and how the information presented relates to the narrative as a whole. The text moves back and forth between decades, repeating facts and incidents. The opaque organization seems to have confused the editors as well. To note just one example, the end of Chapter Four promises that the next chapter will discuss how "ar-

chitecture fused with high art" promoted the "Austrian idea"–even though this is actually done in Chapter Six.

The writing style obscures many of the explanations offered for important terms and issues. For example, when discussing the change from the "Austrian idea" to the "nation-state idea," the author writes: "in terms of national identity, being Austrian was a state of mind, an attitude stemming from emotionally embracing a perspective within the context of an idea resting in history" (p. 81). The text repeatedly employs adjectives like "feudality" and "federative," and it refers to "industrial capitalism," "modernism" (which often appears to be confused with another slippery term, "modernity"), and the "haut bourgeois" (like "haute bourgeoisie" sometimes italicized, other times not) without further explanation–though the book does note that the "*haute bourgeoisie* was, or at least had been in some sense or other, Jewish" (p. 107).

A large number of errors adds to the confusion wrought by the weak organization and lack of clear explanations of terms. Here it suffices to name only a few mistakes in a book that seems to place little emphasis on factual accuracy or even internal consistency. Depending on the passage, Franz Joseph was 19, 16, or 18 when he ascended the throne on December 2, 1848 (see pp. 5, 49, 53). In the text, Victor Adler's son, Friedrich Adler, assassinated Minister-President Stuergkh on October 18, 1916 (p. 151) and on October 21, 1915 (p. 163).[6] Students reading this book will believe that Metternich retired in 1835. The book suggests that Metternich's leading role in state matters ended with the death of Emperor Franz (p. 50) and asserts that young Franz Joseph learned about statecraft from this "grave former chancellor" (p. 52). Though Franz Joseph did take instruction from Metternich, he began these lessons before the pressure of revolution forced the chancellor from office in March 1848.[7] According to *Seedtime*, Karl "Luegar" (a misspelling of Lueger throughout the book) served as mayor of Vienna from 1899-1910 (p. 107), rather than from 1897-1910.[8] The text curiously labels Franz Ferdinand an adherent of "pan-Germanism," a term repeatedly used and never defined in its Austrian context (p. 109), and it crowns Karl king of Hungary in February 1917 (p. 189) rather than in December 1916.[9]

Finally, the book endeavors to prove the relevance of Habsburg history to historical developments from the collapse of the monarchy to the present day. When introducing the history of east central Europe to students and non-specialists, historians often argue for the relevance of the subject. Even here, however, the book falls short. Comments on the Balkans in the first chapter have little or no relationship to the material presented in the book. The book also reflects on the lessons of Habsburg history for the United States: "There may be something that can be called psychological turf, a cybernetically approached space issuing out of the psyche that is not tangible." The text continues on to ask whether "the process of reconstructing, through cybernetics or other approaches, those intangible spaces residing in the human psyche [will] prove deconstructive to America's current state synthesis?" Will this dissolve the U.S.? *Seedtime* warns us that no one had seriously feared the "deconstruction of the political culture" of Austria or of the Soviet Union. "Clio is ever tending to her spinning" (p. 195).

Despite the ambitious scope of the book, the introduction of ideas and terms devoid of necessary explanations makes this book unsuitable for undergraduates. The disorganized chapters do not provide the most basic facts–and those presented are often inaccurate. There is no attempt to set this work within the context of existing scholarship or any explanation of the progression of the chapters. The title suggests that the book will present a new interpretation of the causes of the fall of the monarchy and of the relationship between Austrian political culture and fascism. The text itself, however, provides few clues as to what this interpretation might be.

Notes:

[1]. John W. Mason, *The Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire 1867- 1918*, Second Edition (London and New York: Longman, 1997), reviewed on HABSBURG: http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=2010874530427 and Paula Sutter Fichtner, *The Habsburg Empire: From Dynasticism to Multinationalism* (Malabar, Fla.: Krieger, 1997), reviewed on HABSBURG: http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?-path=28191884727052.

[2]. Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918* (London and New York: Longman, 1989) and Steven Beller, *Francis Joseph* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), reviewed on HABSBURG: http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?-path=14666858516141.

[3]. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809-1918* (Most recent edition: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981); Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

[4]. Though the title would suggest otherwise, Chapter Five does not deliver a serious discussion of "So-

cialism, Nationalism, and National Socialism." On this subject, see, among others, Andrew Whiteside, *Austrian National Socialism before 1918* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962). Brigitte Hamann confronts this subject in her recent *Hitlers Wien: Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (Munich: Piper, 1996).

[5]. Strong echoes many of the themes presented in Oscar Jaszi's *The Dissolution* of the Habsburg Monarchy_ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929).

[6]. Macartney cites October 21, 1916 as the date of the assassination. C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire 1790-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), p. 819.

[7]. Metternich remained Foreign Minister and House, Court, and State Chancellor until March 1848, when he resigned and went into British exile.

[8]. Though *Seedtime* devotes several pages to the Christian Socials in power, it never cites the second volume of John Boyer's study, *Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian Socialism in Power, 1897-1918* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), reviewed on HABSBURG: http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?-path=29794851653186.

[9]. Macartney dates Karl's crowning as Hungarian king to December 30, 1916. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire*, p. 820.

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