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Charlie Jeffrey. *Social Democracy in the Austrian Provinces, 1918-1934: Beyond Red Vienna.* London and Teaneck, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995. viii + 246 pp. $39.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8386-3629-9.

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Austrian Socialists in the Provinces

Charlie Jeffrey has written a book that needed writing. He has explored an area of interwar Austrian history that has been long overlooked and in the process has shed light on some of the most important questions of that period. For too long the political history of the First Austrian Republic was presented as if it had been driven largely by events in Vienna. When historians examined events in the provinces, sometimes it was only to better illuminate and explain what had happened in the capital. Fortunately, over the last two decades this narrow perspective has been expanded by the work of Ingrid Bauer [1], Ernst Hanisch [2], Evan Bukey [3], Gerhard Oberkofler [4], Jill Lewis [5], and numerous others. We now know more about how local and regional conditions helped determine the fate of Austrian democracy. With this book Charlie Jeffrey contributes additional insights to this growing understanding of the failure of Social Democracy effectively to defend its interests in Austria.

Jeffrey's basic thesis is that once one moved out of Vienna, Austrian Social Democracy became a very fragmented affair, fighting a defensive battle for survival in isolated *Hochburgen* (bastions) scattered throughout the country. The national leadership of the SDAP was blind to the difficulties of the party at the provincial and local levels. So preoccupied were they with the achievements of Red Vienna that they formulated their national election campaigns around Viennese themes that had little resonance in the provinces. Local leaders were then forced to deal with election politics they knew to be flawed. Unfortunately, the hierarchical organization of the party did not facilitate input by local politicians in national party politics. Isolated as they were, Social Democratic leaders on the local level concentrated on building their organizations and expanding membership. Their preoccupation with administrative details and their orientation inward led many of them to misjudge the developing political situation in the early 1930s, with the result that the rank and file either left the party or became radicalized out of frustration at the inaction of the party leadership, both on the local and the national levels.

Further weakening the position of the party on the local level was the worsening economic situation in the early 1930s. Where Social Democrats controlled municipal government and the patronage that went with it, the Depression meant that there were fewer spoils to be distributed. Where Social Democratic trade unions were once able to enjoy the fruits of closed shops, the shortage of jobs spelled the end of Social Democratic control of the shop floor. Since they were only islands in a sea of conservatism, these Social Democratic *Hochburgen* had difficulty in coordinating the defense of their positions. Each fought the battle alone, with little or no help from the national party or their compatriots elsewhere. They could therefore be picked off one by one by the conservative provincial and federal governments of the early 1930s.

This argument rests primarily on a detailed study of the Upper Austrian industrial town of Steyr, a major center of automobile production in the First Republic. Jeffrey draws on the example of Steyr to develop hypotheses that he then tests using evidence derived from local studies of Social Democracy elsewhere in the provinces. Since much work remains to be done in this area, his evidence from Steyr is the most compelling. And Jeffrey is careful to point out that Steyr was an unusual case. The party there was arguably stronger than in any other major provincial locality in Austria. It controlled the town council, the main union at the one main plant in town; it even controlled the police force until 1930. Because it was so unusual, Jeffrey correctly cautions against going too far in extrapolating from the Steyr case. For example, the Social Democratic labor union, the Metalarbeiterverband, was eventually greatly weakened in Steyr by the peculiar circumstances of the Steyr-Werke. The plant's management expanded production dramatically in 1928

and 1929, completely misjudging the market. When the Depression hit, profits disappeared and production was shut down for almost a year. Many union members, who had joined simply to get a job, quickly lost their "instrumental" loyalty both to the union and to the party with which it was aligned. So in some ways the loss of Social Democratic power was more acute in Steyr that it was elsewhere in the provinces, simply because it had once been so very great.

Still, the example of Steyr is highly suggestive of what was going on elsewhere. Among the most interesting points Jeffrey makes is that one of the things that weakened the party was the absence of an adequately developed system for permitting grassroots concerns to influence party decisions. Here Jeffrey makes skillful use of Robert Michel's pathbreaking work, now nearly a century old, about the tendency for democratic institutions above a certain size naturally to become ossified oligarchies. Although structurally a democratically organized institution, Jeffrey argues that the party in Steyr succumbed to this Michelian tendency. After long tenure in office, party officials began to confuse their own interests with those of the party as a whole. Maintenance of the organization became their primary concern, since their own positions and income depended upon it. The ultimate good of their constituents took a back seat to the needs of the *Bonzen*–the party bosses. Indeed they assumed that the two were identical. When it came to confrontations with conservative regional authorities and the Heimwehr, local Social Democratic leaders were reluctant to push too hard for fear of a reaction that would crush the entire organization. What they did not realize was that their cautious approach would lead to the defection of their frustrated followers to the more proactive Nazis and Communists, and that ultimately equivocation would lead to defeat just as surely as overreaction.

This provocative work is not without its flaws, however. Jeffrey often repeats the same point several times over–he should trust his readers' memory more. The transitions from one section to another have a mechanical feel about them, and in reading them one is reminded that this book is an expansion of Jeffrey's dissertation . The editing betrays the typical signs of proofreading by machine–some sentences make little sense, though all the words are spelled correctly! There are also occasions when Jeffrey appears to contradict himself, as for example on p. 143, where he maintains that competitive sports such as soccer were frowned upon by the party, after indicating on p. 137 that there were three Socialist soccer clubs in Steyr alone.

But aside from these mechanical problems, there is another perhaps more serious limitation of the work. Jeffrey does not make any attempt to conceal his partisanship. His sympathies are with "the individuals who made up the Social Democratic movement, and who the movement was intended to serve" (p. 231). That he is at least open about his partisanship is to be commended, but this reader would have been happier had there been less of it. Perhaps the most obvious example of the problems this creates is in his presentation of the Socialist attempt to create *Hochburgen* as a natural consequence of the actions of their enemies. The conservatives, he argues, really had nothing to fear from the Socialists, but they reacted so negatively to the growth of socialism within their midst that the Socialists were forced to cut themselves off and build "socialism in one locality." But Jeffrey then goes on to document how socialism's opponents were dealt with in Steyr–with anti-Socialists' businesses boycotted and the power of the local government used to throttle the influence of other parties in town. One must wonder if the conservatives' fears about what would happen should the Socialists spread their influence beyond the borders of Steyr were not at least partially well founded. Unfortunately, during the First Republic the instances were rare when a single party was able to dominate local government completely and nonetheless did *not* exploit its hegemony to suppress its opponents. But despite his sympathy for the Socialist cause, Jeffrey is quite critical of the Socialist leadership, so his partisanship does not extend to hagiography.

Jeffrey himself acknowledges that his book is not the definitive word on Social Democracy in the provinces. It will require a great deal more work to rectify historians' long neglect of this topic and to discover to what extent Jeffrey's arguments are really applicable to Austria as a whole. One area that particularly deserves attention is the position of Socialists outside of *Hochburgen* such as Steyr. In what ways did their experience differ from that of Socialists in the *Hochburgen*? Social Democratic leaders at the village level were even more isolated than Socialists in more industrialized areas in the provinces. They did not have the luxury of patronage as a tool to build the party organization. Were they therefore less likely to confuse their own interests with those of the rank and file? Were they more democratic? How did they react to the anti-Socialist "salami tactics" of the Dollfuss regime? Was more energy expended by Social Democrats outside the *Hochburgen* on auxiliary organizations, because they had a greater sense of encirclement even than the Social Democrats in Steyr? If not, what implications does this have for Jeffrey's argument that the auxiliary

organizations were an attempt to create a separate cultural identity in the face of intense political hostility?

Since Social Democrats outside the *Hochburgen* were often struggling to make socialism palatable to peasants, such an expansion of the field of view will also require examination of the small but important strand of agrarian socialism within Austrian Social Democracy, to which no less a Socialist giant than Otto Bauer made considerable contributions. Since Jeffrey concentrates on industrial socialism in the provinces, agrarian socialism gets only a passing reference in his book. Given the work on the subject by Siegfried Mattl [6], this is a curious omission.

Though his work is thus by no means a complete discussion of Social Democracy in the provinces, Jeffrey has helped raise a number of questions that deserve to be addressed. Perhaps that is the best measure of his success.

[1] *'Tschikweiber haum's uns g'nennt...' Frauenleben und Frauenarbeit an der 'Peripherie': Die Halleiner Zigarrenfabriks-arbeiterinnen 1869 bis 1940* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1988).

[2] "Bauerliches Milieu und Arbeitermilieu in den Alpengauen: ein historischer Vergleich," in Rudolf Ardelt and Hans Hautmann, eds.,*Arbeiterschaft und Nationalsozialismus in Oesterreich. In Memoriam Karl R. Stadler* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1990).

[3] *Hitler's Hometown: Linz, Austria, 1908-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[4] *Die Tiroler Arbeiterbewegung von den Anfaengen bis zum Ende des 2. Weltkrieges*, 2d ed. (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1986).

[5] *Fascism and the Working Class in Austria: The Failure of Labour in the First Republic* (New York and Oxford: Berg, 1991).

[6] *Agrarstruktur/Bauernbewegung und Agrarpolitik in Oesterreich, 1919-1929* (Vienna and Salzburg: Geyer Edition, 1983).

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