In the preface to *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, the editors propose “the principle of montage” as a better strategy for approaching an era that defies a master narrative. Assembling fragments, remnants, and threads in ways that subvert hierarchy and teleology promises a closer engagement with the heterogeneity of interwar Germany.[1] *The Red Vienna Sourcebook* explicitly takes up this methodology in its presentation of 280 translated primary sources and three dozen illustrations from Vienna from 1919 to 1934. With a superior introduction and more editorial commentary, the Vienna book surpasses its Weimar counterpart in tangible ways. The editors and their nineteen collaborators have rendered an invaluable service to scholars by providing a comprehensive collection of materials on Red Vienna that is unlikely to be superseded. *The Red Vienna Sourcebook*—with both a German- and English-language version—will remain an essential text for instructors of modern Central European history for years to come.[2]

The introduction offers three main arguments about Red Vienna as an epoch and an intellectual milieu. First, it frames the story of Austrian Social Democracy and Red Vienna as a history of “two revolutions”: the successful democratic revolution of 1918 and the deferred socialist takeover. The attempt to realize the promise of both revolutions within a democratic republic defined the epoch 1919-34. It wedded the aspirations of late Enlightenment intellectuals and reformers with the socialist visions of Social Democratic politicians and Austro-Marxist theoreticians and social scientists. The need to negotiate between competing interests characterized this sociopolitical experiment, creating a vibrant yet unstable discursive space. Second, the editors highlight the important continuities between fin-de-siècle Vienna and a “Second Viennese Modernism” (*zweite Wiener Moderne*), rightly arguing that pre-World War I intellectuals “continued to create, disrupt, experiment, and imagine” into the postwar era (pp. 4-5).

The primary goals for Red Viennese activists were education and culture for all. Most significantly, the introduction foregrounds the place of Jewish identity in the Red Viennese imaginary. As the authors state, “a book about Red Vienna is, by definition, a book about Jewish Vienna” (p. 10). The Jewish theme gets submerged in the body of the sourcebook, but it remains a crucial insight for understanding the era.

The opening section also contains a useful section on the historiography of Red Vienna and the history of the concept itself, which will assist instructors and students unfamiliar with these inter-
pretive discussions. This kind of exposition—not present in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* but a regular feature in sourcebooks on Nazism and fascism—situates readers well in ongoing conversations about the epoch. Its coverage of contemporary scholarship is noteworthy. If anything, this discussion could have been expanded, drawing on the enlightening work done for the 2019 centenary of Red Vienna at the Wien Museum (to which many of the writers of the *Red Vienna Sourcebook* also contributed).[3]

The richness and diversity of the assembled sources is impressive even if the overall coherence of the sourcebook occasionally leaves something to be desired. The editors collated an amazing array of published materials. In addition to the expected socialist outlets, like *Die Arbeiter-Zeitung*, *Die Frau*, *Der Kampf*, and *Der Kuckuck*, the contributors mined scientific journals and monographs, government speeches and legislation, party programs and propaganda materials, and even conservative and nationalist media. By incorporating such diverse documents, the sourcebook depicts a richer sociocultural reality than most books on Red Vienna. For example, the chapters “Empirical Social Research,” “Demography,” and “The New Woman and Women’s Rights” take readers into the quotidian existences of the Viennese. The first of these chapters documents the precarious housing situations and constrained budgetary conditions of the working class and especially proletarian women. Using survey data, the reader encounters the typical daily (and hourly) schedule of this precarious class. We also see how youth came to class consciousness, how they experienced educational opportunity, and how they assessed life fulfillment. The demography chapter unearths a trove of sources that portray the experiences of housing insecure people, foreigners, immigrants, refugees, Jews, Czechs, Sinti, and Roma. The women’s rights entry amasses materials on women’s voting patterns, the push to decriminalize abortion, the rise of the “New Woman” in the 1920s, and debates about alternative modes of living and working. Each of these chapters benefits from strong introductory sections and cogent editorial glosses before the primary sources. To the sourcebook’s credit, most chapters succeed in these tasks.

The polyphony of voices presented in this sourcebook deserves particular recognition. This is especially true for English-language scholars. While there exist good collections of translated primary sources from leading Austro-Marxists, logical empiricists, Freudians, and modernist authors, vital contributors to Red Vienna have largely been absent, especially women and Jews. The selections from major figures like Margarethe Hilferding, Marie Jahoda, Käthe Leichter, Marianne Pollak, Theresa Schlesinger, and many others enrich our understanding of women’s roles in both the Social Democratic Party and in the Viennese experiment. The protagonists in the Jewish Life chapter (e.g., Moshe Silburg, Melech Ravitch, Anitta Müller-Cohen, Josef Löwenherz, and Leo Goldhammer) add unique perspectives on the place of Jews and Judaism in interwar Austria.

*The Red Vienna Sourcebook* also excels when it presents the discourses and public debates that made the Austrian capital a hothouse of intellectual and political ferment. The controversy over public crematoria, the arguments between urban planners and architects over public housing, and the disputes over socialist arts policies are but three examples that the editors explore using multiple entries. At its most compelling, entire parts of the book engage in a dialogue, with each chapter drawing on those around it. In “Social Engineering” and “Housing,” for example, the ambiguity of the grand Viennese experiment comes into relief. The tension between “choice and coercion” that characterized the relationship between the emancipatory rhetoric of socialist actors and the restrictive policies they prescribed comes out in the chapters on health care, welfare, and education (p. 274). Julius Tandler, the health and welfare reformer, comes to the fore as one ambiguous fig-
ure. On housing, differences of opinion over apartment complexes or single-family homes and between communal kitchens and efficient home ones lay bare the competing interests of reformers and actual people. In these chapters, the editors ably highlight the challenges of translating ideas into action and the problems with trying to create “new humans” while also respecting the autonomy of the individual.

When contributors strike the right balance between topic, analysis, and sources, the sourcebook sings. Many of the chapters could serve as stand-alone units in a class on interwar Austria or Central Europe. When a chapter or part lacks a coherent theme, however, the book proves less helpful. The choice to create a text that avoids fatalism and “eschews a central narrative analysis” has certain advantages, but a clear structure is not one of them (p. 9). The nine-part division of the sourcebook is never explained. The editors concede that there is a lot of overlap between different chapters and that many materials could have found their way into different sections. That reasoning does not explain the existing organization, however. If the chapters and parts presented in previous paragraphs orient the reader well, “Foundations” lacks a clear purpose, with the final chapter particularly out of place. Likewise, “Identities” barely scrapes the surface of the identity questions associated with the era. The reader frequently will feel at the mercy of the editors. When a chapter (like “Theater”) has an effective preamble and detailed glosses, the theme of the part (cultural politics) stands out. The preceding chapters, on the other hand, suffer from a less focused analytic approach, rendering the section inconsistent. The “Vitality” and “Exchange” sections present similar difficulties in spite of several strong chapters in each.

The lack of a coherent overarching structure reduces the impact of the sources, too, by failing to draw connections between chapters. Redundancy is a problem toward the end of the sourcebook. These issues are most evident when excerpts from the same source or debate appear in different sections. The 1926 Linz Program of the Social Democratic Party surfaces in several chapters, yet there is no general discussion of that seminal document. Likewise, Ernst Fischer’s memoir, Käthe Leichter’s This Is How We Live (1932), and the Marienthal study feature in two locations, respectively, but linkages are not fully explored. Occasionally internecine debates take place in separate chapters, for example, the arts policy discussion is found in chapters 24, 26, and 27. These are not major problems, but closer attention to these overlaps would have been appreciated. One last missed opportunity has to do with the deployment of visual sources. While the illustrations at the front of each chapter illumine the text by adding variety, one wonders whether these images may have been better deployed in chapters dealing with visual media (or even in a stand-alone section). The lack of adequate examples in a number of the arts and media chapters likewise disappoint.

None of these objections detract from the magnificent accomplishments of The Red Vienna Sourcebook. The editors and contributors have succeeded in creating a work worthy of the richness and experimentality of the era and the city. The sourcebook will serve as the basis for many Central European and Austrian history classes, and it will provide a foundation for individuals drawn to what Karl Polanyi has called “one of the most spectacular cultural triumphs of Western history.”[4] Like The Weimar Republic Sourcebook and Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham’s Nazism reader (Nazism 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader [1995/1998]), this book will endure as a historical resource and exemplar worthy of emulation in its own right.

Notes


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