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# Review of Social Democracy in the Austrian Provinces, 1918-1934: Beyond Red Vienna.

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Social Democracy in the Austrian Provinces, 1918-1934: Beyond Red Vienna.  
By *Charlie Jeffery*.

London: Leicester University Press, 1995. Pp. ix+246. \$39.50.

It has been a widely held tenet among historians of contemporary European labor movements that the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SDAP) was the first member party of the Socialist International to offer armed resistance against fascism in the 1930s, even if it was not the first to succumb to radical right-wing forces. During the period from the 1950s into the 1970s, the dominant historiographical current addressed theoretical and policy debates within the federal social democratic leadership and praised Red Vienna as the grand municipal experiment in interwar social transformation. To the extent that historians concerned themselves with areas outside of Vienna, they represented the course implemented in the capital as a model followed dutifully by provincial social democrats. The methodological turn that became evident in the 1980s-coinciding with both the fifty-year observance of the civil war of 1934 which destroyed the democratic republic and the party's centennial celebration- directed itself primarily toward Viennese social democratic auxiliary organizations and sought to describe, indeed commemorate, the praxis of political socialization and cultural innovation under the Viennese circumstances of 1918-34.

A new, critical body of literature has emerged since the late 1980s, however, as a challenge to the largely self-congratulatory, Vienna-centered, and elite-dominated character of previous histories of the interwar years. Representatives of the best of this literature are the important critical, revisionist works on Red Vienna written by Anson Rabinbach and Helmut Gruber and the excellent studies of social democratic organizational and daily life in the provinces of Salzburg and Styria attributable to Ingrid Bauer and Jill Lewis, respectively.

Charlie Jeffery's ambitious *Social Democracy in the Austrian Provinces, 1918-1934: Beyond Red Vienna* is the most recent example of this critical focus on left-wing political culture during the Austrian First Republic. Taking the work of Ernst Hanisch as his point of departure, Jeffery employs the concept of the SDAP-organized working-class "milieu" to the Upper Austrian municipality of Steyr. While other provincial Austrian cities shared also experienced a fragmented, embattled existence in the midst of a hostile and militant Catholic conservative agricultural region, Jeffery argues persuasively that circumstances in Steyr were particularly noteworthy among provincial SDAP *Inselbewegungen* (p. 19).

Steyr's primary industry was automobile production, dominated by the sprawling Steyr-Werke. Unlike other industrial pockets in provincial Austria, the concentrated number and organizational level of skilled workers in Steyr remained high throughout the 1920s. This was largely due to the success with which the social democratic affiliated Metal Workers' Union won excellent working conditions and benefits for its skilled labor force through closed-shop agreements and proved itself prepared to defend its gains through strikes when necessary. High wages and reasonable job security relative to the rest of Austria benefited the SDAP-run municipal government; not only were party membership strong and electoral support high into the early 1930s, an impressive network of social democratic free-time organizations, children's support groups, and the local *Schutzbund* (SDAP paramilitary organization) derived the greatest share of their financial support from the voluntary donations and mandatory payroll taxes of

their respective members. The result was a network of party organizations and patron-client relationships that made Steyr, even with its difficulties, into a political and cultural site where local party leaders could feel at least a modest degree of confidence in their work to transform society along social democratic lines.

Jeffery's structural evaluation of the social democratic experiment in Steyr is simultaneously commendable and frustrating. He is at his best in his close examination of industrial relations in the Steyr-Werke between 1919 and 1933, particularly during the depression years. His analysis details admirably the impact of economic crisis on local politics and the manner in which the radical right capitalized on these difficulties. Further, his treatment of provincial social democratic politics in Upper Austria and the lack of consistent communication between the Viennese-based federal party leadership, the provincial SDAP authorities, and officials in Steyr, and the indifference or utter lack of understanding in Vienna for provincial concerns brings essential structural difficulties into relief is excellent. The ossification of the party bureaucracy within Steyr itself and its paternalism in the guise of democracy are handled adroitly as well. Even with these strengths, though, certain difficulties cannot be overlooked-either the overreliance upon newspaper sources at the expense of Upper Austrian Provincial Archive, Federal Interior Ministry, or Verein für die Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung documentation, or the lack of sometimes necessary, at other time sufficient contextualization of sources in the form of appropriate case studies. Here again, it should be noted, Jeffery is far stronger on the issue of industrial relations or the formation of the Steyr social democratic elite than in other areas of his inquiry.

The reader must ultimately judge the success or shortcomings of Jeffery's study on the basis of how effectively one evaluate his definitive departure from the "history from above" he deplores. (This will be difficult for those unfamiliar with the historiography, for Jeffery only rarely notes the authors with whom he takes issue.) Nowhere is this more apparent than in his discussion of cultural initiatives, which lacks an emphasis on *Alltagsgeschichte* capable of integrating cultural life and political socialization. Instead, Jeffery's analysis takes the form of a critique of party elites for pedantically imposing an elite-oriented culture upon its constituency. Moreover, he acknowledges the importance of SDAP auxiliary organizations in fostering relationships of intimacy and a sense of solidarity-essential for the internal integration and demarcation from outsiders fundamental to creating a milieu-yet reprimands the Steyr social democrats for being reactive rather than proactive (pp. 62-76, 133-36). One might question if, in the context of immediate postrevolutionary circumstances and the unprecedented experience of life in a democratic republic, social democratic cultural initiatives in provincial Steyr, embedded in a very conservative Upper Austrian countryside teeming with numerically superior rightist paramilitary groups, could have legitimately been expected to "anticipate the future in the present" (p. 136).

These criticisms notwithstanding, Jeffery's work is well researched and addresses a number of important themes. It should be acknowledged on these grounds, and for the additional research it will stimulate.

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