

Paul Werner

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Ghosts
of
Red
Vienna**

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Review Essay: Rob McFarland, Georg Spitaler and Ingo Zechner, ed. *The Red Vienna Sourcebook*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2020.

Das Rote Wien. Schlüsseltexte der Zweiten Wiener Moderne 1919–1934, herausgegeben von Rob McFarland, Georg Spitaler und Ingo Zechner. De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020.

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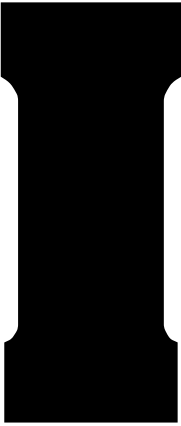
Vienna and New York: The Orange Press

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Published May 1, 2021



“The headlong plunge of conservative thought into a chaos in which it could only act as the grim manager of a hostile worldview.”

„Der Kopfsturz des konservativen Gedankens in ein Chaos, in dem er nur als der grausige Büttel einer ihm todfeindlichen Weltansicht walten konnte.“ Karl Kraus, »Nachruf«, Weltgericht.

In every American college there comes a time when your advisor notices you've been talking an awful lot of Marx lately. Fortunately, there's just the thing for you: the professor, class or book that's going to answer all your questions once and for all. If you're one of those folks who've been asking a lot of questions about Red Vienna this book's for you. If you think it's going to

answer your questions without requiring that you dig yourself out of mountains of misdirection — think again.

For those who never thought about it either way, Red Vienna was that brief period, 1919 to 1934, when the Social-Democratic administration of Vienna conducted an ambitious cultural, social and political experiment in all aspects of life: education, culture, mental health, health care, housing. Concurrently the city hosted an impressive intellectual development led by the likes of Sigmund Freud, Alban Berg, Robert Musil, Karl Polanyi, Ludwig Wittgenstein, none of whom were card-carrying Socialists but whose achievements must be read against the prevailing winds — what Jean-Paul Sartre calls “horizon,” Bourdieu “habitus,” Castoriadis “Imaginary” and Max Adler and Rudolf Hilferding the “mediation of an inner connection with this great time” [*Vermittlung eines inneren Verhältnisses zu jener grossen Zeit*], to quote two, if not the two most prominent Marxist theoreticians produced by Red Vienna. In the inaugural program of the first issue of *Marx Studies*, which they edited, Adler and Hilferding stated:

“Marxism is certainly not a rigid system for us. The works in this volume will show how much we see everything about it as in development, a development which we believe to be able to grasp correctly only if the conscious connection

of the findings from deliberate linkage of Marxist thought-conclusions and methods with the whole of modern intellectual life, meaning the content of the philosophical and social scientific work of our time, is established.”

„So ist denn sicher auch uns der Marxismus kein starres System. Es werden gerade die Arbeiten dieses Bandes zeigen, wie sehr wir alles an ihm in Entwicklung sehen, eine Entwicklung, die wir aber nur dann richtig fassen zu können glauben, wenn nunmehr allenthalben die bewusste Verknüpfung der marxistischen Denkresultate und –methoden mit dem gesamten modernen Geistesleben, das ist mit dem Inhalt der philosophischen und sozialwissenschaftlichen Arbeit unserer Zeit hergestellt wird.“¹

What Tocqueville wrote of French culture in the years leading up to the French Revolution applies as well to Red Vienna: one need not have been consciously revolutionary or socialist to be deeply affected, intellectually, emotionally and in social life.² The famed social psychologist Marie Jahoda echoes the same belief:

¹ Max Adler and Rudolf Hilferding, „Vorwort,“ *Marx-Studien. Blätter zur Theorie und Politik des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus* Vol. I, 1904 (Wien: Wiener Volksbuchhandlung Brand): vii-viii.

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la Révolution française* [1853], ed. J.-P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), III, I, 230.

“When, in the early 20s, I gradually became aware of the larger social scene the social democratic movement in Vienna was approaching its social, intellectual and cultural peak. Notwithstanding economic crises, this mass movement based on Austro-Marxism was pervaded by a spirit of hope that, I believe, has no parallel in the 20th century. [...] Austro-Marxism was not so much a theory as a view of life.”³

Even Georg Lukács, nostalgically looking back after half a century as an established pillar of orthodox Marxism wrote:

“At the time this new realm seemed to us a mental universe of grandiose syntheses, theoretically and historically as well. In this manner we overlooked how little this new approach had truly overcome Positivism.”

„Dieses Neuland erschien uns damals als eine Gedankenwelt groß angelegter Synthesen, und zwar theoretisch ebenso wie historisch. Wir übersahen dabei, wie wenig diese neue Methode den Positivismus wirklich überwunden hatte.“⁴

To those whose careers are built on expunging Marxist thought and practice from Culture, Society and History, Red Vienna is, and must remain, a

³ Marie Jahoda, “The emergence of social psychology in Vienna: an exercise in long-term memory,” *British Journal of Psychology* (1983, 22/4): 343.

⁴ Georg Lukács, „Vorwort“ [1962], *Die Theorie des Romans. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1984), 7.

challenge. This is the fruitless challenge taken up by many contributors to the *Red Vienna Sourcebook* — not all by any means, but enough to disfigure what might otherwise have been an exemplary project. Today as then the Positivists are on the prowl.

For the English-speaking reader this book will be an irreplaceable collection of primary sources in translation, with a whopping 804 pages divided into twelve parts divided into 36 chapters comprising 280 extracts from various primary sources. Each chapter is preceded by an introduction followed by a few suggestions for secondary readings, along with explanations and notes. The volume concludes with a chronology, a list of references and two indexes, one an index of subjects and the other of persons, in the German fashion. There is also a German edition, less useful because many of the original texts are accessible online through the Austrian National Library [<https://www.onb.ac.at/>]. A hundred or so pages of the German version are available for free download from the publisher [<http://www.blickinsbuch.de/book/N7SyrQI4GX>], while the German edition in its entirety is available for download for readers registered at the Austrian National Library. There are three main editors; 19 additional commenters have written brief introductions to each section and to each selection. An impressive number of scholars have been consulted, and it would

be hard to fault the selections themselves. Then there are the translations, and it's always fair game to fault the translations.

Then again, a project of this kind is a process of translation of its own, a game of telephone that slips further and further from the original as production flows from concept to editor to consultant to sponsor to translator to annotations and introductions, to the final needs of the publisher and the distortions of design and promotion. Initially, the *Red Vienna Sourcebook* was pitched to an American publisher as a companion to the *Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (University of California Press, 1994):

“While the downfall of the Weimar Republic has become a horrifying symbol for a certain historical fatalism prevalent in contemporary scholarship, Red Vienna (*Rotes Wien*) suggests a hopeful alternative.”⁵

It's one thing to pitch a book by describing it from the angle most accessible to the general public; it's another to make an editorial strategy out of fitting a square peg into a round hole. This strategy's spelled out in the subtitle of the German-language edition: *Das Rote Wien. Schlüsseltexte der Zweiten Wiener Moderne 1919–1934*, translated in the English-speaking Introduction as “Key

⁵ “Red Vienna Sourcebook Proposal” (September 3, 2017), 1; see also Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, ed., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

texts of the Vienna Moderne,” which suggests a coffee-table book on furniture design [5]. In either language the phrase suggests a continuity with that First Viennese Modernism immortalized by Karl Schorske.⁶ This Second Viennese Modernism, then, would have been an extension of the first, the romping-grounds of the bored fin-de-siècle bourgeoisie. Unlike the decadent Weimar bourgeoisie, however, the bourgeoisie of the Second Viennese Moderne, we are meant to believe, was not decadent, and therefore successful. The fact that Weimar Germany fell to the Nazis in 1933 and Red Vienna to the Austro-Fascists a year later should, we are assured, have no bearing on the perception of success of one and the failure of the other. Also: try not to think of a black bear.

If, as Voltaire once wrote, History is a pack of tricks we play on the dead, then this book’s a game of three-card monte. It reminds me of my graduate days, when I was sent to learn from the Designated Marxist who, as it turned out, had written the master text on Marxism as Modernity, or rather, Marxists as modernists and Modernism as an affliction of the bourgeoisie, ergo Marxists as bourgeois.⁷ Marshall Berman would wander into class in t-shirt and jeans to

⁶ Carl E. Schorske. *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979

⁷ Marshall Berman. *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

ramble on about various historical events, all leading to casual observations about the failure of the Left or, more accurately, the failure of the lefties, who in any case weren't lefties by his lights. There is a whole academic industry devoted to this approach, and the *Red Vienna Reader* is another book on the pile.

At least Berman was better than a resentful modernist like Roz Krauss who would order you out of her classroom if you so much as mentioned Marx; better than the resentful modernism heard at a recent roundtable to promote the *Red Vienna Sourcebook* on ÖRF, the radio and television arm of the Austrian Federal Government. ÖRF is subsidized by compulsory fees on all radio and TV sets, collected by determined agents who turn up at your door, demand to inspect your bedroom, and occasionally threaten to call the police — the ideal venue to spew bile about the evils of the Authoritarian Left.

Here is one of the three editors of the *Red Vienna Sourcebook*, the head of a “centrist” think-tank in Vienna (we'll call him “Editor #1”):

“The hasty abandonment of evidence is, on the one hand, an expression of the intellectual failure of postmodernism, which has abandoned the concept of Truth without Necessity.”

„Die voreilige Verabschiedung der Evidenz ist zum einen Ausdruck eines intellektuellen Versagens der Postmoderne, die den Begriff der Wahrheit ohne Not preisgegeben hat.“⁸

That’s the kind of rant you hear from neo-liberals who are starting to feel the ground shift under their feet, with a local twist in the hidden reference to Karl Popper, the Vienna-born philosopher of neo-liberalism whose Bible, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, is described in the Introduction as “an attempt to process the downfall of Red Vienna and the victory of fascism.” That’s like saying *Atlas Shrugged* is an attempt to process the downfall of social connectedness and the victory of individualism.⁹ Popper’s name has recently resurfaced among right-wing trolls and bloggers, part of the current McCarthyite push in Europe to delegitimize gender studies, post-colonial studies and Marxism, all lumped under the heading of “post-modernism” in a dispiriting echo of the *Positivismusstreit* (“dispute over Positivism”) that pitted Popper against Marxist intellectual Jürgen Habermas in the ‘sixties. According to Popper scientific inquiry must follow the path of logical inevitability, from observation to experiment to verification (“Truth and Necessity”), except that Popper was not as

⁸ Ingo Zechner, Georg Spitaler, Rob McFarland. „Das Rote Wien als »Zweite Moderne«“; interview with Lukas Wieselberg, ÖRF [Österreichische Rundfunk], December 26, 2020. <https://science.orf.at/stories/3203325/>

⁹ Malachi Haim Hachoen, *Karl Popper. The Formative Years 1902-1945. Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 424, 358.

confident as his present-day epigones that the same universally valid scientific principles that should apply to the natural sciences might apply as well to the social sciences, and to History in particular.

Misplaced confidence (if not the arrogance of privilege) is a defining feature of Positivism, the ideology of Auguste Comte, the go-to-philosopher of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Comte himself had no doubts about the universal applicability of his system, it was one of its constituent features:

“Now that the human mind has founded celestial physics, terrestrial physics, either mechanical or chemical, organic, plant or animal physics, it is left to complete the system of observational sciences by founding social physics. This is today, in many important respects, the greatest and most pressing need of our intelligence; this is, I dare say, the first goal of this course, its special purpose.”

« Maintenant que l'esprit humain a fondé la physique céleste, la physique terrestre, soit mécanique soit chimique, la physique organique soit végétale, soit animale, il lui reste à terminer le système des sciences d'observation en fondant la physique sociale. Tel est aujourd'hui sous plusieurs rapports capitaux,

le plus grand et le plus pressant besoin de notre intelligence : tel est, j'ose le dire, le premier but de ce cours, son but spécial. »¹⁰

The motivation behind Positivism was neither philosophical nor scientific, but socio-political:

[Positivist Philosophy] can be seen as the only solid basis for the social reorganization that must end the state of crisis in which the most civilized nations have for so long found themselves. [...] As long as individual intelligences have not adhered by unanimous assent to a certain number of general ideas capable of forming a common social doctrine, it cannot be concealed that the state of the nations will remain, of all necessity, essentially revolutionary in spite of all the political palliatives which may be adopted.

« [La philosophie positive] peut être considérée comme la seule base solide de la réorganisation sociale qui doit terminer l'état de crise dans lequel se trouvent depuis si longtemps les nations les plus civilisées. [...] Tant que les intelligences individuelles n'auront pas adhéré par un assentiment unanime à un certain nombre d'idées générales capables de former une doctrine sociale commune, on ne peut se dissimuler que l'état des nations restera, de toute

¹⁰ Auguste Comte. *Cours de Philosophie positive. Tome Premier, contenant les préliminaires généraux et la philosophie mathématique* (Paris : Rouen Frères, 1830), 22.

nécessité, essentiellement révolutionnaire, malgré tous les palliatifs politiques qui pourront être adoptés. »¹¹

It would be hard to overestimate the influence of Positivism in the early twentieth century or the early twenty-first; not as an explicit philosophical, political or cultural movement but as what Foucault would call an “epistemological unconscious.” In the early 1920s a young Karl Popper was traumatized when confronted at a lecture by Albert Einstein with a conundrum: What if two separate experiments could be used to verify contradictory and self-canceling propositions? (Ernst Mach, who was to have enormous influence on Einstein and on the philosophers of the Vienna Circle, had earlier made a similar observation.)¹² Like his hero Popper, Editor #1 has blithely disregarded Einstein’s caution. Supposing Red Vienna could be shown to have been successful the way a scientific experiment is successful? Which proposition would be proven? Editor #1 has no doubts:

“The social model of Red Vienna was in many ways a profoundly bourgeois one, in the best sense of that word.”

¹¹ Comte, *op. cit.*, 48-49.

¹² Hacohen, *op. cit.*, p. 94 sqq.; Ernst Mach, “On the Economical Nature of Physical Inquiry,” reprinted in *Popular Scientific Lectures*, trans. Thomas J. McCormick (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1895), 193, 200.

„Das Gesellschaftsmodell des Roten Wien war in vielerlei Hinsicht ein zutiefst bürgerliches, im besten Sinn dieses Wortes.“

Nor doubts, either, concerning the proposition that must be contradicted to ensure the validity of the first.¹³ Success, according to the Comtian model, is a validation of the rationalist, or “scientific” approach of the experimenter, and Rationalism, according to a truism in place since the French Revolution, can only be bourgeois since by definition any departure from or refusal of bourgeois rationalism is evidence of undeveloped or deficient cognition — Popper, in an early unpublished thesis in the psychology of education, came dangerously close to this suggestion.¹⁴ According to this argument, successful historical development is proof of scientific correctness in the social sciences the way successful personal development is to the educational psychologist. In the late 19th century this twin proposition, historical and psychological, was applied indistinctly to that class that was assumed to think in socialist terms, and to those who wished to put socialist theories in action—applied, it must be

¹³ See my own brief remarks in a round-table discussion published in the exhibition catalogue for the exhibition *Das Rote Wien*, held in Vienna, 2019 through 2020: „Ausblick: Hoffnung auf die egalitäre Stadt [Debatte]“, Werner Michael Schwarz, Georg Spitaler, Elke Wikidal, ed., *Das Rote Wien 1919-1934. Ideen, Debatten, Praxis* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019): 412-419.

¹⁴ Malachi Haim Hacoen, *Karl Popper. The Formative Years 1902-1945. Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 142 sqq.

said, by the promoters of “Scientific” Socialism as well as its detractors.¹⁵

Since, according to the detractors, the failure of proletarian movements was foreordained, it stood to reason this failure was caused (or would be caused) by the failure of those proletarian movements that claimed the mantle of Science — in other terms, Marxism. The commonplace question, “When has Socialism ever worked?” is the plainspoken version of the right-wing intellectual’s questioning of the verifiability of the socialist hypothesis. That is what Editor #1 means when he adds:

“One of the great achievements of Red Vienna is to have identified nonsense as both an intellectual and a political problem.”

„Zu den großen Leistungen des Roten Wien zählt es, den Unsinn zugleich als intellektuelles und als politisches Problem identifiziert zu haben.“¹⁶

Freud would have been left speechless; or Berg; or Musil; or Wittgenstein; so would William J. McGrath, the go-to reference on the persistence of the

¹⁵ John Keane, "On Turning Theory against Itself." Review of Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*, *Theory and Society* 4, no. 4 (1977): 564-05.

¹⁶ Ingo Zechner, Georg Spitaler, Rob McFarland. Das Rote Wien als „Zweite Moderne“ Interview with Lukas Wieselberg, ÖRF [Österreichische Rundfunk], December 26, 2020. <https://science.orf.at/stories/3203325/>

Dionysian in Viennese politics and culture, whose work is not mentioned anywhere in the *Sourcebook* and its bibliography.¹⁷

It might be objected that, rather than Comte, Editor #1 follows the Empiricist methodology of the nineteenth-century German historian Friedrich (“as it really happened”) von Ranke, which dominates European universities today: outwardly focused on the collection and presentation of data, disdainful of metanarrative and theory. All the same, Ranke subscribed to the concept Hayden White calls “The Historical Process as Comedy,” an approach White traces back to Comte and to which Ranke, according to his many critics, succumbed:

“During this same period, of course, [sic] Enlightenment rationalism was being revised in an Organicist direction by the French Positivists. In the work of Auguste Comte [...], the Mechanistic theories of explanation of the Enlightenment were wedded with an Organicist conception of the historical process.”¹⁸

In plainer terms: to the Positivist, History is a natural process akin to the production of methane out of a cow’s backside; its results can be reliably

¹⁷ William J. McGrath. *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

¹⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 39; for Ranke as an exemplar of “the historical process as Comedy,” see 167 sqq..

anticipated, even duplicated, except that History, unlike the cow, can occasionally be trusted to produce something more palatable than the “pile of shit” which, according to Freud, was the true legacy of the Habsburg Dynasty. According to Comte the progress of reason in History was organic, anchored in Natural Law, “Order and Progress,” says the Positivist motto on the Brazilian flag (1889):

“Positivist Philosophy is the only one to prevail according to the ordinary course of things. [...] the definitive triumph of Positivist Philosophy will take place spontaneously and will restore order in society.”

« La philosophie positive est seule à prévaloir selon le cours ordinaire des choses. [...] le triomphe définitif de la philosophie positive aura lieu spontanément, et rétablira l'ordre dans la société. »¹⁹

Shit was not an option. As phrased in the original proposal,

“The Red Vienna Sourcebook will present Red Vienna as a zone of possibility that operates contrary to the teleological idea of linear inevitability leading from one war to the next.”²⁰

¹⁹ Comte, *op. cit.*, 50, 51.

²⁰ “Red Vienna Sourcebook Proposal,” 2.

This statement goes far to explain the editor's investment in Weimar Germany. Because, if the German catastrophe was caused by the decadence of the Weimar bourgeoisie, how to explain the Austrian catastrophe? What to do when the conclusions to be found in two similar social experiments turn out to be contradictory? This is where Teleology turns to Theodicy, the belief that God's will is revealed in time:

“While the downfall of the Weimar Republic has become a horrifying symbol for a certain historical fatalism prevalent in contemporary scholarship, Red Vienna (*Rotes Wien*) suggests a hopeful alternative, a different historical path...”²¹

Editor #1 wants to preserve the idea of a social class as the agent of History while snatching that role from the proletariat; for the Marxist's faith in the inevitable triumph of the proletariat he substitutes the creaky old legend of the inevitable triumph of the bourgeoisie, except that the proletariat, in the Marxist telling, emerges as a class in a dialectical reaction to another class whereas in Editor #1's retelling the bourgeoisie moves under its own steam, a Triumph of the Modernist Will.

²¹ “Red Vienna Sourcebook Proposal,” I.

To which the Introduction adds:

“Anson Rabinbach categorizes the Austrian SDAP (Social-Democratic Party) [...] as the realization of a long-overdue Enlightenment and [...] the final catalyst of Austrian liberalism.”²²

Except that Rabinbach, one of the foremost authorities on Red Vienna, is made to say the opposite of what he did say, and what he said, in this passage and in an extensive footnote, contradicts the thesis at the very heart of the *Red Vienna Sourcebook*:

“With the eclipse of liberal influence, especially in Viennese politics, after 1895-96, Austrian politics changed radically, reflecting the competition of irreconcilable social and political ideologies for mass support. In the maelstrom of world views which characterized Austrian politics at the turn of the century, only Social Democracy maintained the liberal heritage of enlightenment, parliamentary sovereignty and cosmopolitanism, though it remained tied to the representation of working-class interests throughout.”²³

²² “Introduction,” 2, referencing Anson Rabinbach. *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism. From Red Vienna to Civil War 1927-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 7; no such information appears on that page.

²³ Rabinbach. *op. cit.*, 11; and note 5, pp. 217-28, missing from the German translation (Rabinbach, *Vom roten Wien zum Bürgerkrieg*. Wien: Löcker, 1989); see also Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (New York: Random House, 1989), 168.

Far from being bourgeois elites continuing the great tradition of Austrian Liberalism, the Social-Democrats were the only ones to take up the progressive values touted by Liberalism. Unlike the liberal bourgeoisie, they meant to enforce them. There was no middle ground between the Socialists and their allies on the one hand, and the Austrian upper bourgeoisie: urbane, privileged, Catholic in practice, German in pretense and viciously anti-Semitic.²⁴ In a revealing aside Editor #1 suggests:

“Many opponents of Red Vienna were simply so horrible that, especially as a well-bred bourgeois, one wanted nothing to do with them.”

„Viele Gegner des Roten Wien waren einfach so grauslich, dass man gerade als wohlzogener bürgerlicher Mensch mit ihnen nichts zu tun haben wollte.“²⁵

One would be hard put to imagine opponents of Socialism so horrible that the “well-bred” bourgeoisie wouldn’t flock to them today as they flocked to the

²⁴ Malachi Haim Hacoen, “The Culture of Viennese Science and the Riddle of Austrian Liberalism,” *Modern Intellectual History* 6, 2 (2009): 369–396; Friedrich Stadler, “Spätaufklärung und Sozialdemokratie in Wien 1918-1938,” in Franz Kadrnoska, ed. *Aufbruch und Untergang: Österreichische Kultur zwischen 1918 und 1938* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1981), 468.

²⁵ Ingo Zechner et al., „Das Rote Wien als »Zweite Moderne«“.

Nazis, then the Austro-Fascists, then the Nazis again in the 'twenties and thirties and who knows? Tomorrow:

“The current financial crisis, the erosion of parliamentary democracy, and the increasing power of populist parties recall the period between the two world wars.”²⁶

Threatened by populism, weakened by the intellectual and economic disintegration of the neo-liberal compact in Europe, faced with the siren-call of Fascism, Austria's upper bourgeoisie is desperate to distance itself from its own role in the anti-democratic assaults of the 'thirties and to perpetuate its self-image as heir of a progressive, politically liberal caste. Again, Rabinbach:

“Under crisis conditions the ruling classes and conservatives reacted by giving first priority to the protection and preservation of their threatened positions and possessions, if need be by collaboration with counterrevolutionaries.”²⁷

To paraphrase Robert Musil, bearing witness to the progressive attitudes of the Austrian elites is like watching certain stars that appear in the night sky

²⁶ “Red Vienna Sourcebook Proposal”, 2.

²⁷ Rabinbach, note 5, p. 217, quoting Arno J. Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870-1954: An Analytic Framework* (New York, 1971), 70.

though they collapsed eons ago. Protecting and preserving its threatened position has been for the past decade the major concern of an elite that fancies itself the true heir of rational progressivism, a concern so great they have no qualms moving to the right to protect it. The Extreme Right has reciprocated by furnishing neo-liberals with a so-called Metapolitics, a retooling of Gramsci's "war of position." In turn, neo-liberal centers of power have responded enthusiastically to those extremists "providing those in power with ideological, philosophical, and cultural nourishment that can shape (or contradict) their decisions." In response the privileged occupants of the "extreme center" have repositioned themselves as instruments of "democratic counter-discourse" and "counter-propaganda."²⁸ The result is a kind of cafeteria fascism in which designations like "postmodernism," or "populist," or "utopians of '68" are applied indiscriminately to ideologies, opposing parties and academic disciplines.

One argument of the Extreme Right is well suited to assuage the fears of academics and intellectuals in that area that matters most: the integrity of their

²⁸ Mathieu Delahousse et Maël Thierry. « Marlène Schiappa annonce la création d'une unité de contre-discours républicain sur les réseaux sociaux. » *L'Obs*, vendredi 20 octobre 2020. <https://www.nouvelobs.com/terro-risme/2020/10/23/OBS35123/info-obs-marlene-schiappa-annonce-la-creation-d-une-unite-de-contre-discours-republicain-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux.html>; « Il ne s'agit plus de prendre le pouvoir mais de fournir à ceux qui sont au pouvoir une nourriture idéologique, philosophique et culturelle qui puisse façonner (ou contredire) leurs décisions ». Jacques Marlaud, quoted in Jean-Yves Camus et Nicolas Lebourg, *Les droites extrêmes en Europe* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2015), quoted in Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-right Politics in Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 52.

sinecures. In 1904 and again 1917 and 1919 the preeminent German sociologist Max Weber addressed the issue of objectivity in academic research, especially in the social sciences. In the hands of the extremists and their fellow-travelers Weber's sophisticated and wide-ranging analyses have become a cudgel against academic disciplines in general and the social sciences in particular, a global smear spreading from Poland to Brazil.²⁹

This is the crusade of Editor #1, an attempt to blend disparate, multileveled and oft-conflicting disciplines into one simplistic portmanteau of political incorrectness:

“One of the great achievements of Red Vienna is to have identified nonsense as both an intellectual and a political problem. Entire disciplines have emerged from it: from Logical Empiricism to Empirical Social Research.”

„Zu den großen Leistungen des Roten Wien zählt es, den Unsinn zugleich als intellektuelles und als politisches Problem identifiziert zu haben. Ganze Disziplinen sind daraus hervorgegangen: vom Logischen Empirismus bis zur Empirischen Sozialforschung.“³⁰

²⁹ Sylvain Laurens et Alain Bihr, « L'extrême droite à l'université : le cas Julien Freund », *Agone* vol. 54, no. 2 (2014) : 13-26. Max Weber et Isabelle Kalinowski, *La science, profession et vocation*. Suivi de « Leçons wébériennes sur la science & la propagande », *Agone*, collection Banc d'essais, 2005

³⁰ Zechner et al., „Das Rote Wien als »Zweite Moderne« “. Interview.

This comment refers to two back-to-back chapters in the *Sourcebook* that have little in common except the procrustean bed of editorial imagination. Part Two, Chapter 5, “Logical Empiricism” [II, 5, 91-110], is a sampling of the so-called *Wiener Kreis* or Vienna Circle, the loose gathering of philosophers of Language at the University of Vienna. Far from being monolithic, the Wiener Kreis gathered in a wide range of political and philosophical positions, from the politically neutral Schlick (who was nevertheless murdered for his “Jewish” views) to Rudolf Carnap, who denied the role of value judgements in logic, to Otto Neurath, Marxist polymath and survivor of the Bavarian Republic, the architect of an influential system of visual presentation, as pointed out in the comments accompanying this section. The label “Logical Empiricism,” is a catchall, not a designation but a protective reaction to the international debate provoked by the Vienna Group: the expression was thought to be preferable to “Logical Positivism,” which associated the group and its philosophies with Comte — an accusation which, as Michel Bourdeau has wittily suggested, in the hands of the critics of Logical Empiricism was a denigration of Comte himself:

“Their criticism was aimed not at positivism but at the neo-positivism of Carnap and the other Viennese, and this is why it would be more appropriate to speak of post-neo-positivism. But it has long been pointed out that, on points as

important as the need to take into account the context of discovery or the social dimension of scientific activity, the post-positivists were very often simply reiterating positions already developed by Comte.”

« Leur critique visait non le positivisme mais le néo positivisme de Carnap et des autres Viennois et c'est pourquoi il conviendrait, en toute rigueur, de parler plutôt de post-néo-positivisme. Or voilà longtemps qu'on a fait remarquer que, sur des points aussi importants que la nécessité de tenir compte du contexte de la découverte ou de la dimension sociale de l'activité scientifique, les post-positivistes ne faisaient bien souvent que retrouver des positions déjà développées par Comte. »³¹

The fear of falling back into vulgar positivism, with its claim to formal procedures untainted by social conditions, values or epistemologies, was keenly felt among the members of the Wiener Kreis. By Editor #1, not so much. The two secondary sources that authoritatively present these opposing positions in all their complexity are missing from the short bibliography appended to this section.³² The preceding chapter (“Empirical Social Research,” II, 4, 69-89) has

³¹ Michel Bourdeau, « Philosophie française contemporaine : Comte redivivus », *Dialogue*, Juin 2007 (46.03) : 589 – 611 ; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/231865256_Philosophie_francaise_contemporaine_Comte_redivivus ; Michel Bourdeau, Entry "Auguste Comte", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/comte/> .

³² Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin. *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. New York: Touchstone, 1972; Malachi Haim Hacoen. *Karl Popper. The Formative Years 1902-1945. Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; see also Don Howard. “Politics and Philosophy of Science in the Nineteenth Century.” Plenary address at the 2002 HOPOS conference in Montreal <https://www.academia.edu/8181780/>; Alan Scott,

little in common with the adjacent one except for the adjective “empirical” with its false suggestion of a unified field of science. Rather than a narrow application of empirical or statistical methodologies, Social Psychology (to call it by its proper name) was the product of a no-holds-barred process of methodological flexibility and improvisation with Marxism at its core, constituting, as Adler and Hilferding stated, a “deliberate linkage of Marxist thought-conclusions and methods with the whole of modern intellectual life.” At one point Otto Neurath led a seminar devoted to the translation of Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* into positivist language. “I need hardly say that the attempt failed,” wrote Marie Jahoda.³³ Neurath himself distinguished between what he called “social book-keeping,” a scientific methodology that involved a detached observer manipulating objective criteria, and “Social Psychology,” an alliance of Marxist-inspired social theories with Freudian and Adlerian psychoanalysis.³⁴ “Social Psychology” would be the appropriate description for five of the six selections included under the misleading heading “Empirical Social Research:” Paul Lazarsfeld, co-author of *Marienthal*, the celebrated

“Introduction to Otto Neurath’s ‘Bourgeois Marxism’ (1930) and ‘Worldview and Marxism’ (1931), *Sociologica* 2020, 14(1): 227-234; <https://sociologica.unibo.it/article/view/10821>.

³³ Jahoda, “The emergence of social psychology in Vienna: an exercise in long-term memory,” 345.

³⁴ Jahoda, 344.

survey of unemployment, who would later develop quantitative approaches in America; Marie Jahoda, his co-author; Käthe Leichter, Socialist writer and administrator, who would become a figurehead of the Left Opposition within the Party. As Jahoda put it,

"Austrian research, pushed toward sociology by its Austro-Marxist roots, was forced by its ties with psychology to deal systematically with complex subjective experiences. The combination of quantitative and qualitative sociological and psychological data and analysis, based on concepts from both disciplines was, at the time, an original approach."³⁵

A considerable amount of raw statistical data survives from Red Vienna, mostly in the City Library (*Wienbibliothek im Rathaus*); little of it is used in contemporary research; none appears in the *Red Vienna Sourcebook*.

Charles A Gulick's monumental *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*, the foundational study on Red Vienna and an indispensable reference for statistical data, much of it collected *in situ* by the author himself, is not mentioned at all. This is ironic, considering that the book was originally written in English and doubly ironic since a fair number of the iconic texts of Red Vienna originally quoted or

³⁵ Jahoda, *op. cit.*, 347; see also Charles H. Clavey. "Resiliency or Resignation: Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Austro-Marxism, and the Psychology of Unemployment, 1919–1933," *Modern Intellectual History* (2019), 1–25.

referenced by Gulick have been faithfully inserted in the *Sourcebook*. When Gulick's work first was printed in German translation it inspired a flurry of publishing activity from right-wing Austrian forces eager to bury his message under their exculpatory own.³⁶ The flurry lives on.

Philosophers and sociologists alike distinguish between *Wertfreiheit* and *Werturteilsfreiheit*: between value-free research and research free from prejudice. Similar distinctions have been drawn by “post-neo-positivists” like Hilary Putnam and Paul Feyerabend, and by Marie Jahoda herself.³⁷ It's a distinction lost on those who lob accusations of bias and prejudice against post-modernists, Marxists and others today. Similar accusations might as well have been directed at Jahoda, Leichter and others, because the thinkers and doers of Red Vienna were not so much influenced by the “scientific” Marx of Marxist-

³⁶ Charles A. Gulick. *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*. Vol. I. *Labor's Workshop of Democracy*; Vol. II. *Fascism's Subversion of Democracy*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948; The German translation appeared in five volumes in 1950 (*Österreich von Habsburg zu Hitler*. Wien: Danubia-Verlag) and again in 1976 in an abbreviated version which the author found to be unreliable (Wien: Forum). A digital version of the English original (Vol. I) appears to be in preparation from De Gruyter. <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1525/9780520327634/html>; see also Florian Wenninger. “Austrian politics of history, made in Berkeley? The economist Charles A. Gulick as historian of interwar Austria.” Research paper sponsored by the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, March 20, 2018; <https://mymarshallplan.squarespace.com/news-2019/2018/3/17/new-research-papers>

³⁷ Jahoda, *op. cit.*, 347; Hilary Putnam. *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, Harvard 2004. Paul Feyerabend, *Wider den Methodenzwang*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1975; Entry „Werturteilsfreiheit“ in Karl-Heinz Hillmann, *Wörterbuch der Soziologie* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1994), 932; Marc-Kévin Daoust « Neutralité scientifique (A) », dans Maxime Kristanek (dir.), *L'Encyclopédie philosophique*; <https://encyclophilo.fr/neutralite-scientifique-a>

Leninism as the humanistic, epistemological Marx whose early writings were rediscovered and disseminated a few years after his death, to echo far and wide in the writings of Red Vienna, much as the thought of Rousseau is at once omnipresent yet invisible in the writings of the French Revolution: the point of value-free research was to be passionately political, or what's the use? Ironically, after Leichter was banned from Germany because of her involvement with the workers' council movement in 1918 it was Max Weber who intervened to allow her to earn her doctorate with highest honors — the same Max Weber who at the time was elaborating those theories of value-free research invoked by the Right and the Extreme Center to marginalize the methods and beliefs of Leichter, Jahoda and others today. Red Vienna marks the turn from a trust in rational empirical science toward a value-driven way-of-being, an ethics, a changing-of-the-world. It is this changing of the world that the Right and Center are determined to resist at all costs, then as now, in defense of their belief that the thrust of capitalism is "rationalism," not "orientation to profit... but such orientation in the context of careful, systematic rational planning and discipline," to quote Talcott Parsons, the influential American

sociologist whose translations of Weber are known for their tendentiousness.³⁸ And here is Editor #1 going down the rabbit-hole of his own methodology:

“The philosophers only *interpreted* the world in their various ways, asserted Karl Marx [...], but what really matters is to *change* it. [...] To change society it is necessary to understand it first. [...] This demand for evidence-based policy is what creates the space for utopias that are more than mere fantasies, but it also becomes a utopia in itself when facts no longer form the basis for political decisions.”³⁹

It's been a commonplace for well over a hundred years that Modernity is the objective effect of bourgeois subjectivity. It's another commonplace of bourgeois intellectuals to believe that the performance of bourgeois subjectivity is not merely made possible (*bedingt*) by historical conjunctures; it determines them. The role of the bourgeois intellectual, to turn Marx back to his original sense, is not to change the world through deeds, but to pretend his thoughts suffice simply because they are the right thoughts — and they must be the right thoughts since he's the one who thought them. The Truth of Reason is

³⁸ Talcott Parsons, "Preface to New Edition," in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons [1958] (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), xv.

³⁹ Introduction, Chapter Four, "Empirical Social Research," *Red Vienna Sourcebook*, 69.

always justified by its “success,” regardless of the fact that “success” consists merely of the verification of the truth of the original projection. Positivism is the Diamat of the Ruling Class.

2

“It is time to admit that bourgeois philosophy can only produce verbal statements while working against the great ends it pretends to pursue.”

« Il est temps de dire que la philosophie bourgeoise peut seulement produire des déclarations verbales, mais travaille réellement contre les grandes fins qu'elle prétend poursuivre. » Paul Nizan, Les Chiens de garde.

The *Red Vienna Sourcebook* is like a lobster. It's a treat, but there's a lot of work involved and you need to figure out how the parts fit together before you get to the meat.

Unfortunately, the parts don't fit. the *Sourcebook* mirrors the failed strategy of Otto Bauer, the de-facto leader of the Socialist Party who dreamed of maintaining a balance of forces between antagonistic classes.⁴⁰ Taking the analogy a step further, the *Sourcebook* is weakened by the intransigence of at least one editor, a mirror of the politics of division and polarization practiced by the Austrian Right, then and now. One of the finest collections of Austro-Marxist writings available in English is subtitled *The Ideology of Unity*. This one could have been called "The Ideology of Splitting."⁴¹

Likewise, the City of Vienna today is in a position similar to Red Vienna then, a Socialist fiefdom posing as the last defender of the social compact in the face of growing erosion from the forces of neo-liberalism in the Federal Government and the European Union as a whole. Like the liberal elites, the present-day Socialist Party of Austria (SPÖ) has an incentive to claim a continuity with the Social-Democrats of the First Republic, only it's an incentive of a different type. The SPÖ's emphasis on the unthreatening nature of Red Vienna,

⁴⁰ Otto Bauer, "The Equilibrium of Class Strengths" in *Austro-Marxism: The Ideology of Unity* Volume I *Austro-Marxist Theory and Strategy*, ed. Mark E. Blum and William Smaldone (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 323-337; „Gleichgewicht der Klassenkräfte“, *Der Kampf; Sozial-demokratische Monatsschrift*, 17 (1924): 57-67.

⁴¹ Mark E. Blum and William Smaldone, eds. *Austro-Marxism: The Ideology of Unity* Vol. 1. *Austro-Marxist Theory and Strategy*; Volume II. *Changing the World: The Politics of Austro-Marxism* Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016, 2017; entry "Splitting of the Object" in J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 430.

its attempts to deflect divisions by the Right, mask its unwillingness to confront the limitations of its political and economic ambitions. Faced with unremitting assaults, the SPÖ has fallen back on quality-of-life issues, conceding the political and economic narrative to the Extreme Center. The present mayor, an urbane historian who was formerly City Councilor for Urban Planning (*Stadtrat für Wohnen, Wohnbau und Stadterneuerung*) has a personal interest in comparing the achievements of his administration in housing and urban planning to those of Red Vienna — a somewhat sentimental interest, considering that Vienna is a finance capital for Central Europe, with the concomitant disparities in income and influence; considering as well that Vienna's aggressive housing policy today is dependent on banking and credit, not on direct taxation. What Rabinbach wrote of Red Vienna applies to Vaguely Pink Vienna as well: "Its political fatalism was counteracted by its institutional optimism."⁴²

Considering the resonance of the Viennese model among housing activists in America it's important to distinguish between today's version and the radical version of Red Vienna. I recently spent an afternoon scanning page after page from the *Sourcebook* for my friend Theo in Harlem who's running an insurgent

⁴² Anson Rabinbach. "Politics and Pedagogy: The Austrian Social Democratic Youth Movement 1931-32," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 13, No. 2, Special Issue: *Workers' Culture* (April 1978): 339.

campaign for City Comptroller. I might have done better sending him a copy of Eve Blau's monumental *The Architecture of Red Vienna*, originally published in English and the most comprehensive survey of the topic to date.⁴³ As luck would have it, one of the three editors of the Sourcebook is a researcher in the archives of the *Verein für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, the Association for the History of the Workers' Movement located in the imposing old Party headquarters. [<http://www.vga.at/articles/nav/351>]. He's the only one of the three who brings to the table a background in the history of Red Vienna.

Nevertheless, the first page of the Introduction describes Red Vienna as “a one-of-a-kind experiment in democratic socialism” [1]. It was not. It was a one-of-a-kind experiment in Social Democracy. The misstatement may originate with the translation, which displays a certain ignorance of American political usage: In contemporary parlance a Democratic Socialist believes a just society can be achieved within the parameters of bourgeois democracy while a Social-Democrat would argue for the need to transcend these parameters, democratically if at all possible.⁴⁴ By these criteria the present Viennese administration barely reaches the level of democratic progressivism while the

⁴³ Eve Blau. *The architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

⁴⁴ Michael Harrington. *The Twilight of Capitalism*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.

administration of Red Vienna was Democratic Socialist in day-to-day matters and the Party membership ranged from Democratic Socialist to a left wing issued from the workers council movement and the *Unabhängige*, the “Independents” who had first formed in opposition to the War and would rise again to contest the appeasement policies of the Party leadership, pushing for open resistance in the last years of Red Vienna.⁴⁵ Part II, Chapter 6, Selection 5 “The Struggle for State Power” [124-126] features a portion of the Linz Program of 1926 by which the Party committed itself to violent defensive action in defense of Democracy. “Max Adler. Bourgeois or Social Democracy” [II, 6, 1, 115-116] warns of the restraints imposed by bourgeois democracy and the need to transcend them for a true democracy to emerge. On the right, meanwhile, stood Karl Renner, first Chancellor, then first President of Austria after World War II, represented in four selections [I, 1, 3, 22-23; II, 6, 2, 117-119; VI, 19, 6, 380-382; XI, 32, 1, 629-631], who fully merited the Leninist designation of “social-traitor.”

One need not dwell on the tensions between these positions within the Party — but one should. To recycle Marxist terminology: was the Party reactive or proactive? An instance of Bernsteinian Revisionism negating the very

⁴⁵ Anson Rabinbach. *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism. From Red Vienna to Civil War 1927-1934*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

possibility of revolutionary change, or an attempt at gradualism that conceived revolutionary change as inevitable and therefore in need of patient preparation?⁴⁶ In theory the Party never departed from the latter; the Introduction favors the former:

“Red Vienna [...] has the potential to be considered a model for strategies of urban economic crisis management, the re-democratization of urban space, or the politics of housing construction and urban planning. [p. 5]”

The terms seem unexceptional, giving a broad sense of those areas of concern shared by urban administrators in any number of liberal or progressive democracies today. But as Jahoda would have pointed out, one need only recombine the givens of empirical data to provide a new set of questions and concerns. Part VII, “Housing,” covers 53 pages [389-442], not enough to cover adequately Red Vienna’s greatest claim to fame, its massive program of social housing that served and still serves as a model, or at least an inspiration, for progressive social movements worldwide. Of those pages, however, a third are devoted to “Interior Design,” an instance of what the French call *noyer le poisson*, “drowning the fish:” an exhibition or publication starts out

⁴⁶ Tom Bottomore, “Austro-Marxist Conceptions of the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism.” *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Volume 30, Issue 1-2 (January 1, 1989): 109 – 120.

with a particular focus, then a new editor or curator takes over and pressures or is pressured to “enrich” the offerings by piling on additional material to “correct the balance.”⁴⁷ From all the evidence this occurred with the *Red Vienna Sourcebook* if its organizational confusion, its contradictory statements and the tinge of editorial angst are indicators. The centerpiece of the section on Interior Design is a text by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, the architect best known for creating the original prototype of the Efficiency (or “Frankfurt”) Kitchen [VII, 22, 5]. It’s jarring to read this next to articles about curtains, but it’s instructive that the two are lumped together: criticism of architectural design in Red Vienna tends to swing back and forth from the suggestion that efficiency is bourgeois and chintz is socialist, to the reverse, a kind of frozen dialectic in need of thaw.⁴⁸

More misdirection:

⁴⁷ Wolfgang Kos, Sándor Békési and Wien Museum Karlsplatz and Historisches Museum. *Kampf Um Die Stadt: Politik, Kunst Und Alltag Um 1930*. Exhibition, Wien Museum im Künstlerhaus, 19. November 2009 - 28. März 2010; Wien: Czernin, 2010; Nathalie Heinich and Michaël Pollak. *Vienne à Paris : Portrait D'une Exposition*. Paris : Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989 ; Kirk Varnedoe. *Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture, and Design, an art exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1986*. New York: Museum of Modern Art. Boston: Little, Brown, 1986.

⁴⁸ Leonardo Benevolo, *History of modern architecture*. Volume II. *The Modern Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 554-55; Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centurie*. Fourth edition (Harmondsworth, England: 1977), 472; Manfredo Tafuri. *Vienna rossa : la politica residenziale nella Vienna socialista, 1919-1933*. Milan: Electa, 1980.

“The young Karl Polanyi argued with Otto Neurath and Ludwig von Mises about questions of centrally planned economies and socialization. While Mises and [...] Friedrich Hayek [...] swore by the self-regulatory power of the market [...] Polanyi (with his guild-socialist models) remained close to Otto Bauer’s theoretical ideas about the socialization of industries and services.” [Introduction, 7.]

Never mind that at least one of the quoted sources says the opposite of what’s claimed here:⁴⁹ because isn’t it always already true that socialists and such, being no more than negators of the free market system, will aim to “socialize” all aspects of the economy and therefore all aspects of our lives? And what can “socialize” mean but regimentation, control from above, the abolition of personal and economic freedoms? Ironically, the Introduction channels the post-modernist philosopher Michel Foucault to denounce “the realities of paternalism and half-hearted reforms” [7], an instance of what the late Marshall Sahlins called “poststructuralism [as] a paranoid style neofunctionalism.”⁵⁰ For all its bias, Helmut Gruber’s *Red Vienna. An Experiment in Working-Class Culture* would have better suited this argument: it’s the most comprehensive

⁴⁹ Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: A Life on the Left* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 101-05; see also Anson Rabinbach *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism. From Red Vienna to Civil War 1927-1934* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 25.

⁵⁰ Marshall Sahlins and Filipe Calvao, “In the Absence of the Metaphysical Field. An Interview with Marshall Sahlins,” *Exchange* (2006): 6; https://www.academia.edu/46559941/In_the_Absence_of_the_Metaphysical_Field_An_Interview_with_Marshall_Sahlins

survey of Red Vienna available in English after Gulick.⁵¹ Like Gruber, only more so, the *Sourcebook* distorts the meaning of “socialization” (*Sozialisierung*) while misreading the concept of *Erziehung*, “education.” The two are tightly intertwined: In his seminal *Feuerbach Theses* of 1845 Karl Marx rejected a mechanistic theory of social determinism to propose that a socialist society must be achieved through a circular process of mutually reinforcing human activities: education as socialization. The manuscript was first published by Friedrich Engels in 1888, and it deeply influenced the thinkers and doers of Red Vienna:

“The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. [...] The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.”⁵²

„Die materialistische Lehre von der Veränderung der Umstände und der Erziehung vergißt, daß die Umstände von den Menschen verändert und der

⁵¹ Helmut Gruber. *Red Vienna. Experiment in Working-Class Culture 1919-1934*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; <https://libcom.org/files/redvienna.pdf>

⁵² Karl Marx, “Feuerbach Theses” [1845]; <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>

Erzieher selbst erzogen werden muß. [...] Das Zusammenfallen des Ändern[s] der Umstände und der menschlichen Tätigkeit oder Selbstveränderung kann nur als revolutionäre Praxis gefaßt und rationell verstanden werden.⁵³

It was not enough for the right men to have the right thoughts. The right thoughts must be one with the right activities in a society united as one, and The One was the New Man, the newly formed and self-forming citizen of the future, formed not by the socializing of the means of production but by the so- ciation of relations among producers.⁵⁴

As for Polanyi, the Sourcebook relegates him to two trivial references includ- ing the one cited earlier. Yet Polanyi has become one of the most, if not the most influential thinker of Red Vienna among socialists and radicals in the English-speaking world today for his belief that economic transactions under capitalism involve two parallel and opposing movements, commodification and decommodification. Commodification is the deliberate embedding of all social transactions into economic transactions, decommodification is resistance to that process, spontaneous or not:

⁵³ Karl Marx, „Thesen über Feuerbach“, *Marx-Engels Werke*, Band 3 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1969) 533-534; http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me03/me03_533.htm

⁵⁴ On “sociation” see “Max Adler” in Mark E. Blum and William Smaldone, eds., *Austro-Marxism: The Ideology of Unity* Vol. I. *Austro-Marxist Theory and Strategy* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 22 sqq.

“*laissez-faire* is not spontaneous, but, somewhat counter-intuitively, it is planned, whereas social protectionism was a spontaneous reaction to the social dislocation imposed by an unrestrained free market”⁵⁵

Think, for instance, of a country under lockdown: the economically structured transaction of ordering a book on Amazon displaces the casual social process involved in walking to the local library to borrow one. Decommodification reverses the process. (Georg Lukács, Polanyi’s fellow Hungarian-in-Exile in Vienna in the 1920s, suggests a similar dynamic.)⁵⁶ Likewise, a cooperative draws no clear line between consumption and production: the process of decommodification itself becomes a form of production, and vice-versa; yet the *Sourcebook* does not mention consumer and worker cooperatives, which were aggressively encouraged by Karl Renner and to which Gulick devotes a chapter.

The Introduction states:

⁵⁵ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*. Foreword by Robert M. MacIver (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944), 71.

⁵⁶ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics* [*Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein: Studien über marxistische Dialektik*, 1923], translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 84.

“The innovative economic approach of Red Vienna consisted of the deliberate taxation of luxury items rather than the destruction of luxury as prescribed by orthodox Marxism.” [4]

Of course orthodox Marxism (meaning, I suppose, the Marxism of the Soviet Union) does not prescribe the “destruction of luxury.” Nor did Red Vienna tax luxury *items* but luxury *consumption* on such items as extra servants, stables of horses, and the consumption of coffee and liquors in the more elegant establishments. Hugo Breitner, City Councilor for Finance [*Stadtrat für Finanzen*], raised the cost of luxury consumption while lowering the cost of necessary consumption (housing, water, transportation) because it was imperative, in a small country desperate for foreign currency, to keep costs to workers low so that salaries and other costs of production could be kept low as well, allowing the country to compete internationally [Hugo Breitner. “Capitalist or Socialist Taxation?” I, 2, 2, 37-39].⁵⁷

The same process affected the all-important cultural sector in Vienna, which was attempting to maintain its legacy as a *Kulturstadt*, an international cultural destination. Off-the-cuff capitalists, who cherish the illusion that capitalism is

⁵⁷ Leonardo Benevolo. *History of modern architecture*. Volume II. *The Modern Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 511; Charles A. Gulick, Jr., *Vienna Taxes since 1918*, *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 53, No. 4 (Dec. 1938): 533-556.

equivalent to truck-and-barter as surely as they imagine all Marxists to be intent on sabotage and vandalism, focus on that which is bartered while ignoring the process by which people, horses and a performance of Fidelio are commodified.⁵⁸ In the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* Marx posited the process of cultural consumption and production as a model for commodification. To the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the barbaric cultured bourgeoisie, a museum or musical performance was an invitation to the privileged contemplation of the Beautiful; in the progressive views of the liberal industrial elites and Socialists alike from the late nineteenth century on, a museum or musical performance was an invitation to Erziehung, the acquisition of technical knowledge and attitudes for the tasks ahead: the earliest forms of worker resistance to Habsburg autarchy emerged from cultural education and workers' choirs.

The distinction between Bildung and Erziehung is smudged in the *Sourcebook's* translation of a text by Paul Pisk, a close associate of Arnold Schoenberg who — with Schoenberg's permission — covered contemporary music for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the Party daily:

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, "Chapter II. Exchange," *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 35* (London: Lawrence & Wishart 2010), 94 sqq.

“And since it is our hope that the entire populace, the proletariat, will support the musical culture of the future, we must now spend time and effort to engage workers with music...”⁵⁹

„Und da es unser aller unser aller Hoffnung ist, daß das Volk in seiner Gesamtheit, das Proletariat, Träger der musikalischen Kultur in der Zukunft sein soll, ist schon jetzt Gewicht darauf zu legen, daß sich der Arbeiter mit der Musik beschäftigt...”⁶⁰

The translation, in fact, should read:

“And since the hope among us all is that the People as a whole, the Proletariat, shall be the bearer [*Träger*] of musical culture into the Future, it is important even today to promote the workers’ engagement with music...”⁶¹

Pisk taught alongside the Communist composer Hanns Eisler at the *Verein für Volkstümliche Musikpflege* (“Association for a People’s Music”) and at the adult education centers, the *Volkshochschule*, a refuge for intellectuals and

⁵⁹ Paul Pisk. “Can the Worker Find a Close Relationship to Contemporary Music?” *Red Vienna Sourcebook* VIII, 24, 3, 473.

⁶⁰ Dr. Paul Pisk, „Kann der Arbeiter ein inneres Verhältnis zur Zeitgenössischen Musik finden?“ *Kunst und Volk. Mitteilungen des Vereines »Sozialdemokratische Kunststelle«* Nummer, 2, 2e Jahrgang (Februar 1927): 5.

⁶¹ Paul A. Pisk, “Can the worker find an inner connection with Contemporary Music?”, p. 5; Translated by Paul Werner; <https://theorangepress.com/redviennareader/pisk/Pisk%20Can%20the%20Worker.pdf>

academics denied the right to teach at the University and one of few places in Vienna where Schoenberg's system was taught. Pisk's interest was music instruction, not music appreciation, and this article was meant to explain the reception of music to the *Vertrauensmänner*, the Party members who ensured liaison with the rank-and-file.⁶² To the bourgeois (or the translator) it's unimaginable that the proletariat could be the bearer ["Träger"] of new music into the future, a producer as well as a consumer. Proletarians may only "support" music — financially, like good consumers.

Further on the *Sourcebook* focuses on an intraparty donnybrooks between Oskar Pollak, a rising journalist at the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and David Josef Bach, a friend of Schoenberg who headed the *Sozialistische Kunststelle*, the Social-Democratic Arts Council. As Bach insisted, the issue was less about making the "right" kind of culture accessible than with equal accessibility to culture, whatever its quality in the bourgeois mind; less of a concern with the quality of the offerings than with the economic and social relations enforced; less about the abolition of luxury than its redistribution through the *Lustbarkeitsteuer*, the

⁶² VHA (Volkshochschule Archiv), Vienna. <http://www.vhs.at/vhsarchiv-home.html>

tax on entertainment whose proceeds funded low-cost tickets for the working class.⁶³

The sense of reciprocity between the consumption and production of culture is especially strong in the writings of Ernst Fischer, journalist and editor at the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and an activist on the Left wing of the Party. Fischer is known to English speakers as the author of a book of art-historical theory, *The Necessity of Art*, and a revealing autobiography.⁶⁴ In Austria he's resented for his role as a member of the Communist Party in charge of Culture in the first post-WWII coalition government, and the person to be thanked for the revival of Austria's cultural economy. There are five selections by Fischer in the source-book. Two of them downplay Fischer's role as an advocate for working-class youth frustrated by their lack of political autonomy, focusing instead on his discussion of sexuality [IV, 13, 7, 265-268] and their misplaced interest in sports [VI, 18, 7, 365-67]; two others deal directly with decommodification in production and consumption [I, 3, 8, 62-64; VI, 17, 5, 343-346]. Of these last, the

⁶³ David Josef Bach, "Why do we not have a Social Democratic Art Policy," *Sourcebook VIII*, 24, 2, 468-471; Oscar Pollak, "Why do we not have a Social Democratic Art Policy," *Sourcebook VIII*, 26, 6, 515-517; see also Gruber, *Red Vienna*, 97, who unaccountably ascribes the second article to Otto Leichter; Brigitte Ott. *Die Kunstpolitik der Gemeinde Wien, 1918-1934*, phil Diss, Wien, 1968.

⁶⁴ Ernst Fischer. *An Opposing Man [Erinnerungen und Reflexionen, 1969]*, translated by Peter and Betty Ross with an introduction by John Berger. New York: Liveright, 1974; Ernst Fischer. *The Necessity of Art. A Marxist Approach [Von der Notwendigkeit der Kunst, 1959]*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963.

first (“I am conducting an Economic Study on Myself“) reads like a paraphrase of Polanyi:

“The question is whether the economy will ultimately crush us or whether we will subjugate the economy.”

„Die Frage ist, ob schließlich die Wirtschaft uns vergewaltigen wird oder ob wir die Wirtschaft uns unterwerfen werden.“⁶⁵

Or what Polanyi would have called

“a development under which the economic system ceases to lay down the law to society and the primacy of society over that system is secured.”⁶⁶

Despite manifest differences, Polanyi’s thought converges with Marx in his 1857 Introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy (Grundrisse)*, left in manuscript form and published for the first time in 1903 in *Die Neue Zeit*, the major German-speaking journal of Marxist scholarship:

⁶⁵ “e. f.” [Ernst Fischer]. “Ich untersuche mich volkswirtschaftlich. Arbeiter-Zeitung, January 6, 1931): 5. <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=aze&datum=19310106&seite=5>

⁶⁶ Quoted in Gareth Dale, “Social Democracy, Embeddedness and Decommodification: On the Conceptual Innovations and Intellectual Affiliations of Karl Polanyi,” *New Political Economy* (September 2010), published online (17 June 2010), 7; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232989634_Social_Democracy_Embeddedness_and_Decommodification_On_the_Conceptual_Innovations_and_Intellectual_Affiliations_of_Karl_Polanyi

“Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer. It thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the drive [Trieb] to consumption.”⁶⁷

„Die Produktion produziert die Konsumtion daher, 1. indem sie ihr das Material schafft; 2. indem sie die Weise der Konsumtion bestimmt; 3. indem sie die erst von ihr als Gegenstand gesetzten Produkte als Bedürfnis im Konsumenten erzeugt. Sie produziert daher Gegenstand der Konsumtion, Weise der Konsumtion, Trieb der Konsumtion.“⁶⁸

Capitalism splits social interactions into two separate activities: consumption and production. Consumption is what the bourgeoisie does, or rather, *is*.⁶⁹ Production is what the proletariat does and is, according to the original sense of the word. (*Proletarius*: in Roman Law, one whose service to the State consists

⁶⁷ Karl Marx, “Introduction to the Grundrisse” [“Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy”] <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse>

⁶⁸ Karl Marx. „Einleitung [zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie]“; unpublished manuscript, late August-mid September 1857, reprinted in Karl Marx. Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, Band XIII (Berlin: Dietz Verlag), 622, 624; Hacoen, *Karl Popper*, 440 erroneously states that the *Grundrisse* as a whole was not available until 1939.

⁶⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* II. “The Flâneur,” translated by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983), 58-59, 104-05.

in the production of children.) Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of culture in the Age of Capital. As Marx stated:

“The art object like every other product creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object. [...] Consumption likewise produces the producer’s inclination by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need.”

„Der Kunstgegenstand - ebenso jedes andre Produkt - schafft ein kunstsinniges und schönheitsgenußfähiges Publikum. [...] Ebenso produziert die Konsumtion die Anlage des Produzenten, indem sie ihn als zweckbestimmendes Bedürfnis solliziert“⁷⁰

The division is manifest from the early nineteenth century in the rationalization of the bourgeois self, the agent of the bourgeois Will to Culture.⁷¹ Among German speakers this division expresses itself under the guise of a distinction between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*, the first the passive sufferance of the lower classes, the latter the active privilege of bourgeoisie innately endowed with a narrow, determining view of what “Culture” is to mean.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Jan Ellen Goldstein. *The Post-revolutionary Self. Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Sigmund Freud, in the first page of *The Future of an Illusion*, wrote, “I scorn to distinguish between culture and civilization.” Ernst Fischer, who admired Freud, would have wholeheartedly agreed.

Far from being scorned, the distinction between Kultur and Zivilisation plays a central role in the organization of the *Sourcebook*, as it does in much of Austrian social, political and cultural life, centered around the concept of *Deutschtum* (“Germanness”) in culture and in blood and an implicit belief in the superiority of the German *Kultur* and of German political experience as an organizing principle, the “grim manager” of Austrian nationhood.⁷² In Austria today as in most of Europe, formal and informal systems of privilege and precedence enforce a “Herrenvolk Democracy,” defined as “the extension of equality in political, economic, or other spheres to those within the dominant group but not to those without.”⁷³ Like many large urban areas worldwide Vienna harbors a large polyglot, multicultural population. Officially a third of the residents do not hold Austrian citizenship; the unofficial figure is higher.

⁷² William P. Barnett and Michael Woywode, “Red Vienna to the Anschluss: Ideological Competition among Viennese Newspapers during the Rise of National Socialism,” *The American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 109, No. 6 (May 2004):1455, n. 2; 1463; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3568550>

⁷³ Kenneth P. Vickery, “‘Herrenvolk’ Democracy and Egalitarianism in South Africa and the U.S. South,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 16, no. 3 (1974): 309.

A fair number of the *Sourcebook* selections challenge this dominance, reflecting the outlook of the more progressive segments of the Vienna City Administration, one of the financial sponsors of this project: “New guidelines for the Ranking of Apartment Applicants” for public housing, [III, 9, 1, 175-177] suggests a striving for impartiality in terms of national origin. As a Viennese architect recently explained to an American audience,

“We have right-wing populists talking about whether refugees deserve public housing. So there are still dangers ahead for the [Vienna] model.”⁷⁴

Trouble ahead, trouble behind. A selection on the “Expulsion of Refugees” [III, 9, 1, 179-182]; another on “The Persecution of Gypsies [*sic*] in ‘Red’ Vienna” [III, 9, 9, 189] and yet another on “Foreigners in our Labor Market” [III, 9, 5, 184-185] underscore the brutal reality of free-movement fantasies in the European Union today.

Tensions with people of Czech origin form a separate case [III, 9, 6-8, 185-188] with its roots in Habsburg anti-irredentism. There had long been a

⁷⁴ Andreas Rumpfhuber, quoted in Adam Forrest, “Vienna’s Affordable Housing Paradise,” *Huffington Post*, July 19, 2018 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/vienna-affordable-housing-paradise_n_5b4e0b12e4b0b15aba88c7b0

Czech-speaking Socialist movement in Vienna (distinct from the Austrian); Czechs had their own representatives in the Vienna City Council.

Another chapter is devoted to “Jewish Life and Culture” [III, 10, 191-210], illustrating the ways some Viennese Jews saw and thought about themselves, in contrast to the chapter dealing with the way non-Jewish Viennese saw the Jews, in other terms, with anti-Semitism [XI, 31, 609-625]. There seems to be no middle ground, and perhaps there is none. In the Austrian bourgeois mind, being Jewish is not something that’s produced by social conditions like being Austrian, or Czech or Black. It’s a consumer choice, personal responsibility for being Jewish. As the Introduction puts it [10], in Red Vienna “it was no longer enough to claim or to refuse a religious confession in order to establish your own identity,” an illustration, perhaps an affirmation, of what Steven Beller, among the most reliable writers on Vienna’s Jews, calls the “tails we win, heads you lose” bargain with modernity — or simply the choice enforced on Jews by self-styled modernists.⁷⁵ The problem with Positivism is, one never knows when description ends and prescription begins.

⁷⁵ Steven Beller, *Antisemitism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33; Michael Rothberg, “From Multidirectional Memory to the ‘Migrant Double Bind.’ An Interview with Michael Rothberg. *Austrian Studies Newsmagazine* Vol. 30, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 29.

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"Researchers 'after Nature' may present themselves as they wish, they are dominated by Philosophy. The only question is whether they want to be dominated by a poor fashionable philosophy or by a form of theoretical thinking based on familiarity with the history of thought and its achievements."

*„Die Naturforscher mögen sich stellen, wie sie wollen, sie werden von der Philosophie beherrscht. Es fragt sich nur, ob sie von einer schlechten Mode-Philosophie beherrscht werden wollen oder von einer form des theoretischen Denkens, die auf der Bekanntschaft mit der Geschichte des Denkens und mit deren Errungenschaften beruht.“ Friedrich Engels, *Dialectik der Natur*.*

In the end the reader's left with a disquieting sense of disconnect between the selections and the attempted explanations. Like a conference organizer who realizes too late that the keynote speaker is drunk, or a Communist, the commenters (at least a number) are left waving their arms, interrupting, cutting off the speaker, grasping for explanations or excuses in a futile attempt to deflect, cover up or co-opt the evidence of the selections themselves. Some of it is clumsy, like the convoluted introduction to the otherwise excellent chapter on "Freudo-Marxism and Individual Psychology" [II, 7, 133-149], which quotes a follower of Freud quoting Freud to argue that Freud didn't mean what Freud said, a half-hearted swipe at Elizabeth Ann Danto's groundbreaking argument that Freud meant what he said.⁷⁶ Some of it casually arrogant, like the off-the-cuff suggestion that Otto Bauer was an "assimilationist" Jew, at once offensive to the manner in which Bauer accepted his Jewishness and indifferent to Bauer's own position on assimilationism.⁷⁷ Then there are those red-baiting jabs so common among opportunistic faculty in American colleges, like the

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Ann Danto. *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice, 1918-1938*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

⁷⁷ Ernst Fischer, *An Opposing Man* (New York: Liveright, 1974), 134; Roni Gechtman, "Conceptualizing National-Cultural Autonomy - From the Austro-Marxists to the Jewish Labor Bund." *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 4 (2005), 17-49.

repeated suggestion that culture and science were imposed on the unreceptive proletariat by the usual methods of socialist coercion:

“This fusion of modernist themes with the lexicon of social democracy emphasizes the potential for Red Vienna’s literary culture beyond the narrow definition of party-sponsored realism and social allegory—if only for a small slice of the readership.” [497]

Because isn’t it always already true that the uneducated are too dumb to choose to be educated? This is what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “Racism of Intelligence”,

“That by which the dominant classes aim to produce a ‘theodicy of their own privilege’, as [Max] Weber says.[...] a dominant class whose reproduction depends, in part, on the transmission of cultural capital [...] The racism of intelligence is the characteristic form of sociodicy of a dominant class whose power rests in part on the possession of titles which, like academic titles, are supposed to be guarantees of intelligence and which have taken the place, in many societies, and for access even to positions of economic power, of ancient titles such as titles of ownership and nobility.”

« Le racisme de l’intelligence est ce par quoi les dominants visent à produire une “théodicée de leur propre privilège”, comme dit Weber [...] une classe

dominante dont la reproduction dépend, pour une part, de la transmission du capital culturel [...] Le racisme de l'intelligence est la forme de sociodicée caractéristique d'une classe dominante dont le pouvoir repose en partie sur la possession de titres qui, comme les titres scolaires, sont censés être des garanties d'intelligence et qui ont pris la place, dans beaucoup de sociétés, et pour l'accès même aux positions de pouvoir économique, des titres anciens comme les titres de propriété et les titres de noblesse. »⁷⁸

Or again, note the snide reference to “The Social Democrats’ preferred model of a centralized state” [Introduction, 3], applicable, if at all, to the Socialists’ half-hearted efforts to open up major industries to worker control immediately following the proclamation of the Republic. Yet, as Otto Bauer explained shortly thereafter,

“The enormous task of transforming production, the rationalization of the manufacture and distribution of goods... can only be accomplished on the basis of local and vocational self-government...[and] only on the basis of democracy.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, « Le Racisme de l'intelligence », *Questions de sociologie* (Paris : Éditions de minuit, 1980), 264.

⁷⁹ Otto Bauer, *Bolschewismus oder Sozialdemokratie* (Wien: Verlag der Volksbuchhandlung Vorwärts, 1920), quoted in Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism*, 39.

It was the bourgeoisie, not the powerless proletariat and its leaders, that favored a centralized authoritarian state: In 1919 the *Alpine Montangesellschaft*, the largest mining and steel conglomerate in Austria and its largest employer, was sold abroad to avoid worker control. The Alpine Montangesellschaft went on to build a centralized state of its own, complete with company towns and an armed militia, the Heimwehr, that played a major role in destroying the Republic.⁸⁰ Rather than arguing for a continuity between a mythical liberal bourgeoisie then and now, it might have been more fruitful to suggest Red Vienna was a temporary reprieve in the evolution of the *Ständestaat*, the Corporatist State, from the Habsburgs to the Austro-Fascist regime that opened the way to Hitler. It's an institution that never lost favor among the ruling classes and has become increasingly appealing to them of late.

Then the selections themselves. According to the initial proposal, "Each text will be annotated with notes to facilitate comprehension of names, people, concepts, organizations, and historical references" [5]. Most of the texts have few or no annotations. There is no biographic database appended, while the

⁸⁰ Jill Lewis, *Fascism and the Working Class in Austria 1918-1934. The Failure of Labour in the First Republic* (New York: Berg, 1991), 58 sqq..

vast number of names mentioned in the texts or in the comments are accompanied by brief, often redundant explanations.

At worst there is a synergy of disinformation between the work of translation and the work of interpretation. This is not to question the quality of the translations themselves, which are, on the whole, of high quality. Just that errors of omission become errors of commission when neither the translator nor the commenter understand the context in which the work was written. “Joseph Buttinger. The Viennese Workers’ College” [V, 16, 7, 327-329] is one example. On first reading the comments in the English edition one imagines the commenter to be a reactionary bourgeois feminist, one of those implacable foes of Socialism who have existed since the 1880’s when the future female leadership of Red Vienna was driven out of the feminist movement. This approach seems inappropriate when applied to the author of the selection involved, Joseph Buttinger, who is briefly identified in the English version as “after 1934 one of the leaders of the illegalized [sic] Revolutionary Socialists of Austria.” Buttinger eventually married Muriel Gardiner, the model for Lillian Hellman’s *Julia*.⁸¹ (Did Joe complain when dinner was late because Muriel had been dodging the Gestapo all day? I don’t recall.) Throughout, the English

⁸¹ Muriel Gardiner. *Code name "Mary." Memoirs of an American Woman in the Austrian underground.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

translation of the comments shows a tendentious disregard for nuance. For instance, the original German commenter is made to say that the Workers' University in question was not "aimed at the masses," while the original version uses the singular *die Masse*, which in German does not have the pejorative overtone of the plural *die Massen*. (Several questionable adjectives have been added as well.) In either language the commenter complains of a "lopsided gender distribution" (*Schiefelage in der Geschlechterverteilung*) in the Worker's University, which begs the question, whether it was more lopsided than in Red Vienna's proletarian culture as a whole. Since the Workers University recruited workers it's not surprising that a majority of recruits should be men, given the pervasive imbalance in gender roles overall. The workers council movement of 1919 had included homeworkers as a separate category with its own representatives, but one can't dismiss the uphill battle waged to give working women full equality, nor should one: the commenter references an article from a Socialist women's journal explaining that the Workers' University offered full scholarships with residencies to working-class women who otherwise would be shunted to less strenuous, less advanced training schools, so the reference to excluded "masses" seems especially gratuitous.⁸²

⁸² Emmy Freundlich, "Die erste Frauenschule in der Arbeiterhochschule," *Die Frau* 35, no. 11 (1926): 5. <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-plus?aid=fra&datum=1926&page=125>

In addition, the English equivalent of the word *Vertrauensmänner* is given as “men of confidence,” a literal rendition. The word means “shop stewards” (even Google Translate knows that.) In the original text Buttinger uses the gender-neutral term *Vertrauensperson* to designate shop-stewards as a general class and *Vertrauensmänner* to underline the male exclusivity of specific functions, consistent with usage in Party proceedings of the ‘thirties, which alternate between *Vertrauensleute* (“trusted people”) and *Vertrauensmänner* according to need. So why this nonsensical wild gender chase?

The answer lies with Editor #3, an American professor of German Literature:

“What is the status of Red Vienna today at U.S. universities?”

“Red Vienna is regularly evoked in academic discussions, especially when it comes to housing.”⁸³

When you’re a hammer everything looks like a nail. When you’re an academic everything looks like material for your syllabus and a topic for your next conference, say on “Women in Red Vienna.”

⁸³ „Das Rote Wien als »Zweite Moderne«. Interview with Lukas Wieselberg, ÖRF.

Which brings me to Käthe Leichter, the brilliant, left-wing scholar and activist who in the waning years of Red Vienna was increasingly vocal (along with Ernst Fischer and others) as a spokesperson for the rank-and-file increasingly frustrated by the Party leadership's insistence on playing by the rules of bourgeois democracy — rules the bourgeoisie itself had no intention of following. “Käthe Leichter. The Best Defense” [II, 6, 7, 128-130] is Leichter's response to the Paris worldwide meeting of the Labor and Socialist International in August 1933 to address the threat of fascism which, having engulfed Germany, was now looming in Austria. It was Leichter's last major intervention before the brutal events of February 12, 1934, when the Army joined with right-wing militias to storm the housing projects of Red Vienna, the first full-out fascist assault on a civilian population in Europe. In anticipation, Leichter wrote, it was imperative to empower the proletariat,

“Since [...] the workers' movement now threatened by fascism in other countries has been given a breathing space which, if correctly exploited, will determine if the decisive assault can be successfully repelled.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Käthe Leichter, “The Best Defense” [„Die beste Abwehr“], translated from the German with Notes and Commentary by Paul Werner (2020), 2; <https://theorangepress.com/redviennareader/leichter/Leichter%20The%20Best%20Defense.pdf>

„Denn [...] der Arbeiterbewegung, die in anderen Ländern vom Faschismus bedroht ist, eine Frist gegeben, von deren richtiger Nutzung es abhängen wird, ob der entscheidende Gegenangriff erfolgreich abgewehrt werden kann.“⁸⁵

This passage is missing from the *Sourcebook*. Instead, the commenter brings up a casual allusion of Leichter to “the economic fragmentation of the proletariat” as “ultimately [Leichter’s] best argument against a pointless, violent coup d’état.”

As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz points out, before deciding what the savage really meant to say one owes it to oneself to hear the savage out.⁸⁶

Leichter makes no such argument. In fact, the opposite. In another passage (missing once again) she defines

“the end-goal of our struggle against fascism: not bourgeois democracy again but the socialist conquest of power. [...] Power must be asserted by dictatorial means to safeguard against backlash.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Käthe Leichter. „Die beste Abwehr.“ *Der Kampf* XXVI, 11 (November 1933): 446; <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-plus?aid=dks&datum=1933&page=442>

⁸⁶ Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* Vol. 28, No. 1 (October 1974): 26-45.

⁸⁷ Leichter, “The Best Defense,” p. 11.

„als Endziel unseres Kampfes mit dem Faschismus, nicht wieder die bürgerliche Demokratie, sondern die sozialistische Machteroberung. [...] Es gilt [...] die Macht mit diktatorischen Mitteln zu behaupten, um vor Rückschlägen gesichert zu sein.“⁸⁸

The violence denounced by Leichter — and by Fischer too — is the crushing violence of bourgeois democracy itself: political violence, social violence, cultural violence and military violence as the final blow, while the commenter’s violence is the creaky bourgeois fantasy of a Bolshevik coup. Then again, as that other not-so-red Viennese, the “Knight of Liberalism” Ludwig Mises, put it, “Fascism will never be able to free itself from the power of the ideas of liberalism.” [„Der Faschismus sich niemals [...] von der Macht der Ideen des Liberalismus zu befreien vermögen wird.“⁸⁹

And vice-versa, of course.

⁸⁸ Leichter. „Die beste Abwehr,“ 450.

⁸⁹ Ludwig Mises, *Liberalismus* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1927) 43; quoted Leichter, “The Best Defense,” 17.

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“To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality. For ten who go farther, a hundred may easily stop [...], and the danger of this is too great to run!” Karl Marx in conversation with Henry Mayers Hyndman.

A few years back I was sitting with a group of community workers in a quarry at the edge of an ancient abandoned building in São Paulo. These were young activists, and they were enraptured by Red Vienna as they knew it. I had to remind them how the story ended; how a fragile democracy, always threatened by its opponents, at the end was dangling by a thread while the State itself progressively turned more violent and less democratic. Was it enough to approach Red Vienna from the belief that its success could easily be repeated? Or, as Leichter made clear, must one face the same bitter choices: to go down in resistance to the neo-liberal state, or to go down unresisting like the Social Democrats of the Weimar Republic? The *Sourcebook*,

like the European Project itself, has tied itself to the mast of neo-liberalism.
The best one might hope for today, is to salvage something from the wreck.
To quote the rallying cry of the Asturian worker's uprising of 1934, "Better Vienna than Berlin!"
