

BOOK REVIEWS

Austro-Marxism: The Ideology of Unity. Vol. 1. Austro-Marxist Theory and Strategy. Ed. by Mark E. Blum and William Smaldone. [Historical Materialism, 109.] Brill, Leiden 2016. xix, 543 pp. € 190.00; \$253.00. (E-book: € 190.00; \$253.00).

Austro-Marxism: The Ideology of Unity. Vol. 2. Changing the World: The Politics of Austro-Marxism. Ed. by Mark E. Blum and William Smaldone. [Historical Materialism, 138.] Brill, Leiden 2017. xi, 855 pp. € 235.00; \$270.00. (E-book: € 235.00; \$270.00).

In the history of Marxism, even during its classical age, there were rarely periods when genuine research and intellectual discovery flourished. The rather short summer of Austro-Marxism must be regarded as the most important exception to this rule. Not much of the extremely rich and variegated Austro-Marxist literature has been available in English until now, although a few major works, including Otto Bauer's seminal book *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie*, Rudolf Hilferding's great study *Das Finanzkapital*, and Karl Renner's pioneering study *Rechtsinstitute des Privatrechts und ihre soziale Funktion*, have been translated, albeit belatedly.¹ Otto Bauer's crucial work on the Austrian Revolution (*Die österreichische Revolution*, first published in 1923), was translated in an abridged version in the 1920s.² A new translation of this key contribution to Marxist political theory is in the making; the first English translation of Bauer's last major book *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen? Die Krise der Weltwirtschaft, der Demokratie und des Sozialismus* will be published shortly.³

Regarding the enormous literature that the leading Austro-Marxist theoreticians produced in a relatively short span of time and their many contributions to Marxist sociology, historiography, political science, political economy, and philosophy, it is quite remarkable that there has been only one major collection in English until now, the volume *Austro-Marxism*, translated and edited by Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode in 1978.⁴ The edition edited by Mark Blum and William Smaldone reviewed here provides a timely

1. Otto Bauer, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna, 1924), and *idem*, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*. Ed. by Ephraim J. Nimni and transl. by Joseph O'Donnell (Minneapolis, MN, 2000); Rudolf Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital. Eine Studie über die jüngste Entwicklung des Kapitalismus* (Vienna, 1910), and *idem*, *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*. Ed. by Tom Bottomore and transl. by Morris Watnick and Sam Gordon (London, 1981); Karl Renner, *Rechtsinstitute des Privatrechts und ihre soziale Funktion* (Tübingen, 1929), and *idem*, *The Institutions of Private Law and Their Social Functions*, edited by Otto Kahn-Freund and translated by Agnes Schwarzschild (London, 1949).

2. Otto Bauer, *Die österreichische Revolution* (Vienna, 1923); *idem*, *The Austrian Revolution* (London, 1925).

3. *Idem*, *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen? Die Krise der Weltwirtschaft, der Demokratie und des Sozialismus* (Prague, 1936).

4. Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode (eds), *Austro-Marxism* (Oxford, 1978).

addition to the slowly growing body of Austro-Marxist writings available to the English-speaking world.

Both editors are historians and work as professors in US universities. Both have previously worked on the topic. Mark E. Blum is the author of a rather strange book, *The Austro-Marxists*, in which he tried to present the biographies of four leading Austro-Marxist intellectuals – Otto Bauer, Max Adler, Karl Renner, and Friedrich Adler – in psychoanalytical terms.⁵ William Smaldone has published a good, well-balanced biography of Rudolf Hilferding, which has been well received (and was translated into German).⁶ Neither author shares the rather strange attitude towards the Austro-Marxist tradition that still prevails in the English-speaking world, at least in its more radical leftist or Marxist quarters. Although the chosen subtitle of the book suggests otherwise, as the alleged “ideology of unity”, that is the stubborn refusal of the Austro-Marxist to allow for any of the splits and schisms that wrecked the European labour movement from 1919 onwards, they treat the Austro-Marxists with respect.

In the first volume, the editors provide a series of six short essays, each portraying one of the leading thinkers of Austro-Marxism. In the introduction to this section, Blum already confides to the reader his general view that something was severely wrong with these people and that their thought as well as their actions could and should be best explained in psychoanalytical terms. Of course, as any historian knows, it is not possible to psychoanalyse somebody long after his or her death, just using scant second- and third-hand information about their youth and family life from various documents. The whole psychobiography that Blum concocts in Otto Bauer’s case is based upon the dire fact that Bauer’s younger sister had been a patient of Sigmund Freud in Vienna, and Freud had left a description of her case (the case of “Dora”). In his introduction to volume I and in his biographical essays, he not only relies heavily on the findings (or rather figments) from his 1985 book, he also gives a lot of short-hand characterizations of the authors in question that are rather off the mark and highly misleading for anybody not familiar with them: Otto Bauer was not a Hegelian at all; Karl Renner was not an English pragmatist; Max Adler was neither a Kantian, nor a neo-Kantian; Rudolf Hilferding was not a nominalist; and Friedrich Adler was not a Machian. And Otto Neurath, a core member of the Vienna circle, developed his own specific brand of a philosophy of the social and natural sciences. However, they were all open to and engaged with various strands of philosophical and social-scientific thought as they engaged (critically) with alleged orthodoxies in Marxism. If there was anything that linked the Austro-Marxists as members of a specific “school”, it was their shared idea of Marxism not as a philosophy but as a social science. What Max Adler presented as a specific kind of enlightened “positivism”, Karl Renner at times characterized as “inductive Marxism”, while Otto Neurath insisted that Marx and Engels had laid the foundation for “empirical sociology”.

Matters get worse with Blum’s psychobiographical essays on Adler, Bauer, and the others. Only the short biography on Hilferding, obviously written by Smaldone, gives a clear and correct description of the relevant facts and avoids the fanciful stories of twisted characters that Blum regales the reader with. Unfortunately, these stories have much in common with

5. Mark E. Blum, *The Austro-Marxists 1890–1918: A Psychobiographical Study* (Lexington, KY, 2015).

6. William Smaldone, *Rudolf Hilferding: The Tragedy of a German Social Democrat* (De Kalb, IL, 1998).

the usually hostile attitude, in particular towards Otto Bauer, that prevails in the biographical literature on the Austro-Marxists. Karl Renner is usually treated better. The presentation of Max Adler as an utterly asocial type, however, is rather original. Not surprisingly, Blum, with all his psychoanalytical rigour, cannot make head or tail of the extraordinary, sparkling figure of Otto Neurath. So, it all boils down to a rerun of the old cartoon with Otto Bauer as a Hamlet-like ditherer. In Blum's version: because he was a family man, craving harmony.

Unfortunately, this kind of nonsense on stilts continues throughout volume I, because Blum finds it necessary to adorn the texts by Max Adler, Otto Bauer, Karl Renner, and Friedrich Adler as well as the two by Otto Neurath with headnotes and endnotes. More space is devoted to the selection of texts by Max Adler than to anything else, and the selection of texts is rather odd. We get, first, a short chapter on the concept of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*, which carries multiple meanings in German) from *Lehrbuch der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung*, Adler's textbook on historical materialism, published in 1930–1932. Then, four pieces from Adler's last book, the *Enigma of Society*, published in 1936, followed by two pieces from Adler's 1922 book *Die Staatsauffassung des Marxismus*. And, finally, two pieces from Adler's short book on *Das Soziologische in Kants Erkenntnis-kritik*, published in 1924. As Max Adler had reworked and reformulated his basic ideas from 1904 onwards, it would have been much better to stick to one of his major writings, preferably to his 1930–1932 textbook, written for students.

From Otto Bauer, we get a chapter from his *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* (1907) followed by an article written in defence of his concept of the nation against various critiques. Then, we get Bauer's article "Marxism and Ethics" from 1906 – entwined in more silly remarks on Bauer's psychological state of mind. The next two Bauer articles present his views on historical materialism, and again they come with more stories about Bauer's psychological dispositions. Finally, we get a piece from Bauer's lectures on political economy of 1927–1928. Again, Blum annoys the reader with some completely misplaced remarks, obviously confusing the different meanings of the German term *Vergesellschaftung* (meaning both sociation and socialisation).

From Karl Renner we get first a text on State and Nation from his 1899 book on the subject. Blum blusters about the fact that Renner did not provide a "Marxist" philosophy of law. The next text is a piece from Renner's book *The Institutions of Private Law* (1929), first published in German in 1904, and again the editor Blum shows that he simply does not understand what Renner's book is about. Finally, we get two articles by Renner from 1926 dealing with economic democracy, which provide good examples of the kind of "constructive socialism" shared by Renner and the other Austro-Marxists.

Friedrich Adler, the only natural scientist among the group, is represented by only two articles, "Friedrich Engels and Natural Science" from 1906–1907 and "Why Do We Need Theories?" from 1909. More important articles, such as "Marx and Mach", are omitted. This time, Blum fantasizes about Ernst Mach being some kind of tacit Marxist. Otto Neurath, too, gets just two philosophical articles, and those are a very poor choice if the editors wanted to show how and in what way Neurath belonged to the Austro-Marxist school. The same applies to Rudolf Hilferding, whose work is represented here by just two short pieces, omitting seminal texts that are still widely unknown.

The second volume adds a number of articles by the same authors (except Otto Neurath) mainly dealing with politics from 1899 to 1934. Important post-1934 material is thus omitted. Smaldone's introduction to this volume is a relief compared to Blum's verbose and confused comments in the first.

The texts are presented in chronological order and grouped by author. Unfortunately, this running order ignores the context of the lively debates among the Austro-Marxists. Four major programmatic documents of Austrian social democracy are introduced to the English reader: the Hainfeld Programme of 1889; the Nationalities Programme of 1899; the Agrarian Programme of 1925; and, last but not least, the Linz Programme of 1926, the most important programmatic document of Austro-Marxism (both drafted by Otto Bauer).

The choice of texts here is nearly always good, the debate on parliamentarism, reformism, mass actions during the pre-war times, when Austrian social democracy was still fighting for universal suffrage, is well presented. For the second period, a time of war and revolution, the texts chosen clearly show Otto Bauer's attitude towards Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution as well as the political choices he was advocating during the struggle for the first republic. Max Adler's and Karl Renner's views, often opposed to Bauer's, are not so well represented.

For the third period, the years of consolidation, we get texts by Friedrich Adler and Max Adler, with Otto Bauer's replies missing. Bauer's important 1923 book *Die österreichische Revolution* is notably absent. Hilferding's texts in this part all deal with the situation in Germany. It is a pity that Smaldone does not pay at least some attention to the exchanges between the Austrian and the German social democrats during this period.

The choice of articles for the last period, the years of crisis and political turmoil, is quite good. In the introduction, Smaldone looks for an explanation for the defeat of Austrian social democracy led by the Austro-Marxists. Unfortunately, he falls prey to the age-old jibes by Trotsky and his followers on the Austro-Marxists, avoiding the salient question whether any strategy of all-out attack could have been more effective than the defensive stance the Austro-Marxists actually took. However, Otto Bauer's views on the strategic dilemmas Austrian social democracy was facing are well represented. And his extensive and detailed self-criticism of mistakes made by himself and others in the party that Bauer published after the defeat of 1934 is rightly there.

From Hilferding, we get two articles and a longer lecture from 1930 and 1931, plus two articles from 1932 and 1933 dealing directly with the imminent threat of a Fascist coup. Finally, one text from the new theoretical journal of the SPD in exile, *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, where Hilferding argues for a radical break with reformism, as Bauer did shortly afterwards. Karl Renner is present at the very end with three articles from 1928, 1930, and 1932, which show Renner arguing for a new coalition and further compromises with the political representatives of the bourgeoisie until the very end.

In sum, this is a quite useful collection of Austro-Marxist texts. Readers would be well advised, however, to skip and ignore the ill-informed, fallacious, and confusing comments by Blum and stick to the rest.

Michael R. Krätke

Department of Sociology, Lancaster University
Bowland North, Lancaster, LA1 4YN, United Kingdom

E-mail: kraetkemichael@gmail.com

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