

proletarian origins and feel condescension in the pretence to be still part of the "people"? Is there much difference in the themes and attitudes of the popular music-hall songs to the popular sentiments expressed, say, in the *Beggar's Opera*? Certainly, attempts to suppress the music hall by the use of the Licensing Acts brought forth a strong popular reaction in their favour – but we do not know how many objected to these demonstrations, and why.

Other puzzles remain. Were there really houses holding audiences of 2,000 or 3,000, placed in the narrow street-network of the industrial towns in the North, and if so, could anyone hear what was being said or sung on the stage – particularly when drinks were being served at the same time and people sat at tables rather than in narrow serried rows, as in theatres provided later? Did people go there for the songs, the circus acts, the glimpses of classical theatre – or just the convivial atmosphere? Why was it necessary to add exhibitions, zoos, galleries and other extraneous matter to the largest and most successful of the music halls?

Popular "culture" is not easy to fit into a class pattern. The music hall had its lower middle-class addicts as well as its working men and women, and possibly these predominated in some cities and some parts of London. Against this, there were numerous earnest working men and their families who were not attracted and who deplored the waste of time and money, though they would probably not have favoured the prohibition of these establishments. Moreover, it was not necessarily the employers of labour, or even the titled upper classes, who opposed free and easy, raucous, alcoholic forms of entertainment. The opposition frequently came from the professional middle classes, from clergymen, journalists, medical or legal gentlemen and their ladies, some, no doubt, full of goodwill for the lower orders and conscious of their exploitation by an increasingly capitalistic class of music hall proprietors. On the issue of freedom, perhaps, there was a parting of the ways, only middle-class people thinking of prohibition what they did not like. But as a cultural phenomenon, the music hall remains ambiguous.

Much of this ambiguity is found in this well-researched, thoughtful, well-balanced account. The provincial music hall, in particular, deserved to be rescued from oblivion, and it is well to show London-based historians that there was history also north of Watford. This is part of a complex picture, but many of its complexities still await resolution.

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GRUBER, HELMUT. *Red Vienna. Experiment in Working Class Culture 1919–1934*. Oxford University Press, New York [etc.] 1991. x, 270 pp. Ill. £25.00.

In February 1934 the uprising of Austrian workers against the authoritarian government ended with the death of several hundred soldiers and civilians, the removal of the remaining democratic guarantees, and the destruction of the far-reaching network of labour institutions throughout the country. Four years later Hitler proclaimed the *Anschluss* of his former homeland. In labour history the February uprising has long been considered an impressive, heroic act of defence, but one without any chance of success during the "wave" of fascistic take-overs. But this leaves unexplained how a political movement with more than 600,000 party members, the strongest faction in parliament, allied with a unified, totally social-

democratic trade union, with dozens of local political, economic and cultural organizations, could be destroyed within a few days. In the 1980s research focused on the tradition of the so-called *Arbeiterkultur* to explain the implosion of Austro-Marxism. Producing a hermetic world of symbols, the cultural organizations of the Social Democratic Party had to dissimulate their vanishing influence in the sphere of political power. And, in doing so, they prevented the working class from acting in time against the inability of the party leadership.

In his new book, *Red Vienna, Experiment in Working-Class Culture 1919–1934*, Helmut Gruber to some extent shares this opinion. But his aims go much further. What he wants to do is to make a paradigmatic study of the relationship between different systems of culture in the inter-war period and their influence on the mentalities of the working class. Vienna seems to offer a good case-study for that. Governed by Social Democrats and without a significant opposition, it became famous for its extensive programmes of public housing, important reforms in education, and for its many exemplary social measures. The concept of “Red Vienna” was strictly linked to the labour movement, for on the one hand it was based on the ideas of “municipal socialism”, and on the other hand it depended on co-operation with economic, cultural and educational party organizations and institutions. But behind the slogans of Marxism, both the city’s administration and party organizations were directed by an ideology rooted in the humanitarian tradition of the German liberal movement. Inspired by the Austromarxist philosopher Max Adler they called for the “production of *Neue Menschen*”, an idea closely connected with the images of the bourgeois *Bildungsroman*. Education, based on literacy, should enable every single man and woman to decide whether their behaviour was acceptable or not to themselves and to society as a whole. This necessitated having complete control over one’s feelings and passions and to approximating everyday life to the commandments of moral and natural sciences. In doing so, this Socialist party culture had to supplant the workers’ subculture, that utilitarian system which rose from the needs of everyday life. This policy caused a habitus towards rigid discipline within the working class and the loss of spontaneous power and self-confidence. That has been documented before, but Gruber introduces a new element to the analysis – the rise of (commercialized) mass culture. Socialist party culture no longer had to compete just with traditional working-class forms of entertainment like gambling, drinking or dancing, but additionally with the cinema, the radio and spectator sports as typical forms of culture in the age of mass production. Gruber provides a concise description of the different systems that competed for hegemony over the working class: the system of party culture, including mass organizations like choral societies, hiking associations and sports clubs, etc., with a total membership of several hundred thousand, but also more professional institutions that organized collective visits to theatres, operas and exhibitions; the system of mass culture – cinema, the number of visitors to which rose from about twelve million in 1936 to twenty-eight million in 1933, radio, circus, and, most important, soccer, which attracted about 200,000 spectators every weekend; and, finally, the system of workers’ subculture, based on the family, on friendship, on personal connections and oriented to the needs that rose from the uncertainty of the labour market (the rate of unemployment rose from 30 to 40 per cent in the early 1930s). In dealing with the numbers of participants and the nature of the three systems, Gruber concludes that the Socialist party culture – which in Austria was still synonymous with “workers’ subculture and counterculture” – had to be supplanted in the long run for two reasons: it could not replace

workers' subculture because it ignored the necessity of a specific proletarian lifestyle distinct from middle-class values (implicit in the Austromarxist educational programme); and, furthermore, since it neglected the desire for easy entertainment after the burdens of a working day, it could not rival the way modern mass media invaded the private lives of workers.

Whereas Socialist party culture was in theory a democratic outreach to the masses of members, it affected only a minority of them. This was hardly admitted or possibly not even recognized by the functionaries in charge, partly because, for many, keeping their particular organization or activity going became an end in itself, and partly because they were victims of their own claims of success. Perhaps their unfamiliarity with a mass party so different from the prewar committed vanguard helps to explain their difficulty in reaching unfamiliar masses, and in understanding that the desired cultural transformation of workers depended more on their receptivity than on the theories and program themselves. A number of leaders of the party's left wing were well aware of these shortcomings and during the last years of the republic protested against the "elitism" and "social conservatism" of functionaries satisfied with reaching only an "aristocracy" of workers. (p. 112)

Gruber's analysis is pleasantly readable, but also methodical and concise. Nevertheless, occasionally one misses references to the immediate bourgeois antecedents of Socialist party culture, such as the Pan-German choral societies or so-called *Turnvereine*, the bourgeois societies for the reform of funeral ceremonies, temperance clubs, or associations for the *Volksbildung*, etc. This could have avoided potential misunderstandings, in particular that social-democratic cultural organizations were genuine inventions of Austromarxism (and not linked to the aims of special groups within the working class, looking for "respectability" and "honour"). On the other hand, there are some romantic euphemisms for activities associated with workers' subculture whose significance Gruber overestimates. For example, he sees hiking as "the momentary escape from all the restraints of everyday life into a different regenerative world where a restrictive order did not exist". One can criticize, too, the fact that when dealing with mass culture Gruber's theory of the mass media is not convincing. Cinema, for example, is more than a "democratic" way of narration, as Gruber suggests. It involves an element of montage by the spectator and was thus an entirely new way of seeing the world. I think it was this Fordistic skill and practice that forced Walter Benjamin to prophesy the end of "representation". When they put muscular sportsmen on the cover, were magazines reflecting the newly won self-consciousness of the workers, which Gruber states was one of the most important developments in the subculture of the working class and in party culture as well as in spectator sports? Or was the workers' sports movement a reaction to the new image of the body established by films, photographs, magazines and musical revues? Maybe this question cannot be answered since it demonstrates the limits faced by the classical approach to "culture" as the representation of "values" ("democratic" being one of them). Notwithstanding these details, Gruber's attempt to relate Austrian labour history to the history of mass culture – the first time this has been attempted – is a brilliant conclusion to the debates on *Arbeiterkultur* in Austria that have lasted for more than a decade. It also raises many important questions about the impact of the media revolution on the mentality of the working class.

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