

therefore, was a product of the Habsburg environment more than Rechter realizes. It is true that de facto antisemitic barriers stymied a perfect career, but Kellner actually did very well in Habsburg Austria. Was Kellner typical of Habsburg Jewry? Of course not. Most Jews, especially in Galicia, Bukovina, and Hungary, were ultra-Orthodox Hasidim. But Kellner was typical of modern Jews who believed that Jews formed part of a Jewish nation in the multinational Habsburg state. It was not Zionism itself that helped Kellner bridge the East/West divide, as Rechter argues, but rather the very nature of Habsburg Austria.

doi:10.1017/S0008938924000347

## **Victims' State: War and Welfare in Austria, 1868-1925**

**By Ke-Chin Hsia. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 360. Cloth \$55.00. ISBN: 978-0197582374.**

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Scholars have long recognized the explicit links between military conscription and state welfare provisions for war victims. However, in the Habsburg Empire, this story is often depicted as a series of failures by a weak empire and its even weaker successor states. Ke-Chin Hsia's book aims to remedy this situation by tracing the Habsburg state's treatment of war veterans and dependents from the advent of mandatory male conscription in 1868 through the First World War and the fledgling years of the Austrian Republic. Hsia demonstrates that Austria's economic difficulties and eventual bailout by the League of Nations in 1922 have overshadowed the revolutionary possibilities of the immediate post-1918 period and the active role of disabled war victims in shaping not just emerging welfare legislation but also the political realities of the new nation state. Painstakingly researched, Hsia's book makes important contributions to Austrian history, the history of the First World War, and the modern history of welfare states.

Hsia is particularly keen to question the idea that 1914 is a watershed in the treatment of war victims, instead emphasizing the continuities between Habsburg policies, proposed war-time reforms, and postwar Austrian approaches to the same issues. Hsia briefly traces the multinational empire's response to the needs of disabled war veterans from the late eighteenth century through the period of modern conscript armies, and this longer timeline helps set the stage for the changes that total war would bring in the twentieth century. He persuasively argues that Habsburg policies persisted long after total war made them obsolete. Officials continued to privilege career soldiers, particularly officers, in providing care under the landmark Military Welfare Law of 1875. Even as late as 1918, the empire never fully developed the notion of welfare as an entitlement for citizen soldiers, instead treating conscripts as an occupational category who received compensation for injuries as state employees. State pensions or medical care were not rights but favors from a benevolent patriarch, and the military often focused more effort on maintaining the reputation of state military institutions by keeping uniformed beggars off the streets than on providing help to those whose lives had been shattered by war. Even during the Balkan Wars, there never emerged a sense of citizen entitlement, partly because the multinational Habsburg state could not mobilize around nationalism in the same way that other European states could.

Thus, on the eve of the First World War, the Habsburg Empire had a sprawling and limited structure for dealing with war victims – a system that was immediately strained by mass mobilization and carnage in 1914. The state extended living allowances to soldiers' families out of necessity, but still conceived of mobilization in limited terms, as “‘renting’ adult male citizens from their families” (47). By 1917, however, Habsburg officials could not ignore the growing needs of widows, disabled veterans, and orphans. Hsia concisely explains the forces at work that coalesced in a welfare reform bill and the creation of a Social Welfare Ministry in spring 1918: the threat of revolution, the return of prisoners of war in the wake of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, and vocal advocacy from war victims themselves. The reforms were too little, too late, and with the dissolution of the monarchy that autumn, the new Austrian Republic inherited a piecemeal approach to war victims. While the Social Welfare Ministry provided a continuity in the new nation-state, its conception of aid continued to rely on older ideals of job placement, settlement schemes, and charity.

It took the creation of war victim advocacy organizations as “citizen-clients, activists, lobbyists, organizers, and the partners of the republican state” (131) to push Austria to a more progressive model that began to see the sacrifices of its subjects in terms of citizenship and rights. The largest of these groups, the Zentralverband, participated in framing new democratic legislation that recognized disabled veterans and dependents as people entitled to state compensation and care. Championed especially by Social Minister Ferdinand Hanusch, the Invalid Compensation Law of April 1919 promised more comprehensive services for the war disabled, widows, and orphans. It also became the first war-victim welfare law passed by the former Central Powers' successor nations. Perhaps most significantly, Hsia explains how this entitlement also presented a way for the new republic to nationalize its citizens. For war victims to claim assistance, they had to register as citizens in Austria by March 1919 (with an exception for POWs). This was true for both men and newly-enfranchised women, which emphasized the transformed and modern basis for individual citizenship in the Austrian Republic.

In his last chapters, Hsia outlines forces that would help dismantle the privileges that war victims had possessed for a brief postwar moment. While one might expect the fiscal crisis of 1922 to loom large in these questions, and it does, Hsia points out that perhaps as damaging was bureaucratization and entrenchment by the early 1920s. This led to overly complicated administrative processes, infighting between provincial and central offices, and fragmentation of the activist coalition who had helped spark the change. Party politics also got in the way of a unified solution. Hsia argues that, despite the limited success of this legislation in the early 1920s, these early laws became the basis for the post-World War II welfare state and for lasting gains for disabled persons within Austrian society today.

Scholars of the First World War, comparative welfare states, and Central European history will find Ke-Chin Hsia's work extremely useful and intriguing. Hsia does rely on the reader's working knowledge of Habsburg history and structure, the First World War, and the revolutions of 1918, making this a less accessible book for students, especially undergraduates, who might need supplemental resources. Overall, I highly recommend Hsia's book, which provides a fresh perspective on the transition from empire to republic in Austria while exposing the complicated interplay between political elites and grassroots activists in the making of welfare reform.

doi:10.1017/S0008938924000335