

PUBLICATIONS: NEWS AND REVIEWS

The Sound of Austria

Österreichpolitik und öffentliche Meinung in den USA

John Bunzl, Wolfgang Hirczy, and Jacqueline Vansant. *Laxenburger Internationale Studien LIS 7*. Vienna: Braumüller, 1995. 181 pp., tables, appendixes. Paper, öS 598, DM 62.

Can a world power such as the United States have a genuine, consistent policy toward a small state such as Austria? Writing a book about American policy toward Austria implies that. However, after having read this book, the reader must question that assumption.

In the first part, John Bunzl provides a broad chronological perspective on U.S. policy toward and public opinion of Austria. Bunzl argues—not surprisingly—that historically the American attitude toward Austria has been predominantly a distanced one, dominated by strategic, geopolitical, and pragmatic, rather than ideological or emotional interests. Even fighting Austria in two world wars did not really affect American attitudes toward it. This same pragmatic approach dominated again after 1945, although in a somewhat intensified manner. The struggle over the “disannexation” of occupied Austria provided both a tool for weakening Germany and a forum for Cold War politics. Modest reparation demands, the strong economic stimulation provided by the Marshall Plan, and the “denazification” and reeducation process all served as instruments to drag Aus-

tria into the American zone of influence. Bunzl argues that from the *Staatsvertrag* of 1955 onward, the United States again lost interest in Austria, which is clearly reflected by Bunzl’s lack of interest in this period. However, things changed considerably when Bruno Kreisky’s foreign policy brought Austria glaringly back to the United States’s attention. With the official recognition of the PLO as a legitimate representative body of the Palestinian people in 1980 and Kreisky’s reception of Ghadafi in Vienna in 1982, tensions between the two countries grew considerably. That is where Bunzl is at his best: providing a subtle description of the atmosphere leading up to the Waldheim affair based on a comprehensive analysis of American newspaper articles and the main parties involved in the affair. In the post-Waldheim period, Bunzl sees both continuity of the negative perception—on a low level—of Waldheim and Austria and a shifting of media attention toward “new” Austrian topics, such as migration, xenophobia, and provincialism.

In the second part of the volume, on Waldheim in the U.S.A., Wolfgang Hirczy traces the legal framework (the Holtzman Amendment) and the institutional setup (the Office of Special Investigations) for the Waldheim phenomenon. In a chronological analysis, Hirczy describes how the OSI dealt with the Waldheim files, tackles the role of

Jewish organizations in the United States, and provides a thorough description of the Congressional hearing about Waldheim. Turning to the American media, Hirczy argues that three circumstances boosted the media attention of Waldheim and Austria to extraordinary dimensions. In the first place, Kurt Waldheim was already well-known in the United States: in 1992 CBS even reported on Waldheim’s being struck down by a Viennese tram. After his term as UN General Secretary and before the Austrian presidential campaign, Waldheim was still a VIP in the US media. Secondly, attacks by officials of the Jewish World Congress and Waldheim’s self-justifications turned out to be excellent material for dramatic media coverage. Thirdly, the Austrian elections transformed the discussion into a highly relevant political issue. Media coverage shifted during the campaign toward Austria’s role within the Nazi regime and lingering Austrian anti-Semitism.

The third part of the volume is Jacqueline Vansant’s “Harry Lime and Maria von Trapp treffen sich am Stammtisch,” a translation of a paper presented at the Center for Austrian Studies in 1994. Vansant argues that Hollywood’s construction of Austrian history generally leaves out the National Socialist era, resulting in a “denazification” of Austria in the American cinema. *The Sound of Music*, a film whose influence on the image of Austria in the United States can hardly be overestimated, presents Austria as an ahistoric dreamland. High unemployment, the Austrofascist regime, and collaboration with Nazi Germany give way to a beautiful landscape, wonderful music (Americans sometimes mistakenly think that “Edelweiss” is the Austrian national anthem), and an imaginary geography (the Trapp family flees from Salzburg directly to Switzerland, as if they shared a border). Vansant concludes convincingly that in *The Sound of Music* the director manages to deconstruct the historical Austria, reconstruct a new imagined Austria, and produce an American “Heimat film.”

Summing up, American policy toward Austria is what you might expect: inconsistent, pragmatic, and low profile, determined mainly by external factors. Public opinion in the United States still seems to oscillate between an anachronistic, but positive view of modern Austria and the negative remembrance of the Waldheim affair. This German-language book breaks new ground, but in this area another approach has proved to be more fertile: the political aspect of American-Austrian relations still appears to be less significant than the cultural process of “Coca-Colonization.”

Thomas Winderl
Institut für Politikwissenschaft
University of Vienna

BUDAPEST AND NEW YORK:
STUDIES IN URBAN TRANSFORMATION, 1870-1930

Thomas Bender and Carl Schorske, eds.
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xiv, 400 pp., illus., maps, tables, notes, index.
\$39.95.

This volume is the latest in a series of publications that have resulted from an unusual collaboration between Hungarian and American historians that began during the Cold War and continues to this day. The papers in this present volume grew out of presentations at a 1988 conference, and the fourteen essays actually represent fewer than half of the papers presented. A high degree of selectivity, careful editing, and impeccable scholarship have combined to produce a collection of unusual merit.

Thomas Bender, a leading historian of American cities and culture and the author of *Community and Social Change in America*, and Carl Schorske, whose work on society, culture, and politics in Vienna needs no introduction to European historians, have created a unique concept for the volume. According to their introduction, “In 1870, New York and Budapest were peripheral cities, one on the western pe-

rimeter of the European core, and one on the Eastern” (2). These two cities both experienced phenomenal growth during the period, yet by 1930, the character of each city was quite different. New York was cosmopolitan and diverse, with its immigrants acquiring more and more power as they shaped the city’s politics and culture; however, ethnocentricity and conservatism continued to dominate Budapest as urbanization and modernization came to be feared and loathed by an entrenched Magyar gentry. An analysis of how and why this happened, and what this tells us about Europe, America, and the twin processes of urbanization and modernization, is at the heart of this extraordinary book.

The editors have done more than simply select and correct; they have provided both an introduction and an afterword, and introduced each of the book’s five sections (on politics, public space, neighborhoods, popular culture and the high arts). The advantage to this structure is that one gets a running commentary from two fine historical minds, a constant reminder

continued on page 13