

WEGS, J. ROBERT. *Growing Up Working Class. Continuity and Change Among Viennese Youth, 1890–1938*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, London 1989. ix, 206 pp. \$ 24.00.

In the last decade the capital of Austria has become a particular subject of debates on modernism. As the sphere of action for Freud, Böhm-Bawerk, Wittgenstein, Schumpeter, Schönberg and others, fin-de-siècle Vienna seems to have been a focus of scientific, aesthetic and philosophical mainstreams in the twentieth century. American authors especially have contributed to the understanding of the ideas and the socio-cultural framework of Viennese modernism as a “revolt” against the political failures of the “fathers’ generation” in 1848 and afterwards. The rapid economic growth during the 1890s, the immigration within some twenty years of hundreds of thousands of Czechs, Jews, Italians and other ethnic and national groups within the Habsburg empire (where they formed the mass of the poor artisans and low-paid industrial workers as well as – to a very small degree – the “new bourgeoisie”), the problems of urbanism as well as cultural diversity led to the concept of Vienna as a mirror for the burgeoning new industrial centers in our times and their problems. But alongside the glittering world of philosophical and artistic life, the fascinating experience of a multinational political system and the middle-European way of economic development through state intervention, the “other side” of imperial (and post-imperial) Vienna, namely the everyday life and subculture of the Viennese working class, attracts little interest, neither from Austrian nor from foreign historians and social scientists. J. Robert Wegs, Chairman of History at the University of Notre Dame and well known for his book “Die österreichische Kriegswirtschaft 1914–1918”, now tries to fill the gap with his recent book *Growing Up Working Class. Continuity and Change Among Viennese Youth, 1890–1938*.

Wegs wants to present the “first full-scale attempt to describe the life of Viennese working-class youth ‘from the bottom up’”. To do so, he uses 120 interviews, most of which he recorded himself. This method of oral history offers a broad sample of personal experience that enables us to correct the traditional assumption of working-class history as a universal history of progress. Wegs’ witnesses bring to light worlds of experience that cannot be found in traditional records: the feelings of safety inside the tenement houses; the opposition of both children and parents of schooling because of class-culture patterns and economic needs; the shyness and prudishness of the working class regarding sexual affairs and so on. But how can this abundance of information be handled? How can it be combined with more general trends within the working class and society? Obviously for instructive reasons Wegs decided to cut the complex system of working-class life into manageable pieces – fragments of everyday life. “Workers’ World” (chapter 1) gives a survey of the basic economic, social and political data. “Life on the Hallway” presents the familiar structure of the neighbourhood in the proletarian tenement houses and the loss of this coherence in the world-famous communal buildings (*Gemeindebauten*) of social-democratic interwar “Red Vienna”. “Everyday Life” deals with consumption (but, unfortunately, only to a small extent with certain practices, i.e. the best things for the working father, the worst for the women), with housekeeping, family education, life on the streets, games and – as a result of the last two phenomena –

with the turning point of Wegs' concept: the lack of control over working-class youth and the attempts of bourgeois federations, social-democratic organizations and the State to destroy their autonomy by establishing youth institutions. "Schooling" gives a survey of the educational systems in the Habsburg monarchy and in the Austrian republic by showing a fundamental opposition by the working class to school systems: first, regarding girls' education, because they were needed at home to look after their younger brothers and sisters, and second, concerning boys, because of "a form of class opposition to the dominant culture" and the uselessness of the education received for practical purposes. "Work" refers to the economic developments mentioned in the first chapter but adds an important consideration: with the decline of artisanal professions and the increasing employment opportunities in large-scale industry, the working-class youth no longer followed in the footsteps of their fathers, but preferred (at least as an occupational wish) jobs as mechanical or electrical technicians and longed for apprenticeships. For the first time at the beginning of the 20s, youth (only male youth, of course) "began to consider work as a more permanent part of their lives". This can be interpreted as a step towards an "adolescence", which till 1914 did not exist, due to the families need for the children's working income. "Youth Culture, Sex, and Marriage" finally covers the more intimate side of life, and the conclusion is that the working class was more influenced by rural tradition and its moral standards than by bourgeois or modern concepts of legitimate sex within marriage, self-control and individuality.

In general, Wegs' study indicates that proletarian life till the interwar period was centered around the family – the family as a kind of economic unit. During the 20s and 30s, owing to economic crises, unemployment, and perhaps also linked to the dominant social-democratic subculture, a change took place: the average family size decreased from 8 to 10 persons per household to the one-child family. That meant not only better living conditions for the working-class youth but also a growing degree of control by parents, schools and institutions. So far, Wegs' social-history approach presents us with many important and consistent facts, and we can agree with his attempt to present a "Standardwerk". Somewhat different is his interpretation of working-class youth development as a matrix for the class movement. Wegs establishes a matrix of social and political radicalism that rises from a geometrical picture of society: at the top bourgeois culture, at the bottom that of the lowest strata of the working class. This points up the danger of overestimating the resistance to the bourgeois world. By using the traditional model of control versus autonomy and putting undue emphasis on pragmatic and segmented strategies as a hermetic system, Wegs neglects the explanation of the inner structure or coherence of the supposed "workers' culture" but confines himself to describing patterns of behavior. This, for example, leads him to a precise and meritorious description of the suppression of women workers in factories, households and education, but prevents him from looking for the working-class culture of gender within the sexual matters he is referring to. By reducing "sexual affairs" to a common pattern of marriage, promiscuity, abortions and age, he ignores the fact that – as has been shown in more recent works – sexual misery was one of the key issues in establishing "modernism" or bourgeois ideals within the working class. (To do so, social-democratic educators and others did not speak about sexual intercourse but about venereal diseases, hereditary diseases and fertility.) Wegs also accuses social-

democratic youth organizations of deliberately trying to gain control over the working-class youth. But in addition to the attempts to “civilize” this group of youths, which are described in the theoretical works of social-democratic educators, there were many social experiments in such organizations, such as coeducation and self-government. After studying Wegs’ book, it is still unclear why, especially in the interwar period, politically-bound youth organizations spread throughout the towns and countryside and why these organizations became true mass organizations, with many activities (sports, theater, music, cinema). He even ignores the phenomenon of androgynical ideals, rising from the “cult of youth” in the 20s. Besides that it would be interesting to know how warfare influenced mentalities by leaving “incomplete families”, destroying authority, and leading to a revolutionary situation in 1918–1919 (and to the fact that especially young workers joined the Social Democratic Party, which at that time was supported by more than fifty per cent of Viennese male workers).

There is no doubt that Wegs has provided a picture of the little-known structure of working-class strategies to survive within capitalistic surroundings before the stage of mass consumption. But by emphasizing empirical data as a concept of counterculture we are in danger of constructing a romantic story of the better world of the poor. As Erich Fromm has reported, based on an empirical study of the German working class in the early 30s, skilled workers and lower-level employees tended to resist bourgeois culture, while the lower strata of the working class and higher-level employees inclined towards authoritarian patterns. This seems to be similarly true of Austrian and Viennese workers, whom Wegs would consider to be a “workers’ aristocracy” and therefore (in a vectorial scheme) near to bourgeois culture. For Wegs, on the contrary, the lower strata form the “revolutionary subject”, or, in his own terms: “Those primarily male youths who rejected the adolescent model of extended dependency and submissiveness adopted by bourgeois and socialist leaders formed an antagonistic subculture tied to the street culture of their childhood.” In consequence, this fraternity had to bear all the burdens of reformist politics and fascist attacks. Like in the phylogenetic model of early pedagogical theories, where the same attitudes and modes of behaviour return at each new step on the path of individual development, the street-boys who fought with the gang around the corner, became the street-fighters who confronted fascist invaders in their district ten or more years later. In addition, they (according to Wegs) had to build the left wing inside social democracy, criticizing the leadership for attentism. And finally, they had to form the bulk of the workers in arms, called the *Schutzbund*, when risking and losing the insurrection against the authoritarian government in February 1934. Unfortunately we do not have any evidence on that.

The problematic metapolitical conclusions Wegs presents in this section of his book are to some extent due to the selective Austrian literature he has used for his work: because he placed his confidence in the evidence of a model of hermetic class culture, this perhaps could not be avoided. On the other hand, the description of everyday life, especially of the peer groups, their male structure and their rough games, seems to indicate that working-class culture is a more fragmented culture, mixed with authoritarian, male chauvinist and Darwinist patterns that fitted not only rural and peasant traditions, but also bourgeois “modernism”. Thus, the richness of information on social history Wegs offers and the precise style he uses to

present that should open the way to a broader concept of working-class culture as part of the general "process of civilization".

*Siegfried Mattl*

BALFOUR, SEBASTIAN. *Dictatorship, Workers, and the City. Labour in Greater Barcelona since 1939*. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1989. xii, 288 pp. £ 30.00.

Balfour's study tries to explain how the Spanish labour movement, so long the scourge of the Franco regime, became the poor relation in the new democracy it had helped to create. From one of the most militant, the working-class movement has become one of the least organized in Europe. While most interpretations of the so-called "crisis of unionism" in Spain have centred on the economic recession and the political process of the post-Franco period, Balfour's study seeks the explanation also in the conditions of the dictatorship itself. Therefore, the book traces the experience of the Spanish working class, concentrating on the area of Greater Barcelona, from the victory of Franco's armies in 1939 to the devastations of recession in the late eighties.

The book, comprising seven chapters, is set in a broad chronological framework. The first chapter examines the destruction of the old institutions of the labour movement after the Civil War and the degradation of working-class life in the forties. The particular emphasis of the book is on the period between 1962 and 1976. The second chapter describes the social transformation brought about by economic growth in the sixties. The rise of new forms of labour organization and militancy is analyzed in the third chapter, as well as the vicissitudes of the clandestine organizations of the opposition. The fourth chapter analyzes the local patterns of protest (tradition and leadership, industrial and urban structures); it makes a comparative study of the labour movement in the four main industrial centres of the province of Barcelona (Terrassa, Sabadell, Baix Llobregat, Barcelona) pointing out that it is more correct to speak about "several labour movements, separated by occupation and by geography, each with their own patterns of activity and their own subcultures" (p. 110).

The fifth chapter analyzes the rise of militancy in the early seventies with particular reference to the immigrant community, and the variation in the area (textiles, engineering plants, construction). The sixth chapter examines popular and political dissent in the last years of the dictatorship (local mass strikes), tracing the rise of the new union movement within the broader context of political change in this period. The last chapter discusses the relationship between the crisis of unionism in the eighties and the effects of economic recession, political reform (subordinate role of the unions), and the heritage of Francoism (fragmentation of struggle, lack of experience of unionism, legacy of state intervention in industrial relations) on the labour movement. These three factors weakened the emerging unions.

Balfour's conclusion is that the history of the labour movement between 1939 and the present day is marked by discontinuity. His conclusions are, in general terms,