

THE
SOCIAL REVOLUTION
IN AUSTRIA

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**CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON: Fetter Lane**



**NEW YORK
The Macmillan Co.
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA and
MADRAS
Macmillan and Co., Ltd.
TORONTO
The Macmillan Co. of
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TOKYO
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THE
SOCIAL REVOLUTION
IN AUSTRIA

BY

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CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
MCMXXVI

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book, if it had a sub-title, would be styled a "study in changing values." Its subject is one which is devoid of striking incident, but should not lack interest in a world so feverishly occupied with readapting its own values to changing circumstances.

Everyone knows something about the nationalist movement among the non-German races of the old Habsburg Monarchy, and is aware that most of these races took the opportunity afforded them by the war of 1914-1918 to throw in their lot more or less openly with the Entente, which rewarded them by confirming their independence.

The ideas of Englishmen are not as a rule so clear about modern Austria. They underestimate the absolutist character of the old régime, the cleft which separated the Dynasty and ruling classes from the ruled in all parts of the Monarchy. It is seldom realised that the essentially dynastic policy of the Habsburgs ended by creating among the German subjects an opposition hardly less strong than that of the Czechs or Croats. If it had happened—and it might once have happened—that war had found Germany and ourselves grouped against Austria-Hungary and Russia, our sympathies for the different peoples of Central Europe would have been startlingly other from what they are to-day.

The modern State of Austria is not a mere political rump, but the product, although distorted and maimed, of active and self-conscious forces within the country. It is true that these forces could not have created the present Republic, but for the often unwilling co-operation of the

neighbouring nationalities and the inevitable effects of the war. They took advantage of a situation, rather than created it. Yet if this limits their achievement for good or ill, it does not take away their interest.

The chief moving force in this case was the Austrian Social Democrat Party. The history of the world from 1917 onwards has been that of the struggle between Socialism and the forces opposed to it. It is a subject which is perhaps the most important of our time, and that to which the least clear thinking has been applied. The words "socialism," "communism" and "bolshevism" are not rightly understood by one in a hundred who takes them in his mouth. In practical form they are indeed susceptible to description only, not to definition, just as, to take the opposing ideologies, one definition of "monarchy" would not cover all the manifestations of that form of State even in twentieth century Europe.

Socialism is a system which must take widely different forms according to local variations of history and conditions. It is not a matter to be advocated or condemned as a whole, since every State of Europe to-day is socialised at least in some minor details of its system, and none, not even Russia, has succeeded in socialising anything like the whole. It is hardly possible that, with the general growth of population and the increase of industry, the impulse towards Socialism, where it can be usefully applied, will not continue to increase. It would, therefore, be natural to suppose that all thoughtful men would be anxious to examine seriously and impartially what experiments have already been made, with a view to considering how far and in what manner their lessons may be applied to other conditions.

Such is, however, not the practice of most citizens, nor even of most politicians. As a rule, taking the most extreme form of Socialism which has yet been attempted, and that which grew up under the most abnormal and un-European conditions—the bolshevik experiments in Russia—they either laud or decry it blindly.

This work has attempted to give an impartial survey, from the widest point of view, of what Austrian Socialism is, what it has attempted and what accomplished. In the writer's opinion, such a survey has little practical use if it is confined to lists of figures and economic calculations. It is necessary to look further, to see what were the conditions which gave birth to this particular form of the world movement, how far they helped and how hindered its development, and further, what was its effect on the non-Socialist classes of society. For this reason, less than half of the book is devoted to the Socialist Party itself, the remainder bearing on it only indirectly, but being necessary, in the opinion of the writer, to bring the efforts of that party into focus.

No attempt whatever has been made to lay down the law whether the teaching of Marx, or of any other Socialist leader, is theoretically sound or desirable, and I have tried to eliminate every expression of personal opinion on this point. I have concerned myself solely with results, and here I have done my best—a very difficult and probably a very thankless task—to set down these results with absolute impartiality. It is an attempt which has not, so far as I am aware, been made hitherto, in Austria or elsewhere.

Austrian Socialism must always differ widely from our own. In the first place, it is far more essentially political. Its early history forced it into bitter opposition to the great

political forces which made the old Habsburg Monarchy—the Church, the Dynasty, and the Army. Treated by all three as a hated outcast, it naturally became violently republican, atheist, pacifist. None of these three qualities, unless perhaps the last, appears to me to be necessarily inherent in a theoretically perfect form of Socialism, and it is well to understand the conditions which made them inevitable in Austria. Secondly, it was much more nearly and directly influenced by the example of Russia than our parties have ever been. Thirdly, it has been obliged to devote itself very closely to the complex racial problems of Central Europe. Fourthly, the non-industrial classes with which it has had to deal, both landowners and capitalists, differ very widely from the corresponding classes in Great Britain. In the case of the former, the obstacles in the way of its extension are much greater than they are with us; in the case of the latter, the frequent incompetence and dishonesty among Austrian capitalists may perhaps inspire an exaggerated sympathy for the alternatives offered by Socialism.

I have not attempted to lay before the world any new or startling facts about Austria-Hungary. I have made my account of conditions before the war rather fuller than I should otherwise have done because no work has yet appeared in English, so far as I am aware (and few in German), which adequately covers this ground.

A bibliography of the principal works consulted will be found at the end of the book. The chapters dealing directly with Socialism have been kindly read by Dr Fritz Brueghel, librarian to the Arbeiterkammer of Vienna, who has passed the facts there stated as correct. I cannot expect any person actively engaged in politics in Austria to agree

with all the opinions passed in a work which strives after impartiality.

I am indebted to many friends for kind help and suggestions, and would like to express my especial thanks to my friend, Dr Siegfried Pollak, of the Oesterreichische Volkszeitung.

All opinions given in this work are my own purely personal views, gathered during a sojourn of some five years in the Austrian Republic. No other person is in any way responsible for any opinion expressed here.

C. A. MACARTNEY

March 1926

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