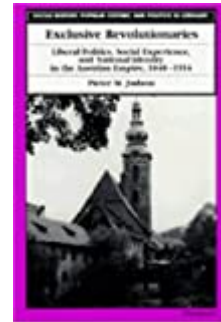


Pieter M. Judson. *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1914.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. xi + 304 pp. \$49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-472-10740-7.



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Burghers, Well Done

In January 1998, the American Historical Association awarded Pieter Judson's *Exclusive Revolutionaries* its annual Herbert Baxter Adams Prize for the best first book in European history. This was a deserved honor. Not only is Judson's book based on voluminous primary source materials, both archival and published, with considerable use of the Haus-, Hof-, and Staatsarchiv as well as six other Viennese and provincial archives or libraries, but, as the Baxter committee noted, its argument is "sophisticated and nuanced," and through its originality it should contribute significantly to future discussion of Austro-German liberalism, general Habsburg political history, and the fate of the monarchy.

The key to Judson's success of presenting such a comprehensive rethinking of the history of German liberalism in Austria is that he has focused not on the ideas of liberalism, but on the people who were attracted to and promoted those ideas. As a result, his work breaks radically from the tendency to treat liberalism as a disembodied entity that spread to Austria from the West like a contagion, and instead centers on using the concept of political culture to link social, intellectual, and political

history. This approach becomes readily apparent in his introduction, where he asserts that the real grounding of Austrian liberalism lay in Austrians' sociopolitical experience, a point he bolsters throughout the book by his attention "to the culture of the voluntary organization." Moreover, he does not accept the standard view that Austrian liberals failed. Rather, Judson maintains that, in the conflict between various interest groups, such as "the crown, nobility, " military, for "mastery of nineteenth-century Austrian Society," it was the liberals' "discourse about society that persistently set the terms for those contests," an argument he ably develops through eight well-organized and closely reasoned chapters (pp. 9-10).

In Chapter One, "Buerger, State, and Civil Society in Vormärz Austria," Judson charts the emergence of the Austrian liberals as a social and political group in the context of nineteenth century Europe. He characterizes nineteenth-century European liberalism as "both a collection of visions about the organization of society and a series of movements dedicated to their realization" (p. 11). He then delineates the emergence of Austrian liberalism and liberals out of two originally separate pre-

1848 urban social groups, the traditional holders of the corporate privileges of urban citizens and the new urban entrepreneurs. Through contacts in voluntary organizations they developed a common ideology centered on “the independent urban citizen, the man who formed the productive cornerstone of society” (p. 12), while adopting “a self-conscious moral superiority toward the second estate” (p. 17). As a result, according to Judson, these early liberals drew a sharp distinction between themselves and the state bureaucracy, even while remaining divided on key points of liberal ideology such as free trade.

The second chapter, “1848: The Transformation of Public Life,” provides only a sketchy account of the major, but well known, revolutionary events. Instead it focuses on the opportunity the revolution offered liberals to apply their experiences in voluntary organizations to politics. In the first half of the chapter Judson demonstrates how liberals adapted the structures and culture of voluntary organizations to the political circumstances by forming civic guard units, academic legions, provisional city councils, and political groups, in Vienna and numerous provincial cities like Prague, Brno, Graz, and Linz. The second half of the chapter outlines how the experiences of 1848 led liberals to begin to sharpen their conception of political community and the nation, which the limits on political debate in *Vormaerz* had allowed to remain vague and idealistic. In the process, their genuine desire to remake society coexisted with an “implicit sense of hierarchy that characterized the liberals’ attitude toward the popular classes, those people who had yet to internalize self-discipline” (p. 50). Still, central to the liberals’ theory, politics was *not* for the pursuit of any group or individual interests but for the achievement of common interests, a fact that Judson insists meant that the German nation envisioned by the liberals was not based on ethnicity (pp. 58-59), and it was this, he maintains, that led them to prefer centralism during the drafting of the Kremsier Constitution (p. 65).

This shared commitment to centralism certainly provided a link between liberals and bureaucrats. Yet in his third chapter, “The Struggle for the State, 1849-67,” Judson once again emphasizes that liberals and central bureaucrats remained separate and competing groups with different visions for the future of Austrian society and government. Unlike most bureaucrats, liberals generally remained committed to the establishment of parliamentary government. Liberal political culture continued to develop in the voluntary organizations, which grew in number during the 1850s despite legal prohibitions. This

gave them a considerable advantage as Austrian constitutionalism took shape during the 1860s, something Judson illustrates well by devoting much attention to the liberals’ provincial organizations during the 1861 elections, particularly in Bohemia, which would supply both leaders and ideas for empire-wide liberalism. By 1867, in fact, on the eve of their taking power, the liberals’ ideas already clearly set the terms of political debate in Austria.

Judson organizes his account of the 1859-67 era of constitutional experimentation around the concept of struggle between the competing visions of bureaucrats and liberals. For him, Anton Schmerling clearly represents the bureaucratic conception of reform between 1859 and 1865, while liberals found a champion of their views as early as 1859 in Ignaz von Plener. He defends the liberals from historians’ charges that they were, among other things, “unwilling to compromise and politically immature,” by noting “the fundamental opposition of interests that divided the semi-absolutist bureaucrat Schmerling from the parliamentary liberals” (p. 105). Judson also questions the emphasis historians have placed on 1866 as a turning point in the national self-conception of Austro-Germans, arguing that as long as German culture remained the dominant language of those in power, as well as official language of government, “German-speaking Austrians did not view themselves as a minority under siege.” Instead, he argues, “Austrian Germans preferred to see their country’s defeat in terms of the ongoing constitutional crisis” (pp. 107-108).

The next twelve years, 1867-1879, for most of which the liberals led the government, are the concern of the next three chapters. In Chapter Four, “Building a Liberal State,” Judson describes how the liberals transformed Austria’s constitutional structure. He places particular emphasis, first, on how they transformed their general principles into government practice, and, second, on the limits of *Buerger* influence in the face of significant opposition by those still largely opposed to liberal principles, including the ruler himself as well as the bureaucracy, army, much of the nobility, a nascent working class, and the nationalities. In so doing, he illustrates how the liberal emphasis on common citizenship, rooted in German liberal values, allowed them to limit both linguistic rights of nationalities and the right of workers to organize while still seeing themselves as promoting an inclusive, common Austrian identity. Yet Judson is insistent here, I think rightly, that Austrian liberals were little different from other European liberals in this, and that it is thus wrong to conclude from their “illiberal measures ... that

the position of bourgeois groups in Austria was exceptionally weak by European standards of the 1860s" (p. 141).

In Chapter Five, Judson uses the liberals' brief period out of power in 1870 and 1871 to trace the history of their association life from 1867 to 1873. In particular, he explores the continued importance of the many ostensibly nonpolitical organizations. Rejecting the view that this was a mark of liberal weakness, he argues that the existing associations in Austria performed the functions as served political associations elsewhere and became the organizational models for those political clubs that were formed. Like their predecessors, the new political clubs eschewed the rhetoric of interest group politics and claimed to speak for the entire community, although their membership was solidly middle class. Yet, they did not seek to widen the appeal of liberalism, preferring to try instead "primarily to raise voter participation among urban *Buerger*" (p. 162). Nor was there a shift in the power structure of the liberals. Lawyers, university professors, industrialists, and to a lesser extent by large landowners and state officials dominated the national movement, while "school teachers, artisans, shopkeepers, and smaller-scale merchants continued to constitute the backbone of the local liberal movements" (p. 163).

In his sixth chapter, Judson treats the liberals' return to power from 1873 to 1879 by exploring how the liberals, who had been the triumphant shapers of the legal constitutional order to at the end of the 1860s, lost power and had been discredited in the eyes of much of the public a decade later. Here, Judson not surprisingly discusses how the *Krach* (economic crisis) that came the same year as the liberals returned to power made managing the political system they had created more difficult, and ultimately alienated some of their electoral base as free trade lost some of its appeal.

The economic crisis, however, was not the only problem the liberal leadership encountered during the 1870s. The so-called *Jungen* (Youth wing), those local activists who had not been able to break into the upper echelons of the liberal leadership, challenged the existing leadership and brought about a split in liberal ranks (p. 168). In so doing, the *Jungen* began the process of disengaging "Germanness from its universalist Austrian associations," although Judson clearly emphasizes the word "began," since he argues they did not yet see Germans as "a full-fledged separate interest group." (p. 169) Thus, while according to Judson the 1873 elections showed "several

important long-term trends in Austrian electoral geography," with divisions between urban curia in solidly German areas that began to support the *Jungen* and the continued dominance of the *Alten* in the large landowner and chamber of commerce curias and among Germans living in language islands, the divisions between the two groups remained fluid throughout the 1870s (p. 174).

As the title of the book's seventh chapter, "From Liberalism to Nationalism: Inventing a German Community, 1880-85," suggests, this period, and particularly 1879-1880, is when an important reorientation of Austro-German liberals' conception of German identity took place. For the liberals, the 1880 Stremayr ordinances, which made Czech an official administrative language in Bohemia and Moravia, were "an attack on their interests in ethnically mixed provinces" (pp. 196-97). This abandonment by the conservative government led liberals to seek new ways to defend the German culture that they had come to associate with the spread of culture and progress. Activists began using the concept of *Nationalbesitzstand* (national property), which referred "both to the national ownership of specific geographic places and to the wealth, power, and cultural capital produced by Germans in those places" (p. 204). Meanwhile, liberals began reaching out to lower class Germans in a move Judson reminds his readers was contemporaneous with attempts by French, Italian, and German liberals to strengthen their bases in a similar way.

Judson's last substantive chapter, "National Unity, Anti-Semitism, and Social Fragmentation, 1885-1914," traces how the changing political conditions created by the expansion of the electoral franchise affected the liberals. Until 1900, Judson argues, most liberals still defined the German national community in the familiar terms of common German cultural legacy and deference to wealth and education, but biological concepts of nationality began to challenge that view. What is more, the liberals' willingness to defend German culture remained suspect to more ardent defenders of the German nation, as evidenced by the Cilli crisis of 1895 that precipitated the collapse of the ministry in which liberals had participated. The liberals' rhetoric had emphasized the importance of defending Austro-German interests, yet during the crisis the government agreed to build a Slovene-language gymnasium in the Styrian town of Cilli, a move that led German nationalists to drop their support of the government.

Meanwhile anti-Semitism, which still would not have been tolerated in liberal clubs during the 1870s and early

1880s, had come to be accepted in liberal associations by 1900. Despite this change, however, Judson points out that German nationalism in Austria, which developed out of Austrian liberalism, remained on the “bourgeois left,” unlike in Germany where liberal nationalism was in alliance with traditional conservative elites. And, as the 1905 Moravian compromise showed, “[m]oderates maintained their political influence by deploying a harsh nationalist rhetoric, but they occasionally found in national compromise an equally effective way of retaining local hegemony” (p. 262).

The overall effect of this well researched and thoughtful study is to make an “overly familiar” Austrian liberalism “less familiar.” And, given liberalism’s dominant political role among the monarchy’s preeminent nationality, no one who studies the nineteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy will be able to look at that polity in quite the same way again. Judson has undermined truisms about Austro-German liberalism’s roots, endurance, and international relationships. Not a fragile import, it was a part of a pan-European vision and movement. It flourished longer in Austria than is usually thought because of its indigenous social base. And local conditions in the Habsburg Monarchy led to both significant differences from German liberalism and parallels with other forms of European liberalism outside the German-language zone.

The key to Judson’s success is his ability to tie together such diverse foci as “political culture,” “social interactions,” “apparently transhistorical ideas,” and “power relations” effectively (p. 272). As a result his book will also change the way we look at German nationalism within the Habsburg monarchy, that spawner of so many varieties of nationalism. Far from appearing earlier than other varieties that arose in reaction to it, a distinct German ethnic nationalism in Austria appears late, itself a reaction to the perceived gains of the subject nationalities. The privileged social, political, and economic position of the monarchy’s German speakers actually led them to cling to an Austrian state patriotism that delayed the emergence of a separate German ethnic nationalism. In Judson’s words, “[n]ationalism in mid-century Austria had been largely an ideological component of liberalism” (p. 269).

Nevertheless, for all of Judson’s success, his reconceptualizing of nationalism raises new problems. Since the book focuses resolutely on liberalism and liberals, the exact contours of the nationalist-liberal relationship are not fully clear. If nationalism was only “largely” a component of liberalism, as Judson says, in what ways

was it not such a component? Are we ultimately to understand nationalism as an offshoot of liberalism or as a separate ideology in competition with a liberalism clever enough to coopt its opponent until late in the century? On a deeper level, does Judson’s distinction between the Austro-Germans’ early liberal nationalism and later ethnic nationalism perhaps reflect a changing Austro-German community in transition from, in Anthony Smith’s terms, an *ethnie* into a nation? Or is there some other yet unhinted at solution? While we may not have answers to questions like these, it is only thanks to Judson’s work that we even have these questions. We now need a comparable study of Austro-German nationalism and nationalists to supplement Judson’s monumental reevaluation of liberalism and liberals.

It is also somewhat sobering to realize that Judson fully describes a single political orientation of only one national group in the multinational Habsburg Monarchy, although it is arguably the most influential orientation of the most influential group. As such it joins the ranks of books by John Boyer, Andras Gero, and Nicholas Miller[1] in shaping a more pluralist historiography of political, social, and cultural transformation experienced by a variety of Habsburg subjects during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are of course other groups whose experiences have not been fully studied, but ultimately what is needed is a synthesis that pays serious attention to both the Germans and the non-Germans. In light of Judson’s path-breaking reevaluation of Austro-German liberals, is it too much to hope that the synthesis might come from his pen?

Note:

[1]. John W. Boyer, *Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian Socialism in Power, 1897-1918*. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1995), reviewed on HABSURG: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=29794851653186>; Andras Gero, *The Hungarian Parliament (1867-1918): A Mirage of Power*. Trans. James Patterson and Eniko Koncz. Atlantic Studies on Society in Change, No. 92. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), reviewed on HABSURG: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=8467879542639>; Nicholas J. Miller, *Between Nation and State: Serbian Politics in Croatia Before the First World War*. Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), reviewed on HABSURG: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?>

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