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Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg pays tribute to Engelbert Dollfuß.
Opening ceremony for the Dollfuß residential homes in Gänserndorf.
Gänserndorf, Wilhelm Willinger, 05 24 1936
Credit: Austrian National Library

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Volume 11: Günter Bischof/Anton Pelinka/Alexander Lassner, eds. *The Dollfuss/Schuschnigg Era in Austria*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004

Dictatorship, Fascism and the Demise of Austrian Democracy

Tim Kirk

Almost a century on from its creation at the end of the First World War, there has been something of a surge of interest in the history of the First Austrian Republic, which has often seemed to stand in the shadow of the more glamorous culture of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, or the more dramatic political history of the Weimar Republic. In particular, the controversial history of the destruction of democracy in the early 1930s and the establishment of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg dictatorship has been overshadowed by the Anschluss and the history of Nazi Austria, not least since the Waldheim affair of the 1980s focused attention on the country's wartime past. Yet in many ways the history of the preceding, "home-grown" dictatorship has remained a much more difficult and controversial subject for Austrians. Few know very much about the dictatorship or how it came about, and discussion of the period has been hampered by the political controversy it still invariably generates.

In this context, the renewal of interest in the political culture—and political legacy—of the "Dollfuss-Schuschnigg era in Austria" since the publication of the volume on that subject in this series thirteen years ago is very much to be welcomed, and not least for the refreshing open-mindedness with which a new generation of historians has sought to question and overturn received wisdoms and old methodologies. Perspectives have shifted considerably, and a tendency to construct contemporary history in terms of affairs of state and institutions, parties, and programs has given way to new approaches, above all an emphasis on everyday experiences and preoccupations that transcend both national boundaries and the chronological milestones of high politics. The work of Tara Zahra and others on indifference to nationalism in the late imperial period and the successor states has enormous implications for how we understood popular political mentalities in the age of fascism and dictatorship;[1] and the work of

1 Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); see also the collection of articles edited by Tara Zahra and Pieter Judson, *Austrian History Yearbook* 43 (2012).

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Robert Gerwarth and others on the transnational roots and networks of the paramilitary political violence is a reminder that from the outset Austria stood in the cross-currents of the formation and development of fascism and authoritarianism in central Europe, that its own fascisms were shaped as much by European developments as by domestic circumstances.[2]

A further important shift has been the development of a much more critical engagement with the historiography of the period. It has frequently been observed, and with good reason, that study of the history of Austria's First Republic has been dominated by the political agendas of the Second, and above all by the perceived need to preserve the domestic political peace that eluded the pre-war generation. Not unlike the Weimar Republic, the Austrian First Republic has frequently been set up as an experiment in democracy that was doomed to fail on account of the uncompromisingly entrenched positions of its leading political actors, and has stood as a warning of what happens when political consensus breaks down. In this comfortable narrative of flawed democracy and inevitable destinies, responsibility for the destruction of parliamentary democracy is shared, and the dictatorship is presented not as fascist itself, but as a defense against the fascism of the Nazis. For most historians of the period, this has long since ceased to be a convincing account of events.[3]

As new, more critical approaches to the history of the First Republic have revealed its positive impact on the lives of many Austrians, such "useful" narratives, and the motives behind them, have been increasingly questioned by a younger generations of researchers, often in doctoral dissertations, project reports, and conference papers. Among the most important recent contributions to the field are two very substantial collections of essays. The first of these, entitled simply *Österreich 1933–1938,* is the product of a conference held in 2011, and jointly organized by the Institute of Contemporary History and the Faculty of Law at Vienna University.[4] It offers an interdisciplinary range of approaches both to the history of the period and its post-war impact, from the origins of the dictatorship and the nature of its constitution, to issues of interpretation, restitution, and rehabilitation since the war. As a collaboration between legal scholars and

2 Robert Gerwarth, "The Central European Counterrevolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War," *Past and Present* 200 (2008): 175–209; Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, eds., *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

3 See Jill Lewis, "Conservatives and Fascists in Austria, 1918–1934," in *Fascists and Conservatives*, ed. Martin Blinkhorn (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 98–117, here 114.

4 Ilse Reiter-Zatloukal, Christiane Rothländer and Pia Schölnberger, eds., *Österreich 1933–1938. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an das Dollfuß-/Schuschnigg Regime* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012).

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historians, it is particularly strong on the fundamentally unconstitutional ways in which the dictatorship was established and operated, using illegal property confiscations as an instrument of repression and political control.[5] The dictatorship was established not by constitutional means, but by violence, and critics of the regime and its policies were dealt with peremptorily. When Dollfuss was interrupted at a rally with the cry "Herr Bundeskanzler, you are violating the constitution," the speaker was unceremoniously removed by a violent mob, bleeding from his nose and ears.[6] Others ended up in the "detention camp" at Wöllersdorf, as opposition was suppressed and political dissent was criminalized.[7] A particular strength of this collection is its attention to the divisive post-war legacy of the dictatorship, including the grudging rehabilitation of such political victims, whose convictions were eventually annulled by the Rehabilitation Law of 2011.[8]

The second collection, also based on a conference in Vienna, draws on an equally impressive range of contributors, and with surprisingly little overlap. It complements the first volume in so far as it aims to provide a historiographical snapshot of the field, drawing on work in progress in order to take stock of new approaches and interpretations.[9] The editors argue that while the political controversy surrounding the subject is still very discernible—and academic arguments about the nature of the regime frequently spill over into the press—the acrimony has nevertheless receded in recent years, and it should now be possible to discuss the regime on a purely scholarly basis. They too see Austria's experience between the wars as inseparable from broader political developments across the continent. The country was at the epicenter of the conflict between fascism and democracy; and although its dictatorships, both before and after 1938, were to a large extent shaped by external circumstances, events in Austria itself helped in turn to shape and influence political developments taking place abroad. Taken together, the contributions to these two volumes constitute a challenging reappraisal of the "corporate state," and one that constitutes

5 See Ilse Reiter-Zatloukal, "Repressivpolitik und Vermögenskonfiskation 1933–1938," in ibid., 61–76; and Christiane Rothländer, "Die Durchführungspraxis des politisch motivierten Vermögensentzugs in Wien 1933–1938," in ibid., 77–93.

6 Thomas Olechowski and Kamila Staudigl-Cheicowicz, "Die Staatsrechtslehre an der Universität Wien 1933–1938," in ibid., 227–241, here 232.

7 Pia Schölnberger, "'Ein Leben ohne Freiheit ist kein Leben.' Das Anhlatelager Wöllersdorf 1933–1938," in ibid., 94–107.

8 Ilse Reiter-Zatloukal, "'Unrecht im Sinne des Rechtsstaats' – Das Aufhebungs- und Rehabilitierungsgesetz 2011," in ibid., 327–346.

9 Florian Wenninger and Lucille Dreidemy, eds., *Das Dollfuß/Schuschnigg-Regime 1933–1938. Vermessung eines Forschungsfeldes* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2013).

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part of a continuing process of questioning the founding mythologies of the Second Republic, from both within and beyond the academy.[10]

By their nature, however, conference collections draw on a diversity of views and approaches, and despite the gradual withdrawal from political positions, there is still a measure of disagreement, or at best a difference of emphasis, on quite how the dictatorship is to be defined, and on how we should compare it with other, similar regimes elsewhere in Europe, a dilemma epitomized in the formulation of R. John Rath many decades ago: "The First Austrian Republic—Totalitarian, Fascist, Authoritarian, or What?"[11] As Gerhard Botz has rather pointedly observed in his own most recent contribution to the debate, it is telling that contributors to the same volume have not managed "to agree on a name for their subject: authoritarian, *(berufs)ständisch* (corporatist) or Austrofascist (with or without quotation marks) are used."[12] Researchers themselves, of course, are only too aware of the tendency to dwell on definitions, and if there is a measure of agreement among the contributors here, it is that more solid empirical research is needed on all aspects of the history of the regime. And there is no shortage of unused or underused archival material; Georg Hans Schmitt, for example, has found the party archive of the ÖVP and former Christian Social Party, housed in the Karl von Vogelsang Institute, to be an underused resource and one which, in addition to its collections of records and political publications and its press archive and library, is particularly rich in visual material, with over three thousand posters and some twenty thousand photographs. Perhaps the most important new resource, however, is the collection *Vaterländische Front und Bundeskanzleramt*. This comprises 400 boxes of documents formerly held in a special archive in Moscow, and returned to the Austrian state archives in 2009. The contents cover not only the establishment and development of the Fatherland Front, but various aspects of the regime's activities, including its relationship with the Church.[13]

10 See also Stephan Neuhäuser, ed., *"Wir werden ganze Arbeit leisten…" – Der austrofaschistische Staatsstreich 1934* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand GmbH, 2004).

11 R. John Rath, "The First Austrian Republic—Totalitarian, Fascist, Authoritarian, or What?," in *Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte. Festschrift Ludwig Jedlicka zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Rudolf Neck and Adam Wandruszka (St. Pölten: Verlag Niederösterreichisches Pressehaus, 1976), 163–81.

12 Gerhard Botz, "The Coming of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg Regime and the Stages of its Development," in *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, ed. António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 121–153, here 121.

13 Georg-Hans Schmitt, "'Im Namen Gottes, des Allmächtigen': christlich – deutsch – berufsständisch. Ausgewählte Aspekte über den Stand und die Perspektiven der Forschung über das christlich-soziale Lager in den Jahren 1929 bis 1938," in *Das Dollfuß/Schuschnigg Regime,* ed. Wenninger and Dreidemy, 141–158, here, 146–7.

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Extensive use is made of the Moscow material by Emmerich Tálos in his long awaited comprehensive study of the Austrofascist political system, a book that builds on several decades of research and expertise in the field and will doubtlessly be the single most valuable work of reference on the subject for the foreseeable future.[14] Tálos systematically analyzes the workings of the regime, relating its propaganda claims and political structures to the realities of life under the dictatorship. He begins with a lengthy discussion of the origins of the regime in the political and economic crisis in Austria during the early 1930s and concludes with a relatively short discussion of its demise in 1938. At the center of the study is an account of the dictatorship that reveals its hollow "corporate" institutions as mere window dressing, imposed and controlled from above by an authoritarian executive, which was in turn supported by the real pillars of the regime: the Fatherland Front (*Vaterländische Front*, VF), the paramilitary organizations, and above all the Catholic Church. The term "corporate state" reflected the self-image the regime wanted to project, he argues, not the reality of the Austrofascist political system. There is no doubt for Tálos that the regime was fascist: Mussolini's Italy was a model from beginning to end, and the *Duce* himself a political mentor to Dollfuss.[15] The Austrian regime did not come to power with the help of a popular mass movement, but attempted to create one instead in the wake of a coup d'état. Unfortunately, any ambition that the movement might have had to make of the VF a flamboyant avant-garde in imitation of other more successful fascist movements was frustrated by the indifference of the people, but also by the regime's continuing insistence on a financial orthodoxy, which helped prolong the economic depression in Austria until well into the 1930s. Kept short of funds by a parsimonious government, the Fatherland Front had to restrict itself largely to cheaper activities, such as snooping on its fellow citizens.

New work brings new insights, and some of the most fascinating ones are from the very same Fatherland Front snoops. In the absence of elections or free public opinion the regime—like other dictatorships—had to gauge the impact of its policies by relying on reports on popular morale in the provinces from its own rank and file, and Tálos uses these reports to assess

14 Emmerich Tálos, *Das Austrofaschistische Herrschaftssystem. Österreich 1933–1938* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2013). A sixth edition of the collection of essays on Austrofascism edited by Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer in 1984, long the standard work on the subject, appeared a year earlier: Emmerich Tálos and Wolfgang Neugebauer, eds., *Austrofaschsimsus. Politik-Ökonomie-Kultur 1933–1938* (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2012).

15 See the recently republished correspondence between the two: Wolfgang Maderthaner, ed., *"Der Führer bin ich selbst": Engelbert Dollfuss – Benito Mussolini, Briefwechsel; mit weiterführenden Beiträgen zum Austrofaschismus von Emmerich Tálos und Wolfgang Maderthaner* (Vienna: Löcker, 2004). The exchange was originally published as an appendix to Julius Braunthal, *The Tragedy of Austria* (London: Gollancz, 1948).

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the reception of the regime. What he finds is revealing: high expectations of change initially, and in the Fatherland Front itself enthusiasm both among functionaries and ordinary members. Within a couple of years, however, it seems to have become clear that the early promise of the regime would remain unfulfilled, and the buoyant mood had dissipated somewhat, even among the regime's own supporters. By the summer of 1935, reports from VF branches in the provinces were openly pessimistic about the political reliability of the population: estimations of "patriotic" political support for the regime in Salzburg and Styria hovered between twenty and forty percent; in the Tyrol VF membership "existed only on paper"; and the political outlook for the regime in suburban Vienna was bleakest of all. One of the main reasons for this widespread popular disillusionment was the continuing economic stagnation. Among the working class in particular, the long-term unemployment that affected virtually every family was combined with deteriorating wages and conditions for those in work, as well as welfare cuts, employer chicanery, and political repression. Disaffection was widespread not only among Social Democrats in the suburbs of Vienna, but among the regime's own supporters in the provinces as well, as a report from a "loyal" VF branch in Laa an der Thaya makes clear: "Workers can find no justice in this state. We must become Communists if the bosses are going to walk all over us just as they like. What has happened so far is a sham."[16] If the objective of corporatism was to transcend the class conflict in modern industrial society over which Catholic ideologues fretted so much, its introduction in Austria was an abject failure.

Central to the regime's plans for integrating workers into the 'corporate state' was the so-called unity union (*Einheitsgewerkschaft*), and trades unionists per se were not treated with quite the outright open hostility reserved for the regime's straightforwardly political enemies in the Social Democratic Party, as Paul Pasteur shows in his recent study of trade unions under the dictatorship. Originally published in French in 2002, Pasteur's work is based on a wide range of archival sources in both Vienna and Amsterdam, (where Otto Leichter's papers are deposited), along with a number of personal memoirs from the period, and it constitutes an important contribution both to the history of the regime and the history of the labor movement.[17] The containment of organized labor was, after all, one

16 Tálos, *Das austrofaschistische Herrschaftssystem,* 452.

17 Paul Pasteur, *Unter dem Hakenkreuz. Gewerkschafter und Gewerkschafterinnen in Österreich 1934–1938*. Translated from the French by Sonja Niederacher (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2008), originally published as *Être syndiqué(e) à l'ombre de la croix potencée. Corporatisme, syndicalisme, résistance en Autriche, 1934–1938* (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen, 2002).

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of the principal goals of the Austrofascist project; what happened to trade unionists and how they responded should be central to our understanding of what the dictatorship was about, and to what extent it succeeded in its aims. The events of 1934 were the most serious reverse the Austrian labor movement had suffered since its years of illegality in the late nineteenth century, and the initial response was one of widespread disorientation and an optimistic hope that the regime would not survive. While the overwhelming majority of trade unionists were resolutely oppositional, few were prepared to engage in illegal activity, and some functionaries optimistically believed that they might be able to collaborate with the regime—despite the swift call from the exiled Social Democratic leadership in Brno for a boycott of the regime's government union and all its works. Their hopes were dashed, however, despite (qualified) overtures from their Christian Social colleagues; on this issue at least, the *Heimwehren* clearly had the upper hand within the regime's power cartel and scuppered the chances of a rapprochement between regime and workforce. The labor movement's achievements during the First Republic now proved very fragile to say the least, and incapable of surviving the suppression of democratic institutions, while Christian Social promises of new "corporate" institutions to represent the position of the workforce remained unfulfilled. Instead, employer-friendly regulations were introduced, wages were driven down, and conditions in the workplace deteriorated, above all for women workers and apprentices, who were left increasingly at the mercy of unscrupulous and above all unregulated employers.[18] The regime's "unity union" was at best ineffectual, at worst an indifferent bureaucracy; and when it came to strikes and other conflicts in industrial relations, it was never clear whether the regime's response would be mediation or repression.[19] Pasteur draws some telling conclusions about the experience of trade unionists under the "Christian authoritarian corporate state." (He eschews the term "Austrofascism.") The Social Democrats were eventually forced to abandon some of their long held positions, and—following the example of the Communists—engage with the official union, thereby laying the foundations for a different kind of corporatist approach to industrial relations after the war. But in any case, he reminds us, ideological affiliations did not map straightforwardly onto Austria's class structure: national identity, gender, and attitudes to religion were also important elements in the formation of political loyalties.

18 Pasteur's findings echo those of Everhard Holtmann, *Zwischen Unterdrückung und Befriedung. Sozialistische Arbeiterbewegung und autoritäres Regime in Österreich 1933–1938* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1978).

19 See Christian Koller, "Streiken im austrofaschistischen 'Ständestaat' 1934–1938," *Vierteljahresschift für Sozial-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 96, no. 3 (2009): 320–335.

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To add complexity to the mix, the Nazis were present all the while in the background, consolidating and extending their influence. In fact, the ambivalence and fluidity of positions on the Austrian right during the 1930s has increasingly become the focus of new research. Julie Thorpe's innovative study of Pan-Germanism in the Austrofascist state finds that political allegiances during this period were far less clear-cut than "conventional wisdom" would have us believe. In particular, she dispenses with the widely accepted tripartite model of Austrian politics proposed by Adam Wandruszka in the 1950s. The *Lager* theory, she argues, was a convenient post-war construction, accepted by the left because it helpfully blurred distinctions between Social Democrats and Communists. It also provided a kind of legitimacy for the League of Independents (VdU), the party in which most former Nazis were concentrated. Above all, however, it created a false sense of political distance between the "Catholic conservative" Christian Social Party and the German Nationalists, concealing the extensive common ideological ground between the two 'camps' and overlooking their close collaboration in the anti-Socialist "bourgeois bloc" coalition governments of the 1920s. For Thorpe, this (deliberate) blurring of the political boundaries has fuelled the myth that while the German Nationalist camp supported the Nazis, the conservatives under Dollfuss and Schuschnigg "acted as a bulwark against fascist movements in Austria."[20] Beginning with an examination of the origins of popular politics in the nineteenth century, she sets out to show that our understanding of the history of Pan-Germanism in Austria is mistaken. The activities of Georg von Schoenerer notwithstanding, the 'Pan-German movement' did not constitute a discrete, if marginalized third political force, alongside the more formidable organizations of the Christian Social Party or the labor movement. It was at once far too pervasive and far too fragmented to be meaningful a political 'camp' in its own right, and should be seen instead as the unifying ideology underlying Austrian politics. It meant different things to different people, from political or economic union to shared cultural values, but it spanned the entire political spectrum up to 1938.

Thorpe's studies of the regional press under Dollfuss and Schuschnigg show that while editors and journalists could not express open support for the Nazis, they were able to articulate German nationalist sympathies that were shared by supporters of the dictatorship, and to a large extent the regime itself. She argues that Austria was already a fascist state before 1938, and one that shared an "entangled" history with both Fascist Italy and

20 Julie Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism and the Austro-Fascist State, 1933–1938* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 8.

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Nazi Germany. This transnational approach to fascism, she suggests, makes the nation state redundant in any case as a point of reference in the broader process of 'fascistization' that swept across Europe in the 1930s, reconfiguring political alliances according to necessity, and leaving a variable imprint on national societies that depended on local circumstances. Austria's particular geographical position meant that it was caught in the cross current of German and Italian fascism, a circumstance that was reflected in the separate but overlapping development of its indigenous fascist movements. The image of an "authoritarian" Austria, which the Catholic Church prevented from becoming fully fascist, is misleading, Thorpe argues. It has its roots in the regime's own propaganda self-image, and its acceptance is based on inadequate comparisons with church-state relations in the ostensibly more secular fascist states of Italy and Germany, or for that matter with other right-wing dictatorships of the period. She has expanded on her approach to the definition of fascism in an article for the *Journal of Contemporary History* in 2010, in which she provides both an overview of the literature on the subject and a summary of her own research findings.[21]

Fundamental to Thorpe's argument is that there was substantial common ideological ground between the 'black' camp (Catholic conservatives and Austrofascists) and the 'brown' camp (German Nationalists and Nazis), which most accounts of Austrian contemporary history have preferred to keep separate. Janek Wasserman's study of the radical right in Vienna during the First Republic endorses this interpretation.[22] In the first instance it is a welcome reminder that not all was red in 'Red Vienna.' Although it was a bastion of the Social Democratic Party, whose Austromarxist theorists forged intellectual alliances with scholars in a number of disciplines on the basis of shared Enlightenment values, it was also home to a powerful group of right-wing intellectuals. The city was just as much a center of conservative politics. It had been run before the war by the Christian Social Party, which continued to dominate national governments from the very beginning of the Republic; it was also the seat of an archbishop and the center of the country's Catholic hierarchy; and it was home to the Republic's social and political elites, senior officers and civil servants, *Besitz- und Bürgertum*, very few of whom had much instinctive sympathy with the Social Democrats and their experiments.

To take our cue from Karl Kraus and his excoriation of the city's "lightweight" right-wing intelligentsia, would be to make the same mistake

21 Julie Thorpe, "Austrofascism: Revisiting the 'Authoritarian State' 40 Years on," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 2 (2010): 315–343.

22 Janek Wasserman, *Black Vienna. The Radical Right in the Red City, 1918–1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

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as their more progressive contemporaries. For if cultural history has been kinder to Kraus than to the *Reichspost*, it nevertheless remains the case that the right-wing press, and not just the daily papers, but also more intellectual periodicals such as *Die schönere Zukunft* and *Das neue Reich,* had a much wider readership, and wielded more influence among the propertied and educated middle classes than *Die Fackel.* It would be an understandable mistake, however. Vienna's right-wing intellectuals were themselves rather pessimistic in the wake of the defeat of the empire, the collapse of the economy and a democratic revolution, which left them feeling dispossessed and disorientated. Nevertheless, conservative ideology enjoyed a remarkable resurgence during the 1920s, and Wasserman traces its development, alternating his focus between the attempts of the Austro-Marxists to establish a new progressive hegemony among the capital's intellectuals, and an increasingly confident, if fissiparous group of right-wing scholars, journalists and pamphleteers: a "Black Vienna" that went from strength to strength. The study concludes with the rise of Austrofascism and the triumph of Black Vienna, which flourished as never before under Dollfuss and Schuschnigg, but became impatient with the perceived weakness of the "corporate state" and increasingly receptive towards Nazi ideology. This radicalization was epitomized by the response of right-wing intellectuals to the 1936 murder of Moritz Schlick, professor of philosophy at Vienna University, by a former student who had been receiving psychiatric treatment. Johann Sauter, a political scientist and disciple of Othmar Spann, but also one of Schlick's colleagues at the university, published an anonymous article about the incident in the pages of *Die schönere Zukunft*. In it he maintained that the student, not Schlick, was the real victim in the affair, and that the murder was the outcome an ideological struggle between the world of materialism, Bolshevism, freemasonry and Jewishness on the one hand, and that of true *völkisch* values on the other. Most of the Black Viennese camp, Wasserman argues, was already embarked on the road towards fascism and Anschluss by the early 1930s.

Wasserman concludes his study with some reflections on the relationship of Black Viennese intellectuals with the Austrian victim narrative of the post-war period. Despite their increasing acceptance of a more *völkisch* fascism, many of the "Black Vienna" intellectuals were arrested and imprisoned after the Anschluss, among them Spann himself, who had some difficulty convincing the Nazis he actually agreed with them. After the defeat of Nazism, these intellectuals were able to recast their inter-war work as apolitical, and themselves as victims of Nazi persecution. Moreover, their position was now strengthened by the absence of left-wing intellectuals, who

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were encouraged neither to return to Vienna after the war, nor to resume their work. In the absence of a critical counter-narrative, rehabilitated former fascists were able to construct a contemporary history that attributed the destruction of democracy in the First Republic to the failures of democracy itself, blaming the Social Democrats for not rallying to the 'patriotic' cause, and joining their persecutors in a common front against Hitler.

At the very birth of Austria's post-war victim mythology, however, is the figure of Dollfuss himself, the originator of the dictatorship, and yet ostensible first victim of Nazi oppression, struck down by assassins for his resistance to fascism. The 'usable past' created by Dollfuss' martyrdom is one which operates very effectively on a number of levels, defining fascism as something external and threatening, but above all something other than Dollfuss himself or his dictatorship. To question the Dollfuss myth and its contribution to the founding mythology of the Second Republic is still, it seems, to invite howls of outrage and indignation from the conservative politicians and historians who have so much invested in it. This is precisely what Lucile Dreidemy has done in her recent "biography of the posthumous," which sets out to deconstruct the Dollfuss myth systematically and comprehensively, and to examine the ways in which the dictator's legacy has been instrumentalized for political ends.[23] She begins with his death in 1934, which was immediately exploited by the regime for propaganda purposes in text and image both ritual and memorial. The hand of the Catholic Church was evident from the outset, and the quasi-canonization of Dollfuss furnished the new regime with an instantly recognizable, if rather morbid, iconography replete with suggestive allusions to the death of Christ, and encouragement for a cult of the hitherto largely unknown St. Engelbert. The representation of Dollfuss as "soldier" and "fighter," and above all as a hero in the struggle against Nazism, enabled his supporters to depict him as a victim rather than a perpetrator of fascism, thereby cleverly identifying Nazism as fascism, and the dictator as an anti-fascist resister. As Dreidemy points out, Dollfuss' own approach to Austria's relationship with Nazi Germany was much more ambivalent. Nevertheless, the Dollfuss myth enabled Austrian conservatives to promote the idea in the United States that Austria was the "first victim of Nazism" long before it was incorporated in the Moscow Declaration of the Allies in 1943. The strategic importance of the victim thesis was perceived as so important for the political stability and international rehabilitation of Austria, Dreidemy argues, that the erstwhile enemies of the "civil war" now collaborated in

23 Lucille Dreidemy, *Der Dollfuß-Mythos. Eine Biographie des Posthumen* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014).

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suppressing discussion of the period, with the Social Democrats compelled to accept a thesis of "shared responsibility" for the destruction of democracy. It is not clear why the SPÖ continued to turn a blind eye to the compromise despite its powerful political position during the Kreisky years—Kreisky had been a victim of the regime himself—and in spite of provocative attempts by ÖVP to breathe new life into it, recasting the "Führer with a friendly face" of Austrofascist propaganda as the "democratic farmer" of the semi-scholarly apologetics of the post-war period. This consensual agreement made the Dollfuss dictatorship a taboo subject and seriously hindered scholarly discussion of the period until the Waldheim scandal distracted attention from it, leaving Dollfuss a "discreet but stable presence" in Austrian political life. Renewed attention, Dreidemy argues, came with the advent of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in February 2000, but culminated earlier, in 1998 with the opening of a Dollfuss museum in the house where he was born at Texing in Lower Austria, creating a modern shrine, as Dreidemy pointedly observes, behind the pretext of popular education.

The publication of Dreidemy's book, which was based on her doctoral research in Vienna, was as much a political as an academic occasion. The polemical tone of the final section in particular, on the enduring determination of his apologists to preserve and reinvigorate the Dollfuss myth, prompted an equally polemical response in the conservative press. Writing in *Die Presse*, Andreas Khol, a senior figure in the ÖVP and former president of the *Nationlrat*, accused her of writing "polemic disguised as scholarship," and leaped to the defense of the "respected political scientist" Karl Gottfried Kindermann (whose controversial account of "Hitler's defeat in Austria" Dreidemy had eviscerated) and Gudula Walterskirchen, a journalist on *Die Presse* and author of a sympathetic anniversary biography of Dollfuss in 2004;[24] and Kindermann himself was prompted to respond in the newspaper's online commentary section to Dreidemy's "grotesque" characterization of many of the dictator's biographers as hagiographers and apologists.[25]

In light of these responses, the rather optimistic suggestion that the political explosiveness of the subject has diminished somewhat seems a little premature, but the increasing divergence of scholarly consensus from popular history and political biography is increasingly discernible.[26] Much of the haggling that remains is around the term "Austrofascist," used by

24 Andreas Khol, "Dollfuß heute: keine Spur von Kult und Mythos. Zu einer neuen, verstörenden Biografie des Autokraten aus Frankreich," *Die Presse*, 28 Nov. 2014.

25 See the commentary section of "Dollfuß-Kult: ein Toter as ewiger 'Führer,'" in *Die Presse*, 18 November 2014 <http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/literatur/4598499/DollfussKult_Ein-Toter-als-ewiger-Fuhrer?_vl_backlink=/home/kultur/index.do> (23 Feb. 2016).

26 Wenninger and Dreidemy, *Das Dollfuß/Schuschnigg-Regime,* 7.

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some to define the regime as wholly fascist and comparable with Italy and Germany, and by others to refer only to elements of it. In practice there is a measure of agreement on a number of issues. Most historians and political scientists would agree that the regime was internally heterogeneous—whether one sees the cartel of power players as the "limited pluralism" of an authoritarian state or the "polycracy" familiar from Nazi Germany. There is also agreement that the regime developed over time, an approach which is compatible with the notion of a broader process of "fascistization" that swept across Europe during the 1930s, leaving a political imprint that varied according to local circumstances, but whose overall tendency was towards a fuller, more pervasive acceptance of fascism. In that context Austria was—arguably—subject to the vicissitudes of the more powerful political currents around it. In any political snapshot of the authoritarian regimes of the 1930s, including Italy and Germany, there is a fluid combination of fascist and conservative forces, which can be interpreted variously, depending on the balance in a particular state or the focus of the historian. Where Janek Wassermann, for example, has found an ideological convergence between Austria and Germany that prepared the road for Anschluss, Gerhard Botz has interpreted the same period, which was characterized by the "uncontrolled growth of corporations" as a bureaucratization of the regime and an effective "de-fascistization."[27]

The focus of much of the new work is on identifying a new kind of common ground across Europe. Julie Thorpe finds the term "para-fascism" useful in this context, as a designation which to suggests a difference of degree rather than one of substance between regimes such as Italy and Germany and those elsewhere, which—according to Aristotle Kallis, who has used the term most extensively—adopted the trappings of fascism without sharing the "revolutionary ideological vision" of the "core" fascist regimes.[28] Historians of fascisms beyond Italy and Germany have found the term particularly useful and applied it to regimes where fascism was present but which did not become fully fascist. For Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, for example, who has compared the "corporate state" with the early Franco regime and concluded that "para-fascism" was the norm and "full fascism" the exception in inter-war Europe.[29] The concept of para-

27 Botz, "The Coming of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg Regime," 144.

28 Thorpe, "Austrofascism," 326; Aristotle Kallis, "'Fascism,' 'Para-Fascism' and 'Fascistization': On the similarities of Three Conceptual Categories," *European History Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2003): 219–249, here, 220.

29 Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, "La marea autoritaria: nacimiento, desarrollo y consolidación de regímenes parafascistas en Austria y España," *Historia Actual Online* 12 (Winter 2007) 119–131.

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fascism provides the basis for a discussion of the development of fascism across Europe that avoids polarization but, like many such definitions, it is as much about ideology as about the lived realities of the period. If there is a common thread to the new research in the field, it is an increasing impatience with prescriptive terminologies and typologies, and a renewed focus on the realities of political change: how and why the dictatorship was established, how it structured itself and operated politically; what it set out to achieve, and how far it succeeded; how it was experienced, and how people responded to it. What researchers have found is a fluidity of ideology and political loyalties, a landscape of the political right in interwar Austria characterized as much by shared values and political affinities as by disagreements; in short a politics which, ultimately, softened Austria up for the Anschluss, rather than served as a bulwark against it.

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