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Anarchism in Austria

Gabriel Kuhn

2009

In the nineteenth century, anarchism in Austria was mainly associated with anti-monarchist sentiments in the non-German speaking territories of the Habsburg Empire. In 1851 Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76) was sentenced to death by Austrian authorities for his role in the Pentecostal Uprising in Prague two years earlier. His sentence was later commuted, and he was extradited to Russia.

Most early anarchists within Germanspeaking Austria emerged from the radical wing of the Social Democratic Party. A major influence was the agitation of Johann Most (1846–1906) in the 1860s. Another important early anarchist agitator was Josef Peukert (1855–1910), co-publisher of the journal *Die Zukunft* (The Future) (1879–84). In 1883–4 the killings of two police agents who had infiltrated the radical workers' movement were attributed to anarchists. The following wave of government repression saw many anarchists imprisoned or forced into exile. The assassination of Empress Elisabeth (1837–98) by self-declared Italian anarchist Luigi Luccheni (1873–1910) in 1898 seemed to confirm the movement's violent character. Anarchism continued to influence radical factions

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of the social democrats, however, most notably the work of Max Adler (1873–1937).

A workers' council movement, strongly influenced by anarchist ideas, emerged in the early twentieth century and proved decisive in forcing the monarchy's dissolution, and, in turn, an end to World War I. A short-lived council republic was established in Hungary in 1919.

After World War I and the establishment of the Austrian Republic, most anarchists rallied around the Bund herrschaftloser Sozialisten (Alliance of Non-Authoritarian Socialists) founded by Pierre Ramus (1882–1942) in 1919. Austrian-born historian Max Nettlau (1865–1944) lived and worked in Vienna during most of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1932 the small railway town of Wörgl in western Austria drew international attention for its successful implementation of a free money system – declared illegal by Austrian authorities a year later – based on the economic theories of Silvio Gesell (1862–1930). The Austrofascist seizure of power in 1933 and the Nazi takeover in 1938 put an end to almost all anarchist activity in the country. Most anarchists fled into exile or were imprisoned or executed.

The reemergence of an anarchist movement after World War II proved difficult. In the 1960s some artists' groups, most notably the Wiener Aktionismus and the Wiener Gruppe, expressed anarchist sentiments. In 1976 the anarchist journal *Die Befreiung* (Liberation) was founded (publication ceased in 1997). It would take until the 1980s, however, before the autonomous movement brought anarchist notions back to public attention and debate.

From 1982 until 2005 the bookstore and publisher Monte Verita was a focus point of anarchist activity. It was associated with an influential anarchist collective, the Revolutionsbräuhaus (Revolution Brewery). The *TATblatt* (Action News) (1988–2005) was the most important journal for the autonomous movement. The Ernst-Kirchweiger-Haus (EKH), a Vienna

squat occupied since 1989, counts as the current center of Austria's anarchist counterculture. The Pierre Ramus Society was founded in 1992 and publishes the journal *Erkenntnis* (Knowledge).

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