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Changing City, Changing Roles:
Municipal Developments and the Urban Social Contract in Nineteenth-Century Vienna

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What does a city owe to its inhabitants? Modern cities contain extensive bureaucratic and administrative structures to ensure that their citizens have a decent quality of life and access to the basic goods and services that many of us have come to take for granted in an urban setting. In this manner, cities long ago evolved past the stage where they were merely a collection of buildings and people united by geography and convenience. This evolutionary process varies considerably from city to city, faster in some and slower in others, but in many cases, it undertook a significant shift during the Industrial Revolution, when cities became magnets for people looking for employment opportunities. This paper will examine the development of municipal socialism in Vienna, how it occurred during a time of tremendous change, and how it signaled a shift the public ethos from the city as a passive actor in public life to one that plays an active role in the health and well-being of its residents for the first time.

The Revolution of 1848

Vienna, capital of the Austrian, and later, Austro-Hungarian Empire, underwent a profound demographic transformation, exploding from 270,000 inhabitants in 1800, to over 2 million in 1910.¹ A number of factors went into the drastic rise in the population of the city during the nineteenth century, but industrialization was among the largest. As occurred in many instances of industrialization in Europe, the opportunity to find new work in the factories and shops that were springing up around the city eventually drew hundreds of thousands of new workers. Cotton and paper mills in particular were a large industry in Austria, with 209 cotton

mills alone throughout the empire, containing well over a million spindles being operated by workers, many of whom came to Vienna just for those jobs.2

In addition to rapid population growth, industrialization also had a side effect of producing strong social unrest among many of the lower classes, not just in Vienna, but in industrializing cities throughout Europe. Living and working conditions were horrid for employees who struggled with long hours, low pay, and rising costs of living. Working days were often between twelve and fourteen hours, and weekly wages for women and children would barely cover the cost of food. Considering that the workforce of the cotton and paper mills in Lower Austria was wholly 60 percent women and children, this led to a significant struggle just to cover the basic necessities. Increasing unemployment in the suburbs of Vienna also led to issues of drunkenness, prostitution, and other social ills.3

This social unrest was a key (although by no means only) aspect of the popular uprisings that broke out in Vienna in 1848. In March, student-led revolutionaries demanded among other things: the resignation of Prince Clemens von Metternich, State Chancellor of the Austrian Empire; freedom of the press; freedom of religion; the abolition of the secret police; and a constitution.4 Despite the revolutionaries making some gains early in the year, violence broke out in October, and many of the troops were forced out of the city. The revolutionaries seized control of Vienna, but a siege by imperial forces followed shortly thereafter. After a short bombardment, the conservative forces re-established control of the city and the government, declaring martial law shortly thereafter.5

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3 Ibid., 13-14.
4 Ibid., 60-61
Although the imperial forces defeated the revolutionaries in the Vienna Uprising, and many of the gains made in the previous year were subsequently lost, the revolution did have a few tangible effects for the city. One such effect was the Provisional Municipal Ordinance of 1850, which established the very beginning of self-rule for the city (as opposed to direct rule by the emperor). The ordinance was largely the work of the Vienna city council, as opposed to the imperial government, establishing the first real sense of municipal independence after the crushing of the Vienna Uprising. In addition, the ordinance allowed for the opportunity to develop a voting system which would lay the foundation for the development of a city-wide political system that would last until the First World War.

The establishment of municipal self-rule and the creation of a new political system had an important impact on the electoral landscape of the city for decades. The city council was faced with the problem of defining the electorate, essentially deciding who would be allowed to participate in the new political system, and who would not. Extending the franchise to the masses was not a serious consideration during the negotiation period of 1848-1849, and the ultimate outcome was an income requirement for voting that excluded a significant number of inhabitants. The most significant revision to this system occurred in 1885, when the income requirements were lowered, allowing a large group known as the Five-Gulden men – those that paid at least five Gulden in property taxes annually – to vote. This increased the eligible voting population in the city by over 12,000. This did not mark the beginning of mass popular democracy, however. Although nearly 70 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot in the 1885

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8 Ibid., 275.
elections, the entire eligible voting population was an extremely small portion of the city’s inhabitants. In fact, the 1887 election was decided by less than half of the entire voting population of 47,757, which itself was not even ten percent of the city’s entire population. Nevertheless, the expansion of voting privileges did increase the responsiveness of the municipal government to the needs and demands of more and more voters.

Another extremely important development for the city in the years following the granting of self-rule was the Imperial Municipalities Law of 1861. This law essentially gave Vienna, as well as other cities and towns “free reign venture into any form of public service that did not conflict with the prerogatives of the imperial government.” Vienna did not instantly become a bastion of unchecked liberal power, but strides were still made toward the development of city services of the city as a result of legislation arising after 1848. This was the foundation for a period of rapid growth in city administration which oversaw such developments as: the creation of new institutions and services; the creation of social insurance; the construction of new hospitals and hospice homes; the expansion of urban rail service; and jointly-financed public works.

*Karl Lueger and the Christian Social Party*

This period of self-rule and developmental autonomy began a period in which municipal consciousness really began to develop, reaching a pre-war zenith in the period during Karl Lueger’s tenure as mayor from 1897 to his death in 1910. An aspiring politician in his youth, Lueger began a long career in Viennese politics that witnessed the evolution of the Christian

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10 Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna*, 213.
11 John Deak, *Forging a Multinational State: State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 186.
12 Ibid., 209.
Social party as a dominant force in the city, and the rise of anti-Semitism as a prominent political issue. Lueger’s leadership of the Christian Social Party and his adept political maneuvering led to his election as mayor of Vienna in 1897.\textsuperscript{13}

Lueger’s Christian Social Party, despite being ardently anti-liberal, was responsible for many of the developments of a municipal socialism (or city ownership of public services) that had much more in common with the Social Democrats than the Christian Socials. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that many of the councilors in the city administration obtained their positions in the earlier liberal period.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, many of the liberals in the administration supported Lueger and his initiatives for a variety of reasons, with political expediency being a rather common one. Compounding this support was recognition even by political opponents that Lueger’s government was making progress in the management and development of the city.\textsuperscript{15}

Lueger’s support for municipal socialism was not rooted in the politics of the past administration, but rather in the political gains that could be made through it. According to John Boyer, the Christian Socials embraced municipal socialism for several specific reasons despite their anti-liberal bent. One major reason was that the municipal programs put in place helped generate revenue and maintain the city’s coffers, which reflected well on the ruling party. Another reason was that the large municipalization projects could be pointed to as key achievements by the Christian Socials for a voting populace that was increasingly demanding such changes. Municipalization also opened up new bureaucratic positions, and thus,

\textsuperscript{13} Geehr, Karl Lueger, 98.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 35.
opportunities to gain political patronage. Finally, municipal socialism helped the party to define itself, especially, Boyer writes, “the practical limits of the word ‘social’ in its title.”

Ultimately, the Christian Socials developed a program of municipal socialism out of electoral necessity and political expediency, but they did not do so without imprinting upon it their own brand of conservatism. For instance, the motivation behind the municipalization of services can largely be described as one of two different philosophies. The first philosophy is one in which municipalization is undertaken with the public good in mind, and the service is operated as a non-profit, or gemeinnützig. The second philosophy is one in which municipalization is undertaken with the intention of profit-making and surplus generation, or gewinnstrebend, and it was this philosophy that Lueger embraced. That the party needed to engage in municipal socialism at all, however, shows how much the ethos had developed regarding municipal responsibilities in the public sphere

_Incorporation of the Suburbs_

A prerequisite for establishing an effective program of municipal socialism was gaining administrative control over the suburbs that surrounded the city. A rapidly increasing population and a limited amount of available space led to rapidly increasing rent prices in the city proper. As a result, most of the new workers settled in the suburbs which were not an administrative part of the city. This had the advantage of providing cheaper living arrangements, as well as closer proximity to the shops and factories that employed many of the inhabitants. In addition, because of the administrative divide, the suburbs were not obligated to pay many of the same taxes that inhabitants in the city were. For Lueger, this ultimately meant was that the city could not create

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16 Ibid., 8.
17 Ibid., 7.
effective, city-wide municipal projects, and also would not benefit from a large (and growing) tax base. In order to solve the problems that plagued Vienna, the suburbs would need to be included as part of the space of the city itself.

The primary solution floated by many politicians and administrators was the incorporation or annexation of the suburbs into the city proper. Karl Lueger was long a proponent of incorporation, seeing it as a key aspect of the modernization of the city. On August 24, 1880, Lueger wrote that it was time for “the party to expand its program for the development of the city, its administration, and its ‘free institutions’ (freiheitliche Institutionen) with respect to bringing ‘wider circles of the population’ to political activity.” The very first item on Lueger’s development plan was the incorporation of the suburbs of the city.\(^\text{18}\)

This was not feasible without a complete overhaul of the tax system, however. So, in early 1890, a proposal was put forth to make significant changes to the tax system, including: the expansion of the collection line for the consumption tax over many of the outer suburbs; the tearing down the old tax walls of the city; the allocation of this newly-available land for the construction of the Stadtbahn; and an elimination of the consumption tax for a number of goods in the city while enforcing taxation of other goods in the suburbs. Erich Kielmansegg, governor (Statthalter) of the province of Lower Austria, of which Vienna was a part, was a major proponent of the bill. His support was essential in getting the tax plan passed, and his political influence would shape the development of the city in other ways as well.\(^\text{19}\)

After the tax reform bill passed, Kielmansegg went a step further and was instrumental in persuading Emperor Franz Joseph to support the unification of the suburbs with the city. He

\(^{18}\) Brown, “Karl Lueger as Liberal,” 255.
\(^{19}\) Boyer, Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna, 251-252.
argued that if the emperor wished to curb social unrest, then he needed to develop more centralized control over the suburbs.\textsuperscript{20} Although the emperor wholeheartedly supported incorporation, there was still a significant amount of debate in the city council. Eventually, those who supported unification won out, and a bill was passed that incorporated the suburbs and the city into a single greater Vienna. It was this bill that laid the foundation for a city-wide municipal socialism that greatly transformed the experiences of the individuals living beyond the city walls.

\textit{Health and Healthcare}

Following the successful incorporation of the suburbs, the city could now effectively address one of the major city-wide topics of importance to Vienna: public health. The creation of a city-wide system to deal with issues of public health does not occur overnight, however. In fact, requires a significant shift in thought, ending in a belief that the city or state has a responsibility for providing for the health of its citizens. Indeed, the perception of health and healthcare as a responsibility of the city or state is a relatively recent one, and in fact that idea is still met with skepticism in many places.

For centuries, charity had been a primary source of things like social welfare and healthcare in Europe, operating primarily through the Catholic Church. For instance, the Church had constructed a series of hospices, leper colonies, hospitals, and other medical facilities from the ancient period into the modern era. In Vienna, we can begin to see a shift away from this attitude with the establishment of the first city hospital in 1873, which, according to Carl Schorske, signified that “the liberal municipality assumed, in the name of medical science, the traditional responsibilities which previously the church had discharged in the name of charity.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 254.
A key figure in the transition from religious to municipal responsibility for healthcare was Lorenz von Stein. A philosopher as much as an economist, Stein utilized the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, as well as romanticism and science in order to help understand social and sociological problems. This led him to emphasize the importance of public administration in finding solutions to social problems. Underlying this emphasis on administration was, according to Richard Geehr, “the perception that the secular state of the nineteenth century was an outgrowth of medieval church policy.”

Health and healthcare were serious concerns for the city, which had experienced recurrent plagues and epidemics throughout history. Widespread illness and periodic plagues were a fact of life in most European cities, but the close proximity of hundreds of thousands of individuals, the unsanitary working conditions of the industrial age, and relatively primitive ideas of health and sanitation only exacerbated the problem in the nineteenth century. Tuberculosis was one of the more significant public health concerns, being such a problem that it was known as the Viennese disease. In addition to tuberculosis, cholera was a threat to the population as well. An outbreak of the disease in 1873 prompted the city council to take steps toward prevention. This included instituting guidelines for disinfection, purchasing new ambulances, and constructing a new hospital on Triester Straße. In addition to this, the Vienna urban health authority put forward a number of official acts in 1873 relating to the establishment of a new pharmacy, the disinfection of latrines and hospitals, the water needs of the hospital at Triester Straße, and the elimination of waste deposits near there, among other things.

22 Geehr, Karl Lueger, 32.
25 Ibid., 18.
Municipal Water System

City management of health and healthcare did not begin and end with the establishment of hospitals and pharmacies, however. Indeed, the nineteenth century saw significant health problems arise from urban growth and overcrowding that would require new solutions. To that end, the city council voted to create the first Vienna Spring Water Main in 1864, which transported clean sources of water to the city from 60 miles away. This ensured an adequate supply of fresh, clean water, and helped to reduce incidence of disease. Residential buildings that were formerly serviced by domestic wells were soon connected to the new water main, with over 70% of them being connected by 1879. 26

This water line was a point of pride for the city, and continues to be to this day. In fact, a city physician argued that the municipal water supply of the city should be exhibited at an international exposition of public health to be held in Brussels in 1876. Furthermore, in their annual report of 1875, the urban health authority boasted that “our city is able to rejoice… about the mountain spring water supply line which is a hygienic achievement unlike that of almost any other city in the world.” 27 Not only did the city accept responsibility for providing these water services, but the urban health authority proudly boasted of the quality of it in comparison to those of other cities. This heavy investment in public health and sanitation shows a clear shift in thinking from the idea that individuals were responsible for their own water access through the use of domestic wells, to the belief that the city government needed to create a water supply for its citizens.

26 Gierlinger, Haidvogl, Gingrich, and Krausmann, "Feeding and Cleaning the City," 231.
Only half of a municipal water system consists of providing fresh, clean water to all who need it, however; the other half is eliminating waste. For Vienna, this was quickly becoming a problem. As the population rose, so did the amount of waste produced each day, from an estimated 420 tons in 1830 to 2,600 tons in 1910, which does not even include waste from industrial sites such as tanneries, butcheries, dyeing mills, or breweries. Urban centers throughout history always needed to contend with issues of human waste, but the nineteenth century witnessed the problem grow to an unprecedented scale. Like many major cities, waste disposal consisted largely of dumping refuse into the river, or one of the many small channels that ultimately led into the nearby Danube.

In 1864, the city government reorganized the public health sector, and the functions of the urban health authority were expanded. This was necessary as many inhabitants had deemed the established waste channel system inadequate, particularly the urban health authority which complained that due to insufficient water flow, waste would often remain in sewage channels for weeks at a time. They identified this as a major reason for the high mortality rates, as well as the fact that floods often led to waste being flushed back into streets and cellars. With the construction of the First Mountain Spring Pipeline, there was now enough water to supply a comprehensive sewer system, and construction of the new sewers began in 1893. The system was eventually completed in 1904, under the tenure of Karl Lueger.

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28 Gierlinger, Haidvogl, Gingrich, and Krausmann, "Feeding and Cleaning the City," 229.
29 Ibid., 230-231.
30 Ibid., 232.
Lueger was praised by many citizens for greatly improving the hygiene of the city, despite the plans being laid before he was in office. During his tenure as mayor, sewage systems increased by more than sixty percent. After the regulation of the Danube River in the 1870s and the incorporation of the suburbs in the 1890s, the city was at last able to put together a comprehensive plan to deal with sewage waste. By 1910 the system was in place, effectively taking waste from all over the city, including the former suburbs, and discharging it downstream. This was a significant transformation for the portion of the populace that previously had limited to no access to this service, instead relying on often open-air waste channels to carry away their waste. This is something that would not have been possible had the municipal government not taken up the charge of making the city a healthier, more livable place.

31 Ibid., 233.
32 Geehr, Karl Lueger, 156.
33 Gierlinger, Haidvogl, Gingrich, and Krausmann, "Feeding and Cleaning the City," 232.
Utilities

The municipalization of utilities, particularly the gas supply, was an important step for the city of Vienna, which was at least partly inspired by similar pushes in other European cities. Joseph Chamberlain, mayor of Birmingham, England, had, for instance, shown in the 1870s that municipal socialism was a political possibility when it came to gas and water utilities.\(^{34}\) The first gasworks in Vienna were constructed in 1828, and the Imperial Continental Gas Association, an English company, began supplying gas in 1843.\(^ {35}\) This company became the major supplier of gas for the city, eventually obtaining a monopoly for gas supply in Vienna.\(^ {36}\) This was part of a larger shift during this period from renewable biofuels such as wood to fossil fuels such as coal, which would itself be replaced later with the widespread adoption of electricity.

Although electrification became a possibility in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Vienna was slow to adopt the new technology for a number of reasons, instead relying on gas lamps to illuminate the city. The biggest problem, according to a report from the Consuls of the United States in 1887, was that the electric companies operating Vienna had very little capital at their disposal to put toward infrastructure development or investment. At the same time, the report stated that the Imperial Continental Gas Association was contracted to provide electric lighting for several buildings in Vienna, but it only did so to protect its interests against possible competition. The Imperial Continental Gas Association had no incentive to electrify the city as a whole, despite being the only organization (aside from the city itself) able to do so.\(^ {37}\)

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\(^{34}\) Geehr, Karl Lueger, 96.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 149.
\(^{37}\) Ibid.
This situation developed as a result of the Imperial Continental Gas Association obtaining a monopoly on gas lines. The city had contracted the company to be the sole provider of public illumination until October 31, 1899, but as the contract drew closer to expiring, a strong push to municipalize the gas industry arose.\textsuperscript{38} Lueger led the construction of a series of new gasworks in the city in preparation for a switchover, and on October 31, the city successfully took over control of the gas supply. This was a fundamental step for the municipal development of the city, and indeed, the apparent success of the gas works laid the foundation for similar undertakings. Other services such as transportation were municipalized, and the construction of a second mountain spring reservoir was undertaken.\textsuperscript{39} This was particularly important for Lueger and the Christian Socials, as the gasworks became a major source of revenue for the city, supporting the \textit{gewinnstrebend} policy that Lueger advocated.

\textit{Conclusion}

There are also numerous other instances that illustrate the shift in expectations from the city as a passive actor in public life to one in which it plays in active role in the health and well-being of its citizens. For example, Lueger’s push to municipalize the Nordbahn rail lines in the city helped to reduce the unfair business practices and price gouging that citizens often protested.\textsuperscript{40} This period was also extremely important for the development of educational institutions that catered to the public. In fact, the late nineteenth century saw the creation of two

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Geehr, \textit{Karl Lueger}, 97.
\textsuperscript{40} Geehr, \textit{Karl Lueger}, 66-67.
private library systems that would later lay the foundation for a city-wide municipal library service. ⁴¹

When examined individually, these developments can be seen as little more than simple attempts at solving problems that plague the city. When taken together, however, I believe they show a comprehensive shift in the way that individuals began to see their city. In drawing upon enlightenment ideals and the development of socialism, many Viennese residents began to identify the municipal government as having an obligation and responsibility for their health and well-being. That is not to say that this was achieved easily, or that these obligations were as extensive as what city residents expect today. But the achievements of this period laid the foundation for municipal development that would continue throughout the twentieth century, and into the modern day.

Bibliography


