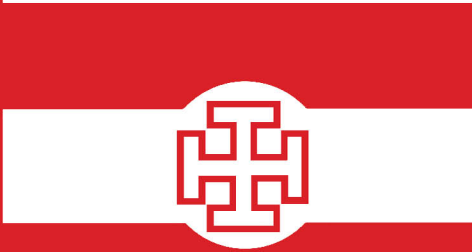


# The Dollfuss/Schuschnigg Era in Austria

## A Reassessment



Contemporary Austrian Studies

Volume Eleven

Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and  
Alexander Lassner, editors

The  
Dollfuss/Schuschnigg Era  
in Austria

# Contemporary Austrian Studies

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Edited by  
Günter Bischof  
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Alexander Lassner

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# INTRODUCTION

*Alexander Lassner and Günter Bischof*

This volume brings renewed investigation to the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg era (1933/34-1938) as part of the ongoing reassessment of the interwar period (1918-1938) within the historical community in America and Europe.<sup>1</sup>

For more than sixty years, scholarly inquiry into the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg era has suffered from divisiveness and politicization perhaps best reflected by the use of the charged terms “*Ständestaat*” (corporate state) versus “Austrofascism.” As is well known, the roots of this antagonism reach back to the 1930s, when supporters and critics of the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg governments engaged in a struggle, frequently raucous and sometimes violent. Thus, for example, after the failed socialist revolt of February 1934, men like J. D. Gregory published apologiae for Engelbert Dollfuss’s suppression of democracy, while, subsequently, Otto Bauer and Karl Renner lobbied French premier Léon Blum for the removal of Gabriel Puaux as French ambassador to Austria – a man considered by the left as too favorably disposed towards Kurt Schuschnigg.<sup>2</sup> And in the wake of the disastrous Anschluss and the world war, those employing the words “*Ständestaat*” and “Austrofascism” have sought, too often, to defend or to accuse the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg governments, rather than to uncover and consider evidence in as objective a manner as possible. While those on the Right have tended to portray the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg governments strictly as a defensive bastion against Nazi Germany, those on the Left have indicted these governments as decisive contributors to the successful Anschluss through their rejection of parliamentary democracy.

Beyond this contentious issue, and as Thomas Angerer has ably demonstrated, considerable difficulties affected historical research in Austria since World War II. These difficulties included, but were not limited to, the writing of *Koalitionsgeschichtsschreibung* (coalition history) in the late 1940s and 1950s and, until recently, the unwillingness of

Austrian (and non-Austrian) historians to address Austrian collaboration with the Nazis during World War II (the so-called Great Taboo).<sup>3</sup> Other obstacles to historical research on the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg era have remained, and a brief discussion of some of these is necessary.

Among the most serious problems has been the issue of untrustworthy and incomplete evidence. Reliance by historians upon the records of public trials, memoirs and diaries of European statesmen and officials of the interwar period, and such postwar official publications as the *Rot-Weiss-Rot-Buch*, has been regular and extensive. But the degree of willful deceit contained in these works, including blatant lies as well as deliberate, far-reaching, and systematic omissions, can hardly be exaggerated.<sup>4</sup> Exacerbating matters has been the belated release of key documents from American and European archives. Hence, for example, crucial archival evidence from the United States and Italy pertaining to the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg era remained closed until the mid- to late 1980s. Since that time it has lain underutilized or ignored. It is, for instance, the rare scholar indeed who has worked in the archives of the *Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito*. This is unfortunate since Italian dictator Benito Mussolini conducted his most sensitive diplomacy through his military attachés, all of whom were members of Italian military intelligence. Worse, volumes of published documents—including but not limited to the *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (DDI) and the *Diplomáciai Iratok Magyarország Külpolitikájához* (documents on Hungarian foreign policy, all of which contain summaries in German)—have been consistently ignored by scholars writing on the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg era, the late R. John Rath's articles on Dollfuss being a notable exception.<sup>5</sup>

Dovetailing with these issues, many historians have relied too heavily on received wisdom, citing secondary sources far more than primary ones. The result is the propagation of myth based upon limited, flimsy, and/or hearsay evidence. Even when scholars look at primary sources, many do so heavily influenced by what they have read before or have been told, rather than considering the evidence as impartially as possible. A powerful illustration of myth propagation related to the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg era is the so-called fact that the French Popular Front government of Blum and Yvon Delbos refused to undertake a rapprochement with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini—despite the warnings of French diplomats and military officials, who informed Blum that Italian cooperation was vital in order to create security against Nazi Germany and to support Austria militarily in case it was attacked by the Reich.

Here again, the issue of “*Ständestaat*” or “Austrofascism” has exerted its baleful influence. Writers on the Left have tended to defend Blum and Delbos’s decision as moral and wise, while chastising the Schuschnigg government as having reaped the bitter fruit of its authoritarian form of government. Meanwhile, authors on the Right have heaped criticism on the French statesmen for being ideologically prejudiced and shortsighted.

But the assertion that Blum and Delbos ignored Mussolini is demonstrably false, and the published documents proving that they made at least one secret effort at rapprochement with the Duce have been obtainable for more than a decade.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, work after work maintains that the French statesmen would have nothing to do with Mussolini, whom they regarded, correctly, as responsible for the murder of Italian socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti. This incorrect view of Blum’s supposed obduracy includes no less than the recent six-hundred-page French biography of Blum by Ilan Greilsammer.<sup>7</sup> There is simply no way to avoid the reality that the only way to write proper contemporary European history, including that of the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg era, is with the knowledge of the required languages, with extensive research in manifold archives and on published primary sources, and without a political agenda.

Another unfortunate outcome of the fact that so much vital evidence was unavailable for such a long period of time is that scholars relied heavily upon German documents, along with a very limited supply of Austrian documents published in *Der Hochverratsprozess gegen Dr. Guido Schmidt vor dem Wiener Volksgericht*, in order to illuminate events in Austria from 1933 to 1938.<sup>8</sup> The chief problem with having resorted to these sources is that the Nazis and their agents—from Josef Leopold, Franz Papen, and Otto Stein in Vienna to Gerhard Köpke, Konstantin Neurath, Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, and Rudolf Hess in Berlin, were pathological liars who, in addition, regularly employed euphemisms of the most insidious kind and were habitually guilty of linguistic perversions. But numerous historians have been blind to the enormous degree of deceit present in the European diplomatic record and, above all, to the perversion of language and of argument in the German documentary record. Similarly, scholars have failed to understand that key members of the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg governments, most especially Schuschnigg, were acutely aware of this situation and, consequently, lied regularly to the Germans.

Given this overall situation, it is unsurprising that a general view has come to dominate the literature on Schuschnigg which portrays him as a naïve academic and/or an incompetent dictator, out of his depth in the battle with Nazism, and not up to the demands of his office. As a lesser

statesman, so the argument holds, he believed in a Germanism that precluded any anti-German stance, and, in order to prevent German aggression, he embarked upon a policy of appeasement that included blind, and ultimately ruinous, attempts to obtain Hitler's acquiescence to the central European *status quo*; in the meantime, Schuschnigg and his colleagues mangled the Austrian economy and prepared the ground for the victory of Nazism through their anti-democratic activities.<sup>9</sup>

Within the limits imposed by one volume, this collection of essays seeks to shed new light on the domestic, economic, foreign, and security policy of the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg governments, and to do so *sine ira et studio*. This does not mean that the authors are not critical of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg—such is inevitable in any honest investigation. But where credit is due, it has been given. And where factors beyond the control of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg were at work, attention has been paid.

The article by *Timothy Kirk* takes a needed international approach to the discourse over fascism in Austria. As he notes, views on fascism have, not infrequently, reflected the politics of the author. Kirk highlights some recent methodologies developed to understand fascism, while linking the breakdown of democracy in Austria to a more widespread rejection of parliamentary democracy among members of the mainstream Right in Europe.

Three scholars from the Economics University of Vienna have analyzed macroeconomic aspects of the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg era. *Gerhard Senft* begins by tracing the economic and social preconditions that led to authoritarian rule in Austria. He shows that the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg governments failed to stimulate the domestic economy through vigorous government intervention, which, in turn, helped foreign trade to assume the "pivotal position." While there were some limited successes in the realm of foreign trade, key officials in the Dollfuss and Schuschnigg governments remained mired in 19<sup>th</sup> century economic thought, with detrimental results for the Austrian economy.

*Hansjörg Klausinger* investigates the Vienna and Chicago schools of economic theory. After contrasting the two schools' views on policy, he discusses the debate that took place with regard to deflation, "priming the pump," wage cutting, and monetary policy. The author notes that the dearth of activist economic policies in Austria reflected, in some ways, that in other countries. Ultimately, Klausinger writes, the Chicago school had little impact on Austrian policies; and, had Dollfuss or Schuschnigg turned to the Vienna school for direction, they would have been poorly served.

*Peter Berger* reexamines the economic policies of the League of Nations towards Austria. In contrast to what some scholars have argued—namely that Austria was the victim of League policies—Berger explains that officials in Vienna sometimes forced League representatives to yield to particular Austrian demands. Moreover, those policies set down by the League, far from being universal failures, enjoyed some remarkable successes.

An international approach and a revisionist view characterize the article by *Jens-Wilhelm Wessels* on Austria's economic problems in the 1930s. He accepts the notion that the Dollfuss/Schuschnigg governments pursued restrictive and orthodox economic policies that hampered economic recovery. But he demonstrates that there were other, more important factors which explain the failure of economic recovery in Austria: profound global structural changes (including the expansion of industrialization in the world economic periphery), the contraction of world trade and its slow recovery, and the rise of economic nationalism in Europe and the United States.

Expanding on recent research concerning Dollfuss's personality and *Weltanschauung*, *James William Miller* continues the investigation into why Dollfuss eliminated parliamentary democracy in Austria. The author highlights Dollfuss's conviction that any policy which hurt the interests of the peasantry had to be avoided. Further, Dollfuss operated with an "elitist" and "authoritarian" conception of democracy, in which elections primarily played a legitimizing role. In the end, Dollfuss embraced the notion that authoritarian methods were a more effective way of governing the state.

*Helmut Wahnout* deals with a long-neglected area of study, namely, the Austrian constitution of May 1934. His focus is on the differences between the corporative constitution as it was written and as it was practiced. In doing so, he also gives us a "map" of how the Austrian government operated. Overall, Wahnout concludes that the corporative elements of the constitution did not develop in any meaningful way, and that, increasingly, power became concentrated in the hands of the chancellor, ultimately leading to a "chancellorial dictatorship."

*Alexander Lassner's* study derives from a larger work on European international relations from 1932 to 1938 and the origins of World War II. In contrast to historiographical orthodoxy, he shows that the foreign and security policy of the Schuschnigg government was both sound and realistic. Schuschnigg and his colleagues correctly understood that the only way to prevent armed aggression against Austria by the Third Reich was through a politico-military guarantee to be obtained from Britain, France,

and Italy. Unfortunately, for reasons that had nothing to do with Austria's form of government, such a guarantee was not forthcoming—with disastrous results.

In the non-topical essay section of this volume, *Megan E. Greene*, a recent graduate of Princeton University, compares the policies of two potent European political movements (far?) right of center—the Austrian Freedom party FPÖ and the Lega Nord of Italy.<sup>10</sup> After a careful definition of the spectrum of right wing politics in Europe, she looks at specific issues such as the two parties' immigration, welfare, and employment planks in their political campaign strategies and their policy impacts in the national governing coalitions. Greene concludes that the Italian Lega Nord adopted more extreme ideologies and policies on the right than the Austrian FPÖ. Nevertheless, the European Union levied sanctions against Austria for FPÖ participation in the governing coalition but not against Italy for Silvio Berlusconi's inclusion of the Lega Nord in his government. It seems to be easier to state an example vis-à-vis EU newcomers and small countries like Austria than vis-à-vis "insiders" like the founding member Italy, one of the larger EU members. This essay, written from a detached American perspective, is published as a contribution to the ongoing and intensifying discussion about center-right coalition building in European politics.

The FORUM *Commissioning History: Austria and World War II Restitution and Reconciliation* deals with the recent upsurge of historical commissions being set up in Austria and all over Europe to confront the World War II past and to deal with the surfeit of war-related memory. Parallel to these commissions the Swiss, German, and Austrian governments have set up reconciliation funds to make late payments to former victims of the massive campaigns of National Socialist property plunder and slave labor exploitation. These major campaigns of restitution settlements and reconciliation efforts need to be seen against a larger post-cold war backdrop of a new "moral economy" or righting the injustices of the past, and a new "guilt of nations" (Elazar Barkan).

A series of Austrian case studies of such commissions and their results are presented in this FORUM. *Brigitte Bailer-Galanda* and *Eva Blimlinger* summarize the establishment and the agenda of the Austrian Historical Commission. *Oliver Rathkolb* introduces his work on various commissions for private industries and banks. *Dieter Stiefel* summarizes his major report on the Austrian record of restitution efforts for forcibly transferred life insurance policies after the Anschluss, commissioned by the Austrian insurance industry. *Margit Reiter* presents her work on the hydroelectric power plant of Kaprun, a study commissioned by the Austrian electricity

industry. It shows both the massive utilization of foreign and slave labor by the Nazis during World War II to get Kaprun started and the employment of many former Nazis after the war to get it finished. She also looks at the “myth of Kaprun” in the history of Austrian reconstruction and how the odd labor history was purged from postwar Austrian memory. *Martin Eichtinger* relates the results of the Schaumayer Commission on slave labor and the Reconciliation Fund set up as a result of negotiations with Eastern European and the American governments. This FORUM is part of the ongoing effort of *Contemporary Austrian Studies* to elucidate the complex mix of actions by Austrian victims and perpetrators during World War II and Austrians’ postwar memory of their role in the war.

The role of Austrians during World War II is also on the agenda of the three review essays by *Evan Burr Bukey*, *Hermann Freudenberger*, and *Robert Edwin Herzstein*. While Bukey and Freudenberger review important recent works on the vast record of the *Ostmark’s* contribution to the political economy of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, Herzstein revisits the story of one *Wehrmacht* lieutenant, Kurt Waldheim, whose postwar cover-up of his role during the war has become representative and highly symbolic of Austria’s long procrastination and failure to vigorously confront its World War II past. A number of book reviews and the annual review of Austrian politics complete this volume.

As always we are very grateful to a number of institutions and people for their unflinching support in helping us complete this volume. We would like to thank the contributors for their timely submission of essays and collegial handling of requests. The UNO-Innsbruck team of Irene Brameshuber-Ziegler, Tanja Stampfl, Gertraud Griessner, and Ellen Palli in Innsbruck did their usual superb job in copy-editing, correcting, proof-reading, type-setting, and shepherding along the two dozen manuscripts of this volume. Helmut Wohnout arrived just in time for helping us obtain portraits of Dollfuss, Hornbostel and Schuschnigg from the ÖVP party archives in Vienna. Dean Robert Dupont of Metropolitan College at UNO and Professor Franz Mathis, the coordinator of the friendship treaty with UNO at the University of Innsbruck, used their financial wizardry to make publication of this volume feasible. Ernst Aichinger of the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York secured support from the Austrian Foreign Ministry in Vienna. At Transaction Publishers, Anne Schneider brought the volume to publication with her characteristic friendly efficiency.

In June 2002, Gordon “Nick” Mueller retires as Director of UNO’s Center for Austrian Culture and Commerce and as one of the executive

directors of CAS to become full-time Director of the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans. It is not using too much hyperbole to note that Nick is the rock on which the unique university partnership between New Orleans and Innsbruck has been built. In 1976, he was the founding father of the highly successful UNO Summer School in Innsbruck, which instigated the UNO – University of Innsbruck partnership in 1983 and the subsequent establishment of a dense network of student and faculty exchanges and many other scholarly ventures. *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, too, is a product of this lasting cooperation. The fact that we go into our second decade of publication attests to Nick's precious vision in trans-Atlantic partnering and the longevity of this university friendship treaty. One of Nick's lasting legacies is that he has stubbornly anchored and institutionalized the partnership in such a way that it can continue without him on the controls. Such shrewd foresight is not always the case in the halls of academe. We will all miss him and his subtle leadership!

Arlington, Virginia/Larose, Louisiana, May 2002

### Notes

1. For some recent examples see Gordon Martel, ed., *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered* (London: Routledge, 1999); Martin S. A. Alexander, ed., *Knowing your Friends. Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); R. M. Salerno, "The Mediterranean Triangle: Britain, France, Italy and the Origins of the Second World War, 1935-1940," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1997; Robert Mallett, *The Italian Navy and Fascist Expansionism 1935-1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); H. MacGregor Knox, "The Fascist Regime, its Foreign Policy and its Wars: An 'Anti-Fascist' Orthodoxy?," *Contemporary European History* 4 (1995): 347-65; Robert Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave 1933-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Jacques Nobécourt, *Le Colonel de La Rocque (1885-1946) ou les pièges du nationalisme chrétien* (Paris: Fayard, 1996); Gerhard Stourzh and Birgitta Zaar, eds., *Österreich, Deutschland und die Mächte: Internationale und österreichische Aspekte des "Anschlusses" vom März 1938* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990).

2. J. D. Gregory, *Dollfuss and his Times* (London, 1935). My thanks to Timothy Kirk for bringing this work to my attention. On the lobbying efforts of Bauer and Renner for the removal of Puaux (and, subsequently, for the accusations leveled against Puaux in the socialist paper *Le Populaire*) see Thomas Angerer, "Die Französische Österreichpolitik vor dem 'Anschluss' 1938," *Vierteljahrshfte für Zeitgeschichte*, 40 (1992): 48, 48 n. 108. For good reasons, Blum and Delbos ignored the efforts of Bauer and Renner and retained Puaux. Indeed, by 1937-38 Blum, Delbos, and Puaux were of much the same mind with respect to the Schuschnigg government. Alexander N. Lassner, "Peace at Hitler's Price: Austria, the Great Powers, and the Anschluß, 1932-1938," Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 2001, 564-70, 573-83, 588-91, 607-8, 610, 704-7; see especially *ibid.*, 520 n. 16.

3. Thomas Angerer, "An Incomplete Discipline: Austrian *Zeitgeschichte* and Recent History," in *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, vol. 3, *Austria in the Nineteen-Fifties*, ed. Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Rolf Steininger (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 207–27.
4. For the most recent example of distortions and omissions by a former European cabinet minister of the 1930s, in this case a prior foreign minister in the Schuschnigg cabinet, see Alexander N. Lassner, "Egon and Heinrich Berger von Waldenegg. Biographie im Spiegel: Die Memoiren zweier Generationen," in *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, vol. 9, *Neutrality in Austria*, ed. Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Ruth Wodak (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 341–51.
5. Rath made excellent use of the DDI. See R. John Rath, "Deterioration of Democracy in Austria, 1927-1932," *Austrian History Yearbook XXVII* (1996); R. John Rath, "The Dollfuß Ministry: The Democratic Prelude," *Austrian History Yearbook XXIX* (1998); R. John Rath, "The Dollfuß Ministry: The Intensification of Animosities and the Drift toward Authoritarianism," *Austrian History Yearbook XXX* (1999).
6. Lassner, "Peace at Hitler's Price," 247-48, 248 n. 30, 473, 560-61.
7. Ilan Greilsammer, *Blum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 338, 352, 361.
8. *Der Hochverratsprozess gegen Dr. Guido Schmidt vor dem Wiener Volksgericht* (Vienna, 1947), 345-415, 467-578.
9. Prominent examples include the only complete biography of Schuschnigg: Anton Hopfgartner, *Ein Mann gegen Hitler* (Graz: Styria, 1989), 67-68, 128-129. See also Norbert Schausberger, *Der Griff nach Österreich: der Anschluß* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1978), 355; Walter Wiltschegg, *Österreich – der "Zweite Deutsche Staat" ? Der nationale Gedanke in der Ersten Republik* (Graz: Stocker, 1992), 100-8; Peter Streitle, *Die Rolle Kurt von Schuschniggs im österreichischen Abwehrkampf gegen den Nationalsozialismus (1934-1936)* (Munich: Tuduv-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1988), passim; Felix Kreissler, *Der Österreicher und seine Nation: ein Lernprozeß mit Hindernissen* (Vienna, H. Böhlau, 1984), 30-35; H. James Burgwyn, "Italy, the Roman Protocols Bloc, and the *Anschluß* Question 1936-1938," *Austrian History Yearbook XXII* (1988): 123, 125, 134, 141, 146. For the most influential and misleading portrayal of Schuschnigg and his foreign/domestic policy in the English language see Jürgen Gehl, *Austria, Germany, and the Anschluß 1931-1938* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).
10. This paper is an abbreviated and considerably revised and updated version of her senior thesis submitted to the Department of Politics: Megan E. Greene, "Combating Right-Wing Extremism in the European Union: A Case Study of the Austrian Freedom Party and the Italian Lega Nord," Princeton University, 2000.

# TOPICAL ESSAYS

## Fascism and Austrofascism

*Tim Kirk*

Fascism determined the political agenda in Europe for a quarter of a century, from its origins in the right-wing political violence that followed the First World War to the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. The transformation of Europe from a continent of new parliamentary democracies in 1919 to one of radical right-wing dictatorships in 1939 is unthinkable without fascism, however one defines it, and whatever role indigenous fascist movements came to play in the new authoritarian regimes that sprang up everywhere. Every country in interwar Europe had a fascist movement of one kind or another, however insignificant in terms of numbers or real political clout;<sup>1</sup> and fascism was, more often than not, a common ingredient in the broader political offensive mounted by a dispossessed political class attempting to regain the initiative from a broadly democratic Left.<sup>2</sup> Although only Italy proclaimed itself fascist, the populist rhetoric, authoritarian policies, and above all the monumental symbolism and militaristic rituals of fascism came to define the new political style of continental Europe during the 1930s.

Yet few political movements have been as difficult as fascism for historians and political scientists to pin down. Few of the fascist movements and none of the other right-wing dictatorships of the interwar years adopted the term fascist to describe themselves, and Mussolini's "fascist international" of 1934 failed to take off. Contemporary observers in Italy and abroad were nevertheless in no doubt about the affinities between the Italian Fascist party and its foreign imitators;<sup>3</sup> and admiration for fascism was expressed often and openly.<sup>4</sup> The situation was transformed by the war, the defeat of the Axis, and the revelation of war crimes and atrocities: All forms of generic fascism came to be associated, directly or indirectly, with the Nazis and the Holocaust. Moreover, the postwar order in Europe was explicitly anti-fascist, both in its constitutional arrangements and in its political rhetoric, and the memory of earlier sympathy for fascist movements was repressed. Most postwar European governments claimed

some degree of association with anti-fascist forces, and active anti-fascists served in many of them.<sup>5</sup>

The desire to forget the recent past in the interests of present and future political stability was initially compounded by new distractions, above all the immediate and widespread necessity for domestic consensus as a basis for reconstruction and the changing political priorities that came with the cold war. But although there were powerful incentives in postwar Europe to let sleeping dogs lie, fascism has proved to be a “past that will not pass away,” and this is because it has always been difficult for Europeans to account for the fascist past satisfactorily without undermining the compromises on which the postwar order was founded. In short, then, the overriding reason for the complexities and ambiguities in the interpretation of fascism is relatively straightforward: After sixty years in which no public figure, political party, or significant organization in the public sphere has been able to espouse fascism openly, it still matters who is accounted a fascist and why.

The particular difficulties encountered by Austrian historians (and historians of Austria) in dealing with the recent past have been well documented elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Austrians, no less than other Europeans, have been deterred by the political constraints of the present from accounting adequately for painful episodes in the recent past, and historians of “Austrofascism” have found it difficult to break free from the carefully agreed compromises that characterized the “coalition historiography” of the 1950s. The problem is not entirely Austrian: It arises from the lack of an agreed definition of fascism, and this deficiency has been compounded by a failure, for similar reasons, to define the “residual category” of neighboring authoritarian regimes in east central Europe to which the “corporate state” is otherwise ascribed.<sup>7</sup> The following discussion is an attempt to locate, within the broader context of the changing historiographical perspectives of postwar Europe, accounts of Austrofascism from its ideological and political gestation, through its passage to power, to the nature of the regime itself. It will raise the question of whether the origins and development of the dictatorship in Austria did not rest on the same uneasy coalition building between authoritarian conservatives and fascists that brought fascism to power in Italy and Germany.

### **Postwar Politics and the Historiography of Fascism**

Interpretations of fascism have tended to reflect the political orientation of the commentator and changes in the international political climate. This was already the case before the Second World War, when two schools of thought were already emerging. Marxist observers—including, but not only, those directed by the Comintern—categorized both Italian Fascism

and Nazism as examples of the same generic fascism that also found expression in the countless other radical right-wing movements across Europe. At the same time, liberals were beginning to equate first Italian Fascism and then Nazism with Soviet Communism, categorizing both the right-wing authoritarian regimes and that of the Left as examples of totalitarianism.<sup>8</sup> It was this second kind of interpretation that gained currency in the west during the early years of the cold war, when it was mobilized as a “device . . . to link the present enemy, communism, with that of the recent past, Nazi-fascism.”<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that the term “totalitarian” was no more than a crude propaganda slogan (although it was that too), but it was one that proved, in the first instance at least, to be of limited usefulness. Consequently, the first attempts to describe structural similarities in Stalinism and Nazism proved only superficially convincing to a subsequent generation drawing on more detailed research on each of the two systems.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, rigid interpretations emanating from the Soviet bloc—interpretations which insisted on the indivisibility of a fascism that was essentially the puppet of “capitalism in crisis”—bore the stamp of an official ideology and found little resonance even among western Marxists.

During the later 1960s, however, the conservative orthodoxy was challenged in West Germany, and among western historians generally, by new theories of generic fascism. The revival of interest was led by Ernst Nolte’s *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche* and gathered pace with the general liberalization of the political climate.<sup>11</sup> The challenge was mounted both within the universities and outside, largely by the Left, and often by members of small, marginal (and as it proved, mostly ephemeral) radical groups. In practice, it was often difficult to make clear distinctions between the intellectual posturing of the revolutionaries and the political posturing of many academics, and in these circumstances conservative intellectuals objected to what they interpreted as the undue “politicization” of the universities (while reasserting their own positions from positions of relative strength within the academy). But the new general explanations of fascism, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, came to supplant theories of totalitarianism during the 1970s. They also implicitly challenged other assumptions about fascism, those which limited it to the interwar years and to the two “core” fascist states (Italy and Germany) or reduced it simply to “Hitlerism” or “Mussolini-ism.”

Even before the end of the cold war, however, the historiographical landscape was shifting again as the political climate changed. From the late 1970s, a revisionist “new Right” took the initiative on a number of historical questions, and established something of an intellectual hegemony, which forced its opponents to re-examine their own perspectives. Conservative historians in the Federal Republic seized the opportunity to attempt (unsuccessfully) to construct a “usable past” for Germany.<sup>12</sup> A

different kind of revisionism was being undertaken in Italy, where Renzo de Felice, the country's foremost scholarly expert on Mussolini, dismissed the foundational anti-fascist mythology of post-war Italy as a development which had undermined Italy's sense of itself and made it "a country irredeemably mistaken."<sup>13</sup> De Felice's assertion in the 1990s that the history of fascism could be read apolitically was welcomed by the resurgent Right, then organizing in a broad coalition which encompassed not only radical right-wing particularists of the Lombard League, but also the euphemistically termed "post-fascist" *Alleanza Nazionale*. The tentative "normalization" of fascism has taken place on two levels, the academic and the political, and new perspectives have been formed—are being formed—in a political context where "post-fascists" increasingly participate in government and decision making at both local and national levels.

The decline in the "fascist paradigm" in the 1980s was not simply the straightforward consequence of the emergence of the "new Right," however. The attempt to construct a satisfactory theory of fascism had been frustrating in other ways, and by the early 1990s it seemed to have run out of steam altogether. It was not just that "totalitarianism" enjoyed a revival in the context of the "new cold war"—although it did (and still does), albeit in modified form.<sup>14</sup> The main problem was that the theoretical approaches that had abounded in the 1970s were never adequately underpinned by sustained empirical work on a comparative basis.<sup>15</sup> The irreducible minimum for a generic theory of fascism was surely a fundamental similarity between Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, yet in the new perspectives of the 1990s the Third Reich came to be defined in terms that defied meaningful comparison with Italian Fascism. Moreover, historians of the two regimes were increasingly going their own separate ways. Many of those working on Nazism had come to emphasize the singular nature of the Nazis' biological racism and its consequences, a project which extended beyond anti-Semitism and the Holocaust to encompass such subjects as sterilization and family policy as well as the complicity of German medicine, science, and industry in the Nazis' racial projects.<sup>16</sup> The scale of "racial policy" in Italy on the other hand, however broadly defined, was indisputably less than that in Germany. The belatedness of anti-Semitic legislation in Italy, which, in 1938, was foisted on an apparently unwilling Italian public as a consequence of the alliance with Germany, seemed to underline the lesser importance of race in Italy; it is certainly true that the persecution of the Jews was less efficient and enthusiastic in Italy than almost anywhere else in Europe. Finally, the historiographical divergence was compounded by the increasing centrality of "cultural" approaches (in the broadest sense) to new works on Italy, a preoccupation that was seen variously as "secondary" or methodologically problematic for a comparative history of fascism.<sup>17</sup>

These interpretational differences seem less problematic than they once did. Italian historians themselves have challenged earlier, more reassuring assumptions about Italian anti-Semitism under Mussolini. They have argued that Fascist racial legislation was not a “deviation or a falsification of the true Italian spirit,” but that the application of the anti-Jewish laws of 1938 throughout Italy constituted a logical premise for the more radical measures (deportation, incarceration, and extermination) implemented in the German-controlled Salò Republic after 1943.<sup>18</sup> Such reinterpretations have located the specific racism of 1938-1945 within a broader reappraisal of Italian attitudes to race since the Risorgimento.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it has become clearer that the eugenic and “biologist” thinking that underpinned Nazi racism was equally well established, if less successful, in Italy (and indeed in much of the industrialized, urbanized world).<sup>20</sup>

In the end it seems that reports of the death of fascism as a comparative analytical tool were premature. Certainly there was something of a retreat from the intense, and intensely polemical attempts to construct general typologies of fascism, at least on the Left, but the 1990s nevertheless saw the publication of several such general accounts of fascism, now from a liberal perspective, and with an emphasis on ideology or doctrine.<sup>21</sup> There has been less progress, on the other hand, towards the satisfactory history of “real existing fascism” that eluded an earlier generation, although collections of essays and conference papers have continued to bring together the research findings of scholars with specialized national research interests.<sup>22</sup> More recently, Robert Paxton has formulated a number of methodological proposals which provide the basis for an understanding of fascism as a developing phenomenon, changing through time and in response to changing contexts and relationships. Paxton argues that historians have concentrated unduly on ideology, since there has rarely been a connection between what dissident right-wing intellectuals set down in the early days of the movement and what fascist parties then set out to do. Moreover, he argues that, since it is in the nature of fascist ideology to draw on the “slogans and symbols of the patriotic repertory of one particular community,” varieties of fascism “fit badly into any system of universal intellectual principles. It is in their functions that they resemble each other.”<sup>23</sup> If we strive too hard to identify the irreducible essence of fascism to one ideological element or a “checklist” of characteristic features, we can become both reductive and ahistorical. The consequence is all too frequently a series of static snapshots, conveying little sense of depth, broader context, or development in time—what Paxton calls “bestiaries”: “a catalog of portraits of one beast after another, each one portrayed against a bit of background scenery and identified by external signs.”<sup>24</sup> This characterization applies to the less successful fascisms of smaller states in

particular, not least Austria; for although Austria had the misfortune to generate two native fascisms, she has frequently been passed over all too quickly in such general surveys.

### **Austrian Fascism and Austrofascism**

The emergence of two fascisms in Austria between the wars reflected a broader historical division on the political Right between a clerical conservatism united around the Christian Social Party (CSP) and a more fragmented network of secular liberal and national groups, the majority of which came together in the Greater German People's Party (*Großdeutsche Volkspartei*, GDVP) after the First World War. Although it was already a declining force in its Vienna stronghold before 1914, the CSP went on to become the major party of government during the First Republic, and the GDVP was its junior partner in a series of right-wing *Bürgerblock* coalitions during the 1920s, an arrangement which (intentionally) excluded the Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei*, SDAP) from political power at the national level. (The Social Democrats remained unassailable as the regional party of government in Vienna, where their successful political and economic programs remained an irritant to their bourgeois opponents.)<sup>25</sup>

Austria's two fascisms reflected in extreme form the ideology and outlook of the more "mainstream" parties in the two broad "bourgeois subcultures." The use of the swastika emblem by regional branches of the GDVP reflected the party's closeness, in the provinces at least, to a more radical *völkisch* tradition, but the Austrian Nazis (organized in the DNSAP) remained outside the newly-formed party; indeed, from 1926, a younger generation of more middle-class and pro-German Austrian Nazis broke away from the party and subordinated themselves directly to Hitler in an Austrian branch of the NSDAP. The DNSAP, now a much less significant political force, withered away. The connections between the CSP and the *Heimwehren*—"home guards" similar to the German *Freikorps*—were more complicated. There was considerable sympathy for Pan-German ideas in south-eastern Austria (above all in Styria and Carinthia), and the Styrian *Heimatschutz* realigned itself with the Nazis in a "national-fascist" camp during the early 1930s.<sup>26</sup> On the whole, however, *Heimwehr* fascists and Nazis represented two distinct varieties of indigenous Austrian fascism. The former was essentially a rural movement of landowners and peasants, largely pro-clerical in its ideology, drawing inspiration from Catholic corporatism for its conception of the state and looking to Italy as a practical model for an independent Austria. The latter was secular, *völkisch* in its outlook, and more urban and petty bourgeois in its social composition. It

was increasingly controlled by the German Nazi Party and aspired to Anschluss with the Reich.<sup>27</sup>

There is little disagreement about the fascist nature of either movement. The ideology and policies of the Austrian Nazis were in any case those of the NSDAP. Those of the *Heimwehr* movement were most famously expressed in the Korneuburg Oath of 1930, a rallying call which sought the fundamental renewal of Austria and demanded of all comrades an “undaunted” belief in the fatherland and restless eagerness in a common endeavor. Despite their differences, the two fascisms shared a number of common features. The *Heimwehr*, like the Nazis, “rejected democratic parliamentarism,” Marxism, and the “shaping of the economy by liberal capitalism.”<sup>28</sup> Both sought the destruction of the labor movement and its political and industrial organizations, and both drew on visions of a society free from class conflict: the Christian *Ständestaat* in the case of the clerical Right and the Nazi racial utopia of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which also proposed corporate frameworks. The rationale for political change differed in tone. The clerical Right emphasized the restitution of a supposedly traditional authority, and drew on the social ideology of the church; the Nazis dwelt on the need for national rejuvenation.

It is important, however, for an understanding of the breakdown of democracy in Austria, to see the two strands of fascism in the broader context of a more widespread rejection of parliamentarism on the “mainstream” Right, something that was not always emphasized in the era of “*Koalitionsgeschichtsschreibung*.” In this respect, of course, the situation in Austria was no different from that in Liberal Italy and Weimar Germany, or indeed in other parts of Europe, where members of the traditional ruling classes and of powerful institutions such as the military, the churches, and the bureaucracy were inclined to see a more authoritarian form of government as the best solution to what they perceived to be unworkable parliamentary systems.<sup>29</sup> Sympathy for anti-democratic thinking in Austria—as elsewhere—was also strong among the established social and economic elites, but was most forcefully articulated by those who dealt in ideas: academics, journalists, and politicians. The most prominent spokesman of the anti-democratic Right was Othmar Spann, whose critique of liberalism and call for an authoritarian corporate state was delivered as lectures to successive cohorts of students at Vienna University and published as a book, *Der wahre Staat*, in 1921. His ideas were taken up by Catholic student groups and were also influential among *Heimwehr* ideologues and on the right of the CSP.<sup>30</sup> Spann was one of a number of so-called “national-Catholic” intellectuals within an academic community that was “an almost ideal environment for irrationalist politics; . . . a veritable ‘breeding ground’ of fascist and Nazi ideas.”<sup>31</sup> Beyond the university, anti-

democratic ideas also found a degree of sympathy among the clergy and civil servants.<sup>32</sup>

Politicians were ambiguous in their attitude to parliamentary democracy from the outset. In the Tyrol, where right-wing paramilitary groups had very quickly forged links with their Bavarian counterparts soon after the end of the First World War, political leaders in 1919 began to consider the possibility of a revision of the province's constitution in favor of a system based on estates; and a contemporary pamphlet expressed opposition to "democracy in the vulgar sense as it was created by the French Republic" in favor of a "genuinely Germanic democracy . . . permeated through and through by an aristocratic consciousness of rank."<sup>33</sup> This rejection of representative parliamentary democracy in favor of "true" democracy implementing "objectively correct policies" [*objektiv richtige Politik*] was shared by the leading conservative politician of the 1920s, Ignaz Seipel. As a young theologian before the First World War, Seipel had argued that a Christian people owed allegiance to its leader "not on account of a party resolution or electoral manipulation, but for the simple reason that he is the leader."<sup>34</sup> Only such a leader could articulate the will of the whole people rather than the sectional interests of a nation inexplicably divided against itself. During the mid 1920s, Seipel developed a concept of "true democracy," a term which became one of the dominant slogans of the Christian Social Party towards the end of the decade. It was a conception that was dismissive of public opinion and the "masses," and one which made a disturbing distinction between Parliament itself, and the pluralistic political culture on which it rested: "True democracy" was opposed to the dependence of Parliament on parties especially after the loss of the monarchy, which had been a "corrective" to the evil of party rule.<sup>35</sup>

This critique of parliamentary democracy became shriller towards the end of the 1920s. Anti-democratic impulses gathered pace as the *Heimwehr* emerged as an independent force to be reckoned with, and as the beleaguered Left of the Christian Social Party lost ground to the centralizing tendencies of the right-wing leadership and its Pan-German Allies: Symbolically, for the elections of 1927, the party leadership preferred to forge a "unity list" with its anti-clerical coalition partners than to respect the feelings of the party's own Christian democrat wing in the provinces. The Unity List nevertheless lost seats in elections to the *Nationalrat*, and the situation was further inflamed by the events of July 1927. Criticism of republican institutions intensified in the political uncertainty that followed Seipel's resignation in 1929, and increased pressure for a revision of the constitution came from various quarters on the right, above all from the *Heimwehr*. Like Seipel's calls for "true democracy," the campaign was couched in a familiar anti-parliamentary rhetoric.<sup>36</sup> The stakes were raised by *Heimwehr* leaders, who threatened that if Parliament permitted "a few

Jews [*Judenbuben*] with red carnations” to prevent reform, it would go ahead without them; they submitted their plans for a corporate state in September 1930 against a background of provocative *Heimwehr* demonstrations.<sup>37</sup>

In any event, the constitutional reforms were far more limited in scope than the extreme Right had demanded and represented a reversal for the *Heimwehr*. In fact, the revised constitution was a triumph of democratic cooperation between the parties that “testified to the political acumen of the leadership of the three political camps” (and ought to have revealed the hollowness of rightist anti-parliamentary rhetoric).<sup>38</sup> The national elections of 1930 confirmed, however, that the “mainstream” Right, in conditions not dissimilar to those outlined by Robert Paxton as necessary for the success of fascism, was no longer able to wield power alone, but was reluctant to accept the legitimacy of a Social Democratic Party that was increasingly popular with the electorate. In these conditions, argues Paxton, “some fascist leaders . . . are willing to reposition their movements in alliance with . . . frightened conservatives,” and in 1932 the Christian Social Party was compelled to rely on the support of the *Heimwehr* to form a new government with a majority of one.<sup>39</sup>

The immediate catalysts for political change were reminiscent of conditions in Italy and Germany at similar junctures. The center-right had been able to live with parliamentary democracy for as long as it had been able to maintain its own dominant position at national level, but now saw its electoral support leach away to the extreme right, while support for the center-left remained relatively stable. As in Italy and Germany, the arithmetic of parliamentary majorities was to prove a decisive factor in the breakdown of democracy. In 1930, the CSP won its smallest share of the vote since the establishment of the republic (35.7%) while some 9% of the vote went to the two fascist movements. (The *Heimwehr* campaigned independently in 1930.) Between 1931 and 1933, virtually every constituency in the country voted again in regional and local elections which established a pattern of Nazi electoral gains that seemed to echo developments in Germany itself. In provincial parliaments and local councils up and down the country the non-clerical Right (Pan-Germans and Agrarian League) was virtually eliminated and replaced by Nazis. Finally, the Nazis won 41% of the vote in municipal elections in Innsbruck—not a traditional German nationalist stronghold. The significance of these shifts in electoral allegiance was clear: If another general election were held soon, it might well make the Nazis by far the biggest right-wing party in the *Nationalrat*.<sup>40</sup>

The difficulty for the bourgeois parties of retaining control of Parliament and other institutions was compounded by the political violence on the streets. The country was in the grip of a protracted political and economic crisis which seemed insoluble. The only way to resolve it within

the frame-work of parliamentary democracy would have been a “grand coalition” bringing together the Social Democrats and the Christian Social Party. Quite apart from the purely political antagonisms that stood in the way of such a solution, this would have meant the Social Democrats sharing responsibility for the imposition of ever more draconian austerity measures on its own supporters. In addition, the failure of just such a coalition had marked the end of parliamentary government in Germany in 1930.

The tension was raised by the *Heimwehr*'s abortive “march on Vienna” in 1931 and by the formation of a new administration by Dollfuss in 1932, a government which brought the *Heimwehr* into power and ended the possibility of Social Democratic toleration of the government. Cooperation with the SDAP was now unthinkable. Leading industrialists, more eager than ever during the depression to reduce the cost of wages and social policy, had met Chancellor Buresch in 1932 and urged against any attempt to achieve a consensus with the Social Democrats, arguing instead in favor of greater powers for the executive.<sup>41</sup> Dollfuss made his own views clear in 1933, when he spoke of doing “everything step by step to force the Marxists to their knees,” and Schuschnigg later recalled that the coalition with the Social Democrats had been rejected as impractical since 1931.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Dollfuss followed the example of Heinrich Brüning, who had used presidential decrees to circumvent the German *Reichstag* and revived the War Economy Enabling Act of 1917 in order to govern not only without being accountable to the *Nationalrat*, but without the Austrian president's own “strictly circumscribed” power to issue decrees. The law was first used on 1 October 1932 to pass an order making members of the *Creditanstalt* liable for the bank's losses, and was applied with retroactive force. The Social Democrats demanded that the order be withdrawn but members of the *Nationalrat* were advised by the chancellor's adviser, Robert Hecht, that its use was perfectly legitimate even in peacetime.<sup>43</sup> The Social Democrats' concerns were noted in cabinet, but Hecht assured the ministers that the law was now a part of the new constitution and could be seen as a “general economic enabling law.”<sup>44</sup> As in Germany, government by decree marked the end of parliamentary democracy: The War Economy Enabling Law was used to suspend local elections in 1933, for example. It was most useful, however, in the suspension of Parliament itself.

### **The Establishment of the Corporate State**

The breakdown of democracy and the establishment of the dictatorship has attracted as much—if not more—attention from historians than the Austrofascist regime itself, and the focus has been on two events in particular: the suspension of Parliament in 1933 and the brief “civil war.”

There is some disagreement about the interpretation of these events between those historians who do not see dictatorship as the intended or even inevitable outcome of the crisis, and those who find the evidence for a concerted drive towards dictatorship overwhelming. In the former perspective, the suspension of Parliament was the consequence of an unfortunate sequence of events involving obduracy and lack of judgment on both sides. In March 1933, the Social Democrats and Pan-Germans joined forces to prevent the government from punishing striking railway workers with disproportionate severity, and Karl Renner, the chairman of the *Nationalrat*, declared their motion carried. When his decision was challenged by the government, Renner resigned, and his own resignation was followed by that of his two deputies. The president could, in these circumstances, have dissolved Parliament and called a general election but did not do so. Instead Christian Social Party leaders met the following day and resolved to govern by means of the Enabling Law until the opposition parties could be persuaded to agree to a revision of the constitution. Certain provisions in the constitution were suspended immediately and all political meetings were banned.

The interpretation of these events has always been contested. The next day Dollfuss declared himself “in favor of a healthy representation of the people” and a supporter of parliamentary government, but added that Parliament had made itself impossible.<sup>45</sup> By September he had warmed to his theme: Parliament had abolished itself [*sich selbst ausgeschaltet*] and must never be allowed back. Instead, there should be a “social Christian German state of Austria, on a corporative basis, and under strong authoritarian leadership.”<sup>46</sup> The notion that the Austrian Parliament had abolished itself was greeted with skepticism at the time—a British foreign office memorandum noted that Dollfuss had in effect “carried through a *coup d'état*,” and *The Times* noted that the Austrian government seemed “in no hurry to return to parliamentary forms.”<sup>47</sup> The British journalist G. E. R. Gedye “found the Ringstrasse blocked with barbed wire entanglements and rifle-rests. The grounds of the Hofburg were crowded with mounted police with slung carbines, storm companies with rifles, hand grenades and steel helmets,” and reported that deputies were being prevented from entering the chamber by the police.<sup>48</sup> But the suggestion that the Austrian Parliament brought about its own ruin has been remarkably persistent. Analyzing the transition from democracy to dictatorship half a century after the event, Ulrich Kluge emphasized the role of “undemocratic impulses that determined the ‘self-destruction of Parliament’” rather than conspiracy, an approach which provoked a sharp critical response from Rudolf G. Ardelt.<sup>49</sup> Both agreed, however, that this episode is central to an understanding of the way in which the corporate state was constituted. Helmut Wahnout has judged the events surrounding the parliamentary session less important for

future developments than the government's decision to exploit the situation in order to introduce further constitutional reforms and rule without Parliament.<sup>50</sup> More recently R. John Rath, in one of a series of essays on the life of Dollfuss, summarized the situation succinctly: "The resignation of all three presidents of the *Nationalrat* made it possible for its enemies to abolish it by asserting, with at least a modicum of truth, that it had dissolved itself."<sup>51</sup> Kluge emphasizes the very close relationship between the sudden end of Parliament and the finalization of careful plans for authoritarian government which enjoyed broad support both in the Christian Social Party and among economic interest groups, and which rested on the precarious coalition between political Catholicism, Pan-German agrarians, and the extremist *Heimwehr*".<sup>52</sup> An alliance of conservatives, radical fascists, and rural economic interests not entirely dissimilar to the government coalition that appeared to be forming in Germany at the same time. All that remained was to place the authority of the new regime on a permanent footing.

The crisis in Parliament provided the opportunity to suspend the constitution; the political space to finish the job was provided by the abortive uprising of Social Democratic industrial workers in response to provocation from the government and the *Heimwehr*. Government policy was deliberately confrontational, and it is difficult to draw a clear line between the actions of the police and those of the *Heimwehr*, effectively the paramilitary wing of the governing coalition. The SDAP leadership was under pressure from its rank and file to take decisive action but was afraid that any response to government intimidation of workers might unleash a civil war which the Left would inevitably lose. Its tactical error was to name specific government measures which the party would counter with general strike, which meant that the government could avoid a crisis while proceeding with the dismantling of the democratic state, and proposals for constitutional reform on a corporate basis were presented to the cabinet in December 1933.<sup>53</sup> This process gathered pace with renewed pressure on Dollfuss from Mussolini, who wanted to see the establishment of a fascist state in Austria. In February, leaders of the Social Democratic paramilitary organization, the *RepublikanischerSchutzbund*, were arrested, provocative house searches for *Schutzbund* weapons were instituted by the public security minister, *Heimwehr* leader Emil Fey, and at the same time the provincial leaders of the *Heimwehr* attempted to mount a rolling *coup d'état*.<sup>54</sup> National labor leaders counseled caution, but local *Schutzbund* leaders in Linz resolved to undertake resistance, and a conflict broke out which quickly spread to Vienna, where a series of armed clashes took place. Although resistance was probably stronger than the government had expected, order was restored in a few days. 131 civilians were killed in the fighting, 25 of them women and children, and over 350 were wounded,

while on the government side there were 55 dead and over 250 wounded. The SDAP was dissolved on 12 February, and within two weeks over two thousand of its members were arrested. Summary courts were set up, and nine death sentences were carried out in the capital almost immediately. Thousands more Social Democrats were then prosecuted in the ordinary courts in trials that continued into 1935.<sup>55</sup> The Vienna city council and senate were dissolved immediately, and a commissioner was instead appointed by the government. Finally, a new—arguably fascist—constitution was promulgated on 1 May.

The role of Dollfuss was crucial to these events. If in 1932 “no one dreamed that he would become a fascist dictator,”<sup>56</sup> his impatience with democracy and preference for an authoritarian corporate order were well known and well documented at the time, not least by his admirers. J. D. Gregory, a contemporary apologist for the then recently established *Ständestaat*, tells us that “Dollfuss had already postulated a ‘German corporate state’ in 1915.”<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, recent studies of the chancellor’s career have been relatively sympathetic. Much has been made, for example, of the undoubted sincerity of his political beliefs, an approach that is only possible if one is prepared to take the chancellor on his own terms. Laura Gellot, for example, has argued that “Dollfuss’s political philosophy . . . cannot be understood if confined or analyzed according to liberal definitions of democracy and dictatorship,”<sup>58</sup> his philosophy was a product of the rural values of the peasant milieu, in which he was raised, and this is borne out by James Miller’s study of the chancellor’s agrarian policy.<sup>59</sup> As Rath has shown, however, the chancellor’s political priorities involved support for agriculture, particularly the more affluent farmers, at the expense of industry, urban workers, and the rural poor.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, they were responsible for provoking opposition from the Social Democrats and the industrial lobby alike, and thereby contributed to the difficult political position in which Dollfuss found himself in the early 1930s.

### The Nature of the Corporate State

Chancellor Dollfuss’s commitment to Catholicism and to the social teaching articulated in *Rerum Novarum*, was also central to his political ideas: The new regime was officially designated “Christian.” Otto Bauer went further and described the regime as an alliance between clerical fascism and *Heimwehr* fascism, thereby raising what has been one of the central questions in the debate. Ernst Hanisch, among others, has vigorously contested this kind of interpretation. He argues that the corporate state was never fully fascist but remained “semi-fascist,” and not least because the church constituted “something of a barrier against full fascism.” The regime, “supported and legitimized by the Catholic church,”

had totalitarian tendencies but never managed to overcome the extensive “free spaces” that remained.<sup>61</sup> This was also true, of course, of both the “core” fascist states, with the qualification that the church was less inclined to legitimize the regime. In both Italy and Germany, a measure of agreement was reached between the regime and the church—bringing about a greater degree of co-operation in the former than had existed for several decades, and both Mussolini and Hitler encountered opposition from the church. The difference in Austria was not only that the Church was much closer to the dictatorship but that Catholicism was a defining ingredient in an “Austria ideology” that drew on the memory of the Holy Roman Empire, and cast the Austrians as “supranational” and the truncated territory of the republic as a passing phase. If there were dreams of a new Reich among the right-wing Catholic intellectuals of Vienna, it was of a restored “universal” Holy Empire that would trump the “*Kleindeutschland*” to the north and encompass non-Germans as well.<sup>62</sup> The reality was more prosaic: Christian motifs were used to symbolize the corporate state, and the Catholic identity was an important part of the Austrian identity propagated by the regime, not least as Austria asserted its independence under pressure from Germany; but the universality of the Austrian identity is less convincing if measured by attitudes to non-German minorities.

Exactly how the corporate state would have developed under Dollfuss is, of course, impossible to know. In any event, he was assassinated during a botched Nazi coup in July 1934, and the development of the corporate state took place under his successor Kurt von Schuschnigg. The new constitution abolished elected institutions and established an impotent Parliament and four advisory “councils;” the real power was concentrated in the executive. The corporative system that was to underpin the new regime, based on seven estates representing different sectors of the economy, never fully materialized. The reality of the Austrian corporate state was even more of a sham than that in Italy. In the absence of a genuine fascist mass movement in Austria, the symbolic unity of the regime was expressed by the Fatherland Front (*Vaterländische Front*, VF), which had been set up by Dollfuss shortly after the suspension of Parliament in 1933. It was now the only permitted political organization, adopted all the external paraphernalia of a fascist movement, and articulated the regime’s ideology. It, too, was a fraud. Whereas the roles of the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF) and the NSDAP became also relatively directionless once their respective leaders had won power, the VF had no period of political struggle from which to retire. Its initial membership was built up by absorbing organizations rather than enlisting individuals, and it never really mobilized authentic popular support for the regime.<sup>63</sup>

Kluge distinguishes between a theoretical dualism based on authoritarian government on the one hand and a “democracy” of occupational

estates on the other, but concludes that real political power was exercised in accordance with a “modernized neoabsolutism,” ostensibly provisional and with the notional objective of overcoming the country’s immediate crisis. In practice, he concludes, the system suffered from the same absence of a reciprocal constitutional relationship between state and society that had eluded the parliamentary system but is essential to the politics of a modern state.<sup>64</sup> In the absence of evidence for any real popular resonance on the part of the corporate state, there have been those who have found in it ‘a foundation for the future of a workable Austrian identity.’<sup>65</sup> There are grounds for skepticism about this new-found identity in the light of the Anschluss euphoria of 1938 and of postwar opinion polls suggesting that a substantial number of Austrians still thought of themselves as Germans. “To this day,” writes Fred Parkinson, “the term *nation* and *national* refer automatically and implicitly, without any need for explicit affirmation, to the German nation.”<sup>66</sup> Dollfuss and Schuschnigg, he goes on, so abused the term “patriotism” that people were alienated rather than convinced. Similarly, Evan Bukey, one of the most knowledgeable historians of Austrian public opinion in this period, has been scathing about the regime’s attempts to mobilize popular support for an Austrian identity when, at the same time, it sought to silence those who said otherwise.<sup>67</sup> The confusion seems to lie in the methodological approaches of the two schools of thought. Those who dismiss the idea of an emergent Austrian national consciousness between 1934 and 1938 have attempted to assess popular feeling, while those who find it have tended to refer to the regime’s intentions, and to the ways in which a separate Austrian identity was promoted and discussed among those sympathetic or close to the regime. Much of this identity rested on a political and cultural nostalgia for the imperial past and a sentimentality associated with traditional values, expressed not least in public sculpture and monuments, and in a Biedermeier revival among the chattering classes: an Austrofascist chic, which, although predominantly reactionary, could not dispense with elements of modernism.<sup>68</sup> (The attempt to reconcile the two is captured in Fritz Seibel’s fashion sketches of men wearing smart country clothes.)<sup>69</sup> What comes across most clearly from the visual and material culture, however, is that much of what is new reflects not a national identity but a recognizably international modern style. The direct impact of Austrofascist aesthetics seems to have been limited to a new vogue in religious painting and a spurt of church building. The situation for literature and the performing arts was perhaps rather more directly influenced by the regime’s intolerance. A contemporary theatre critic, Jura Soyfer, wrote that a future theater historian would have to “dismiss this epoch with a few sad words; John Warren adds that “although the Austrian government was able to use the theater for its own ends, the confused state