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**Michael Gehler, *Zeitgeschichte im dynamischen  
Mehrebenensystem: Zwischen Regionalisierung, Nationalstaat,  
Europäisierung, internationaler Arena und Globalisierung*  
(Bochum: Winkler, 2001)**

*J. Robert Wegs*

Michael Gehler has stepped outside the narrow confines of national history with this study that maintains contemporary history must address a broader level (*Ebene*) of issues such as regionalization, national identity, international relations, Europeanization, and globalization. It is an attempt to define contemporary history and fit Austrian local and national history into a larger international framework, a task that few Austrian historians have tackled.

The future of historical investigation, Gehler maintains, lies in understanding the many levels of local/regional, national, international, and global history of the modern (*neueren*) and recent (*jüngerer*) times (p. 27). He understands that region has both a territorial and a mentality-functional dimension that does not necessarily exclude the other. With careful attention to the existing international literature, Gehler discusses regions from an economic, political, and cultural point of view.

He points out that contemporary history in Austria, unlike that in Germany, is an equally recognized subject in the history curriculum characterized by a much greater emphasis on the "present and political explosiveness of its research subject matter, the greater indefiniteness of the developments under consideration and the presence of witnesses who through their testimony can contribute new sources" (p. 13).

In a stimulating discussion of Ernst Hanisch's *Der lange Schatten des Staates*,<sup>1</sup> which Gehler applauds for its attempt to take a long view of the development of Austrian history over a three-century period, he criticizes it, nevertheless, for failing to deal with the center versus periphery issue, the dualism between regional and cross-border formations, resisting national entities, and finally, the internationalization and Europeanization of politics (p. 44). Contemporary history, Gehler maintains, must deal not only with local, regional, and national history, but also with the relations

between states and with the multilateral connections such as the involvement of the state in international affairs (p. 45). This criticism is part of a very stimulating debate over Austria's past that has been going on in Austria and elsewhere since the mid-1980s.

Contemporary history studies began in the 1960s with the history of the worker's movement, the resistance, and the persecution of the victims of National Socialism. Gehler contends that the second wave of contemporary history in the 1980s was marked by the large involvement of women historians, the role of Austrians in the National Socialist period, and the *Wehrmacht* with "intensive research" about fellow travelers and perpetrators. This "controversial, lively and conflict-rich" engagement with the shadowy side of Austrian contemporary history came primarily from outside the universities and among non-established historians. In the 1990s, the themes changed to the study of right-wing populism, right extremism, and neo-Nazism. With Austria's entry into the European Union in 1995, historians focused more exclusively on a regional and international view, thus ushering in a third period of contemporary history with collective works addressing national, economic, social, and cultural history becoming a necessity. A "middle and younger generation" along with numerous institutes were the major engines of this change, but the generations' issue is not dealt with in any great detail and is left rather vague in Gehler's analysis.

In a section specifically devoted to Austrian contemporary history, Gehler notes the absence of monographic, collective works and source editions for central epochs and whole-state themes. He writes that the narrowly focused studies typical of the 1950s and early 1960s began to be replaced only in 1994 with Hanisch's book and his joint work with Rolf Steininger *Österreich im 20. Jahrhundert*.<sup>2</sup> Gehler proceeds to list a number of works written in the 1990s that reveal advances in Austrian historiography that will be of much value to all who wish to pursue both Austrian history and its ties to international history. Here one learns about the most recent works in political, military, economic, social, judicial, cultural, and women/gender studies. He ends this section with an insightful analysis of recent work on Austria's involvement in the Third Reich, the European Union, and a review of Austrian journals and the media. There is insufficient space in this review to mention the many new works Gehler cites that have brought Austrian historiography abreast of that in other European countries in terms of breadth and methodology.

From this point on, Gehler takes a broader view that deals with international issues such as the European Recovery Program, European integration, integration's impact on the national state, the United Nations, the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, and so forth. Similar to the preceding sections, he deals with the most recent and growing literature on these topics. Here he addresses such questions as the widening or dee-

pening issue in the situation of small states after the breakup of the Soviet Union. He includes the forms of nationalism that some may find troubling and the questions and limitations of academic history.

Taking up the issue of confusion concerning the questions that arise from the breakup of the Soviet Union leads some to fear that the economic advantages of regionalization is not a momentum through which the world has experienced innovations, and research is obsolete about authenticity, "the new" and progress. Again, he brings further light on the issue.

In a discussion of "makers," Gehler challenges existing theories among others) and the post-communist historians who are theories. Regarding the year 1989 leads him to prevent any comparisons, in his mind, and annihilation of the eliminationist and *(Instrumentarium)* posited singularity of the massive nature of the million lives. With

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pening issue in the European Union, divisions among EU members, the situation of small states in the European Union, the impact on Europe of the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the widening of the European Union to include the former European members of the former Soviet sphere. While some may find the discussion rather dense, Gehler's attention to significant questions and literature will be of continuing importance for students, academics, and the wider population.

Taking up the issue of globalization, he writes of the conceptual confusion concerning the term although it is on the lips of most people. Questions arise concerning its newness, and its Janus-faced nature that leads some to fear it and others to laud it. In this regard, he cites works that discuss the economic inequality brought about by globalization and the advantages of regionalism. He agrees with those who believe that globalization is not a new phenomenon, but one that has gained a recent momentum through technological innovation and accelerated communications, deregulations, and privatization. History itself, according to Gehler, has experienced more competitiveness, higher productivity, numerous innovations, and increased teamwork since the 1980s. But long and hard research is obsolete, and the Internet, the new mode, leads to questions about authenticity. He cites a number of works that criticize this rush to "the new" and praises works that deal with the "creativity" of slowness. Again, he brings much German-Austrian work to the fore that will shed further light on the nature of globalization.

In a discussion of new sources, one-sidedness, and missing "troublemakers," Gehler discusses the role played by troublesome historians who challenge existing views (such as A.J.P. Taylor and Norman Finkelstein, among others) and revelations provided by the opening of the archives of the post-communist states. On the first issue, he expresses the need for historians who are willing to take on controversial issues and reject existing theories. Regarding the second, the oppression in these states between 1945 and 1989 leads him to question the uniqueness of the Holocaust because it prevents any comparison and any repetition. Also, the new evidence supports, in his mind, that the illegality, repressive apparatus, and persecution and annihilation of the communist systems were more extensive, more eliminationist and, therefore, more murderous than the instrumentation (*Instrumentarium*) of the National Socialists (p. 135). Furthermore, the posited singularity of the Holocaust does not take into consideration the massive nature of the communist elimination practices that took over 80 million lives. With these views, Gehler has become a "troublemaker."

Viewing Austrian contemporary history from an international perspective, Gehler castigates Austrian historians for not dealing fully and honestly with their past until outsiders, primarily Americans such as Evan Bukey and Bruce Pauley, began to do so. He attributes this to a lack of courage



among Austrian historians and the taboo aspect of Austria's past association with Nazi Germany. Austria, he contends, needs "troublemakers" to bring up challenging and embarrassing questions that would force debate of controversial issues. Austrian history dealing with the post-1945 period will have no legitimacy unless it deals with the National Socialist heritage and the role and functions of the Greater German question with its "southeast" mission. He questions the extent to which the present generation will be reproached by a later generation for neglecting its own times or viewing them in a one-sided manner.

In the penultimate chapter, Gehler discusses concrete examples of his previous theoretical deliberations. Here he provides details about new studies of the Cold War, European integration, international economic relations, Christian Democratic parties in an international context, European regions in relation to home markets and globalization (Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino), interregional cooperation, history of business and its internationalization, international finance, comparative international and global right-wing extremism and populism, and global protest against great power lust, transnational concerns, and the multilateral agreement on investments. The range of subjects dealt with in this chapter should give readers of this review an idea of the complexity of Gehler's study.

In his concluding chapter, Gehler continues his criticism of Austrian contemporary history. He notes that it lacked a European and global dimension into the 1990s. German contemporary history also failed in that it dealt overwhelmingly with German subject matter. Other problems were its passing of moral judgments and examination of attitudes that "while praise worthy, does not belong to the profession" (p. 191). Contemporary history should also not be a reaction to the mood of the moment, nor let itself be used for cheap daily political advantage or misused for the "giddy-paced and superficial business of party politics" (p. 192).

Globalization demands, according to Gehler, the abandonment of a Euro-centric viewpoint and the questioning of its underlying national state viewpoint and, if need be, its rejection. Austrian-centered history will continue to be possible, but only in an international and global perspective. This knowledge will facilitate the writing of regional and national history since knowledge of global phenomena will make both more understandable by providing "wider perspectives, new insights and additional interpretations" (p. 193). Austrian writing of the history of other nations will overcome the Austrian-centered introspection (*Nabelschau*) and the rejection of exaggeration and one-sidedness inherent in Austrian historical studies. The now more dynamic historical realm includes the newer and broadened versions of historical study including territorial states, trade and economic areas, military blocks, and traditional historical, geographic, and ethnic forms as well as the new innovative mental, cultural, and virtual spaces. He does not

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want readers to misread him and turn away from the study of local, regional, and national history, but to consider them in the contexts of larger questions, international developments, and their global effects.

After a brief description of the postmodern attack on traditional positivistic history, Gehler turns to the problems plaguing contemporary history. He charges that the universities have degenerated into provincial training institutions because of the "fruitlessness and unproductiveness" of the scientific personnel and through their own scientific disinterest, a research-retarding official atmosphere, and incompetent university leadership (p. 200). The university is not the place to pursue contemporary history; rather, non-university institutes, foundations, academies, and research positions that promote such study are. To gain credibility, Gehler recommends that Austrian contemporary historians produce more monographs, write in English since the Anglo-American scientific community tends to read only English, and publish their works in prominent places in order to reach a wider-reading public.

Although he recognizes that the widening of subject matter in contemporary history has its good side, he realizes that it has a negative side in that it threatens the loss of what is essential. Therefore, he advocates that synthesis is necessary because it makes comparison with other regional and national histories possible. Further, it is an error of the postmodernists to assume that one need only investigate and sort discourse while, in their opinion, comprehensive descriptions are no longer possible and even superfluous. In regard to history in general, Gehler is himself pessimistic, "The overwhelming push to abstraction, the loss of the concrete and the absence of the decision-making individuals (*handelden*) means a danger for its existence" (p. 205). He follows with a view that will anger many young historians that "[w]hen the history of remembrance culture and historical memory becomes more important than history itself," then it becomes questionable what history is and will become in the future (p. 205).

Gehler's final pages are filled with valuable questions and comments concerning regional, European, and world history; European integration/disintegration; comparative investigations; interdisciplinary research programs; and internationalization and globalization that will provide much food for thought for other researchers. In addition, the excellent bibliography Gehler provides will serve as a major jumping-off point for anyone wishing to pursue contemporary history. While the broad analytic nature of the book does not allow him to provide sufficient evidence for his views on a number of subjects, such as the Holocaust, his analysis will stimulate not only Austrian but also foreign historians to look at history in a broader manner.

## Notes

1. Ernst Hanisch, *Der lange Schatten des Staates: Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Österreichische Geschichte 1890-1990) (Wien: Ueberreuter, 1995).
2. Rolf Steininger and Michael Gehler, ed., *Österreich im 20. Jahrhundert*, 2 vols., vol. 1: *Von der Monarchie bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*; vol. 2: *Vom Zweiten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart* (Wien: Böhlau Studienbücher, Grundlagen des Studiums, 1997).

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